



“You will know them by their fruits.” Mt. 7:16

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(Society of Friends)

I was born in Philadelphia, Pa., second month, eleventh day, 1832. I was converted in Philadelphia, in 1856, in my twenty-sixth year. My conversion was very clear and unmistakable. After long years of legal striving, in which I resorted in vain to every method my soul could devise for gaining the favor of God and the forgiveness of all my sins, I was taught to see my own utter helplessness in the matter, and to trust entirely and only to Christ to save me. I know that I was born again; and never from that time have I doubted this. Never have I had a moment's fear about my acceptance with God, or my present possession of eternal life.

As time passed on the Lord graciously led me into the knowledge of much truth. My guarded education in the Society of Friends, of which I was at the time a member, had already separated me very much from the vain fashions and amusements of the world, and my chief interests were all centered around the religion of Jesus Christ, as the only object really worthy of serious thought or attention.

But my heart was ill at ease. That I grew in knowledge I could not deny; but neither could I deny that I did not grow in grace; and, at the end of eight years of my Christian life, I was forced to make the sorrowful admission that I had not even as much power over sin as when I was first converted. In the presence of temptation, I found myself weakness itself. It was not my outward walk that caused me sorrow, though I can see now that that was far from what it ought to have been; but it was the sins of my heart that troubled me – coldness, deadness, want of Christian love, intellectual apprehension of truth without any corresponding moral effects, roots of bitterness, want of a meek and quiet spirit – all those inward sins over which the children of God are so often forced to mourn.

I could not but see, that, although I was not under law, but under grace, still sin had more or less dominion over me, and I felt that I did not come up to the Bible standard. The Christian life contemplated there was a life of victory and triumph; my life was one of failure and defeat. The commands are there given -to be holy, to be conformed to the image of Christ, to be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, seemed almost a mockery to me, so utterly impossible did I find it to attain to any such standard; for I made very earnest efforts after it. At times I went through agonies in my efforts to bring about a different state of things. I resolved, I prayed, I wrestled, I strove; I lashed myself up into the belief that all I held most dear in life could continue to be mine only as I attained to more faithfulness and devotedness of walk. When sickness came upon any whom I loved, many were the vows recorded in the depths of my soul that, if God would but spare their lives, I would henceforth serve Him with all my heart. But all was in vain, and, it seemed, even worse than vain “When I would do good, evil was present with me”; and I could see no hope of deliverance except in death, which, by destroying the “body of sin” to which I was chained, would thus break the yoke of my bondage.

At times some new discovery of the truth of God in the Bible would seem for a while to carry me above temptation, and to make me more than conqueror. And my heart would rejoice at the thought that now at last I had found the secret of living, and that henceforth my continued defeats would be turned into continued victories. But after a while, as the aspect of truth, in which I had been rejoicing, became

familiar to me, I found to my further sorrow that it seemed to lose its power, and I was left as helpless ever, only under deeper condemnation, because of the increased responsibilities of increased knowledge.

There was also another thing that troubled me. I had been taught, and I found in the Bible, that it was my privilege to know the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a leader and guide to my soul, and I believed that He was indeed dwelling in me, but I felt that in experience I knew very little about His teaching, and had no actual consciousness of His presence. That it would be an inestimable blessing thus to know Him, I realized more and more, as I discovered the utter powerlessness of my own wisdom and judgment to guide me properly, and felt increasingly that, only as the Spirit accompanied and energized my service, was it ever of any avail. But here, too, all my efforts seemed worse than useless, and I found myself only involved in continually increasing perplexity and darkness.

At times the belief forced itself upon me that all Christians were not like me; that the lives of some were full of a degree of devotedness and depth of communion to which I was a stranger; and I wondered what their secret could be. But, supposing it could consist in nothing but their greater watchfulness and earnestness, I knew of no resource but to seek to redouble all my efforts, and to go through the same weary round of conflict and struggle again, only, of course, to meet with the same bitter defeat.

Such was my life; and, in spite of much outward earnestness and devotedness, I felt it to be a failure. Often I said to myself that if this was all the Gospel of Christ had for me, it was a bitterly disappointing. For though I never doubted the fact of my being a child of God, justified and forgiven, a possessor of eternal life, and an heir of a heavenly inheritance, still, when my heart condemned me – and this was almost continually -- I could not have confidence toward God, and I was not happy. Heaven itself seemed to lose its charm to the heart that was afar off from God

I began to long after holiness; I began to groan under the bondage to sin in which I was still held. My whole heart panted after entire conformity to the will of God, and unhindered communion with Him. But so thoroughly convinced was I that no efforts, or resolutions, or prayers of my own would be of any avail, and so ignorant was I of any other way, that I was almost ready to give up in despair.

In this time of sore need (1863) God threw into, my company some whose experience seemed to be very different from mine. They declared that they had discovered a “way of holiness,” wherein the redeemed soul might live and walk in abiding peace, and might be made “more than conqueror” through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I asked them their secret, and they replied, “It is simply in ceasing from all efforts of ours and in trusting the Lord to make us holy.”

Never shall I forget the astonishment this answer gave me. “What!” I said, “do you really mean that you have ceased from your own efforts altogether, in your daily living, and that you do nothing but trust the Lord? And does He actually and truly make you conquerors?”

“Yes,” was the reply, “the Lord does it all. We abandon ourselves to Him. We do not even try to live our lives ourselves; but we abide in Him, and He lives in us. He works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, and we hold our peace.”

Like a revelation the glorious possibilities of a life such as this flashed upon me; but the idea was too new and wonderful for me to grasp. I had never thought of Christ as being such a Saviour as I now heard Him described to be. I had known, indeed, that He gave me life in the first place as a free gift, without I myself being able to do one single thing toward obtaining it, except to believe and to receive. But that He should now live my life for me in the same way, without my being able to do anything except believe and receive, surpassed my utmost conceptions. I had learned how to trust Him for the

forgiveness of my sins; but I had always trusted myself to conquer them. I had seen the sad error of legality as applied to my redemption; but I was altogether legal in my thoughts as regarded my daily holy living. I had never dreamed of trusting the Lord for that, and I did not know how to do it.

*So I went to work harder than ever.* Over and over again I tried to dedicate myself to God. I sought to bind my will with chains of adamant, and to present it a holy offering before the Lord. I lay awake whole nights to wrestle in prayer that God would grant me the blessing He had granted these other Christians. I did everything, in short, but the one thing needful. I could not believe; I did not trust; and all else was worse than useless. But perhaps not altogether useless; for it taught me very effectually one necessary lesson, and that was my own utter and absolute helplessness.

At last, however, I saw clearly that; I was indeed truly nothing; that I needed the Lord just as absolutely for my daily living as I had needed Him in the first place to give me life. I discovered that I was just as unable to govern my temper or my tongue for five minutes, as I had been long ago to convert my soul. I found out, in short, the simple truth, which I ought to have learned long before, that without Christ I could do nothing; absolutely nothing. I saw that all my efforts, instead of helping, had only hindered the work.

Then I began anew to search the Scriptures. I found that the salvation He had died to procure was declared to be a perfect salvation, and that He was able to save to the very uttermost. I found that He offered Himself to me as my life, and that He wanted to come into my heart and take full possession there and subdue all things to Himself. I felt that this was indeed a gospel to meet my utmost needs, that such a salvation as this would satisfy the widest limit of my longings, and unspeakably I desired to appropriate it as mine.

But here I was met by another enemy, whom I had thought forever slain. It seemed as if I could not trust the Lord; as if I was actually afraid to do so. Legality had been met and conquered, but unbelief still remained, and threatened to shut me out altogether from the promised land of rest. Although God had declared the Lord Jesus to be a perfect Saviour, sufficient for my daily and hourly needs I could not believe He would really prove to be so. It seemed too great a test to repose in any one, even in the divine Saviour. But in His infinite love He broke down this last remaining barrier also.

He sent to our house (in 1864) a young man whose soul was in great darkness because of doubts concerning his salvation. It was my privilege to point him to Jesus Christ as a Saviour just suited to meet his needs, and to tell him of the completeness and present reality of the salvation purchased by Him.

And as I talked to him and set forth the boundless love of Christ, and divine power to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by, Him, my heart was rebuked for my own unbelief. Could it be that the Saviour, who was willing to forgive the sins of the rebel, would be unwilling to deliver the longing soul of one who loved Him, and panted to follow Him, from the present power and dominion of sin! Was I to urge another to believe that his prayers for forgiveness were answered, when I did not believe that my prayers for conformity to the image of Christ were, or ever would be? My heart shrank back at the thought of such inconsistency, and the last barrier of unbelief was broken down. The Lord revealed Himself to me as so worthy of my utmost confidence, that I could not help trusting Him. He showed Himself to me as a perfect, and complete, and present Saviour, and I abandoned my whole self to His care; telling Him that I was utterly helpless, that I could not feel, nor think, nor act, for one moment as I ought to do, and that He must do it all for me – all. *I confessed my own absolute inability to dedicate myself to His service, my powerlessness to submit my will to His; and I cast myself, as it were, headlong into the ocean of His love, to have all these things accomplished in me by His almighty working. I trusted Him utterly and entirely. I took Him for my Saviour from the daily power of sin with as naked a faith as I once took Him for my Saviour from its guilt. I believed the truth that He was my*

*practical sanctification, as well as my justification, and that He not only could save me, and would save me, but that He did. The Lord Jesus Christ became my present Saviour, and my soul found rest at last, such a rest that no words can describe it – rest from all its legal strivings, rest from all its weary conflicts, rest from all its bitter failures. The secret of holiness was revealed to me, and that secret was Christ. Christ made unto me wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*

*At first my faith was but a weak and wavering one. Almost tremblingly I hung on to Christ moment by moment, saying continually in my heart, “Lord, I trust Thee, I trust Thee. Look, Lord, am trusting Thee.” But I found to my astonishment that it was a practical reality that He did deliver me. When temptation came, I did not try to conquer it myself, but at once handed it over to Him, saying “Lord Jesus, save me from this sin. I cannot save myself, but Thou canst and wilt, and I trust Thee.” Then I left it with Him, and He fought for me, while I stood by and held my peace. And He always came off conqueror.*

Thus daily my faith grew, and I was able to apprehend more and more of that for which I was apprehended of Christ Jesus. I longed to grasp the utmost limits of the deliverance from sin, purchased for me by the death of Christ. Just what this limit was I did not understand, either in its nature or extent, but I could leave it all to Him. I did not indeed know what was the meaning of that Scripture wherein we are told that the body of sin was destroyed by the crucifixion of Christ, and where we are commanded therefore to reckon ourselves dead to sin. (Rom. 6) But I did know that it meant something which would enable us henceforth not to serve sin, but to bring forth fruit unto holiness; and also that it must mean something which would please and satisfy God. And, since this was God’s purpose in the death of Christ, I saw that it must be my privilege to enter into it, although in myself so vile and unworthy. And I saw, also, since Christ had finished the work God gave Him to do, that my part in it could only be to accept the gift from His hand, and that that gift, therefore, was mine the moment I trusted God for it. I did therefore trust Him definitely for this very thing; and I, even I, was enabled to “reckon myself dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Jesus Christ my Lord.”

Thus that flesh, which I had discovered to be so utterly corrupt and incapable of improvement, I now found could be reckoned to be dead and consequently abandoned. Necessarily I had at first only a very imperfect comprehension of what this meant, but practically I found, from the very first, that just in proportion as by faith I did abandon the flesh or carnal nature in me, and reckon it to be dead, so also did the flesh lose its power over me to conquer or enslave.

And “according to my faith” I have found it done unto me, ever since. Whenever I, by faith, reckon myself to be dead, I find I am dead in practice. In putting off the old man by faith, and putting on the new man, I find that the one is actually put off and the other is actually put on. My soul has entered into that interior rest or “keeping of Sabbaths” which the apostle Paul, in Heb. 4:9, declares “remaineth for the people of God”; and I am dwelling in the “peaceable habitations” and “quiet resting places,” promised in Isaiah 32:18. Not that there are no conflicts. Ah, no! But the battle is no longer mine, but Christ’s.

And now, if I am asked what is my life; with a deep and abiding sense of my own nothingness I can only answer that, insofar as I am faithful, Christ is now my life. Once I had truth about Him, but now I have Himself! Once I tried to live in my new nature, independent of Him, now I am joined to Him in a oneness that is indescribable, knowing that I have in truth no other life but His, and seeking more and more to live only there. Not that I never leave this blessed abiding-place, and walk in the flesh again, to my unspeakable regret. But Christ is always the same, and the way of access by faith is always open; and, thanks be unto God, He is faithful to keep that which I have committed to Him, and more and more does He confirm my soul steadfast and immovable in Him.

All the former period of my Christian course seems comparatively wasted. I was a child of God, it is

true; but my growth was stunted, and my strength feeble. But when this secret of faith was revealed to me, I began to grow; and the dedication, which was before impossible to me, became the very joy of my heart.

Since the time of my entrance into this life I have gone through many “experiences” and have outgrown many “dogmas”; and in some respects my “views” have greatly changed. But, through all, my attitude of soul has remained unchanged. I have sought to keep a continual spirit of surrender and trust, and have tried to be obedient to the best light I knew. When I have failed, it has been the result of either disobedience or lack of faith, and it has been needed only a return to the place of perfect surrender and entire trust, to restore my soul again to its place of rest. At every moment, when surrender and trust have been active, the Lord has never failed to respond with His wondrous grace. Moreover, He has never failed to make even my mistakes work together for my eternal good. In short, I have found it to be more and more true, every day of my life, that Christ is a complete and ever-present Saviour and that if I but commit all my interests to Him, *I have as a dear child once said, nothing to do now but “just to mind.” To say “Thy will be done” seems to me, more and more, the sweetest song of the soul. The deepest longings of my whole being are met and satisfied in God. He is enough!*

Believing, resting, abiding, obeying – these are my part; He does all the rest. What heights and depths of love, what infinite tenderness of care, what wise lovingness of discipline, what grandeur of keeping, what wonders of revealing, what strength in weakness, what comfort in sorrow, what light in darkness, what easing of burdens I have found; what a Saviour, no words can tell!

“Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”

HANNAH WHITALL SMITH, PHILADELPHIA, PA., April 19, 1887

Source: “Forty Witnesses” by S. Olin Garrison

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