



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

P. C. BENNET

(Methodist)

Though I was not favored in early childhood with pious parents, yet serious religious impressions attended me from a period as far back as memory extends. These would at times intensify into pungent convictions of sin and terrible apprehensions of God’s displeasure. Thus I continued, sometimes praying in secret, and unsuccessfully resolving to “to do better,” until sixteen years of age, when I was enabled to decide the question, and yield my heart to Jesus.

Soon my mind was called to the subject of Christian holiness. Much of the interest awakened in my heart on this subject is due to the instructions of my class leader, and of my faithful pastor, the now sainted Ninde.

I also derived great confirmation from reading, at a certain time, the first chapter of the first Epistle of John, and Dr. Adam Clarke’s comments thereon. After that reading I think I never doubted the attainableness of purity of heart

At times, thenceforward, I earnestly sought this blessing. The language of my heart often was,

“Oh that with all Thy saints I might
By sweet experience prove
What is the length, and breadth, and height,
And depth of perfect love.”

After I entered upon my life-work, the Christian ministry, the importance of enjoying the “fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ,” was frequently and deeply impressed upon my mind. I clearly saw it was my duty to instruct the people in this, as well as other Bible doctrines. I tried to do so; but, alas! My sermons on this subject were little else than doctrinal. O how they lacked that light and life, that fire and power which actual experience, only, can inspire.

I never heard of a soul that was awakened to seek this glorious fullness under my preaching in those days. Still, as then, so now I believe I did my duty as far as I went. I had no right to do otherwise than preach a full salvation.

My reason taught me that if the Gospel is an antidote to sin at all, it is an antidote to all sin--that if Christ can save men from sin to any extent He can “save them to the uttermost.” Any other view made the mediation of Christ so meager and inadequate that I could not entertain it for a moment. Still, strange enough, my faith traveled little beyond this for eight years.

During the session of the Black River Conference, of which I was then a member, in 1846, I became deeply impressed with the importance of personal holiness. This impression increased as I proceeded to my work. Nor did it wear away as formerly. During a Camp-meeting in August, near Fulton, New York, my mind was greatly exercised thereon. On Saturday, I returned, not satisfied that the precious pearl was yet mine, though greatly encouraged and strengthened in the search for it. At tea, my dear wife, who had not enjoyed the privileges of the Camp-meeting, but who, for a long time, had known my earnest struggles for full redemption, inquired if I had attained this great object of my desire. I replied, “I do not know that I have, but I never felt so fully the Lord’s as now.” At this point my feelings

became uncontrollable.

I left the table, repaired to my study, fell on my knees, wept, prayed, tried to take hold on Christ by faith, as my Saviour from all sin, but all apparently in vain. My wife, knowing that I had been absent all the week, suggested perhaps I had better compose my mind, and make some preparation for my Sabbath services. But it seemed to me impossible to turn my thoughts in that direction. The language of my heart was, "How can I ever again preach the gospel of purity, till that purity is experientially mine?" Night came on--a dark and stormy one. All was commotion within and without. At this point I thought of a brother near by, who with me, at the camp-meeting, was a seeker after this priceless treasure, and who, as I supposed, had found it. I proceeded at once to his residence, confident that he could tell me just how to grasp the prize; but what was my surprise and grief to learn, that we both were in about the same condition. We wept and prayed together, but seemed unable to help each other. I returned, and spent much of the night in earnest pleadings for a clean heart. Sabbath morning came, and the hour of public service. "What shall I do? The people expect me to lead their devotions, but I have no preparation made!" Yet even this thought did not divert my heart from the all-absorbing theme.

Proceeding to the church, and commencing the services, I read Psalm, 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me." I could think of no other text that I dared venture to read, for present use. It was safe to employ this, for it expressed so fully the desire of my heart. I commenced to speak, but in spite of all effort to suppress the rising tide, my emotions over-powered me. I succeeded in merely telling the people that my tears were not caused by a sense of guilt for never did I feel a clearer assurance of acceptance with God; but that I saw such a distance between myself and Him--such a glorious fullness in the provisions of grace, that I could not rest till in experience it was mine.

I proceeded to my next appointment, for I had three that day, in as many different places, and announced as my text, Hebrew, 12:14: "Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." I explained the nature of the holiness mentioned in the text, with a good degree of liberty, and I think with clearness, for theoretically I was correct, but when I attempted to tell how to "follow"--pursue it, I was again conquered by emotion, and compelled to confess that experientially I knew not the way. I assured the people of my earnest desire on this subject, and that when I obtained it, I would, to the best of my ability, tell them all about it.

Still engrossed with this great theme, I hastened to my next appointment, and addressed the people from Rom 6:22: "Now being made free from sin," etc. The discourse ended--for this time I maintained the mastery of my feelings and the labors of the day ended, I as yet in deep agony of spirit for the fullness of salvation.

No change occurred in my experience for several days, but the matter, which at times for years had engaged my attention, was settled without any provisos. The solemn vow was passed; I was fully consecrated to the Lord. The old man was nailed to the cross, and there he was to hang until entirely dead. So much was gained over all former periods. There was not the slightest wavering of purpose. But how to believe so as to receive the desired blessing I knew not. I seemed to think, that I must exercise a different kind of faith from that by which I was justified. I would read the Bible, the Christian Manual, a work of great value, fall on my knees, try to believe, and fail as often of success; fail because I tried so hard.

At length, my mind was directed to a brother M., several miles distant who had been for years a witness of perfect love. I felt a strong impression to seek instruction from him. Yielding to this impression, I hastened to him and stated my business. He at once left his work, and proceeded with me to the house of Brother W. The object of my coming being explained, we engaged in prayer. After we arose, Brother M. said, "Now, Brother B. tell us what have been your exercises of mind for the last few days?" "This I

did as well as I could, and was remarking, that during all that long, severe struggle, I felt not the slightest sense of condemnation--that the expression, "hunger and thirst after righteousness," described my feelings the best of anything I could think of.

Brother M. interrupting, said, "See, Brother B. you say hunger and thirst after righteousness, expressed your feelings the best of anything you can think of; now why did you not think of the latter part of that verse?" Quick as thought, my heart fastened upon it, and the promise, "for they shall be filled," seemed to be made especially for me.

I cannot remember that it had occurred to me at all during the period of earnest inquiry and prayer just described. But now it appeared so real, so tangible, so entirely mine, that without hesitancy, and without effort, I seemed to lean upon it, to swing out upon it, as it were, and receive the fullness.

O the unspeakable joy that then filled my heart. Such a ravishing view of my Saviour, of the glorious provisions of His grace, and of their manifestation to me, was over-powering.

" O the rapturous height
Of that holy delight
Which I felt in the life-giving blood,
Of my Saviour possessed,
I was perfectly blessed,
As if filled with the fullness of God."

When I became able to speak, I found myself on a bed, with Brother M. at my side, and extending to him my hand, I said with unwavering assurance, "Brother M., I've got it!" Precious hour! Precious spot! More precious Saviour! I could not doubt--I had no desire to doubt. Jesus had promised; I trusted that promise. I had asked, and had received something. I felt sure that He had given me just what I had asked for. I knew He had not given me "a serpent" when I asked "a fish." And then, too, I saw how simple was the whole process. It was only to believe, just as when I felt the pardoning love of my Saviour. I saw it was the same kind of faith, only exercised for a different object. Then I felt an awful sense of guilt, and desired pardon. Faith, renunciation of self, and trust in Christ alone, brought the pardon I sought. Now, I felt lack of purity, and my faith took hold of my Saviour as ready to impart that. I saw, too, that my efforts to believe failed, because, though unconsciously, I was really trying to work myself up into the embrace of my Saviour, instead of resting, --trusting in Him without effort. The consecration of myself, of all I was, of all I had, and of all I hoped to be, or to have; in short, of my whole being, as made without the slightest reserve--of this I had the clearest testimony of consciousness. Still, I seemed to cling to this very sacrifice after it was on the altar, as a means of bringing my heart into the desired union with Jesus. But when I left this--left it where it belonged--on the altar of God, and leaned alone on the promise of my Saviour, the assurance of acceptance was given, and unutterable rapture filled my soul.

Then it seemed to me so strange that I had lived so long without this fullness; and that such multitudes in the church, and even in the ministry of a church that from the first had made this a prominent doctrine, and all of whose ordained ministers had solemnly declared that they expected to be made perfect in love in this life, and were "groaning after it." I say it seemed so strange that so many were content to live without it.

With a full heart, and a heavenly influence diffused all through my being, I began to tell my brethren what the Lord had done for me, and the way in which He had led me. In so doing I was greatly strengthened. O what a privilege it was to be able, through grace, to testify from experience that "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." Instead of treating the subject merely as a doctrine, it was to me such a heartfelt reality that it seemed a wonder that all could not see and embrace it at once as an experience.

More than twenty-one years have passed since that glorious event and amid the varied experiences of this period I have not wavered in belief as to the reality of the work then wrought, nor yet as to the importance of urging this experience as the “central idea of Christianity.” And I wish to add, for the admonition of those who have just entered the rest of perfect love, that an attempt to be ambiguous in my testimony on this subject, when it was proper to speak out plainly, has always tended to obscure my spiritual vision, and to diminish the ardor of my devotion. I am more and more persuaded that whatever degree of light God kindles within us, must be reflected upon others in word as well as in action, as a means of feeding the sacred flame. Such, I understand, to be the teaching of our Lord, and such has been one of the lessons of my experience.

Source: “Pioneer Experiences” by Phoebe Palmer

[Return to the Enter His Rest website](#)