



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

PASCAL PERRY BELEW

My mother was a Campbellite and a strong advocate of salvation by water; but she liked to attend the Methodist revivals at Knoxville, which were conducted in those days by Rev. Henry Maxwell, Rev. L. L. Pickett, and others of like faith. It was during such meetings, when I was very young, that my first impressions of God and religion were formed. Having been taught that God would give a person what he asked for, I began asking. I prayed for a hobby horse, and someone got it for me. Then I prayed for things which could not be reasonably expected, and not getting them, desisted from the practice of prayer.

My first real conviction for sin was at the age of eleven. For several years past the Methodist Church had conducted few regular services and no revivals, and spiritual life in the community was almost if not entirely extinct. Then some holiness people, who were affiliated with the work of which *Rev. Martin Wells Knapp* was a leader, began meetings in the little church.

When they were invited to lodge in the home of someone, they accepted the invitation; if they received no such invitation, they slept upon the church floor. They ate with grateful appreciation such food as was given them, and fasted and praised God when they had no food. And when they sang the songs of Zion it seemed that the angels must have leaned forward to catch the sweet strains of their victorious singing. Their preaching made one feel that heaven had no top and hell had no bottom.

I did not get saved in those meetings. I had been exposed to the unscriptural and ignorant teaching that a child is not responsible for its sins until it becomes twelve years of age. And while I can not say that I fully believed it, yet it did have something to do with my not yielding to God.

However, the conviction that I was lost stayed with me. I quit some naughty things which I had been doing and began to read the New Testament and pray in secret. I was convinced of the way of salvation, and have always been glad that I learned the truth before error fixed itself in my mind.

When thirteen years of age, I attended a series of meetings conducted by the Knoxville Christian Church. It was in this church that mother held her membership. During these meetings my sense of spiritual need again became acute and the excuse of irresponsibility having been swept away when I passed the “age limit,” I resolved to get right with God. The only expressions asked for in these meetings were to join the church or renew your church covenant. My teaching at the holiness meetings had convinced me that there was a “more excellent way” of getting religion, therefore, I sought recourse in prayer. I well remember the grove to which I repaired and almost the spot where I kneeled. There I asked God to pardon by sins and pledged to Him a life of obedience. I did not immediately receive the witness to my acceptance; but that night when I publicly acknowledged Christ by uniting with the church my soul was filled with a sense of peace and security. When I asked God to remove the embarrassment which I felt in going forward, it vanished at once. In all my Christian experience I have never had a more ready answer to prayer.

After being baptized by immersion I was enrolled as a member of the church – and left alone to work out my own salvation. For days my soul reposed in the glad confidence that I was God’s child. It was then that it first dawned upon me that I should preach the gospel.

But the atmosphere in my home was not conducive to godliness, the community environment was bad, none of the churches seemed to have any spiritual life; consequently, I gave up the fight. It would be almost as reasonable to expect a young child to live in a refrigerator as it is to expect a new convert to survive in the frigid atmosphere of a spiritually dead church. I do not know exactly when my relationship with God was broken. I gradually “dried up” in soul and awoke to the fact that I was backslidden. Let those that will “stick to the old church”; but having learned by sad experience the futility and danger of such a course, I am forever committed to the policy of an organized church for the promotion and conservation of Scriptural holiness.

While I did not long retain my justification, the memory of it lingered as a restraining influence. The first falsehood that I told thereafter was some two years later concerning my age while trying to secure a position in Covington, Kentucky. I never did get low enough to drink booze and “cuss,” and used to argue for religion when I was far from possessing it. But little by little the minions of hell fastened the manacles of sin so thoroughly about me that I seemed to be hopelessly bound.

In the late summer of 1913 a series of special meetings were being conducted at the Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church. I was a regular attendant at the meeting and on the particular night of which I speak was standing outside (a practice of which I am now justly ashamed) listening through the open window. There was no response to the appeal of the evangelist; and the pastor made some closing remarks in which he referred to the case of a man with whom the Spirit of the Lord had ceased to strive. I do not recall that the incident made any great impression upon me at the time. But the next day while I was working alone in a tobacco field, which some one has rightly called the Devil’s chewing gum patch, as suddenly as a bolt from the blue and as distinctly as I ever heard the voice of man, God spoke to me. And this is what He said: “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” My feelings at that moment no tongue can describe. Under the floodlight of Holy Ghost conviction I was all but overcome with a fearful sense of my lost estate. If I had been disposed to doubt the fact of eternal punishment, I could not have done so now. My guilty distance from standards of right seemed to be that of infinity. The sins of my backslidden and ungodly life stood out before me as the darkest in all the catalog of human transgressions. I seemed as a miserable fugitive from justice who had at last been apprehended and was deserving of and near to the direst damnation. With trembling voice and weeping eyes I pleaded with the Christ of Calvary for mercy. But I was yet unwilling to abandon my sinful career, and even the compassionate Christ cannot pardon an impenitent sinner. Satan immediately said: “You have waited too long. Your opportunity is gone. You have sinned away your day of grace, and God will not hear you.” My near frantic soul was engrossed in black despair. In my desperation I fled from the field, for God was there; and to a guilty soul the presence of God is as terrible as hell itself.

In a vain attempt to break the nightmare of conviction I plunged anew into worldly pleasure, and but for the longsuffering of God would today be in hell. For two long months life seemed unbearable. Heat was a vivid reminder of the hell fire which awaited me, and everything seemed to speak of eternity. I longed for release from my awful gloom and was afraid for the Spirit to leave me lest He might not return; yet clung to a life of sin. My call to the ministry made it yet more difficult to yield. It was very clear to me that if I became a Christian I would have to preach the gospel; and Satan was always present to show me the impossibility of my doing so. I had barely completed the fourth grade in a country school and was now an ignorant young man of nineteen with no funds and little opportunity to acquire an education. How could I preach? Oh, the anguish and struggle of those dark hours!

One day I was again working alone in the same field where conviction had seized me. I was weeping and praying as I worked. My call to the ministry now seemed to be all that stood in my way. I was willing to forsake my sins. I would live a righteous life and help to support the church, but preach I could not. But as I grew more desperate in my seeking my courage arose. If I tried to preach and could not it would only be an honest failure; but if I disobeyed God and refused to try I was lost forever. Then

with a firm reliance upon Him who helps the willing, I made a final and vigorous effort to conquer my own unwillingness and agreed to undertake the most solemn and fearfully responsible work in which mortals can engage. Instantly the burden of my sins rolled away. My weeping was turned into laughter and my gloom into joy. And there in God's great temple of nature I sang songs of triumph and praised Him for victory.

But my struggle was not over. I was ignorant of the Devil's devices. I did not understand the process of temptation and under the tempter's fearful probing cast away my confidence. When I relinquished my faith I, of course, lost my peace of soul and lapsed again into darkness. However, in a few days I learned that a holiness meeting was being conducted a few miles from my home in the Blackburn Chapel schoolhouse. In company with another young man I attended one night, and what a meeting it was! A gracious revival Spirit was manifest. The saints had the glory; and when they prayed the place may not have been shaken, but I was. The preaching had the heavenward pull and the singing was victorious. It was the first time I ever heard the song "I Would Not Be Denied," and when they had sung the third stanza:

"Old Satan said my Lord was gone,
And would not hear my prayer;
But praise the Lord the work is done,
And Christ the Lord is here."

my soul took courage. I saw that the impressions which had disturbed my serenity of soul were the malicious whisperings of Satan and felt that I should testify with the others to the saving grace of God. But the young man with me was unsaved and I was in the rear of the building where the Devil works hard; so I stifled my conscience and went home with a heavy heart.

I resolved to attend the meeting again the next night and publicly acknowledge Jesus Christ at the altar; but it was a rainy night and when I reached the schoolhouse it was dark and empty. I went again the following night but the meeting had closed! Having learned that Rev. J. L. Thornton, one of the preachers that conducted the meeting, lived some ten miles from my home, I decided to visit him in the interest of my soul. This I did on the following Sunday afternoon.

Our roads in Kentucky were not surveyed in a direct course, as is generally done in the middle western states, but meandered through the hills so as to follow as far as possible the line of least resistance. After a long drive over such roads and several inquiries I reached his home, which stood several hundred yards from the public road, and immediately made known my mission.

Brother Thornton was just ready to start to Sunday School and invited me to attend with him. Not wanting to interrupt his plans, I went. It was at the Mt. Calvary Holiness Christian Church, which was then located about three miles east of Sherman, Kentucky. The church is now located near Flingsville and is known as the Liberty Pilgrim Holiness Church. There being no preaching that day, immediately after Sunday School we returned to the home of Brother Thornton to engage in the conference for which I had come to see him. With that hospitality for which the South is so well known my horse was placed in the barn and fed. Then, too, I had come to complete the work of getting right with God and knew not how long it might take. We then repaired to the house and it was the most wonderful home that I had ever seen. Not from the standpoint of beautiful architecture and rich furnishings, but because God was there. This good man, his wife, and all their children gathered about unworthy me and lifted their voices in a volume of prayer which I am sure was heard on the other shore. Never before had such interest been taken in me.

Nor did it require coaxing to get me to pray. Dissatisfied with the world and tired of sin, I was seeking that rest of soul which only God can give.

But even earnest prayer will not suffice for that simple trust which God requires of the seeking heart.

We arose from our knees, and there by that wonderful fireside, as this man of God explained to me more fully the way of faith, the burden rolled away and my soul was filled with a deep measure of that peace which passes understanding. I started for home immediately; and brighter by far than the sparks which my horse's feet occasionally struck from the stone road was the fire of God which burned in my being. I had discovered a new world. The stars came out on dress parade, the trees seemed to clap their bands for joy, and all creation rejoiced with me. As the wheels of my buggy hummed a tune down that country road my soul gave expression to its feeling in singing:

“O what a change from a world of despair,
Glory divine with my Saviour to share;
Where once was gloom now 'tis light everywhere,
O what a change! O what a change!
“O what a change! Now His face I can see,
Once hid from view now 'tis glorious to me
Once bound with sin, What a joy to be free,
O what a change! O what a change!”

That was on the evening of Oct.26, 1913, and from that day down to this hour I have enjoyed sweet fellowship with God. On Nov. 11 following in a cottage prayer meeting after making a full and complete consecration of my all to God, I was graciously baptized with the Holy Ghost and Fire. The years following have been times of precious victory and He now abides as my Sanctifier.

Source: My Old Kentucky Home by Pascal Perry Belew

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