



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

Sheridan Baker

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Being A View of Christian Holiness Taken From the Standpoint of Personal and General Experience, With Scriptural Confirmations Introduced With the Author's Experience

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"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." -- Rev. 2:17

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Introduction

I had no early religious education. I was born and reared in a rural district by parents who, though honorable citizens and living happily together, never said anything to their children, during my stay at home, for or against Christianity. Hence, when I left the farm in my eighteenth year to enter an academy, I had no theory about Christianity nor bias toward any church. I had a consciousness of spiritual want, and believed that want could, in some way, but I did not know how, be met by joining a church and living right. Shortly after I commenced study I met a young man, a classmate, who had been converted and lived right, and who spoke to me concerning the interests of my soul. I immediately became so deeply convicted that it seriously interfered with my study and sleep. I sought a grove some distance from the village, and after looking all around to be sure no one saw me, I kneeled for the first time in my life to pray, but the exercise was so distasteful and unnatural to me that I soon ended it; nor have I any recollection of making a second attempt at that time. My awakening, of course, soon faded, and I lapsed back into a state of indifference on the subject until my twenty-third year when a senior at college.

At this juncture a great revival of religion, embracing in its fruits over thirteen hundred converts, swept over the seat of the college and surrounding country. Again my attention was called to the necessity of spiritual life, and without the broken sleep and terrible night visions of my former awakening, I carefully counted the cost of becoming a Christian, and determined to make the venture. I had more generally, during my term at college, attended on Sunday the United Presbyterian Church of that place, but I now concluded to attend the Methodist Episcopal Church where the revival had been in progress for near a week, and where I had heard, at one of the services I attended, some

testimonies which then seemed to me quite marvelous. I heard both sermons on Sunday, and at night, with no little difficulty, I presented myself at the altar of the church as a subject for prayers. I left the church that night, at the close of the services, with a heavy heart; and from something that was said about joining the church, which seemed to me at that time such a trifling matter compared with my regeneration, I was led, through a subtle temptation of the enemy, to fear that the brethren were seeking my membership in their church, rather than my salvation. This caused me to stay away from the meetings, and continue my search for pardon in private, until Tuesday night, when, by invitation of two young converts, I returned to the services.

On my way to the church I determined to resume my public efforts for the desire of my heart, and did return to the altar of prayer. I had noticed that most of those who "got through," as it was then called, stood erect upon their knees, turned their faces upward, spread out both hands, and cried aloud for mercy. I determined at this time to do the same, and with a great struggle, immediately upon kneeling, I put myself in this attitude, and cried out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." By this time, though I had been careful of my moral character and was regarded as a Christian by many, I felt the terrible pressure of condemnation and made the cry of a genuine penitent sinner. Immediately my burden was gone, and I felt a pleasure in being where a little time before it seemed to be the most unpleasant place in which I had ever been. I did not, however, take this to be religion, or the pardon I was seeking, but such a subjugation of myself as would now make it easy to seek what I was after. With great earnestness and delight I proceeded to pray, when the parable of the prodigal son came to my mind, and I saw myself a great way off and the Father running to meet me. Instantly I was on my feet, without any muscular effort of which I was conscious, laughing at the top of my voice, and with a spiritual discernment which enabled me to see a number of persons, in whose piety I had no confidence because of their joviality, with shining faces enveloped in a halo of light, and others, whom I judged pious, in a dark cloud with sad and dejected countenances. This vision, which radically changed my notions of religious living, has ever been clear to my memory but has never been fully repeated in my experience.

As soon as the spirit of laughter subsided, I felt an impulse to labor for the salvation of others, and commenced at once among my fellow students. Early next morning I wrote a letter to my parents, which was nearly a continuous shout, and which awakened them to a sense of their great need. They sent for me to come home on a visit, which I made in a week or two after my conversion, and prayed for them and the other children, till the entire family, except the younger and irresponsible children, were happily converted to God. These labors for the salvation of others I have continued to this day with more or less zeal and success, often the zeal nearly gone, and the success scarcely discernible.

In passing through the large congregation, on the night of my conversion, to seek and persuade my fellow students to accept Christ, I noticed that I passed by others with a seeming indifference, seeking only my favorites. This indicated to me a partiality which I thought ought not to exist in one who was truly converted, but so happy was I then that this rather unpleasant discovery scarcely made a ripple upon the surface of my raptures. The next afternoon, however, this matter of partiality and some others of a kindred character, so disturbed me that I sought an interview with the preacher for the purpose of learning more about my true state.

I was satisfied that either I had not obtained a true conversion, or I had misapprehended its nature. I had been made much happier than I supposed it possible for a soul in the body, but the change of nature was not so complete and radical as I supposed a true regeneration produced. And I now believe that [if I had received the instruction](#) I

should have I would then have received a clean heart in less than twenty four hours after my conversion. I was ripe for it, and only needed the knowledge of my true want, and the way to get the supply. But whatever the preacher intended to teach me, I got the idea that I now had commenced the Christian warfare, and my efforts must be directed primarily to the repression of the evil tendencies of my depraved nature, and secondarily to guarding from without the encroachments of the world and sin. I had tasted the wonderful sweets of pardon and adopting love, and was ready for anything in the way of toil and sacrifice to retain my new-found joys, so I girded myself for the conflict, and manfully did I fight through my probationary term in the church. I was then taken into full connection, licensed as an exhorter, and soon thereafter constituted a local preacher.

As I had frequently lectured to the public on different moral subjects before my conversion, I was hurried by my brethren into the ministry, and admitted on trial at the next session of the annual conference. I soon found in reading those works which the Discipline places before the young preacher, that a much higher Christian experience than I enjoyed, and just such as I had hoped to attain, was taught as the heritage of faith. At once I became deeply concerned for the blessing of entire sanctification, and commenced fasting, praying, and consecrating myself anew, with a view of seeking this great salvation. But as I found no one professing it, and preachers older and wiser than myself speaking hesitatingly upon the subject, I lapsed into a state of indifference concerning it.

After sixteen consecutive years in the itinerancy, and the educational department of our Church work, I was forced by feeble health to retire from the active ranks of the ministry. During my efficiency I had accumulated a small sum of money, which was increased by several hundred dollars from my father-in-law's estate. To use these means so as to support my young and growing family, I entered into the mercantile business. In this, my industry, frugality and care were rewarded to such a degree that I not only kept my family, but accumulated with astonishing rapidity, as compared with my capital and size of my trade. This prosperity so increased my attachment to business, and intensified my love for gain that, within the short period of four or five years, I found my spiritual interests greatly imperiled by the love of money. This led me to call earnestly upon God for protection against this danger, and to more liberal giving to benevolent purposes. And, though my liberality seemed to myself considerably greater than my brethren's who had equal and much larger ability, yet the danger remained and the love of gain was fast becoming the dominant passion.

At this stage of my experience I was thrown among a number of persons who enjoyed freedom from the power of this world, and were made perfect in love. From one of these I bought a copy of "Perfect Love," by J. A. Wood. The testimony of these humble Christians and the reading of this book were used by the Spirit to start me in pursuit of the same gracious state as a desirable religious experience, and as the only remedy for my fears and danger.

Very soon after I commenced to press my suit for entire sanctification, a few minor tests were presented and disposed of satisfactorily to my conscience, and a temporary relief was obtained. Among these early tests was the tobacco habit. This now began to appear inconsistent with a state of holiness. I therefore abandoned the indulgence with the purpose of never resuming it, unless by a Divine permit, which never has been granted. I fought the appetite for two or three weeks when, either in sleep or not noticing the fact, it was removed, and has not to this day returned. This loss of the desire for tobacco took place nearly two months before I had the assurance of inward purity, and gave me great satisfaction in the new-found freedom. But I was soon convinced that the object of my pursuit, and the gracious work needed, had not been reached. I was, however, quite encouraged, and with the conviction that the way to the attainment of this grace was

nearly cleared, I continued my suit with greater ardor. I was now ready for severer tests, and questions concerning the appropriation of funds began to arise in my mind and to stir me profoundly. I had in my safe some \$2,000 in Government bonds, and held also a mortgage claim on a neighboring farm for \$1,200, besides some smaller savings which I did not need in my business. These had been carefully laid away as a source of revenue to increase my yearly returns, and a source of supply when infirmity or age might retire me from my work. It was therefore a severe strain upon my strength of purpose, and my feeble longings for holiness, when these serious financial questions commenced to lay heavily upon my conscience.

The first test on this line which the Spirit gently pressed was whether I was willing, for so great a favor as I was asking, to part with my bonds, to sell them and devote the proceeds to benevolent uses. After a day or two of worry and anxiety over the matter, and seeing there could be no advancement in my pursuit without facing the issue and making the sacrifice, I resolved to do it if the Lord should ask it and open the way for it. This victory over self and the ruling passion was attended with more than usual religious joy, and for a day or so I seemed near the prize. Soon, however, it was suggested that the principle which required the bonds as an offering to God demanded also the mortgage claim, for neither of them was necessary to the successful prosecution of my business. The thought was almost unbearable, but the Lord graciously aided me to bear the deep probing and virtually make the offering. I now supposed that nothing more could be asked, and I rejoiced for some time in a good degree of religious freedom, and, as my business was flourishing, I could foresee all these losses replaced in less than twelve months. Then it was suggested that if these savings were required as a precedent condition to a state of holiness, the funds to replace them would be required as a condition to retain the grace, and thus I was forced to face the obligation of giving all I could make hereafter, and of being contented with my present stock in trade, my business house, and family residence.

This was indeed plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right hand, but the Lord mercifully helped me, and I was enabled to make up my mind to this condition of my worldly affairs.

My religious experience at this stage in the process, though deeper than anything I had known heretofore, was far from being joyful and satisfactory. I continued to read the Scriptures, and to pray and trust for the witness of the Spirit to the work of inward purity. One day I opened the Scriptures at Matt. 19:21: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven and come, follow me." The Spirit applied the word, and the truth, like keen steel, entered my heart, and after some days of doubting I was enabled finally to yield, but not without a great deal of debating the matter, and with pains and heartaches which my pen cannot describe. The struggle was now ended. I felt that I was no longer possessor of these things, but simply a steward, and the stewardship to last no longer than necessary to make a wise distribution of the funds.

After this complete devotement of property to God, two considerations prevented a speedy appropriation to benevolent uses. One was, the conviction that a careless and indiscriminate giving would be acting the part of a cross child that dashes to the ground and destroys what it is not allowed to keep, and, of course, would be as displeasing to God as no giving. The other was the conviction that a hasty movement would awaken the suspicion of my friends, and they would have me arrested on a charge of derangement. Such had been my earnestness in seeking holiness, that my family had noticed a change in my conduct, and some of my patrons in the store had observed something unusual. Hence the most cautious and quiet procedure was necessary to keep

down all suspicion of mental disturbance, and meet my covenant engagements with God.

For some months very few calls for money were made upon me, and these for comparatively small sums, much less than the profits of the business for the same time. So reticent had I to be, and so slowly did ways open to carry out my purposes, that the property became such a burden, as a trust, that I longed to be clear of it. In this dilemma I kept looking to the Lord for guidance, when it was suggested that, as ways did not open to distribute this property, possibly the Lord intended me, as I had accumulated most of it, to hold and use it for Him. Somebody must do this, and would He not more likely appoint the person who made it than any other? After a careful examination of this impression, I was satisfied that its origin was identical with the suggestions which I had followed, and that this must be heeded as well as they. I was now enabled, after due consideration, to settle on a financial policy which would meet my engagements with the Lord, and enable me to feel at rest on a matter of finance. I would use what I had accumulated as wisely as I could, and give away all the proceeds after meeting my family expenses, and hold the principal ready for distribution when Divinely called to make it. This policy has been followed with scrupulous care ever since, and it has been a pleasure to give my labors gratis to the Church for the last seventeen years, and to distribute yearly all the income from the funds invested, except my necessary expenses in humble living.

This experience in the consecration of money will not be complete without the statement that I have not always been able to please my brethren in the disbursement of these funds. There are popular enterprises, and worthy ones too, which I do not liberally support, because I would have but little left to give to some more obscure and less popular charities. I find it just as necessary to discriminate, and follow my honest convictions in the causes supported, as to support any. I dare not consult the wishes of my brethren only so far as may be necessary to find the Divine will in the matter of giving.

These statements are a mere summary of the salient points of this part of my experience. The various frames of mind, the states of the affections and emotions, and the many questions that have come up for settlement in the details have, as far as possible, been passed over. There is, however, a matter connected with the secret of my rapid accumulation, which does not belong to the experience in the consecration of money, that I will name. I did not enter this business for the purpose of accumulating riches, but simply to make a living for myself and family; and when I managed it alone, I would lock up every evening of the weekly prayermeeting, and attend church. And while the protracted meetings would be in progress, I would close the store during the hours of religious service, and take my place with the worshippers. I was often tempted to desist from this, as some of my best customers would complain of the disappointment which it caused them. Especially would I be tried when I learned that some of these, with exhausted patience, had left my house and gone to other stores with their trade. But almost all of these would, after a few weeks or months, return and bring some of their neighbors with them. Thus my trade continually increased till I had to secure help; and had these helpers consented to accompany me to church, the store would ever have been closed at the time of religious service. And to this rigid subordination of business to religion, more than to any business talent which I possess, do I attribute my worldly prosperity.

I must now ask the reader to return with me to the point where, in the irreversible consecration of money and self to God, the old man was nailed to the cross, the self life crucified, and the struggle ended.

Here my troubles might have ended in perfect peace, had I been at this time with some one to instruct me correctly in the simple way of faith. But instead of a deep, sweet rest in Christ, I now felt that all my worldly comfort was gone, and my spiritual resources completely exhausted, and I far from being a happy man.

My hungering and thirsting after righteousness now became so intense that I could do nothing but pray for a clean heart. And in answer to my prayers, I would be consciously blessed, sometimes two and three times a day for nearly two anxious months, yet I could not venture to profess or believe myself every whit whole. At this juncture I met at a campmeeting several persons professing and enjoying perfect love, and immediately sought instruction from them. I was told that if I was really consecrated to God, with a view of seeking holiness, I might at once, without any further effort or good works upon my part, believe that the Holy Spirit does now fully save me. I now saw that I had been waiting for a sensible evidence that the work was done, before I could trust God, or believe Him faithful in the fulfillment of His promises.

With this new light I determined I would distrust no longer, but by the help of grace, would believe and "reckon" myself, as ordered, "dead indeed unto sin." Here it was suggested that there was danger of practicing a willful self-delusion; but the Spirit helped my infirmities, and I was enabled to see that it was perfectly safe to obey God, and that He, not I, would be responsible for any disastrous results that might follow such obedience. I now felt very thankful for increasing light upon duty and privilege, and ventured to state to two or three persons in sympathy with my struggles for holiness, and who were solicitous for my success, that I believed myself very near the place where Divine mercy was pledged to give me the victory.

At this juncture I was extremely cautious lest I might profess a measure of grace which I did not possess; yet I noticed that the less ambiguous my statements, and the more positive my confessions, the clearer my light, and the more satisfactory my experience. This enabled me to declare that if I were not dead to sin, I was certainly dying, and, of course, would soon be dead. Perhaps it was not over thirty minutes after this till I made the "reckoning" clearly, and stated it positively to others. Very soon I found myself in a state of adoring wonder at the greatness of salvation, [and the simplicity of the way to its possession](#). I now could see that Christ was all and in all, and that to truly accept Him was to possess all things, and to confess to too much was an absurdity. This state of wonder and rapture lasted for several days, and my heart called upon all the angels, all the redeemed, and all beings that had breath, to aid me in praising the Lord for my being and its wonderful possibilities through the provisions of the atonement. It appeared the most marvelous fact that ever reached my mind, that I should be washed in the blood of the Lamb and made whiter than snow. I felt such a sense of inward cleanness that I wished all on earth could only see what the Spirit could do for one so worldly, so selfish, and so unclean. An almost irrepressible desire seized me to tell all I met, saint and sinner, at home and abroad, in the families and on the highway, what the Lord had done for me. This desire, and the accompanying effusions of the Spirit which occurred every few minutes through the day, continued for some years with more or less force.

By and by, I began to turn my attention away from what had been done for me to what I began to see before me, and I perceived that a state of purity and general fullness of the Spirit were small matters in contrast with "all the fulness of God," and living in the realm of the "exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think." Since then I have been a continuous seeker, not for pardon, or purity, or the grace already obtained, but for more and more of the Christ nature. "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize."

About two weeks after the event of my entire sanctification the presiding elder of the district took sick and sent for me to come and see him. I immediately responded to the call, and found that he wished me to attend his quarterly meeting on the following Saturday and Sunday. I promised to do so, and asked for the plan of appointments, proposing to do his work, as best I could, and send him each Monday what

money the stewards gave me, until he should be well able to resume work. This he gladly accepted, and in a few days passed to his reward. The leading brethren of the district consulted concerning his successor, and, with my consent, agreed that I should proceed with the work, and pass the salary to the widow who was left without resources for support. During the nine months that remained of the year, I spent two or three days of each week at quarterly meetings. This gave me a fine opportunity every week, before different audiences, to declare what the Lord had done for me, and to press the subject of holiness upon the churches. In this I met with comparatively little open opposition, and soon the work of revival commenced on different charges, and a goodly number of conversions, and a still greater number of sanctifications, took place in the district.

Before my labors ended in this field, I had sold my stock, leased my store property and dwelling, and prepared to return to the ranks of effective preachers, and take work at the approaching annual conference. This I did, and was sent to raise up a second Methodist Episcopal Church in Canton, Ohio. With a missionary appropriation of \$100, I commenced labor in a ward school-house in the southern part of the city. The first Sunday I preached to a small congregation, announced my mission, read Wesley's definition of a Methodist from his Plain Account, read some of the General Rules, stated my purpose to organize a society upon the basis of the Discipline and Methodist standards of doctrine, and asked for the names of persons who were willing to join the new society on these conditions. Six persons, who were at the time members of the First Methodist Episcopal Church, and who were professors of holiness, gave their names. Next Sunday the number swelled to near thirty, and soon thereafter we formally organized. The board of stewards then added to the missionary appropriation \$1000, making a salary of \$1,100. This was promptly paid every week without any fair, festival, bazaar, or dunning of the membership. The secret of this was that I became intensely interested in the salvation of my people; and, being few in number, I visited them frequently, inquired into their spiritual state, rejoiced with them that rejoiced, wept with them that wept; helped in a small measure, those who needed financial aid; and wedded, by my love and attention to them, their affections to me, without intending anything but their salvation. And, though with two or three exceptions they were all poor, being day laborers and washerwomen, yet such was their love for the pastor that every dollar of their hard earnings was divided with him. I could have said of them, had the occasion arisen, as Paul said of some of his helpers, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks."

At the close of the first year we numbered one hundred and twenty Spirit-baptized souls, and bound together with a love that lasts to this day, and flames up when we meet on the highways or anywhere else. At the end of the second year the number had increased to one hundred and seventy; we had a new church nearly completed, and were prospering in our souls, though from various causes we were not multiplying so rapidly as we should have done. This, and other reasons, led me at the close of the second year to ask for a removal, believing that it would be best for all concerned. My request was granted and I was appointed to another charge, but I was taken down by rheumatism and kept disabled so long that I was compelled to resign it. Soon after this resignation I recovered and commenced helping pastors in opening revival work upon their charges, and this line of labor I have continued, so far as able, to this day. For these services I have accepted no remuneration of any kind except traveling expenses and board while at work. My reasons for this have been, first, I had an income sufficient to meet my wants and which enabled me to give to benevolent uses from \$500 to \$1,000 each year; and second, I wished to remove all suspicion concerning the motives that prompted me to the course taken.

In this work I have, upon invitation of the preachers who desired my help,

traveled over the greater part of Ohio, and portions of the neighboring States and Canada, spending about ten days at each place, and directing my efforts chiefly to the sanctification of the membership. In this work I have seen many of the preachers, and many hundreds of the more spiritual of their flocks, sanctified wholly. A few of the preachers, who had no sympathy with my special work but desired their charges to reap the benefits of my labors in a revival, and who came under conviction for holiness themselves but refused to follow the light, soon lost the grace which they had. Some of these have left the pulpit for other callings; some have been arrested and expelled from the church for scandalous sins, and others have surrendered their credentials without trial, and retired from the ministry and the Church of their early choice in disgrace. I have learned in these and similar facts that it is a fearful thing for either laymen or ministers to receive the light and refuse to follow it. But it would require a considerable volume to detail all the interesting incidents that have come to my notice, and valuable facts learned in this work of seventeen years continued summer and winter, and cannot be even hinted at in this outline of experience.

In closing, I ought to state that naturally I was very unwilling to labor without compensation, and especially on some lines of work, but the "life more abundant" gave me such a passion for the holiness work that, without remuneration, it had nearly proved a snare, and led me into a subtle idolatry, weaning the affections from the adorable Bridegroom Himself to the less delightful matter of religious work. And now, nearing the close of probationary life, I still find my supreme delight in union with Jesus Christ, and in preaching, writing, and giving of my means to spread the doctrine and experience of Christian holiness. But as I look back over the work I see so much error, infirmities, and other matters to lament, that I look away from it to the pitying Father for needed solace, and, as my only hope, throw my helpless soul upon the naked mercy of the compassionate One.



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