

Testimony

by Thomas Cook

The speaker shares their personal experience of seeking and receiving full salvation, emphasizing the importance of faith, surrender, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 1 John 1:7

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Thomas Cook preaches on the importance of testifying to the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ and the experience of entire sanctification through the work of the Holy Ghost. Early Methodists made humble confessions of heart purity, leading to spiritual revival. Mr. Wesley emphasized the duty of confessing heart purity and urged ministers and believers to openly declare God's work in their lives. The sermon highlights the journey from initial conversion to the pursuit of full sanctification, emphasizing the need for complete surrender and faith in receiving the fullness of God's grace.

Transcript

The Rev. John Fletcher once said to Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers, "Come, my sister, we will covenant together to spread the sacred flame, and testify before men and angels 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.'" With flowing tears Mrs. Rogers replied, "In the strength of Jesus I will;" and she did, until she went "sweeping through the gates, washed in the blood of the Lamb." It seems to have been the custom among early Methodists to make humble, prudent, but frank acknowledgement of the work of entire sanctification, when it was wrought in their souls by the power of the Holy Ghost. We give a few testimonies which come first to hand: "The Lord for whom I waited came suddenly to the temple of my heart, and I had an immediate evidence that this was the blessing I had for some time been seeking." "No sooner had I uttered the words 'I shall have the blessing now' than refining fire went through my heart, illuminating my soul, scattered its life through every part, and sanctified the whole. I then received the full witness of the Spirit that the blood of Jesus had cleansed me from all sin."

"My heart was softened, and warmed, and filled; my prayer was turned into praises, and I could do nothing but shout, 'Glory be to God.' Whether I hold or not, I am sure that God took full possession of my heart on the 14th of July."

These are but samples of the numerous testimonies which have been handed down to us in the biographies of those who are held up before us as "epistles" to be "read and known of all men."

At first Mr. Wesley advised that great caution should be exercised in making definite confession of heart purity, but as the doctrine and experience became more generally known and appreciated, he changed his attitude, and constantly urged the duty to confess it upon ministers and people. Writing to John King, one of his preachers, in 1787, he said, "It requires a great deal of watchfulness to retain the perfect love of God; and one great means of retaining it is, frankly to declare what God has given you, and earnestly to exhort all the believers you meet to follow after full salvation." It was soon found that this testimony humbly and truthfully given moved the hearts of others as nothing else could do. Those who heard it were stimulated to seek the same grace, and a general revival followed. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

The testimony of the cleansed leper will do more to recommend the physician than the most persuasive and cogent arguments. We might advertise a remedy for cancer, but who would believe in our remedy unless we could point to some we had cured? St. Paul recognized experience to be one of the chief elements of Evangelical power. Writing to Philemon, he said, "That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus." Though he was the master logician, on occasions when life and liberty were at stake, he did not attempt any elaborate argument to justify his action, but told the story of his conversion. Three times his commission was renewed, and each time he was reminded that he was chosen not so much to preach as to testify. St. John often left the advocate's stand and entered the witness-box, as is seen from the frequent occurrence of the words "We know," so characteristic of his Epistles. He believed that man might be saved from all sin and know it, so as to be able to testify, as he did, "The Blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin."

The great need of our times is a witnessing Church and ministry. "Ye are My witnesses, said the Lord." Not that we would recommend loud professions as to attainment. Instead of professing anything, let us confess Christ as a Saviour from all sin, if we have proved Him to be such. This will make Him and what He is to us prominent as contrasted with some attainment which might call attention to ourselves. If by humbly declaring how great things God hath done for us we can encourage some trembling and fainting soul, and kindle desire after like precious blessing, it would be cowardice or false prudence not to do it with humility. For this reason the writer ventures once again to relate how he was led into the experience which he has, in these pages, been attempting to describe.

My conversion was so clear and satisfactory that I could never doubt its reality. Need I say it was an eventful day in my history when I first realized God's pardoning mercy, and received the assurance of His favor? The beginnings of this life of loyalty and love I shall never forget. It seems but yesterday, though many years have now passed since the love of God was shed abroad in my heart, and I was reconciled to God, who loved me, even me. It was a change as from death unto life. A new fountain of joys was at once opened in my heart, so exceedingly precious and sweet as utterly to extinguish all desire for that which I had called pleasure before. All my fears of death, judgment, and hell were fully swept away, and I could do nothing but praise God continually. My tastes, desires, and impulses were all changed; "all things became new." I was truly a new creature, and seemed to be in a new world.

With such experiences is it any wonder I imagined the work of moral renovation was perfected, that sin was not only forgiven, but fully expelled from my soul? But soon I discovered my mistake. My highly-wrought emotions subsided, and petty annoyances of life chafed, the temptations of the devil assailed; and then I found out, as pride, envy, unbelief, self-will, and other forms of heart-sin stirred within me, that much needed to be done before I could be "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." The "old man" was bound, but not cast out; the disease was modified, but not eradicated; sin was suspended,

but not fully destroyed. True, sin was stunned and deadened, and held in check by grace; its power was broken, but its pollution continued. It did not reign, but it existed, making its presence felt in a constant "bent to sinning," and at times a painful sense of duality contrasting most strikingly with the sweet feeling of oneness with Christ I now experience. There were foes within as well as without; some of the Canaanites remained, and were thorns in my side and pricks in my eyes; the flesh and spirit were in a state of antagonism, which I saw to be manifestly only a temporary position -- one or the other must eventually conquer; the light was mingled with darkness, and love with its opposites.

How many headaches and heartaches I had in struggling with my bosom foes, no language can describe. All the time I was enjoying sweet fellowship with Christ, was blessedly conscious of acceptance in Him, was an earnest worker in the Lord's vineyard, and would rather have died than willfully sinned against Him. But though I never was a backslider in the ordinary sense, my Christian life was unsatisfactory, at least to myself. There was much of vacillation about it, sinning and repenting, advancing and retrograding, swinging like a pendulum between God and the world.

My experience was full of fits and starts, changeable and uneven. I was conscious also of a mighty want; there seemed a vacuum in my nature which grace had not filled, a strange sense of need, which I cannot describe, but which all who love the Lord Jesus with less than perfect love will understand. My religion moreover was full of action, but I saw little result from my efforts. I fear now that to furnish subject-food for self-worship was the great end in much that I did, and not the glory of Jesus.

For three years this half-and-half sort of life continued, when I was so dissatisfied that I felt unless I had something better I could not go on any longer. Reading Methodist biographies about this time stirred my heart, and filled me with hope for better things. I thought what God had done for others He could do for me; and an inexpressible longing possessed me to enjoy the fullness of which they spoke. I began at once to seek it, determined to give God no rest until I was sanctified wholly. The more earnestly I sought the worse I seemed to become. What a view I had of the sinfulness of my own heart! I saw what a charnel-house it was -- a depth of depravity there which would at once have utterly paralyzed my faith, and extinguished my hope. I then apprehended the goodness of God in not revealing to me my need of cleansing when I sought forgiveness. It was enough that I should realize my guilt and exposure to the pangs of the second death when I came to God at first. Had I then seen my own heart sin as I saw it afterwards, I believe I should have despaired in view of the difficulties; so God's revelation of my need was tempered in mercy until I had strength enough to receive it. It was in my case very similar to that of Professor Upham: "the remains of every form of internal opposition to God appeared to be centered in one point -- selfishness!" I had once prayed to be saved from hell, but prayer to be saved from myself now was immeasurably more fervent. How I struggled and wrestled for the victory I shall never be able to tell, but sin and self die hard.

From experiences I had read and listened to I imagined it would be all gladness entering into this rest, but I found it a different process. The way was through the garden and by the cross; I had to learn the hard lesson that every victory is gained by surrender, and that the place of life is the place of death. I saw it all clearly enough, that before there could be a full and glorious resurrection to spiritual life and blessedness, there must first be a complete death of self -- my hands must be empty if I would grasp a whole Christ. Again and again I searched my heart, and surrendered, praying all the while that any idol might be uncovered of which I was unconscious, that the Holy Spirit would make demand after demand until self were exhausted. Perhaps my reputation was the last thing laid on the altar. How concerned I used to be for the good opinion of my fellow mortals, instead of seeking the honor that comes from God only! But I

see now that I never had any reputation until I gave it to God. Blessed paradox, "He that loseth his life for My sake shall save it," and in all other matters this is equally true. Acting upon the advice of one deeply experienced in Divine things, I wrote upon paper the several items included as well as the obligations assumed in the complete consecration of myself to God. I did this to secure definiteness of surrender.

At last I felt sure, so far as I knew it (and we are not responsible for what we do not know), that upon all I had I could honestly inscribe "Sacred to Jesus." The language of my soul was "None of self, and all of Thee." But still the Lord tarried. Why did He not come and fill His Temple? I afterwards saw that it was because I did not receive Him by simple faith. In consecration we give all, by faith we take all, and the one is as essential as the other. I had received justification by faith, but was seeking sanctification by works. What strugglings and wrestlings and tears I might have been saved, had I known the simple way of faith then as I do now; but I had no one to help me.

Some months passed, during which I was at times almost in a state of despair; but my extremity was God's opportunity. At this very juncture, when I felt I must die unless I received the grace, an Evangelist came to our town, and proclaimed "full salvation" to be a present duty and privilege. There was no disputing his teaching; if by faith, it must be a present experience. Faith cannot be otherwise than an instantaneous operation. It was like a revelation from heaven to me, and I rejoiced in hope, though not in actual possession of the fullness, during his visit. Some friends entered into rest before he left, but, greatly to my disappointment, I did not. Instead of receiving Christ as my Saviour, to the uttermost in the absence of all feeling, I waited for some wondrous emotion, some great exaltation of soul. In fact, I was seeking the experience of another friend, who had been prostrated under the weight of glory which fell upon him as he wrestled for the blessing. How many seekers make this same mistake! They forget that in all God's works is beautiful variety, and in the spiritual world this is as true as in the natural world. He scarcely ever deals with two persons alike. I had set the Lord a plan to work by, and was disappointed. Instead of in the earthquake, God spoke to me in the "still small voice." I saw my blunder afterwards, and was willing to be blessed in God's own way, with or without emotion. It was then -- oh, glory to His Name! -- He spoke to me the second time, "Be clean."

The circumstances were as follows:-- A few friends who had received "full salvation" during the Evangelist's visit decided to meet together week by week, to encourage each other in the way, and assist those who might be seeking the experience. It was at the first meeting where the Lord met me. After listening to their experiences I could bear no longer, but asked them to begin at once to pray that I might enter in. I fell upon my knees, with the determination not to rise again until my request was granted. The passage, "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," was instantly applied to my heart, and with such power as I had never felt before. What a fullness of meaning I saw in the words! Was I walking in the light? Truthfully I could answer, "Yes, Lord; so far as I know Thy will I am doing it, and will do it, by Thy grace helping me." I then saw that the passage was not so much a promise as a plain declaration. If I walked in the light, the full cleansing from sin was my heritage, and all I had to do was immediately to claim it. Without a moment's hesitation I did so, and cried out at the top of my voice, "I claim the blessing now." My friends then began to sing -

'Tis done I Thou dost this moment save,

With full salvation bless;

Redemption through Thy blood I have,

And spotless love and peace.

While they sang the refining fire came down and went through my heart, searching, melting, burning, filling all its chambers with light, and hallowing my whole heart to God. Oh, the indescribable sweetness of that moment! All words fail to express the blessedness of the spiritual manifestation of Jesus as my Saviour from all sin. My heart warms as I write at the remembrance of the event which transcends all others in my religious history. It was not so much ecstatic emotion I experienced as an unspeakable peace; "God's love swallowed me up." For a few moments, "all its waves and billows rolled over me." So much afraid was I lest I should lose the delightful sense of the Saviour's presence, that I wished those with me not to speak or disturb me; I wanted to dwell in silence, as my heart was filled with love and gratitude to God.

I need not say the reception of this grace proved an era in my religious life. Many beautiful years have passed away since then. But no words can ever express the complete satisfaction I have in Christ; the sweet sense of rest in His hallowing presence from all worry and care, the ease and joy of His service; not "I must" now, but "I may;" the delight I find in prayer and praise; the increased preciousness and fullness of meaning I see in the Scriptures, and the clear and indubitable witness of cleansing through the blood of Jesus. How I wish I could tell of the sweetness, the richness, and indescribable blessedness of this life of perfect love. I cannot tell the story; but I cannot let it alone. O, for a thousand tongues to proclaim Jesus to men, the mighty Saviour, who is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him! Reader, will you join us and help us to spread the sacred flame?

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