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"Of my conversion, I may say of a truth that it was, in the judgment of all who knew me, of a very marked and decisive character, being followed by a visible change in character and life, such as was seldom witnessed. "

On Sabbath, November 9, 1884, I completed the eighty-fifth year of my life. The first seventeen years of this period were spent in the darkness of impenitency and sin, a state rightly represented by the words "having no hope, and without God in the world." The following eighteen years I lived and walked in the dim twilight of that semi-faith which fully knows Christ in the sphere of "justification of faith," but knows almost nothing of Him in the sphere of "sanctification by faith," and is absolutely ignorant of Him in the promise, "he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." During the subsequent fifty years I have found grace "to walk with God" in that sphere of cloudless sunlight in which "we are complete in Christ," and know Him as "our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption" -- know Him not only as "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world," but as "he that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost," and in which, consequently, "God is our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning are ended."

I am distinctly aware of the fact that should I, in speaking of the past, use a single word or sentence for self-glorification, I should grievously offend my God and Saviour, and in a corresponding degree wrong my own soul. My object will be to state merely such facts and characteristics of the periods of any life as may be interesting and instructive to the reader.

Here permit me to say, in general, that while I was in public regarded an unexceptionably moral youth, no individual ever did or ever can lead a more godless life than I did. I never in a single instance, excepting at my mother's knee, offered a prayer to God in any form. I never entertained or expressed a sentiment of thanksgiving for a blessing received, or confessed a sin to my God; nor did I ever do or avoid doing a single act from regard to His will, favor or displeasure.

Two facts peculiarized my natural characteristics. On one side my nature was specially tender and sympathetic; while, on the other, it was equally characterized by the strongest and most positive of temperaments and propensities. My temper, for example, was very easily excited, and when I was excited I was utterly reckless of all consequences in time or eternity, and of any pain that might be inflicted upon me. The thought of that temper so horrified me, while alone in my father's pasture, at the age of ten years, that I exclaimed aloud, "This temper will ruin me!"

From my early years the principle of ambition had continuous and absolute control over my daily thoughts and all my plans for future life. I would be an educated man, and in that sphere "a man of renown." Everywhere I openly avowed that purpose and made it a leading theme of conversation with those of my own age especially. In no youth that I ever knew did the principles of pride and self-will, the latter especially, exist with such strength as in myself. A more restless nature than one, as it seems to me, ever did possess. Those facts sufficiently indicate my natural disposition and temperament. My mother once called me to her and said, "The neighbors who visited here yesterday afternoon had a conversation about you. They all agreed that if you should live on to manhood you would become a very good or a very bad man. There would be nothing half-way about you."

My Conversion, and the Succeeding Eighteen Years

Of my conversion, I may say of a truth that it was, in the judgment of all who knew me, of a very marked and decisive character, being followed by a visible change in character and life, such as was seldom witnessed. During the first five years of my Christian life I was directly instrumental in originating four important revivals of religion -- three of these occurring in the schools which I taught, and these where no work of grace existed within hearing distance around. Nor was my ministry of eight years' continuance, during this period, a fruitless one; no less, I suppose, than 2,000 souls being added to the churches through my instrumentality.

Marked Characteristics of the First Eighteen Years of My Christian Life

1. There was at length, notwithstanding all my prayers and efforts to the contrary, a gradual fading out of that love, until I was fully at home in the sentiment of the hymn:

"Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,  
How sweet their memory still;  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill."

That "aching void" remained a characteristic of my religious life up to the close of the period now under consideration.

2. Not long after my religious life commenced I found, to my great sorrow and regret, that those sinful propensities which had held absolute control over me during the era of my impenitency still existed, and when temptation arose "warred in my members" with seeming undiminished strength, and were frequently "bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which was in my members." No believer, as it seems to me, ever did or ever can strive more resolutely and untiringly than I did to subdue and hold in subjection his evil propensities, or made less progress to effect his purpose than I did. When subject to strong and especially sudden temptation I found myself not more than a conqueror, but a groaning captive. For eighteen years, for example, I maintained a most determined war upon that evil temper; yet when suddenly provoked, I found myself, and that invariably, betrayed into words and acts of which I would have occasion to repent and confess as sins. How often did I exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Nor did my struggles and most determined resolutions issue in any seeming increase of power over these propensities.

3. During these eighteen years after the fading of my primal joys, I was from time to time troubled and not infrequently agonized with painful doubts -- doubts about my standing as a believer, about the truth of the Gospel, and a future state as revealed in the same. I seemed to myself to be among the number who feared the Lord, obeyed the voice of His servants, and yet walked in darkness and had no light.

4. As far as the inner life was concerned, I seemed to myself to be making no progress. I did considerably grow in knowledge, and in power as a preacher, but the light within did not brighten on toward the perfect day.

5. The fear and dread of death, which had thrown such a deep gloom over my impenitent life, continued to oppress me during the eighteen years under consideration, rendering my ministerial visitation to the sick and attendance upon funeral seasons of great trial and pensiveness. Thus far "through fear of death I had all my life-time been subject to bondage."

6. I did know how to preach the Gospel to the impenitent, to lead inquiring sinners unto Christ for the pardon of sin; and I could also "preach the doctrines" to believers, urge them to faithfulness in a duty, to labor and pray for the conversion of sinners, and to liberal contributions for every good cause. In all these respects I had good success in my sacred calling; but when I reflected upon such precepts and utterances as the following: "Feed my sheep," "Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak," "I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established," I said to myself, "There is a lack in me of essential qualifications for the highest functions of my sacred calling." I did not know how to conduct religious conversation among my people; "to feed the flock of God."

7. I saw there was an essential defect in my experience and character as a Christian. I read and prayerfully pondered such passages as the following; namely, "The water I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"; "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee"; "Whom having not seen, ye love, and in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"; "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that hath loved us," etc. As I read such passages I said to myself, "My experience hardly approaches that which is here revealed as the common privilege of all the saints." In the secret of my own spirit I said, "I will never cease inquiry and prayer until God shall open the eyes of my understanding, that I may know the things which are freely given us of God." After some years of most diligent inquiry and prayer my eyes were opened, and "I beheld with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord," and "knew the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," and merged "out of darkness into God's marvelous light." In that light I have lived and walked for the past fifty years.

When I reflected, as I often did, upon this up-and-down sinning and repenting form of life on this lower plane, I frequently said to myself, "This does indeed seem to be a strange kind of service to offer to my God and Redeemer. I know, however, of no other way of leading a religious life but to do as I am doing --that is, renewing a broken purpose as often as broken, and after every fall to rise up and start anew with the same purpose as before." When a sense of weariness and despondency came over me in view of the facts of such a life, I often repeated to myself the words, "Faint, yet pursuing."

During all those years such passages as the following were a dead letter unto me: passages in which "the very God of peace" promises, on condition that himself "sprinkle clean water upon us," and that we shall be clean; that "he will turn his hand upon us, and purely purge away our dross, and take away all our sin"; that he will "sanctify us wholly, and preserve our whole spirit and soul and body blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

When I apprehended that He was just as able to "sanctify me wholly" as to justify me fully, then, totally renouncing self and self-dependence, I entered upon the faith-life in its true and proper form.

My Fifty Years' Walk With God

And here permit me to remark that there has been during this period a total disappearance of all those painful experiences which threw such a "disastrous twilight" over the preceding eighteen years of my Christian life. The peace and joy which, as an unfailing and unfading light, have filled and occupied these past fifty years have so far surpassed and eclipsed the "peaceful hours enjoyed" during the ardency of my "first love" that the latter is seldom "remembered or comes into mind." Not a throb of pain from the "aching void" so long left in my heart by the passing away of those "peaceful hours" has been experienced during these fifty years. On the other hand, that void has been occupied and filled by "the peace of God" during this entire period.

During these fifty years I have almost, and I might say quite, ceased to be conscious of the existence and action of those evil propensities (lusts) which, during the preceding eighteen years, "warred in my members" and so often rendered me a groaning captive "under the law of sin and death," "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus having made me free" from that old law. Immediately after my entrance into "the brightness of the divine rising."

I became blissfully conscious that all my propensities were, by divine grace, put under my absolute control; that I was no longer a groaning captive, but the Lord's free man -- free and divinely empowered to employ all faculties and propensities, physical and mental, as "instruments of righteousness in the divine service."

In but one single instance, for example, have I, during all these fifty years, been conscious at all of a movement of that evil temper, the strongest of all my propensities, and that was but for an instant, and occurred some thirty or forty years since, no one suspecting the fact but myself. Brother Finney, after our very intimate association of fifteen years' continuance at Oberlin, made the statement to a leading minister, a mutual friend of ours: "Brother Mahan never gets angry, nor does he ever, under the severest provocations or the most trying and disturbing providences -- lose the even balance of his mind."

As the result of fifty years' experience and careful self-watchfulness I present myself as a witness for Christ, that "our old man may be crucified with him," and "the body of sin destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Were those old propensities against which I so long and vainly fought, and whose existence and action within I so long and deeply lamented, now warring or acting at all in the inner man, should I not be, sometimes, at least, conscious of the fact?

Nor has a shadow of one of those doubts which so frequently darkened my vision --- doubts of my standing with God, of the truth of His word, and of an eternity to come -- had for a moment a place in my experience since "the Sun of Righteousness rose upon my soul with healing in his wings."

In the inner life also there has been during these fifty years, not as formerly, little or no conscious growth, but an increasing knowledge of my indwelling God and Saviour, and a consciously growing "meekness for the inheritance of the saints in light," as well as of the doctrine and the great revelations of the sacred Word. Knowledge now, also, as it had not then, has a consciously transforming power, changing the moral being into the image of Christ, "from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The fear and dread of death which threw such a deep gloom over my impenitence, and continued to oppress me during the eighteen years of my primal Christian life, has never approached my mind since "the brightness of the rising" at the commencement of the period now under consideration. O! how sweet is the whisper of the angel,

"In my room,  
A few more shadows and he will come."

As long as Christ has work for me here I much prefer earth to heaven; when that work shall have been finished I am possessed of but one desire, and that is, "To be absent from the body and present with the Lord." My entrance into the high

er life was attended by two important facts -- a vast increase of effective power in preaching Christ to the impenitent, and "the edification of the body of Christ" (believers) became the leading characteristic and luxury of my ministry. Religious conversions became as easy and spontaneous as the outflow of water from a living fountain. How often have I had occasion to repeat the word of the apostle as applicable to myself: "Blessed be God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

Should I designate what I regard as one of the leading, if not the leading, characteristics of my experience and life during these fifty years I should refer to such Scriptures as the following; "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee"; "And the fruit of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever"; "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplications with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." At intervals my joy in God becomes so full and overflowing that it seems as if the great deep of the mind is being broken up. But my peace, quietness, and assurance know no interruption. "In whatever state I am, I have learned therewith to be content"; my abiding place being the center of the sweet will of my God.

Should I be asked, "Have you not sinned during these many years?" my reply would be, "I set up no such pretension as that. This I do profess, however: that I find grace to 'serve Christ with a pure conscience.' But while 'I know nothing by (against) myself, yet am I not hereby justified, but he that judgeth me is God.' I do 'have confidence toward God,' because 'my heart condemns me not.' I have this evidence also that the love I have does cast out all 'fear that hath torment." In the consciousness of such facts I commit to Christ the keeping of my soul, and that in 'the full assurance of faith,' the full assurance of hope, 'the full assurance of understanding.'"

As the result of these fifty years' experience and widely-extended and careful observation, together with the most careful and prayerful study of every part of the word of God which bears upon the subject, I may add here that not a shadow of a doubt rests upon my mind of the absolute truth of these great doctrines, namely, the doctrines of justification by faith, sanctification by faith, and of the baptism of the Holy Ghost to be received by faith.

Soon after I became conscious of a personal union with Christ, "I in him and he in me," I inquired of the Lord whether such blissful union could be an abiding one. In specific answer to such inquiry this promise was, all-impressively, presented to my faith, and has ever since abode in my heart as the light of my life; namely, "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the day of mourning shall be ended."

ASA MAHAN

Taken from Forty Witnesses, by Rev. S. Olin Garrison, M.A., Fountain Press, Pennsylvania.

**Re: Personal Experiences of God - Asa Mahan - posted by learn (), on: 2008/9/20 15:07**

Thanks for this testimony.