



Helps to Holiness

Chapter 28 – SOME OF GOD'S WORDS TO ME

"God doth talk with man, and he liveth" (Deut. v.24).

God did not cease speaking to men when the canon of Scripture was complete. Though the manner of communication may have changed somewhat yet the communication itself is something to which every Spirit-born soul can joyfully testify. Every one sorry for sin, and sighing and crying for deliverance, and hungering and thirsting for righteousness, will soon find Out, as did the Israelites, that "God doth talk with man."

God has most commonly and most powerfully spoken to me through the words of Scripture. Some of them stand out to my mental and spiritual vision like mighty mountain-peaks, rising from a vast, extended plain. The Spirit that moved "holy men of old" to write the words of the Bible has moved me to understand them, by leading me along the lines of spiritual experience first trodden by these men, and has "taken the things of Christ and revealed them" unto me, until I have been filled with a Divine certainty as altogether satisfactory and absolute as that wrought in my intellect by a mathematical demonstration.

The first words which I now remember coming to me with this irresistible Divine force, came when I was seeking the blessing of a clean heart. Although I was hungering and thirsting for the blessing, yet at times a feeling of utter indifference – a kind of spiritual stupor – would come over me and threaten to devour all my holy longings, as Pharaoh's lean kine devoured the fat ones. I was in great distress, and did not know what to do. To stop seeking I saw meant infinite, eternal loss; yet to continue seeking seemed quite out of the question with such a paralysis of desire and feeling. But one day I read: "There is none that calleth upon Thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee" (Isa. lxiv. 7).

God spoke to me in these words as unmistakably as He spoke to Moses from the burning bush,



or the children of Israel from the cloudy mount. It was an altogether new experience to me. The word came as a rebuke to my unbelief and lazy indifference, and yet it put hope into me, and I said to myself:

"By the grace of God, if nobody else does I will stir myself up to seek Him, feeling or no feelings."

That was ten years ago, but from then till now, regardless of my feeling, I have sought God. I have not waited to be stirred up, but when necessary I have fasted and prayed and stirred myself up. I have often prayed, as did the royal Psalmist, "quicken me, O Lord, according to Thy lovingkindness"; but, whether I have felt any immediate quickening or not, I have laid hold of Him, I have sought Him, and, bless Him! I have found Him. "Seek, and ye shall find."

So that before finding God in the fullness of His love and favor, hindrances must be removed, "weights" and "easily-besetting sins" must be laid aside, and self smitten in the citadel of its ambitions and hopes.

The young man of today is ambitious. He wants to be Prime Minister if he goes into politics. He must be a multi-millionaire if he goes into business, and he aims to be a bishop if he enters the Church.

The ruling passion of my soul, and that which for years I longed after more than for holiness or Heaven, was to do something and be somebody who should win the esteem and compel the applause of thoughtful, educated men; and just as the Angel smote Jacob's thigh and put it out of joint, causing him for ever after to limp on it, the strongest part of his body, so God, in order to sanctify me wholly, and "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," smote and humbled me in this ruling propensity and strongest passion of my nature.

For several years before God sanctified me wholly, I knew there was such an experience, and I prayed by fits and starts for it, and all the time I hungered and thirsted for – I hardly knew what! Holiness in itself seemed desirable, but I saw as clearly then as I have since I obtained the blessing,



that with it came the cross and an irrepressible conflict with the carnal mind in each human being I met, whether he professed to be a Christian or avowed himself a sinner; whether cultured and thoughtful, or a raw, ignorant pagan; and this I knew instinctively would as surely bar my way to the esteem and applause of the people, whose goodwill and admiration I valued, as it did that of Jesus and Paul. And yet, so subtle is the deceitfulness of the unsanctified heart, that I would not then have acknowledged it to myself, although I am now persuaded that unwillingness to take up this cross was for years the lurking foe that barred the gates against the willing, waiting Sanctifier. At last I heard a distinguished evangelist and soul-winner preach a sermon on the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and I said to myself, "That is what I need and want; I must have it!" And I began to seek and pray for this, all the time with a secret thought in my heart that I, too, should become a great soul-winner and live in the eye of the world. I sought with considerable earnestness; but God was very merciful and hid Himself away from me, in this way arousing the wholesome fear of the Lord in my heart, and, at the same time, intensifying my spiritual hunger. I wept and prayed and besought the Lord to baptize me with the Spirit, and wondered why He did not, until one day I read those words of Paul, "That no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Cor. i. 29).

Here I saw the enemy of the Lord – self. There stood the idol of my soul – the passionate, consuming desire for glory – no longer hidden and nourished in the secret chambers of my heart, but discovered before the Lord as Agag was before Samuel; and those words, "No flesh shall glory in His presence," constituted "the sword of the Spirit," which pierced self through and through, and showed me I never could be holy and receive the baptism of the Spirit while I secretly cherished a desire for the honor that comes from man, and sought not "the honour that cometh from God only." That word was with power, and from then till now I have not sought the glory of this world. But while I no longer sought the glory of the world, yet this same powerful principle in me had to be yet further uncovered and smitten, in order to make me willing to lose what little glory I already had, or imagined I had, and be content to be accounted a fool for Christ.



The ruling propensity of the carnal nature seeks for gratification. If it can secure this lawfully, well; but gratification it will have, if it has to gain it unlawfully. Every way is unlawful for me which would be unlawful for Jesus. The Christian who is not entirely sanctified does not deliberately plan to do that which he knows to be wrong, but is rather betrayed by the deceitful heart within. He is overcome, if he is overcome (which, thank God, he need not be), secretly or suddenly, in a way which makes him abhor himself, but which, it seems, is the only way by which God can convince him of his depravity and need of a clean heart.

Now, twice I was so betrayed – once to cheat in an examination, and once to use the outline of another man's sermon. The first deed I bitterly repented of and confessed but the second was not so clearly wrong, since I had used materials of my own to fill in an outline, and especially since the outline was probably much better than any I could prepare. It was one of Finney's. In fact, if I had used the outline in the right spirit, I do not know that it would have been wrong at all. But God's word, which is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," searched me out, and revealed to my astonished, humbled soul, not merely the bearing and character of my act, but also of my spirit. He smote and humbled me again with these words: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth" (1 Pet. iv. 11).

When I read those words I felt as mean and guilty as though I had stolen ten thousand dollars. I began to see then the true character and mission of a preacher and a prophet: that he is a man sent from God and must, if he would please God and seek the glory He alone gives, wait upon God in prayer and diligent searching of His Word till he gets his message direct from the Throne. Then only can he speak "as the oracles of God," and "minister as of the ability which God giveth." I was not led to despise human teachers and human learning where God is in them, but I was led to exalt direct inspiration, and to see the absolute necessity of it for every one who sets himself to turn men to righteousness, and tell them how to find God and get to Heaven. I saw that instead of everlastingly sitting at the feet of human teachers, poring over commentaries, studying another man's sermons and diving into other men's volumes of anecdotes, and then



tickling the ears of people with pretty speeches and winning their one-day, empty applause by elaborately finished sermons, logically and rhetorically,

Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,

God meant the man He sent to speak His words, to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him, to get alone in some secret place on his knees and study the word of God under the direct illumination of the Holy Ghost, to study the holiness and righteous judgments of God until he got some red-hot thunderbolts that would burn the itching ears of the people, arouse their slumbering consciences, prick their hard hearts, and make them cry, "What shall we do?" I saw that he must study and meditate on the tender, boundless compassion and love of God in Christ, the perfect atonement for sin in its root and trunk and branch, and the simple way to appropriate it in penitence and self-surrender by faith, until he was fully possessed of it himself, and knew how to lead every broken heart directly to Jesus for perfect healing, to comfort mourners, to loose prisoners, to set captives free, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God.

This view greatly humbled me, and what to do I did not know. At last it was suggested to my mind that, as I had confessed the false examination, so now I ought to stand before the people and confess the stolen sermon outline. This fairly peeled my conscience, and it quivered with an indescribable agony. For about three weeks I struggled with this problem. I argued the matter with myself. I pleaded with God to show me if it were His will, and over and over again I promised Him I would do it, only to draw back in my heart. At last I told an intimate friend. He assured me it was not of God, and said he was going to preach in a revival meeting that night, and use materials he had gathered from another man's sermon. I coveted his freedom, but this brought no relief to me. I could not get away from my sin. Like David's, it was "ever before me."

One morning, while in this frame of mind, I picked up a little book on experimental religion, hoping to get light, when, on opening it, the very first subject that my eyes fell on was "Confession." I was cornered. My soul was brought to a full halt. I could seek no further light. I



wanted to die, and that moment my heart broke within me. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart ..."; and from the depths of my broken heart, my conquered spirit said to God, "I will." I had said it before with my lips, but now I said it with my heart. Then God spoke directly to my soul, not by printed words through my eyes, but by His Spirit in my heart. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John i. 9). The first part about forgiveness I knew, but the last clause about cleansing was a revelation to me. I did not remember ever to have seen or to have heard it before. The word was with power, and I bowed my head in my hands and said, "Father, I believe that." Then a great rest came into my soul, and I knew I was clean. In that instant, "The Blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God," purged my "conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. ix. 14).

God did not require Abraham to slay Isaac. All He wanted was a willing heart. So He did not require me to confess to the people. When my heart was willing, He swept the whole subject out of my mind and freed me utterly from slavish fear. My idol-self was gone. God knew I withheld nothing from Him, so He filled my soul with peace and showed me that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," and that the whole will of God was summed up in five words: "Faith which worketh by love."

Shortly after this, I ran into my friend's room with a borrowed book. The moment his eyes fell upon me, he said, "What is the matter; something has happened to you?" My face was witnessing to a pure heart before my lips did. But my lips soon followed, and have continued to this day.

The Psalmist said: "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, Thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation: I have not concealed Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth from the great congregation" (Ps. xl. 9, 10). Satan hates holy testimony, and he nearly entrapped me at this point. I felt I ought to preach it, but I shrank from the odium and conflict I



saw it would surely bring, and I hesitated to declare publicly that I was sanctified, lest I might do more harm than good. I saw only reproach. The glory that was to follow was hidden from my eyes. Beautiful, flowery sermons which appealed to the imagination and aroused the emotions, with just enough thought to properly balance them, were my ideal. I shrank from coming down to plain, heart-searching talks that laid hold of the consciences of men and made saints of them, or turned them into foes as implacable as the Pharisees were to Jesus, or the Jews to Paul. But before I got the blessing, God held me to it, and I had promised Him I would preach it if He would give me the experience. It was Friday that He cleansed me, and I determined to preach about it on the following Sunday. But I felt weak and faint. On Saturday morning, however, I met a noisy, shouting coachman on the street, who had the blessing, and I told him what God had done for me. He shouted and praised God, and said:

"Now, Brother Brengle, you preach it. The Church is dying for this."

Then we walked across Boston Common and Garden, and talked about the matter, and my heart burned within me as did the hearts of the two disciples with whom Jesus talked on the road to Emmaus; and in my inmost soul I recounted the cost, threw in my lot with Jesus crucified, and determined I would teach holiness, if it banished me for ever from the pulpit, and made me a hiss and a byword to all my acquaintances. Then I felt strong. The way to get strength is to throw yourself away for Jesus.

The next day I went to my church and preached as best I could out of a two-days-old experience, from "Let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. vi. 1). I closed with my experience, and the people broke down and wept, and some of them came to me afterward and said they wanted that same experience, and, bless God! some of them got it! I did not know what I was doing that morning, but I knew afterward. I was burning up my ships and casting down my bridges behind me. I was now in the enemy's land, fully committed to a warfare of utter extermination to all sin. I was on record now before Heaven, earth and Hell. Angels, men and devils had heard my testimony, and I must go forward, or openly and ignominiously retreat in the face of a jeering foe. I see now that



there is a Divine philosophy in requiring us not only to believe with our hearts unto righteousness, but to confess with the mouth unto salvation (Rom. x. 10). God led me along these lines. No man taught me.

Well, after I had put myself on record, I walked softly with God, desiring nothing but His will, and looking to Him to keep me every instant. I did not know there was anything more for me, but I meant, by God's grace, to hold what I had by doing His will as He had made it known to me and by trusting Him with all my heart.

But God meant greater things for me. On the following Tuesday morning, just after rising, with a heart full of eager desire for God, I read these words of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?" The Holy Ghost, the other "Comforter," was in those words, and in an instant my soul melted before the Lord like wax before fire, and I knew Jesus. He was revealed in me as He had promised, and I loved Him with an unutterable love. I wept, and adored, and loved, and loved, and loved. I walked out over Boston Common before breakfast, and still wept, and adored, and loved. Talk about the occupation of Heaven! I do not know what it will be – though, of course, it will be suited to, and commensurate with, our redeemed capacities and powers; but this I then knew, that if I could lie prostrate at the feet of Jesus to all eternity and love and adore Him, I should be satisfied. My soul was satisfied – satisfied – satisfied!

That experience fixed my theology. From then till now, men and devils might as well try to get me to question the presence of the sun in the heavens as to question the existence of God, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the sanctifying power of an ever-present, Almighty Holy Spirit. I am as sure the Bible is the word of God as I am of my own existence, while Heaven and Hell are as much realities to me as day and night, or winter and summer, or good and evil. I feel the powers of the world to come and the pull of Heaven in my own soul. Glory to God!

It is some years now since the Comforter came, and He abides in me still. He has not stopped



speaking to me yet. He has set my soul on fire, but, like the burning bush Moses saw in the Mount, it is not consumed.

To all who want such an experience I would say, "Ask, and it shall be given you." If it does not come for the asking, "Seek, and ye shall find." If it is still delayed, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke xi. 9). In other words, seek until you have sought with your whole heart, and there and then you will find Him. "Be not faithless, but believing." "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

I do not consider myself beyond the possibility of falling. I know I stand by faith, and must watch and pray lest I enter into temptation, and take heed lest I fall. Yet, in view of all God's marvelous loving kindnesses and tender mercies to me, I constantly sing, with the Apostle Jude:

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power. Both now and ever. Amen."