

“But How...”



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Old Paths Classics

“But How...”

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“But How. . .”

“For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.”

Rom. 7:18.

This is the cry from the heart of many a disappointed, defeated, disheartened, troubled Christian. The beginning of the Christian pathway was so bright. He looks back to the time when he received the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. He rejoiced in the joy of knowing that his sins were forgiven; a great burden was lifted from his heart; he was filled with love for his newly found Saviour. It seemed then that he would never want to sin again, that nothing could be simpler than to live always in the power of this new joy. But this did not last. Gradually the first exuberant joy died down; the old temptations came back as strong, even stronger than before; the desire to pray and read the Bible grew less; there came bad falls and failures such as he had thought had been left behind forever. And now, after months, or it may be years, of Christian experience, there has come to him a settled sense of failure, a state of continual self reproach; a deep impression that his Lord looks on him as a failure, too. There have been bright patches in his pathway, times of blessing at conference meetings and the like, when he seemed to get a new grip on things, and felt that he had entered a new phase in his Christian life. But the influence of such times has not lasted; there has been the coming down from the mountain of temporary joy and victory into the valley of further defeat and failure, and the valleys have been longer of late, and he is beginning to distrust the mountain top experiences because they make the valleys so much darker by contrast. And whether it is concerning his private Christian life which seems so full of defeat and failure, or whether it is concerning his

attempts at Christian work, which have been so feeble and fruitless, the cry of his heart is expressed in exactly these words, “How to perform that which is good I find not.”

Does that describe your experience of the Christian life? Then it is especially for you that this booklet is written in an effort to show clearly God’s way of deliverance for those who are troubled as you are. For God *has* a way of deliverance, do not doubt that for a moment. You may enter into that way today and walk joyfully in it all the days to come.

Get it clear, first, that deliverance comes by laying hold of and acting upon certain great truths revealed in God’s Word. But before we set down these great truths as simply as possible, and see how we may lay hold of and act upon them, will you seek to realize these two facts?

- Only God, by His Holy Spirit, is able to lead you into His way of deliverance.
- He desires far, far more than you do, that you should find that way.

So take a moment now, in His presence, to tell Him (in the light of the first of these facts) that you are entirely depending on His Spirit to lead you into His truth. Then tell Him (in the light of the second of these facts) that you are confident that He has brought you to this time and place to bless you, and that you are expecting Him to teach you as you read.

Now, the first great truth is this:

1. You, with your sinful nature, are incapable of producing any good thing.

The sinful nature with which you were born remained unchanged when you were born again. It is just as incapable of doing good now as it was when you became a Christian.

Thus you will have found God’s way of deliverance. The cry of your heart, “How to perform that which is good I find not,” will be silenced forever, for you will have learned the secret that is only learned by those who have passed from Romans 7 into Romans 8, and who can make the words of the second verse of that great chapter their own, saying with the Apostle, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

And your faith *can* be attacked. Your faith may fail. Those glorious facts may become almost useless so far as your experience is concerned, because you fail to reckon on them and live in the power of them. So it is your faith that the enemy will single out as the chief point of his attack. Whether by fierce temptation, whether by the circumstances into which you are brought, whether through your feelings, whatever means he may use, *his one aim will be to discredit God's facts to you, and so shake your faith in them and Him.* "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist *steadfast in the faith*" (1 Peter 5:8, 9). When circumstances seem impossible, when all signs of grace in you seem at their lowest ebb, when temptation is fiercest, when love and joy and hope seem nearly extinguished in your heart, then cling, without feeling and without emotion, to God's faithfulness; hold on to the fact that He loves you infinitely, and even now is working in you mightily; and honor God, and put the enemy to flight by taking to yourself the words of Job, "Though he slay me, *yet will I trust in him.*" "I have prayed for thee," says the One who ever lives to make intercession for us, "that thy faith fail not."

This faith of yours can only be maintained and strengthened by regular, prayerful study of God's Word, depending on His Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth, and in prayer and waiting upon God receiving each day afresh the needed strength to lay hold of the things that are freely given to you of God. So set apart each day a definite time for being alone with Him, if possible in the early morning, and let nothing take that time from you. Then, before the rush of the day begins, seek a fresh and firmer grasp of the great facts of His Word, each day anew reckoning yourself dead unto sin, and alive only unto God; each day anew claiming and reckoning on the filling of His Holy Spirit, in whose power alone can you live to please Him each moment, each hour, each day.

You "cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8) by any effort you make, any more than an unsaved man can. You are as unable to produce one good thing, thought, word, or deed, as you were unable to blot out the record of your past sins. "In me," said Paul, "...dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). That is what God says about you with your sinful nature: in you dwells no good thing. No good thing. Take a moment and let that sink in. Ask the Holy Spirit to drive it home and enable you to accept God's estimate of you. Don't shrink from believing it utterly; accept the truth of it without reservation, even though at the moment you cannot begin to see all that it implies. It seems to be a truth that should lead you to despair. No, the acceptance of it is the beginning of the pathway that leads to deliverance.

For has not all your experience been teaching you the truth of it? You have tried to do good; tried to love, and please, and serve God; tried to produce in your life and service the goodness and the fruitfulness that you know should be there. And you have failed. Of course you have. Do you see what you have been doing?

You have been trying to prove in your life the very opposite of what God says is the truth. God says: in you dwells no good thing; you have been trying to produce some "good thing." And now you are downcast and disheartened because you are beginning to find that there is "no good thing" there to produce. You have been struggling against the admission of that truth, because you felt that in admitting it, you must admit once and for all the downfall of your Christian life. In reality the admission and acceptance of that truth will be the place where deliverance will begin for you. There will be no deliverance until, in utter despair of yourself, you admit that you cannot do the first thing toward pleasing and serving God.

And notice this, and try to grasp the significance of it in relation to your past unhappy experience. God's dealings with you are all directed to this end, to bring you to that place

of utter despair of and distrust in yourself. He will let you fail, He will allow defeat and disappointment in your life, He will spare you no necessary suffering, in order to bring you to that place. For you must learn by experience, and bitter experience it often is, that in you dwells “no good thing.”

You did not realize that, did you? You thought that your failure was proving that God could not make use of you. In reality He is bringing you to the place where He can begin to use you. You thought He was looking on you reproachfully, because you cannot do the things that please Him. In reality, He knew all along that you cannot, and He is watching over you in unchanging love, waiting until you learn the lesson which He sees is necessary for you to learn.

It has been well said that the secret of the Christian life can be summed up in the words, “Let go, and let God.” The first thing is to “let go.” You have been clinging desperately to your hope of “making good” as a Christian; you have been clutching, like a drowning man at a straw at the last remnants of good which you imagine you possess; you have felt that, if you let them go, your whole Christian life must go. Now you are beginning to see your mistake. God is telling you to “let go,” to do the very thing that you have felt would be your downfall. Will you do it? Let go your last remaining hopes of being able to live the Christian life by any effort you can make, and admit once and for all the truth of God’s verdict that in you dwells “no good thing.” Let go just as you did when you first came to Him for forgiveness; you brought with you then no lingering remnant of the “filthy rags” of your own righteousness; you could find no reason in your own heart why He should accept and bless. It was:

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me.
Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.

reckoning that God has kept His Word with you, and daring to believe it, though you may not be conscious of any emotional outburst.” Take a few moments in silence to do that now.

One word in conclusion. This life which you have entered is all the way along a life of *faith*. Feelings there will be at times, feelings of joy unutterable and full of glory but not always. When the feelings come, they will be as the result of faith, but they are not a necessary part of faith, and the lack of them is by no means a proof that faith is in vain. Faith rests, without emotion, on immovable facts, not on feelings which are ever changing. And so for the maintenance of this life, as for its start, for the continual “being filled” with the Spirit as with the first “filling,” everything depends on your faith.

It is well to get that firmly fixed in your mind. In the days to come there will be seasons of desperate attack from the enemy of your soul. All his power will be put forth in the endeavor to shake your confidence in your Lord. The words of the Lord to Peter before his fall are well worth bearing in mind, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, *that thy faith fail not*” (Luke 22:31, 32). It is on your faith that the strain will come. Get that clear. That is the point of the enemy’s attack. That is the one point that you must guard at all costs, whatever may come.

Satan will not waste time attacking God’s facts. They are unassailable.

- God has finished with your old nature on Calvary.
- In the Holy Ghost, who dwells in you, you have all the resources you need.

These two facts Satan knows: They cannot be attacked. They are tremendous, unalterable, unassailable *facts*. But only your faith will make the facts real in your experience.

move you from depending utterly and only on the Holy Spirit's work, and believing that He is active within you even when you are not conscious of it.

In Thy strong hand I lay me down,
So shall the work be done,
For Who can work so wondrously
As the Almighty One?

As you live thus you will enter experimentally into the meaning of those great words of Paul in Gal. 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me by His Holy Spirit]: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

So we have seen that the entrance into and continuation in the life for which you have been longing will be by faith: the faith which listens only to God's voice, turning a deaf ear to the many other voices which clamor for a hearing; the faith which does not look for feelings, but reckons on God's facts, resolutely counting on them, in the face of everything that may seem to contradict them.

Everything then depends upon such faith. Leave the other truths for a moment, and focus your thoughts on this central one. *You have the Holy Ghost dwelling within you, and He desires to fill you, and to be to you all you need in your Christian life.* There is nothing for you to do but just to take what He wants to give. Will you do that now, deliberately and definitely? Bow in His presence; tell Him you have failed; tell Him that if any good thing is to come in your Christian life, He must do it all; tell Him you give yourself to Him, just as you are, not trying to make yourself better, or prepare for His blessing, just "letting go"; ask Him to fill you *now*.

"Then" (in the words of a great Christian leader) "rise up and go forth from your chamber, not trying to feel filled, but

Come as you came then. Cling to nothing else. Let go every other hope of ever being what God wants you to be. "Let go," and then "let God."

This brings us to the second great truth of His Word which you must lay hold of and act upon, and a glorious truth it is, truly "good news" to a troubled Christian such as you.

2. God has given His Holy Spirit to dwell within you, for the purpose of working in you both to will and to do all that He requires of you.

If it is true that in yourself you have no power to produce any one thing that God requires of you, it is equally true that in the Holy Spirit you have power to produce all that God requires of you. And the Holy Spirit dwells within you. He is there for the purpose of working "in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). But though He is there for that purpose, He cannot do His work while you are trying to do it for Him. He has entered (so to speak) the door of your life, but up to now you have kept Him on the threshold, looking on while you try to straighten up the house yourself. Your very efforts to please God and do His work are hindering His working. He cannot do His work while you are in the way. But when you "cease from your works," when you recognize at last that all your best efforts must end in failure, that in you dwells "no good thing," when you "let go," then the way is prepared for Him to come and do His work in you.

Lay hold of these great facts:

Just as God gave the Lord Jesus Christ to die for you that there might be pardon enough for all your sins; so He gave the Holy Ghost to dwell in you that there might be power enough to meet all your needs.

Just as the blood of Christ covers all your sins, and you do not go looking anywhere else to get rid of any one of

them, so the power of the Holy Ghost. covers all your needs, and you must not look anywhere else in order that any one of them may be met.

Just as, in your salvation, God did all, and you took no part in it, but to accept what He had done, so in your sanctification and service God must do all, and you will take no part in it but to accept what He will do for you.

When God gave you the Holy Ghost at your conversion, He gave you all you need for your Christian life and service. God requires nothing of you which the Holy Spirit cannot work in you nothing which He will not work in you, if you will let Him. Not one good thing can you produce yourself. It is useless for you to try. The attempt will drive you more and more to despair. When He gets to work He will produce all good things.

What is your need?

Is it *holiness*? You will not find even the beginnings of it in yourself. He is the Holy Spirit. Where He is allowed to work, increasing holiness must be the result.

Is it *love to God and to others*? You can never work it up. He is the Spirit of love, and where He is allowed to work in a human heart (however cold before) He sheds abroad the love of God in that heart (Rom. 5:5).

Is it *assurance*? It will never come by reasoning or argument. He is the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15), and His work is to witness with your spirit that you are indeed a child of God, enabling you to call God "Father" with a full assurance.

Is it *power over sin and for service*? He is the Spirit of power (2 Tim. 1:7). He is "the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead" (Rom. 8:11). If He is allowed to work in you, all the power of His resurrection will be put forth in you to conquer sin and to perform God's will through you.

the Cross with Christ, without laying hold, first of all, of the even greater positive truth that the Holy Ghost is within you to produce all the power and goodness that you need. That is why we stated the truth about the Holy Spirit's work before this other truth that you are "crucified with Christ." Because it is as you reckon on the Holy Ghost dwelling within you to work in you all that God requires, that you will be able to understand more clearly and reckon more confidently and effectively on the great fact that you are crucified with Christ. So it is that the Apostle wrote, "If ye live after the flesh [that is, obeying the desires of your old sinful nature], ye shall die: but if ye *through the Spirit* do mortify [put to death] the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13). Those three words, "through the Spirit," are very important. This great truth of crucifixion with Christ will be understood and experienced only as the Holy Spirit is allowed to do His work in your life. It is His work to make real in your experience all the benefits of your union with Christ in His death. It is the ceasing from self effort, the receiving of His fullness, and the reckoning on His working, you need to learn first of all. And as you do that continually, making it the habit of your life to refuse to expect any good thing from yourself, and confidently to expect every good thing as the result of His working, the understanding of this second truth, that your "old man was crucified with him," will help you when that old nature comes clamoring for recognition and seems likely to entice you to sin, or drive you to despair. Refuse to recognize its existence or its claims; recognize only one thing the Holy Spirit's perfect working in your life. When the old nature rises up (as it will), with its promptings to sin, and you are tempted to doubt whether the Holy Spirit is really at work in you, and to worry because of the existence of that "old man" within, take your stand upon God's unshakable fact, "My old nature was done with forever at the Cross." Because of that do not let any of its manifestations of life

who is filled with the Spirit, and on which further light is shed by his experience only as he continues to live in the power of that same Spirit. The truth is this:

3. When Christ was crucified, He took with Him to the cross, not only your sins, but your sinful nature too.

In some wonderful way, deeply mysterious, but nevertheless true, your sinful nature was put to death on the Cross with Christ. So, not merely has God pronounced that your sinful nature can produce no good thing, but He has shown His estimate of that nature, shown how He regards it as an utterly corrupt, useless thing, by passing sentence of death upon it, as being unfit to live, and nailing it to the Cross with Christ. (Let me say again, with emphasis, this is a truth so deep that it is not only unappreciated by, but utter foolishness to the one who is not taught it by the Holy Spirit.) And as with the fact of the power of the Holy Ghost, so with this fact, its power can only be known in your experience as you lay hold of the fact by faith. God has finished with your old nature, “the old man,” as it is sometimes called in Scripture. It has been judged, condemned, and executed in Christ. “Our old man,” writes Paul (Rom. 6:6), “is crucified with him.” And he goes on, “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin” (Rom. 6:11). As you reckon on this amazing fact, the power of it begins to be experienced in your life (how, you cannot tell), and there is worked out in some degree in your life what God tells you is indeed a fact; your old nature is kept in the place of death, and its former power to make you sin has gone.

The mystery of this truth is beyond the grasp of the human mind; the power of it in the life can be unmistakable. But do not make the mistake of trying to lay hold of this great negative truth that your old nature was nailed to

Is it an *understanding of God’s Word*? Alone, you cannot understand it. You may fill your head with its teachings, but a heart knowledge of its truths, and the assimilation of them into your life, are beyond your reach. He is the Spirit of truth; His work is to lead you into all truth (John 16:13). If He is allowed to do His work, God’s Word will begin to live to you as never before, and to exercise a power in your life which you had not thought possible, till you say with one of old, “O how love I thy law!”

Is it that you want *Christ to become real* to you? It is the Holy Spirit’s work to make Him real. He alone can take of the things of Christ and reveal them to you (John 16:14), until the Saviour’ becomes to you not One far off whom you know by the hearing of the ear alone but “a living, bright reality, more dear, more intimately nigh, than even the sweetest earthly tie.”

So we could go on. But there is no need. The great and glorious fact is this, that, in giving the Holy Ghost, God gave you all you need for all your Christian life and service. It matters not what you are, or what you are not; it matters not what you can do or what you cannot do, you have all in having Him. He has not been given to help you when you do your best; He has been given to do all, because over the very best that you can produce God has written, “no good thing.”

The one condition that must be fulfilled on your part, before He will do the work which He has come to do, is faith. You receive His power and working, and continue to receive them every day, in exactly the same way that you received God’s pardon for your sins through faith (Gal. 3:14).

Just as there was always pardon for your sins because Christ died, but it did not become yours in experience until your faith made it yours; so there is power for you in the Holy Ghost. But it will not be yours in experience until your faith makes it yours.

Faith is getting out of the way and letting Him work. Faith is “letting go and letting God.” Faith does not persuade Him to do anything; it makes way for Him to do what He longs to do. He longs to get to work in your life, doing for you, in His own wonderful way, what you have so sadly failed to do for yourself. Faith says, “Lord, I am not going to try any more. Come Thou, and do Thy work.” He does not ask you for any gift before He will come and bring you blessing. You have “no good thing” to offer Him if He did. The only “surrender” that He asks of you is the surrender that consents to stop working and lets Him do all. Do not try to any reason in yourself why He should work His blessings in you. The only reason is in His great heart of love, which found its full expression on Calvary, when every barrier that could keep your soul from blessing was broken down. *That* is why He is going to bless you. Not because of anything in you.

And the turning point in your life of failure will come when, refusing to listen to any reasons that Satan or your own heart can give why He should not bless you, you ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, and to do in and through you from henceforth what you have been vainly struggling to do up till now. And having asked Him to fill you, believe that He has done it, and reckon on His power, expecting evidence of His working. If you do not get the evidences at once, if you do not get them for some considerable time, do not let that trouble you. Hold on to your attitude of faith toward God; tell Him that, as He has promised the Holy Spirit to them that ask (Luke 11:13), and as He has commanded you to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), you believe that He has filled you in response to your request and, whether He pleases to show you the evidences of that filling sooner or later, that you are counting on it even now as a fact, and expecting His working in and through you. Remember that once you have asked for and

claimed the filling of His Holy Spirit, taking Him at His word concerning His willingness to give you this blessing—once you have done that (let me say it reverently) the responsibility is on Him, and “He abideth faithful.” “I take, He undertakes.”

I take the promised Holy Ghost, I take the power of Pentecost To fill me to the uttermost, I take He undertakes.

And in His own time and way He will make it abundantly clear to you that He has indeed granted your request.

When the result of His working begins to become apparent to you, it is likely that the first thing to become very clear to you will be what is spoken of by the Apostle Paul in I Cor. 2:12, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” You will begin to see, as you have never seen before, that God’s way is always to give freely, and that our part is not to try to win His blessings by our feeble, futile efforts but only to receive His gifts. It will become clear to you, in a way that only the Holy Spirit can make it clear, what it means to be “under grace” that all God’s dealings with you, at the beginning of your Christian life, and all the way along, are on the principle of free and utterly unmerited grace. And when you look for the ground of this free giving of God, you will find it always and only in the fact that Jesus has died, that He has “offered one sacrifice for sins forever,” that “by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” On the ground of that perfect work upon the Cross, God can give freely and forever every blessing that you need.

And this brings us to the third and last great truth that we are going to mention. We have deliberately left it until the last, though some may think that it should have come earlier. But it is a truth which only begins to dawn on one