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THE APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN LIFE

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"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest,
he also hath ceased from his own works..." -- Hebrews 4:9-10

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INTRODUCTION

As the Lord was preparing me for my salvation experience, one of the things I saw was the need for a movement on the earth similar to that which took place in the Apostles' days. What I have found by entering into the rest with God is that gospel life which was the common and expected experience for all of the believers of the primitive Church. It was considered to be basic Christianity. My prayer is that the following testimony will fall into the hands of those who recognize the need to return to that apostolic church life and that they will be encouraged to seek until they find.

J. M.

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HOW I ENTERED THE REST

My initial salvation experience with God was very powerful. I felt God's presence come into my soul the moment I yielded my life to Him and this inward presence grew throughout that

first day to such an extent that I could never doubt that God had saved me. I had immediate victory over all sin and as I walked with God this victory continued to my great comfort and delight. How grateful I was to find the living God, the answers to this existence and the power to lead a holy life. God Himself was my Father and I was His son by adoption. I was truly awestruck by it all.

For over sixteen and a half years God's presence, blessings, and direction for my life were with me and, as I maintained daily communion with Him, He was faithful to preserve me in my walk towards heaven.

As soon as I began to understand that a second work of grace was to be done in the heart of a believer, I prayed to God that He would never allow me to be satisfied until I had obtained that blessing. I was well aware after my conversion that there remained in me "the motions of sin," such as anger, pride, or covetousness which might cause me to sin if I were not careful to make use of God's grace to preserve me in the time of temptation. The existence of this root of sin grieved me much and I longed for the deliverance that this second blessing was to provide.

Because of vacillating ideas as to just exactly what this blessing was and how it was to be obtained, I also vacillated in my earnest pursuit to obtain it. My inconstancy hindered God from granting me what I so desired to obtain. But God, in His, oh-so-great, faithfulness so ordered things in my life that I became forced to do that which is absolutely necessary in order to prevail, namely, to seek Him with all my heart, soul, and strength.

The circumstances which brought about this single-hearted pursuit of Him was the apparent dissolution of the church to which I belonged. As a result of an eruption of some internal problems that existed in the church, we went from a membership of forty-three to a membership of four in a period of about four months. Having no pastor, the four of us who were left had no choice but to cleave to God with all our souls and strength if we desired to maintain our salvation. This is what we did and this is exactly what God had been desiring that we should do. What looked outwardly to be a hideous disaster was secretly the pathway to a pure heart, the second blessing.

We went to God in earnest supplication that He would care for, preserve, and encourage our souls. And our Precious Savior was not slack in this regard. Almost immediately He gave us hope for the recovery of the church, only in a new and better way.

For the next two and a half years I spent much time in prayer, fasting, and reading. I began to take an interest in Church history in general but this soon gave place to the pursuit of the history of perfection within the Church. I met with many individuals in my reading who professed to have arrived at elevated spiritual states of holiness and perfection. What George Fox and the early Quakers possessed was always before my eyes as the ideal of what I was looking for. However, I had always had a desire to look into a certain phenomenon which took place in the mid to late 1800's which has been called the Holiness Movement. I began to familiarize myself with the writings of the people who started the movement and of the later ones who carried it on.

Almost right away the Spirit of the Lord opened up to my mind the weakness of the movement. There was no singular united church. It was an interdenominational movement. Thus it

lacked unity and harmonious leadership. Those involved did not constitute a church. It was a movement within churches.

But I could not get around the testimonies of many of these Holiness people. They spoke of a definite spiritual work that took place after conversion that put their souls at rest and in a "large place" -- of peace, purity, love, and happiness. I wanted it. I prayed for it, persistently presenting to the Father the words of His Son, "Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened unto you."

I had always had an inward feeling that the attainment of this blessing would somehow involve faith, since faith plays such an integral role in a Christian's whole walk with God. However, I had no idea how much faith or how that faith was to be employed. I also had a vague notion that the Holy Ghost had already been poured out once and for all. It seemed as though this blessing of the Holy Ghost was my privilege as a Believer if only somehow I could attain to it.

Earlier in my walk I had made an abortive attempt to rather recklessly "take it by faith" I got down on my knees and said, "Lord, I believe that I'm sanctified!" and then got up and tried to believe that I was. But it was not long till something tripped me up unawares and I felt anger rise up in my heart. This episode set me back somewhat and my pursuit for holiness slackened. It seems as though I simply lacked sufficient faith and knowledge to successfully attain to this blessing.

But now the outward circumstances of my life forced me to be serious in my pursuit in a way that I had never been before. With only four of us left, we did earnestly cleave to God and He was faithful to knit us together in heart and mind. Without knowing it, we were all reading books by authors who had been involved in the Holiness Movement. Our regularly appointed meetings for worship became very precious to us.

About two and a half years after the church troubles had begun, the Lord began to give us messages for meeting that would direct us into a closer walk with Him, a walk that would give Him more glory. One message, for example, was that we ought not to attempt to do personal combat with our evil propensities at the moment of temptation but rather to turn the battle over to God and wait in Him for the victory. Thus when victory comes He is magnified and not self in any way.

One evening as I was sitting in meeting it came into my mind to read the sixth chapter of Romans and as I did it occurred to me that the Apostle Paul had addressed the epistle to the whole Roman church. Whether it was a new convert or someone older in the Lord, all were invited and even commanded to live up to the conditions that Paul was describing in this chapter. I saw that in this chapter he leaves no loopholes for sin at all in the life of a Christian, either outwardly in actual visible sin or inwardly in the heart or mind. He said, "knowing this that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ Our Lord... For he that is dead (with Christ) is freed from sin... Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." It opened up to me that this was the doctrine and experience of the Apostolic church and ought also to be mine. I was astonished at the concept that "the old man" should be

considered as crucified already with Christ on the cross and that I should reckon myself to be dead indeed unto sin.

The next morning as I was on my knees in prayer, the concepts which had taken hold of my mind the night before came freshly into my mind again and were so livingly presented to me that I acknowledged it to be from the Lord and covenanted with Him that henceforth I would reckon myself "dead indeed unto sin."

As I went about my work-day, the normal temptations and wrong thought patterns would assault me. But as each combat would come I turned inwardly to God and told Satan or myself that, "No, I reckoned myself dead to this or that:" and I discovered that there was new power attending me to overcome. Sometimes the combats were fierce but at the end of the day I came out the victor through this new power that had been granted me. Something was stirring deep within me. It felt as though the butterfly of true spiritual liberty was beginning to emerge from its cocoon with my soul.

In a Wednesday night meeting on September 6, 1989, I was again stirred in my soul to read from Romans. This time it was the seventh chapter which came alive in my mind. As I sat reading it, I saw that Paul was describing a state that he was in before he was sanctified. This description of his former state plainly had been mine also for practically the whole sixteen and a half years that I had been serving the Lord. It was the state of being under the law of conscience in my mind which constantly witnessed against the root of sin within. And as Paul had been striving in his own strength to destroy that root, so had I been, and with as little success. Finally he was made to cry out in desperation, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" And then his response, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" I then saw that lasting victory over evil propensities was to be had through and only through Our Lord Jesus Christ. Things that the Lord had been whispering to me during the recent months concerning leaning upon Him for victory seemed suddenly to crystallize and become clearly focused in my mind. I stood in the meeting and conveyed these ideas to my brethren.

The next morning, again as I was in prayer, the Scriptures and ideas of the night before came before my eyes. I knew that all I needed to do was believe that God Himself through Jesus Christ was my sanctifier and to give up my own strivings so that He could do the work in me. I therefore covenanted with God on those terms. At that moment, September 7, 1989, I entered into the rest that there is for the people of God.

There were no sensational feelings attached to this verbal covenant and I felt nothing in particular after I had made it except that I should tell my wife about it, which I did. It is as though I had discovered that a large parcel of land had been left to me as part of my just inheritance and I did not know about it. When I discovered the fact, I simply took possession by the faith of the contract agreement which I saw plainly opened before my eyes.

Like the woman described in the book of Solomon's song, I had come up out of the wilderness leaning upon my Beloved. And truly, all the travail that I had passed through was indeed as nothing in comparison to the magnificence of the possession that has been given to me. Peace is mine. That intense battle with inward sin is over. The days of my sorrows are finished. The Lord is nearer more consistently than ever I knew before. He is more than a Conqueror for me

in all the trials and temptations that might assault me. I know that my growth in this state has no boundaries. He has placed me in a large place and it is no longer I that live but Christ that liveth in me. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Without Him I can do nothing. My victory and growth depend on only one thing and that is that I rest and abide in Him. He is my salvation, my sanctification. Glorious salvation, full and free! We do nothing but lean on Him. He does it all. Oh, what misery I could have saved myself if I had known this from the beginning. This is indeed the normal Christian life. This is the apostolic gospel life. Everyone who calls himself a Christian ought to be walking here. It is our privilege, bought with blood by the only one who could purchase it for us, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It is the Christian's privilege not to have to fight and war with the old man, our carnal nature, our evil propensities. The battle has already been won. All the Christian has to do is believe this and keep his eyes on the Son through whatever temptation, trial, grief or difficulty that comes along and He will give the victory. All the praise then belongs unto Him. Self has no place here. This is the saint's rest.

No longer do I see God only as a Righteous Recompenser of all sin and sinners. But I truly have discovered the God of love who will always forgive and who is waiting to be gracious to all. The blood of Our Lord has canceled out all men's sins and even that root of sin in the soul which is the cause of all men's misery. These unspeakable gifts of the Spirit await any soul who will go to God in earnest and yield to Him their all. What love is this. Freely given to all who will go to God for it. Now I see men as creatures whom God loves, has forgiven already, and is only waiting for them to comply with His wooings and He will freely pour His peace, love, and joy into their souls.

The Bible is an entirely different book to me now. It is as though I see holiness and sanctification written on every page. Its whole message is aimed at making men holy, cleansed from all sin which is made possible by the unspeakably magnanimous death of Our Lord on the cross. By His shed blood all have access into the holy of holies.

Now, my soul having entered into this glorious rest with God, I cannot help but lament the poor, wretched condition of modern Christianity that I see all around me. Truly I see it as in the apostasy, having erred from that original purity and power that the blessed gospel first went forth in. I do not stand as a condemning judge. My soul simply yearns as I know the Father's does that all might come to know the glorious liberty of the sons of God and that peace which surpasseth understanding. Satan has robbed Christianity of its nobility, its rightful standing which is to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Whom the Son of God makes free, they are free indeed.

Yet this truth stands so near to any soul who has been truly born again. The moment a believer has the faith to believe in the power and efficacy of God to cleanse him from all sin and yields his all, trusting God to do for him what he is unable to do for himself, God will surely come to his aid and bring him into the "rest that remaineth for the people of God." He is waiting to be gracious.

My friends, these are those last days before the coming of Our Lord: "... for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first!" When the church world no longer believes in, seeks for, or even knows of a state of being cleansed from all sin, it has fallen away.

Modern Christianity is like the Laodicean church which thinks itself to be rich, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing and knows not that it is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. And yet I believe there are many souls who recognize their need and are secretly yearning for a way of holiness to be cast up that they might walk in it. The counsel of Our Lord to such is to "buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see!" This counsel is none other than a call to this experience of heart purity which I have been trying to describe. It is for all and it is not only Our Lord's desire that we should attain to it but His command as well. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." It is ironic that men should have to be chastened into that which yields such wondrous delights. Does it not say something about the natural depravity of the human soul? But oh listen to this blessed promise.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Oh, the blessed delight of supping in true and continual soul communion with Our Savior, the lover of our souls. He satisfies our longings as nothing else can do.

Though the message to the Laodicean seems severe yet it is given in love and is full of the greatest blessings if heeded. Open your mind to consider what might be the greatest possible reward for a saint in glory. Surely, the most awe-inspiring sight in heaven will be to see the Lord seated on His throne of glory. Behold the repentant Laodicean's reward: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne." Could there possibly be a greater incentive to repent and be zealous for the Precious Savior's sake than this, to sit in the throne of glory with Him throughout the endless ages of eternity? "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches:"

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THE END