

Conditions of Success In Soul Winning

by
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Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch, who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Acts 11:22-24

Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee. -Psalm 51:11-13

Upon these two passages of Scripture I wish to set forth briefly some of the qualifications and characteristics of either preacher or layman who is likely to be successful in leading souls to Christ. It is said here of Barnabas that he possessed four of these qualifications, or characteristics:

First, he was glad when he saw evidence that Gentiles were converted at Antioch. There was no envy excited in his heart by the display of the divine power toward the Grecians, although it contravened all his race prejudices. Yet being sent there to look into that very matter and finding from the Christian experiences related by these Grecians that they had the same evidence of God's forgiveness that his own people in Jerusalem had, his heart instantly rejoiced. I put this, then, as one of the first things - the kind of a spirit that rejoices, that is glad at the display of the divine power in the salvation of men. I am sure that it is impossible for anyone to be influential in leading another to Christ whose entire heart is not made glad by the display of the divine grace in the conviction and conversion of sinners. Usually the young convert possesses this qualification in a very high degree.

It is one of the evidences by which he becomes convinced that he is a Christian himself. When contrary to his past experience, to his past sensations and emotions, he finds himself rejoicing if anybody expresses an interest in the salvation of his soul, it is strong proof that he is himself a subject of divine grace, especially if he finds himself more rejoicing if that interest culminates in clear evidences of a personal regeneration.

We may examine our hearts upon this point and may measure our readiness for a work of this kind by asking a question: Would we be glad tonight if God should commence a work of grace in this house, or would we regard it as so great an inconvenience to us that we could not take pleasure in this display of the divine power? I am sure that if such beginnings of God's mercy should find you unready to welcome it, the first thing you would need to do in order to efficiently lead others to Christ would be to ask God to put you right on that point. Your heart is out of tune with God's heart. There is not a proper degree of correspondence in sentiment and in feeling between you and the divine benevolence, if you cannot, offhand, just as the case comes up, instantly rejoice over the salvation of sinners.

The second characteristic possessed by Barnabas, as stated here, was that "he was a good man." I shall never attempt to set a limit to the means employed by the Spirit of God in dealing with men, but may say this: That unless a man is a good man, unless he has the reputation of being a good man, unless in the estimation of people that are without he is what is ordinarily called a good man, he cannot be very efficient in leading them, through any influence he may bring to bear, into an interest in the Christian religion.

I understand the word "goodness" here to be used in its ordinary sense. What constitutes a good man in this ordinary sense might not perhaps be agreed upon by all people, but the following things are evidently comprehended in the term: You would not count a dishonest man a good man; whether he were actually dishonest or not, if his conduct had been such that in the esteem of the community in which he lived he was put down as dishonest, unless he could in some way efface that impression, by some means reverse the popular verdict, I do not see how any effort that he might put forth would be likely to be beneficial in impressing that community with favorable views of the religion of which he claimed to be a sample and exponent.

Moreover, the term "good man" must comprehend truthfulness. I mean that the man must not have among the people with whom he associates the reputation of being a liar. It is impossible for anyone to exert a deep personal influence for religious good upon a community unless they have confidence in his veracity. If what he says is questionable in their judgment, if the report goes out about him and fastens itself upon the mind of the people that his word is unreliable, he may be gifted, he may be eloquent, he may possess every other natural accomplishment necessary to do good as a public speaker or as an exhorter, but I do say that if there attaches to him the stain of falsehood, then until he removes that impression, his influence for good is at a minimum with that people. The term, "good man," covers the whole ground of moral action, in the common acceptance of that word: veracity, honesty, kindness, mercy, and all kindred qualities.

Now, Barnabas, in any community in which he ever lived, certainly did make the impression that he was a good man. Unfortunately there are many professing to be Christians who do not make that impression. They do not create in the minds of

outsiders the thought, "That is a good man." They say he is a professor of religion but they do not call him good.

The third qualification possessed by Barnabas is far more important: "He was full of the Holy Spirit." In the beginning of Gospel times, when they selected a preacher or deacon, they not only looked to his moral character, not only insisted on his being a manly man among men, but they required that he should be "full of the Holy Spirit." That this insistence was by divine direction and meant to apply to all ages, appears from the pastoral epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus.

But what means the phrase, "full of the Holy Spirit"? It does not mean that you should be a converted man, though that is implied. It means far more than that. A great many genuinely converted men are not full of the Holy Spirit. Many converted men are backsliders. Many other converts are as yet babes in Christ, but when we say that a man is full of the Holy Spirit, that means that the divine indwelling governs his actions, furnishes his motives, giving him his power, as when on the day of Pentecost they ere all filled with the Spirit and so endued with power.

His fourth qualification is thus expressed: "He was full of faith." This, though implying it, does not refer to personal, saving faith, for every Christian has that faith who personally receives and appropriates Jesus Christ. To be "full of faith" means something more than and different from that. In the present use of the word one may have little faith. He may believe in Christ as his Savior and yet at the same time his faith in the promises of God may be so feeble that his hold on them is as shaky as the grip of a paralytic, or his faith may be so enlarged that God's promises to him seem brighter than any star shining on the face of night.

One "full of faith" fully assures his heart that what God has spoken He will surely bring to pass, and so sets his mind and stays his soul upon the promises of God that you cannot scare him, you cannot shake him from his foundation. And so with great confidence and assurance he goes out into the world. For instance, there is the promise that God will bless His Word faithfully preached to the people. Now, you know that your own faith in that is not the same degree at all times. Some days, when you came to church, if the question were suddenly sprung upon you, "Do you believe God's Word is going to be fulfilled today?" you would say in your candor, "I have not thought much about it. I am not taking hold of it with the grip that I sometimes do. I am not praying about it. I am not expecting to see the Word fulfilled today."

To be "full of faith," then, means that every word of God is not only "yea, yea, and nay, nay," but that you see it to be so, and you feel it to be so, and you would risk your life upon its being so. Indeed, you so go out and do things in your confidence that to the unspiritual world you appear to be a fool. To the devotees of fashion, pleasure, politics, and money, you appear to be a crank, an enthusiast, a bigot or a madman. So when the zeal of Christ was eating Him up, His kindred and friends sought to restrain Him by a writ of lunacy. To Festus, Paul was crazed by learning. As the servant is not above his master, the man full of faith today must expect to

excite the scorn of all the worldly minded. In all sincerity, from their standpoint, they will inquire, "How can you do that?" But with you it is all right. You are full of faith. You believe that what God says, He will do.

Such being the character of Barnabas. what followed? The record declares the consequence. He had these four qualifications:

- (1) He was glad at a display of the divine power in the conversion of men even when it crossed his prejudice;
- (2) he was a good man;
- (3) he was full of the Holy Ghost; and
- (4) he was full of faith. Following right after that, stated as the most natural consequence in the world, it is said that "much people were added to the Lord."

Our second Scripture, the one from the fifty-first Psalm, presents the negative aspects of our case $\frac{3}{4}$ the disqualifications. It assumes that at one time in your life you were a good man, in the ordinary acceptation of good; that you were moral in your thought and in your life; that you did regard the rights of other people and respect them, and that you did have respect for God's moral government over your own soul. It implies that you once were of that kind.

It also not only implies a genuine personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, but that there was a time when you were conscious of the presence of the Holy Ghost with you. And then it implies, not that you had forfeited your salvation, but that by slight and imperceptible divergencies from the right path or by the commission of some great sin under the sudden power of temptation in a moment of weakness, you had forfeited the joy of salvation, the strength of Christian power, and the sweet consciousness of the divine Presence.

It may also suppose such hardening of heart, such blunting of the moral perceptions, as leaves you in profound ignorance of your loss. The Laodicean church furnishes a classic illustration: "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

As an individual illustration, let Samson serve. When the source of his strength had been removed, he got up and shook himself and went out as at other times and "wist not that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him." I do not mean the spirit of conversion. I mean the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, that presence whose companionship makes up your joy in religious life. Now the Holy Spirit was gone from that man in that sense. As a consequence his heart became hardened. He was insensible to the fact of his sin. He did not think about it. It did not wound him. It did not grieve him. But he jogged along, going through the forms of religion as he had been accustomed to do, and all the time "attitudinizing," not only before the people, but absolutely before himself, as a deliverer of the former time.

It is a hopeful sign in a backslidden Christian when he notices that his power over sinners is gone, notices that his joy in the salvation of God has departed, when he not only will not say that he enjoys religion like he once did, but he knows he does not; when he is sure that there is no melody in his heart as he comes up to the divine service. Although he may not have expended one single thought in order to connect his lack of power and his lack of joy with that sin or series of sins committed, yet at the same time he does know that the joy is gone and the power is gone.

Now, if that man is disqualified from teaching transgressors God's way, how much more one whose eyes are not opened at all! He stands spiritually disqualified from leading souls to conversion; why? What is it that ever enabled you to teach transgressors the way of God? What is it that ever gave you the power to lead a soul to Christ? Unquestionably the presence of the Holy Spirit in you and with you. Now, as that Spirit is withdrawn, how can you do that? There is no power in you that will reach men. You may get up and talk at the prayer-meeting. You may go through all the forms of religious service. You may honestly try to say impressive things. You may study out a speech or exhortation or sermon and try to throw yourself into it with the old time vim and unction, but deep down in your heart you know that you are not reaching the people. Your zeal is affected; your tears are pumped.

You may not have analyzed your condition to see just why you have no power, but there comes a time when God, who converted your soul and knows you to be in a backslidden condition, begins to stir you up. The first thing by which you may know that God is knocking at the door of your heart is that this part of the Scripture is fulfilled: "My sin is ever before me. Two weeks ago I thought about my business. I could even go down and teach a Sunday-school lesson and never have any particular thought about any offense that I had committed. But now something has come and is the most important thing within the range of my vision. That which outlines itself with the greatest distinctness, that which rises up like a mountain in a plain, is my sin. It is all the time before me. I see it when I go to church. If the preacher preaches, I see my sin. If the brethren pray, I see my sin. If they sing a good song, I see my sin. If I go up-town, I see my sin. If I lie down at night, even after I shut my eyes, I see my sin. My sin is ever before me."

Now, you may be sure that a loving God is dealing with You when that is the case. When He can keep your mind from everything in the world but the offense you have committed, you may be sure that bitter, distasteful, mortifying, and humiliating as is the experience through which He is leading you, that God is near you. He is breaking your heart. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. Brother, you cannot help, you cannot do much, you cannot inspire others, you cannot muster up the right kind of enthusiasm, you cannot take hold of the work of saving men with that unforgiven sin resting upon your heart.

What more? If God is dealing with you, He will make you see the relation of that sin to Him. "Against Thee have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight." That is quite different from remorse. Remorse looks to yourself. It looks to the evil consequences as they affect you and your family; but when God's Spirit is dealing with you and

convicting you, if it is a genuine case, then you may rest assured that the most troublesome thought in connection with that sin in your mind is that it is against God. "Against Thee have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight."

Again, if God is dealing with you, the next thing will be this: You will begin to pray, and it will be such praying as you have not done in a long time. This fifty-first Psalm will express your sentiments: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: blot out all my transgressions... Hide Thy face from my sins... Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me... Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Let not the passing of the Spirit from me be an eternal one." As if every bone in you were broken, as if all the moisture in you were dried up, as if you were nothing but kindling wood set on fire by hell, does your deep contrition seize you with its pangs and burn with its flames.

If God is dealing with you, there will come into your mind this thought - and this is the closing thought in connection with this part of the subject ³/₄ which also establishes its connection with the main point I am discussing, that one of the deep and abiding sources of your sorrow is: "I have put myself in a position where I cannot be useful as a Christian. I not only see that I have sinned against God, but I see that by sinning against God and carrying this sin unconfessed in my heart, I have divested myself of power to do good to other people."

As soon as you see that, an entirely new motive rushes into your heart, like a messenger from heaven. It furnishes you with a new incentive to pray. What is it? "Not only, O God, have mercy on me and blot out my transgressions; not only restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, but, Lord, do this for the sinner's sake. Do this not for my own miserable sake, for I have not deserved it, but do this so that I may be able to teach transgressors Thy way and that sinners may be converted unto Thee." So that even in the depth, the deepest depth of your sorrow and trouble, that unselfish thought comes in, that thought that looks to the case of others.

I imagine Samson must have felt something of this; indeed I see not how he could escape it when he was grinding in the mills of the Philistines, when his eyes had been put out, when they were mocking, as he trod his weary round, slaving in darkness for the enemies of God and his people, surely the thought, the most poignant thought that ever afflicted his soul was: "I once could see. I once had power. I once had strength that nobody could withstand, and God gave it to me that I might do much good. I have wasted it. I have been deprived of it on account of my sins, and now, oh, the wretchedness of my condition, not so much that this slavery is painful to me, not so much that I have lost my sight, not so much that I have been derided and jeered at by my enemies, but because there comes to me on every breeze the wailings of my people and the clanking of their chains. Blindness nor night hides from me the invaded homes, the desecrated hearths, the maidens given to shame, the gray hairs dishonored, the young men under the lash of taskmasters-the general widespread demoralization and bondage of my people. I hear the cry of the maiden in the grasp

of a ruffian, 'O Samson, help, help!' I hear old age appealing to heaven: 'O God, didst thou not dower Samson with strength in our behalf?'"

Now, if he had any such feeling as that, what must be the feeling of a genuine Christian when he can look back to the time when he was a happy servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoyed all of the communion of God's house; when the spirituality of the hymns and of the prayers were precious to him; when once he could with an upright face and a beaming eye and a glowing cheek and a confident heart, go up and take hold of the hand of a sinner and say to him, "Come to Jesus." Now his head is hanging down: "I cannot do it. I wish I could. Outside of the wretchedness that is my own, outside of the pain and shame that I carry with me wherever I go, more than all that is the bitter thought that one of the lights of God has been eclipsed. It is not shining, throwing a radiance upon the pathway of the lost. 'O God, restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me, and then will I teach transgressors Thy way and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.'"

You will observe that the simplest, most familiar thoughts suggested by the text have been presented. I do know if you have committed any sin about which your soul has not been convicted and do not see it all the time before you, if you have committed any sin that has shorn you of your strength and hardened your heart, then the first thing for you to do is to pray David's prayer. That is the road to a revival of religion; therefore pursue it with undivided attention: "O Lord revive, revive!" Do not wait. Begin now. When you have felt that sin, and confessed it and carried it to God with humble contrition and earnest prayer, and there comes to you a sense of the divine forgiveness so that your heart has put off its cypress and crape and its windows have been thrown open, and its chambers illuminated with joy, the joy of salvation, then you will work, and you will work with power and you will work impressively.

It cannot harm us to restate these points: To be glad at the display of divine power in the salvation of men; to be a good man; to be full of the Holy Spirit; to be full of faith. Or if you have backslidden into any sin, seek the restoration of the joy of your salvation. Then are you ready to lead sinners to Christ and may expect that much people will be added to the Lord.

These are the steps toward success and revival. The searching part, the part that touches the church, to that part the old-time preachers invariably addressed themselves in the beginning of a meeting. Go back as far as records or tradition may extend, you will find it so. The biographies of the long line of good men shows this clearly $\frac{3}{4}$ that they distinguished very clearly in their thought and in their preaching between a revival of religion and the conversion of sinners. They made the one the sequence of the other.

The church is the agency, and I do venture to say that it is the only divinely appointed agency for the salvation of men, and the church's power in publishing the gospel of Jesus Christ is dependent upon the purity of her garments, upon the brightness of her

light, upon her fidelity to Jesus Christ, and upon the degree of her fervor and the fullness of her consecration.

Why wait for a meeting, then, to commence this preparatory work? Let each begin with himself and over against his own house. Examine your heart, determine for yourself whether strength is with you; whether there is conscious power with you when you talk to sinners. If you have it not, will you just take your eyes off the sin of every other man, woman, and child in the world? Take them off. I tell you that when God's Spirit deals with your own case you do not then say, "The sins of my neighbors are ever before me." You do not then raise an outcry against the offenses of other people, but you are so absorbed, so wrapped up in the thought of your own vileness, your own distance from God, your own guilt, that this is all that you can see, and as a cloud, commencing no bigger than a man's hand, comes nearer and gets larger and expands its borders until the whole heavens are blackened and every light in the sky is shut out, so it is with your own soul when you see your own case as you ought to see it, for any sin unconfessed, unforsaken, unpardoned, interferes with your usefulness in the salvation of sinners.

I preach this sermon to myself. I preach it to every deacon in the church. I preach it to the choir. I preach it to you, brethren and sisters. And I say that this part of it we can take hold of and go to work on at once. Are you ready to do it? Are you ready to look into your own case? Or linger you yet in that dreadful condition, that condition of David when for nearly a year his conscience did not hurt him and his sins did not rise before him? He was going on defiant before the people and before the mirror of self-esteem, as one who loves God and hates iniquity.

Will you do what I ask? If you will, whatever else may be the result, in your case there will be a revival. Have you ever seen a garden or a field in which everything was dried up? The soil was deep and rich. It had been cultivated with great painstaking. The owner had spared neither labor nor skill, but it did not rain. A drouth came on and his field or garden was parched and dried up. Is it that way with your soul? Then you need a visit from on high. You need to pray, "Savior, visit Thy plantation. Send us, Lord, a gracious rain." You need to pray that there should be an outpouring of the Spirit upon your heart, for I tell you that on the land of God's people there come up thorns and briers until the Spirit is poured out from on high.

The way to bring about a revival is to commence yourself, and commence with your own case. There are Samsons in the church, but the question is, has Samson been shorn of his locks? Have the eyes of Samson been put out? Is he working in the mills of the Philistines? Is he working along, unconscious of the fact that the Spirit of God has departed from him and he has not the strength of other days?

Bear with my urgency and plainness of speech. You may be the most modest woman in the land, the most virtuous, the most faithful. You may be everything that, touching human affairs, is most excellent, but God knows that if your heart turns riot to the salvation of other people, if your heart is out of tune on that subject, you are backslidden. There is something wrong. There is some kind of a sin committed. I

leave you to find out what it is. But I do know that often, from causes that seem to be too slight for recognition, there plant themselves roots of bitterness, occasions of strife, occasions of alienation. There fastens upon the heart an envious or jealous or an unforgiving spirit, and so, when we stand praying before God our own heart being full of bitterness and censure of others, perhaps of our brethren and sisters, we cannot pray - we say the words but there is no power in the words.

I appeal to you as the church of God to let us look at these matters in their relation to the salvation of sinners. That is why we are here. May I not even become personal, urging the questions: Do you lack faith? I mean, have you much faith? Can you take hold of God's promises? Is the sense of the Holy Spirit with you? Do you feel the Spirit filling you? Do you stand before the community as good men and women? Or are you backslidden, with sins unforgiven, separating between you and God? How is it? Let us get the stumbling-blocks out of the way. I commend you to God, to the word of His grace, and especially to the inquisition, the searching inquisition, of God's Holy Spirit.