

Real or Imaginary?

Chapter 4 “His Deeper Work in Us” By J. Sidlow Baxter

In the ensuing chapter we requisition evidence from the testimony of outstanding Christians. Let us here and now put it beyond all misunderstanding (if possible!) that we would no more base a theory of sanctification upon subjective human experience apart from clear Scripture teaching than we would formulate a Christian doctrine upon Old Testament “types” without New Testament statement. The clear teaching of the written Word must ever be our decisive court of appeal.

On the other hand, it is just as wrong to ignore or belittle Christian testimony; for, reflect, true Christian experience is the Holy Spirit at work. And, while His work in the believer often clarifies or vivifies His teaching in the Scripture, it never contradicts it. Let us learn, then, certainly with due caution but also with reverence, from devout Christian experience and testimony. What we submit in this chapter is no mere buttressing of doubtful theory by appeal to a handful of witnesses regardless of stature or qualification—as our pages will show. JSB

If a doctrine is genuinely Scriptural, it will find endorsement in Christian experience. Therefore, if this teaching of “entire sanctification” as (in general) a second, radical crisis-work of God in the regenerated is “according to the Scriptures”, there should be ample attestation of it in the life and testimony of consecrated believers.

Is there, then, any such body of witness? If so, are the witnesses trustworthy? Are they first-hand? Are they independent of each other, yet unanimous as to the main issue? Are they sufficiently varied to show that the teaching and experience are not peculiar to only one school or denomination? Are they as mentally discerning as they are religiously zealous? Are there those who lived long enough ago to prove that the experience is no mere present-day novelty? Are there others recent enough to prove that it is no mere story of the past? Is the testimony of the witnesses corroborated by their character, behaviour, and service?

Well, it seems to me (not yet committing myself unreservedly) that the multitude of witnesses to the so-called “deeper blessing” seem to measure up collectively to all such requirements. To quote them in plenty and at desired length would need a copious volume, not one short chapter such as this; but we can at least submit here several outstanding yet truly representative testimonies which, we think, should carry considerable conviction to the open-minded.

In submitting this argument from recorded Christian experience, however, let me make this once-for-all plain, especially to my brethren in the ministry; I am not in any subtle sympathy with the modern trend, in some quarters, to make experience a secondary norm of truth along with Scripture (after the manner of Schleiermacherian liberalism) any more than I can mentally tolerate making Scripture and tradition two equal norms. The one safe guide and final authority is the divine Word itself. But as a subordinate partner to Holy Writ, Christian experience can be highly illuminating.

Let me also make clear at the outset that in calling these witnesses I do not necessarily agree with all their doctrinal views on sanctification, nor even with some of the explanations which they give of their own experience. It is their experience itself with which we are here concerned, and their faithful attestation of it.

In requisitioning such as Dr. Asa Mahan, for instance, and Mrs. Hannah Whitall Smith, I am keenly aware of the penetrating hermeneutical criticisms levelled at both by the theologian Benjamin B. Warfield in his monumental work, *Perfectionism*. I agree with him (though not without some reservations) as to Pelagian curves in the Oberlin teaching on sanctification, and the Quietist bent in Mrs. Smith’s later “Higher Life” teachings:

but the deciding factor about all those whose testimony we are here appropriating is that they were truly consecrated Christian men and women, of long-proven integrity, transparent motive, good judgment, and trustworthy as witness-bearers.

Dr. Asa Mahan

We begin by calling on Dr. Asa Mahan, first president of Oberlin College, Ohio, U.S.A. How well I remember poring over writings of his which came my way years ago, when I was a young disciple wanting to know for myself whether there was reality or not in “this second blessing idea”. I call on Dr. Mahan first because he was a scholar and a well-known public figure who, having lived a sanctified life before many observers for over half a century, wrote a reminiscent explication of it as a radiant octogenarian. The following are selections.

“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 knows Christ in the sphere of ‘justification by faith’, but knows almost nothing of Him in the sphere of ‘*sanctification* by faith’. 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 Spirit’.

“Here permit me to say, in general, that while I was in public regard 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 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, favour or displeasure.

“Of my conversion, I may say of a truth that it was, in the judgement 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 2000 souls being added to the churches through my instrumentality.

There was at length, notwithstanding all my prayers and efforts to the contrary, a gradual fading out of that joy. 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 could strive more resolutely and untiringly than I did to subdue and hold in subjection such evil propensities, or made less progress to effect his purpose than I did. During those eighteen years, after the fading of my primal joys, I was from time to time troubled and not infrequently agonised 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, yet walked in darkness and had no light.

‘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: ‘The water that 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; 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 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 enquiry 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 enquiry 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 emerged ‘out of darkness into God’s marvelous light’. In that light I have lived and walked for the past fifty years.

“And here permit me to remark that there has been during this entire 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 un failing and un fading 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’. During these fifty years I have almost, and might say quite, ceased to be conscious of the existence and action of those evil propensities 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’; for ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ has 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.

“As a 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 at all in the inner man, should I not be, sometimes at least, conscious of the fact?

“My entrance into the higher life was attended by 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 conversation became as easy and spontaneous as the outflow of water from a living fountain. Should I designate what I regard as one of the leading characteristics of my experience during these fifty years, I should refer to such Scriptures as, ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee’. 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.

“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 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 which I have does cast out all ‘fear that hath torment’.

“This promise . . . has lived in my heart as the light of my life: ‘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 days of thy mourning shall be ended’.”

[Frances Ridley Havergal](#)

We strike a sharp contrast in passing now from the venerable Dr. Mahan to the gentle, cultured, deft-penned genius whose hymns are now sung all over Christendom, Miss Frances Ridley Havergal. The famous C. H. Spurgeon spoke of her, in his day, as “the last and sweetest of England’s religious poets”. Much of the spiritual depth and richness of her hymns we owe to a sudden, luminous mind-opening and heart-cleansing crisis which she herself called a “second experience”. The approach to this was gradual; but the actual occurrence was that of a sudden sun-burst through cloudy doubts and uncertainties. Although for many years she had loved the Lord and delighted in His service, there was “not so much of a holy walk and conversation or uniform brightness and continuous enjoyment in the divine life”. She wrote, “I do so long for a deeper and fuller teaching in my own heart”. What she longed for came soon afterwards, and she joyously wrote, “I see it all, and I have the blessing”. Here are extracts from her testimony.

“It was on Advent Sunday, December 2nd, 1873, I first saw clearly the blessedness of true consecration. I saw it as a flash of electric light; and what you see you can never *unsee*. There must be full surrender before there can be full blessedness. God admits you by the one into the other. He Himself showed me all this most clearly. You know how singularly I have been withheld from attending all conventions and conferences; man’s teaching has consequently had but little to do with it. First, I was shown that ‘the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin’, and then it was made plain to me that He who had thus cleansed me had power to keep me clean; so I just utterly yielded myself to Him and utterly trusted Him to keep me. . . . He brought me into the ‘highway of holiness’, up which I trust every day to progress, continually pressing forward, led by the Spirit of God. And I do indeed find that with it comes a happy trusting, not only in all great matters, but in all the little things also, so that I cannot say ‘so and so worries me’.

“It was that one word ‘cleanseth’ which opened the door of a very glory of hope and joy to me. I had never seen the force of the tense before, a continual present, always a present tense, not a present which the next moment becomes a past. It goes on cleansing; and I have no words to tell how my heart rejoices in it. Not a coming to be cleansed in the fountain only, but a remaining in the fountain, so that it may and does go on cleansing.

“One of the intensest moments of my life was when I saw the force of that word ‘cleanseth’. The utterly unexpected and altogether unimagined sense of its fulfillment to me, on simply believing in its fullness, was just indescribable. I expected nothing like it short of heaven. I am so thankful that, in the whole matter, there was as little human instrumentality as well could be. . . I am so conscious of His direct teaching and guidance through His Word and Spirit in the matter that I cannot think I can ever unsee it again. I have waited many months before writing this, so it is no new and untested theory to me; in fact, experience came before theory, and is more to me than any theory.”

[Dr. Daniel Steele](#)

I doubt whether there ever was a more lucid or penetrating writer on this subject of sanctification than the late Dr. Daniel Steele, formerly a professor in the University of Boston. There is a verve and wit, an originality and directness, which always betoken that what he writes comes fresh and genuine from the living experience of his own heart. If we cannot always “amen” his conclusions, we are always blessed by godly provocation to search the Word further, to see “whether those things be so”. Here, in substance, is his impressive contribution.

“I was born into this world in Windham, N.Y., October 5, 1824; into the kingdom of God in Wilbraham, Mass., in the spring of 1842. I could never write the day of my spiritual birth, so gradual did the light dawn upon me, and so lightly was the seal of my justification impressed upon my consciousness. This was a source of great trial and seasons of doubt in the first years of my Christian life. I coveted a conversion of the Pauline type.

“The personality of the Holy Spirit was rather an article of faith than a joyous realization. He had breathed into me life, but not the more abundant life. In a sense I was free, but not ‘free indeed’; free from the guilt and dominion of sin, but not from strong inward tendencies thereto, which seemed to be a part of my nature. In my early ministry, being hereditarily a Methodist in doctrine, I believed in the possibility of entire sanctification in this life, instantaneously wrought. How could I doubt it in the light of my mother’s exemplification of its reality? I sought quite earnestly, at times, but failed to find anything more than transient uplifts from the dead level. But when I embraced the theory that this work is gradual, and not instantaneous, these blessed uplifts ceased. For, seeing no definite line to be crossed, my faith ceased to put forth its strongest energies. In this condition, a period of fifteen years, I became exceedingly dissatisfied and hungry.

“I was led by the study of the promised Paraclete to see that He signified far more than I had realized in the new birth, and that *a personal pentecost* was awaiting me. I sought in downright earnestness. Then the Spirit uncovered to my gaze the evil still lurking in my nature; the mixed motives with which *I* had preached, often preferring the honour which comes from men to that which comes from God.

“I submitted to every test presented by the Holy Spirit and publicly confessed what He had revealed, and determined to walk alone with God rather than with the multitude in the world or in the Church. I immediately

began to feel a strange freedom, daily increasing, the cause of which I did not distinctly apprehend. I was then led to seek the conscious and joyful presence of the Comforter in my heart. Having settled the question that this was not merely an apostolic blessing, but for all ages— ‘He shall abide with you forever’—I took the promise, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you’. The ‘verily’ had to me all the strength of an oath. I found that my faith had three points’ to master—the *Comforter, for me, now*. Upon the promise I ventured with an act of appropriating faith, claiming the Comforter as my right in the name of Jesus. For several hours I clung by naked faith, praying and repeating Charles Wesley’s hymn—

Jesus, Thine all-victorious love
Shed in my heart abroad.

“I then ran over in my mind the great facts in Christ’s life, especially dwelling upon Gethsemane and Calvary, His ascension, priesthood, and all-atoning sacrifice. Suddenly I became conscious of a mysterious power exerting itself upon my sensibilities. My physical sensations, though I am not of a nervous temperament, and was in good health, alone, and calm, were indescribable, as if an electric current were passing through my body with painless shocks, melting my whole being into a fiery stream of love. The Son of God stood before my spiritual eye in all His loveliness. This was November ‘7, 1870, the day most memorable to me. I now for the first time realized ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’. Reputation, friends, family, property, everything disappeared, eclipsed by the brightness of His manifestation. He seemed to say ‘I have come to stay’. Yet there was no uttered word, no phantasm or image. It was not a trance or vision. The affections were the sphere of this wonderful phenomenon, best described as ‘the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit’. I was more certain that God loved me than I was of the existence of the solid earth and the shining sun. I intuitively apprehended Christ. This certainty has lost none of its strength and sweetness after the lapse of more than seventeen years. Yea, it has become more real and blissful.

“I did not at first realize that this was entire sanctification. The positive part of my experience had eclipsed the *negative*, the elimination of the sin-principle by the cleansing power of the Paraclete. But it [i.e. this deliverance] was verily so. Yet it has always seemed to me that this was the inferior part of the great blessing of the incoming and abiding of the whole Trinity (John 14 23).

After seventeen years of life’s varied experiences, on seas sometimes very tempestuous, in sickness and in health, in tests of exceeding severity, there has not come up out of the depths of either my conscious or my unconscious being any thing bearing the ugly features of sin, the wilful transgression of the known law of God. All this time Satan’s fiery darts have been thickly flying, but they have fallen harmless upon the invisible shield of faith in Jesus Christ. The rule of life, I find, must be sufficiently delicate to exclude those acts which bring the least blur over the spiritual eye (Heb. 5: 14). If any act brings a veil of the thinnest gauze between me and the face of Christ, I henceforth and forever wholly refrain therefrom.

“As another indispensable to establishment in that perfect love which casts out all fear, I have found the disposition to confess Christ in His utmost salvation. As no man could long keep in his house sensitive guests of whom he was ashamed before his neighbours, so no man can long have the company of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the temple of his heart while ashamed of their presence or their purifying work.

“In this respect I follow no man’s formula. The words which the Spirit of inspiration teaches in the Holy Scriptures, though beclouded with misunderstandings and beslimed with fanaticisms, are, after all, the most appropriate vehicle for the expression of the wonderful work of God in perfecting holiness in the human spirit, soul and body.

“I testify that it is possible for believers to be so filled with the Holy Spirit that they can live many years on the earth conscious every day of a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, and of no shrinking back through a felt need of further cleansing, from an instant translation into the society of the holy angels and into the presence of the holy God. This has been my daily experience since 1870 [i.e. for the past seventeen years].”

Rev. C. W. Ruth

Only a year or two ago, when casually browsing among the bookshelves of a brother minister, I came across a little book bearing the title, *Entire Sanctification*. Until then I had never heard of its author, the Rev. C. W. Ruth, yet he was one of the most widely travelled holiness preachers at the beginning of our twentieth century; and his little treatise, issued in 1903, is a trenchant testimony. From its introductory “Life Sketch” we cull the following.

“The writer was born September 1st, 1865, in Hilltown township, Bucks county, Pennsylvania. Both my father and mother were devoted and consistent Christians, and members of the Evangelical Association, before I was born; hence I grew up in a home-atmosphere of real spirituality and godliness. For this I am devoutly thankful. I do not think there was ever a day, from my earliest childhood to the time of my conversion, that the Spirit of God did not strive with me, and bring to my heart conviction for sin and my need of a Saviour. Oftentimes I was ‘almost persuaded’ to become a Christian, and always cherished the purpose to do so at some time; and yet, withal, I procrastinated, and so became more and more hardened and corrupted by sin.

“Living in a country village or on the farm, I never had the privilege of attending even a grade school, and for the most part attended a country school; and even there circumstances compelled an irregular attendance. When I was the age of sixteen it was decided that I should learn some trade, and so arrangements were made for me to go to a neighbouring town (Quakertown, Pennsylvania) to serve an apprenticeship in a printing office. Here again I found myself surrounded with religious influences, as the proprietor of the printing office was a Christian gentleman.”

(Mr. Ruth then narrates how, at the age of seventeen, he was truly converted. What happened thereafter, is described in our further quotations.)

“During the following year I lived a most honest and devoted Christian life, attending faithfully all the means of grace. I carried two Testaments—one German and one English—in my pockets, and used my spare time in studying the same. Thus I maintained a clear experience of justification. But I had only gone a very short time in my Christian experience until I discovered, much to my amazement, that there still remained a ‘something’ in my heart which hindered me, and at times even defeated me. The principal manifestations of that ‘something’ were, a man-fearing spirit, the uprising of an unholy temper, difficulty in forgiving and loving an enemy, etc. I learned that Jesus could remove the root of those difficulties out of the heart. Just one year after I had been so gloriously converted, while yet in my first love, I definitely sought the experience of *entire sanctification*. After seeking earnestly for some days, one Sunday night while walking down the side-walk toward the church, conscious that I had consecrated myself all for time and eternity, I was enabled to look up into heaven, and say, ‘I believe that the blood of Jesus cleanseth my heart from all sin now; He sanctifies me now.’ Suddenly and consciously the Holy Spirit fell upon me, and I knew just as positively and as assuredly that God had sanctified me through and through, as I had known a year before that He had pardoned my sins. I rushed into the church, and before the pastor had time to announce the opening hymn, I told the congregation what had occurred on the sidewalk, and that God had sanctified me wholly. Billows of glory swept over me until my joy seemed to be utterly inexpressible and uncontainable. Oh, the blessedness of that hour! Surely heaven could be no better. And from that day to the present—now almost twenty years—Satan has never had the audacity to tempt me to doubt even for one minute that God did then and there sanctify me wholly.

“Since that time I have never had a vacation of three weeks, and have averaged more than one sermon a day each year. I have preached and testified the gospel of holiness everywhere, and have never had services continuing one week or more without there being seekers. I regard it as a conservative statement when I say that in my meetings I have witnessed more than thirty thousand souls kneel seeking pardon or heart-purity. Four times I was elected as Presiding Elder—each time over my protest, but with it continued the work of holiness evangelism. I have travelled more than one hundred and fifty thousand miles in filling my engagements, and have laboured in thirty-three States and Canada, among twenty-five different denominations.”

Dr. Edgar M. Levy

In Mr. Olin Garrison’s compilation, *Forty Witnesses*, the longest contribution is by the Rev. Edgar M. Levy, D.D. It

is too long for full inclusion here, but our excerpts reproduce coherently his testimony concerning entire sanctification.

After describing his conversion at the early age of thirteen, Dr. Levy resumes: “In my twenty-first year I was ordained pastor of the First Baptist Church, West Philadelphia, then just organized. Here God greatly blessed my labours. I was proud of my success. After a pastorate of fourteen years I accepted a call to Newark, New Jersey. Here, also, God wonderfully blessed my labours, and hundreds were added to the Church. But oh, how were all my services, even the best, mixed with selfishness, ambition, and pride! A consciousness of this often filled me with shame and sorrow. Then I would make a new effort to improve my life by more watchfulness, zeal, and prayer; and although failure was sure to follow, yet, not knowing of any better method, I would tread the same weary road over and over again.

“Severe afflictions visited me. The sweetest voice of the household group was hushed; the brightest eyes were darkened in death; health failed; many friends proved unreliable; hopes withered; the way grew rough and thorny. My unsanctified soul, instead of learning submission, became impatient of restraint, would sometimes murmur against the dealings of God with me, question His wisdom, and doubt His love.

“After a residence of ten years in Newark I returned, in the autumn of 1868, to the scene of my early labours, and became pastor of the Berean Baptist Church, Philadelphia. In February, 1871, Mr. Purdy, an evangelist, was holding meetings in the Methodist church adjacent to mine. Many Christians from different churches were also in attendance. Day after day, with meekness and gentleness, and yet with unwavering confidence, they told the story of long years of conflict, and of ultimate and complete triumph through simple faith in the blood that cleanses from all sin, of their soul-rest and abiding peace, of their power with God and man, and the fulness of their joy.

“At first I became deeply interested, and then my heart began to melt. I said: These Christians are certainly in possession of a secret of wonderful power and sweetness. What can it be? Is it justification? No; it cannot be that. I have experienced the blessing of justification; by it I have been absolved from all my sins; by it I stand in the righteousness of Christ; every privilege of a child of God, and every grace of the blessed Holy Spirit, has been secured to me; but I do *not* find that it has destroyed the power of inbred sin, or brought to me complete rest of soul. I have peace; but it is often broken by ‘fear which has torment’. I am conscious of loving God, but it is like some sickly, flickering flame which I am expecting every moment to expire altogether. I have joy, but it is like a shallow brook; the drought exhausts it. I have faith, but it is such a poor, weak thing that I am in doubt sometimes whether it is faith at all. I ‘hate vain thoughts’; yet they continue to come, and seem at home in my mind. I believe that Jesus saves from sin; and yet I sin from day to day, and the dark stains are everywhere visible.

“I commenced a careful examination of the doctrine of sanctification. I reviewed my theological studies. I conversed with intimate friends of my own and other denominations. Nearly all of them pronounced the views advanced as nothing else than unscriptural and pernicious errors. They admitted the existence and universality of the disease, but could tell of no adequate remedy this side the grave. They allowed that the malady might be mollified; but in this life, they affirmed, it could never be perfectly healed.”

Dr. Levy then describes a later meeting in his own church, and continues: “After the sermon a number of persons bore testimony to the fullness and completeness of their present salvation. They represented several evangelical denominations—the Methodist, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Friends, the Baptists; and there was a beautiful harmony in all they said. I had no reason to doubt the truthfulness of their statements. I might question their logic, and find fault with their theories, and reject their phraseology, but how could I dispose of their *experience*? My judgment was assailed as it had never been before. After the meeting I returned to my study, fell upon the floor, and poured out my soul before God. I did not pray for pardon, but for purity. I did not seek clearer evidence of my acceptance, but to be ‘made free from sin’, not in a judicial or theological sense, but by a real, conscious *inwrought holiness*.

“That night I was unable to sleep. I was completely broken down in heart before God. The vision of Isaiah seemed

reproduced. ‘I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.’ ‘Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.’

“The morning at length dawned, and on every ray I could read, ‘Walk in the light, as He is in the light.’ ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts’, as chanted by the seraphim, seemed floating through all the air. As I thought of God, it was not so much His power or wisdom or justice or love that attracted my attention, as His infinite holiness.

“That day, Friday, March 9, 1871, was observed by the church as a special season of fasting, humiliation, and prayer. My soul was in great agony. I can compare my experience on that memorable day to nothing else than crucifixion. It seemed to me that I had gone up with Christ to Calvary and was transfixed to the cruel and shameful cross. A sense of loneliness and abandonment stole over my mind. ‘An horror of great darkness fell upon me’, and all the powers of hell assaulted my soul. The enemy brought before me with tremendous force my life-long prejudices, my theological training, my professional standing, my denominational pride. It was suggested that I must leave everything behind me should I go a step further in this direction. The dread of being misunderstood, of having my motives questioned, of being called ‘unsound in doctrine’, of being slighted by my ministerial brethren, and of being treated with suspicion and coldness, filled my heart with unspeakable anguish. Everything appeared to be sliding from under my feet.

“This mental conflict, however, soon subsided. The storm-clouds passed away, and light began to stream in. I was now done with theorizing, with philosophical doubts and vain speculations. I cared no longer for the opinions of men. I was willing to be a fool for Christ and to suffer the loss of all things. I cried out, ‘Teach me *Thy way*, O Lord! and lead me in a plain path’.

“When the meeting ended I repaired immediately to the parsonage. I threw myself into a chair, and at once the wondrous baptism came. I seemed ‘filled with all the fullness of God’. I wept for joy. At once I had a new and wonderful sense of the presence of Christ. Those words of Jesus were made real to me:

‘Abide in Me, and I in you’. The sovereign will of God seemed at once so sweet and blessed that I felt lost in the thought that God ruled over me and in me. I found myself praising Him for every trial, sorrow, disappointment, and loss. My sense of unworthiness was greatly quickened. I felt a sweet spirit of forgiveness in my heart. My love for the brethren was much enlarged. Denominational distinctions disappeared.

“Answers to prayer now began continually occurring. The personality and work of the blessed Holy Spirit were revealed to my spiritual perceptions as never before. Indeed, all the doctrines of the Gospel at once became luminous in the presence of the Sanctifier. What was formerly a speculative conviction became now a wondrous reality. Life has become marvelously simplified and natural. I no longer work for liberty, but as having liberty. I do not find this life—what in my ignorance I once regarded it—one of mysticism, indolence, and self-congratulation, but a life of ceaseless activity amid undisturbed repose.

“I have not found that this experience exempts us from trial, persecution, or disappointment. For me the way has frequently been strewn with thorns rather than roses. Unkindness has often wounded my heart. Friends have turned away, sometimes with pity, and sometimes with blame. At times I have been in heaviness through manifold temptation, and faith has almost yielded to the outward pressure; but, blessed be God, for sixteen years I have been preserved from all murmuring, disquietude, or fear.”

Dwight L. Moody

It may be useful now to draw this chapter to a close by giving a couple of rather briefer testimonials. Was there ever a greater evangelist than D. L. Moody? The impact of Moody and Sankey in Britain, America, and other countries was such that even yet we have not taken its full measure. As to personal character and temperament, Moody was eminently the forthright, practical sort, impatient toward any kind of lazy religious professionalism or sanctimonious bluff. He was the embodiment of downright reality; energetic, blunt, and big in human sympathies. To him, praying

without doing was just as wrong as doing without praying. Yes, that was Moody; and his testimony which we here reproduce bears the characteristic impress of the man. After a considerable period of seeking into the blessing of real sanctification and the enduement of power for service, the blessing “came”; and this is how he describes it:

“This blessing came upon me suddenly, like a flash of lightning. For months I had been hungering and thirsting for power in service. I had come to that point where I think I would have died if I had not got it. I remember that I was walking the streets of New York. I had no more heart in the business I was about than if I had not belonged to this world at all. Right there, on the street, the power of God seemed to come upon me so wonderfully that I had to ask God to stay His hand. I was filled with a sense of God’s goodness, and felt as though I could take the whole world to my heart. I preached the old sermons that I had preached before without any power; it was the same old truth, but there was a new power. Many were impressed and converted. This happened years after I was converted.

“It was the fall of 1871. I had been very anxious to have a large Sunday School and a large congregation, but there were few conversions. I remember, I used to take a pride in having the largest congregation in Chicago on a Sunday night. Two godly women used to come and hear me. One of them came to me one night after I had preached very satisfactorily, as I thought. I fancied she was going to congratulate me on my success, but she said, ‘We are praying for you’. I wondered if I had made some blunder, that they talked in that way.

“Next Sunday night they were there again, evidently in prayer while I was preaching. One of them said, ‘We are still praying for you.’ I could not understand it, and said, ‘Praying for me! Why don’t you pray for the people? I am all right.’ ‘Ah,’ they said, ‘You are not all right; you have not got power; there is something lacking, but God can qualify you.’ I did not like it at first, but I got to thinking it over, and after a little time I began to feel a desire to have what they were praying for.

“They continued to pray for me, and the result was that at the end of three months God sent this blessing on me. I want to tell you this: I would not for the whole world go back to where I was before 1871. Since then I have never lost the assurance that I am walking in communion with God, and I have a joy in His service that sustains me and makes it easy work. I believe I was an older man then than I am now; I have been growing younger ever since. I used to be very tired when preaching three times a week; now I can preach five times a day and never get tired

I have done three times the work I did before, and it gets and better every year. It is so easy to do a thing when love prompts you. It would be better, it seems to me, to go and break stone than to take to preaching in a professional spirit.”

[Hannah Whitall Smith](#)

Few popular religious books have had such wide and continual sale as Hannah Whitall Smith’s judicious little book, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*. All of us who are fond of reconnoitering among the shelves of evangelical bookstores have its pleasant title there again and again. Many of us will thank God for what it meant to us in our earlier years as Christian disciples. How, then, did its author come into her “secret”? She herself shall tell.

“I was converted in Philadelphia in 1856, in my twenty-sixth year. As time passed on the Lord graciously led me into the knowledge of much truth. But my heart was ill at ease. At the end of eight years of my Christian life I was forced to make the sorrowful admission that I had not even as much power over sin as when I was first converted.

I began to long after holiness. I began to groan under the bondage to sin in which I was still held. But so thoroughly convinced was I that no efforts or resolutions or prayers of my own would be of any avail, and so ignorant was I of any other way, that I was almost ready to give up in despair.

“In this time of sore need (1863) God drew into my company some whose experience seemed to be very different from mine. They declared that they had discovered a ‘way of holiness’ wherein the redeemed soul might live and walk in abiding peace, and might be made ‘more than conqueror’ through the Lord Jesus Christ.

“I asked them their secret, and they replied, ‘It is simply ceasing from all efforts of our own and trusting in the Lord to make us holy’.

“Never shall I forget the astonishment this answer gave me. ‘What!’ I said, ‘do you really mean that you have ceased from your own efforts altogether in your daily living, and that you do *nothing* but trust the Lord? And does He actually and truly make you conquerors?’

“Like a revelation the glorious possibilities of a life such as this flashed upon me, but the idea was too new and wonderful for me to grasp. I was altogether legal in my thoughts as regarded daily living. I had never dreamed of trusting the Lord for that, and I did not know how to do it. I lay awake whole nights to wrestle in prayer that God would grant me the blessing He had granted these other Christians. Then I began anew to search the Scriptures. I found that the salvation He had died to procure was declared to be a perfect salvation, and that He was able to save to the very uttermost. I found that He offered Himself to me as my life, and that He wanted to come into my heart and take full possession there and subdue all things to Himself. He showed Himself to me as a perfect and complete and present Saviour, and I abandoned my whole self to His care; I cast myself, as it were, headlong into the ocean of His love, to have all these things accomplished in me by His almighty working. I believed the truth that He was my practical sanctification as well as my justification, and my soul found rest at last, such a rest that no words can describe it—rest from all its legal strivings, rest from all its weary conflicts, rest from all its bitter failures. The secret of holiness was revealed to me, and that secret was Christ. My soul has entered into that interior rest or ‘keeping of sabbath’ which the apostle Paul, in Hebrews 4:9, declares ‘remaineth for the people of God’. Not that there are no conflicts; the battle, however, is no longer mine, but Christ’s.

“All the former period of my Christian course seems comparatively wasted. I was a child of God, it’s true, but my growth was stunted, and my stature feeble. When this secret of faith was revealed to me, I began to grow; and the dedication which was before impossible to me became the very joy of my heart.

“Believing, resting, abiding, obeying—these are my part; He does all the rest. What heights and depths of love, what infinite tenderness of care, what wise lovingness of discipline, what grandeur of keeping, what wonders of revealing, what strength in weakness; what comfort in sorrow, what light in darkness, what easing of burdens I have found; what a God, and what a Saviour, no words can tell!”

“What more . . .

We have now heard these several witnesses. In the words of Hebrews 2:32, “What more shall we say? “—for the foregoing witnesses are but several out of a host. A. M. Hills concludes one of his chapters in *Holiness and Power* with a shining galaxy of their honoured names. “Why is it,” he asks, “that those who oppose this second blessing, this baptism with the Holy Spirit, or holiness, or entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, no matter by what name called, always pick out the cranks and fanatics? Why cannot they be honourable enough to think of and name some whose lives and work are the glory of the Church of God during the last two centuries? Let me name just a few of the mighty host who have received this baptism with the Spirit, and have exhibited its effects to the world, however they may have differed in philosophy and theology: John Wesley, Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Mrs. Jonathan Edwards, Adam Clark, John Fletcher, William Carvosso, Hester Ann Rogers, David Brainerd, James Brainerd Taylor, William Tennent; and these bishops of the Methodist Church—Whatcoat, Asbury, McKendree, Hamline, Simpson, Foster, Newman, Ninde, Thoburn, Foss, Mallalieu, Taylor of Africa, Bowman, Goodsell, Pierce; and in other denominations, evangelists D. L. Moody, C. J. Fowler, R. A. Torrey, Wilbur Chapman, A. B. Earle, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frances Ridley Havergal, Mrs. Van Cott, Frances Willard, Hannah Whitall Smith, Dr. A. B. Simpson, Professors Dugan Clark, and David B. Upregraff, Dr. Daniel Steele of Boston University, Rev. J. A. Wood, Drs. Levy, Inskip, McDonald, Lowrey, Gordon, Dunham, Keen, Andrew Murray, J. O. Peck, J. A. Smith, F. B. Meyer, Alfred Cookman, General Booth and his holy wife Catherine, who mothered the most efficient family in the kingdom and service of Christ the century has seen. These are a few godly souls, representatives of the great army of saints who are called ‘holiness cranks’ by people scarcely worthy to touch their shoe-latchets.”

“What then. . .

In the words of Romans 8:31, we ask again, “What shall we then say to these things?” Were all these eminent witnesses self-deceived? Could all such godly persons be exaggerating to the point of untruth? Was all their experience of this radical and enduring sanctification an abnormal prolongation of delusive autosuggestion? It may be objected that even the saintliest and most scholarly persons have frequently been mistaken in their theological reasonings, explanations, and conclusions. The validity of that objection we fully admit. We admit much *more* than that: for we take leave to think that some of those whose testimonies we have here reproduced were at least partly wrong in *their* theory of sanctification, and even in their explanation of it in their own experience! Yet that in no way invalidates their witness; for here we are not concerned either with their interpretations of Scripture or even with their explanations of their own experience, but solely with their witness to *the experience itself*.

Can we doubt, then, the factual honesty of the experience reported by witnesses whose lives and words are stamped by such evident integrity? The several whom we have quoted, remember, represent tens of thousands. Must we not accept this body of testimony? Even though we may heartily disagree with some of the contributors in their interpretations or *theories* of sanctification, must we not believe in the reality of the *experience*? In view of the evidence, I, for one, am persuaded that “entire sanctification”, in the sense of a further major divine intervention in the already regenerated soul, is not only soundly inferable from Scripture, but amply attested by Christian experience.

I underscore: the foregoing testimonies are *not* a buttressing of mere theory by extra-Scriptural appeal to *experience*. They are adduced as showing a common correspondence with what we find in *Scripture*. Nor are we trying to account theologically for what can be explained temperamentally. Those witnesses record a transformation *beyond* explanation in terms of natural psychology. That experience did *not* bring a once-for-all, indefectible sanctification. It depended on *continuous* yieldedness to God. But it was real—and wonderful.

DEDUCTION

As complementary to Old Testament pointers and New Testament patterns the foregoing testimonies represent a large body of Christian experience which surely confirms that the conscious realization of entire sanctification often or even usually comes by way of a post-conversion crisis. All the foregoing witnesses and the many others whom they represent sought the blessing in that way on the basis of what they understood Scripture to teach; and the Holy Spirit answered them on that basis. This parallel between what Scripture seems to teach and what the divine Spirit seems to endorse in experience should not be lightly dismissed.

Chapter 5 Instantaneous or Gradual?

“Theology has been taken captive by the modern spirit. The theory of evolution has relegated everything sudden and supernatural to the limbo of superstition.... We can understand culture, but distrust conversion. Growth appeals to our sense of reason, but a sudden elimination of inherited tendencies is not harmony with the processes of Nature. That is why so much modern preaching is of the sheet-lightning sort; it shines but does not strike. Glittering generalities may dazzle, but they accomplish nothing.”

Samuel Chadwick

Late Principal, Cliff College, Sheffield, 1937

Instantaneous or Gradual?

As we have seen, Scripture teaches an inward holiness and spiritual fulness far above the average Christian experience of today. We have lingered over Old Testament pointers to it, and New Testament patterns of it, and

well-known witnesses to it. Before we examine more closely the *nature* of it, there is a further aspect which claims consideration, namely, the teaching that this inward liberation and expansion is wrought *instantaneously* in the consecrated believer.

This insistence, that “entire sanctification” is wrought *instantaneously*, has been a prominent feature of nearly all holiness teaching in its more recent and specialised forms. In the life of full deliverance from “inbred sin”, and full endowment by the Spirit, and full fellowship with God (so the teaching runs) there are two major crises: (1) regeneration, (2) entire sanctification; and the second is as instantaneous as the first.

All will agree that *regeneration* is instantaneous. There is a moment up to which an unconverted man is spiritually dead, and from which he is spiritually alive. In an instant the divine Spirit creates life where there has been death. There may be a long process leading to it, but regeneration itself is necessarily instantaneous.

Just as decidedly, all who have followed the Wesley teaching, and certainly all who have advocated the “eradication” theory, have emphasized that the causative crisis of entire *sanctification* is instantaneous.

[John Wesley](#)

John Wesley, in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, clearly teaches that while there may be a gradual process both to and from entire sanctification, the transition-point itself necessarily occurs in an instant. With some persons, that instant is pronounced and memorable; with others it is reached so gradually as to be scarcely distinguishable; but in either case the becoming *entirely* sanctified is strictly instantaneous.

Most of Wesley’s treatise is in the form of question and answer. In reply to the query, “Is this death to sin, and renewal in love, gradual or instantaneous?” He says, “A man may be dying for some time; yet he does not, properly speaking, die till the soul is separated from the body; and in that instant, he lives the life of eternity. In like manner, he may be dying to *sin* for some time; yet he is not dead to sin till sin is separated from his soul; *and in that instant* he lives the full life of love”.

Making himself once-for-all clear, he commits himself to this manifesto: “(1) That Christian perfection is that love of God and our neighbour which implies deliverance from all sin. (2) That this is received solely by faith. (3) That it is given *instantaneously*, in one moment. (4) That we are to expect it, not at death, but every moment”.

Most forcibly of all (see *Journal of Hester Ann Rogers*, p. 174) he writes, “You may obtain a growing victory over sin from the moment you are justified. But this is not enough. The body of sin, the carnal mind, must be destroyed; the old man must be slain, or we cannot put on the new man, which is created after God (or which is the image of God) in righteousness and true holiness; and this is *done in a moment*. To talk of this work as being gradual, would be nonsense, as much as if we talked of gradual justification.”

Tyerman says (*Life and Times of Wesley*, see vol. 2, pp. 346, 416, 444), “The doctrine of Christian perfection, attainable in an instant by a simple act of faith, was made prominent in Methodist congregations in 1762, and ever after it was one of the chief topics of Mr. Wesley’s ministry and that of his itinerant preachers”.

[Representative Others](#)

Since Wesley’s time this insistence on the instantaneousness of entire sanctification has remained emphatic among his successors in holiness teaching.

The Rev C. W. Ruth, in his *Entire Sanctification*, says: “The human side of sanctification . . . may be gradual. That is, the individual may be some time in completing a ‘dedication’ of his all to God. But the moment this is completed, with faith really touching the promise, then the divine side of sanctification, which is ‘to make holy or pure’ . . . is instantaneously and divinely inwrought through the power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 29).

The Rev. A. M. Hills is equally incisive when he writes, “This idea of growing into holiness is contrary to sound

theology. Growth is a gradual process. The Bible always represents sanctification as an *act*. Growth is the work of man, life-long. The sanctifying ‘baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ is an *act* of God, given as suddenly today as on the morning of Pentecost. The cleansing, purifying work of the Holy Spirit was wrought instantaneously in every case recorded in Scripture. There is no such command or thought in the Bible as ‘Become holy by degrees’.” (*Holiness and Power*, p. 322).

The Rev. Isaiah Reid, in his trenchant little work, *How They Grow*, says, “The people who have this grace, and who confess it, are not those who have come into possession of the experience by the method of gradualism. On the other hand, their universal testimony is that the work was instantaneous, and by grace, through consecration and faith. . . . Testimony proving that we are correct comes from people in all ages and in all denominations. We have tested it again and again in large meetings, and have never yet found one in possession of the grace of entire sanctification who reached the experience by growth. All gradualists are in a state of growth, and hence they are growing and groaning after it, but do not have it. The people who have the experience are qualified to tell how they received it. The get-it-by-growth people never know how to tell anyone how to obtain a holy heart so as to have it. They cannot, till they have it themselves; and as they are still in a state of growing into it, they are not yet in a state of entire sanctification. They have *some* (sanctification) they say, but how much they cannot tell; nor how long the growing may yet continue they have no idea. Many of the ‘growth’ advocates honestly say, while they claim a growth of forty years or more, that they are no better in this respect than when they first began.”

Experiential Counterpart

The foregoing quotations are representative enough to make further cullings superfluous; yet it may well be added that this *doctrine* of instantaneous sanctification seems attested by a “great cloud of witnesses” as being correspondingly instantaneous in *experience*. (For Wesley’s testimony to this see appendix on *Instantaneous Sanctification*, p. 248).