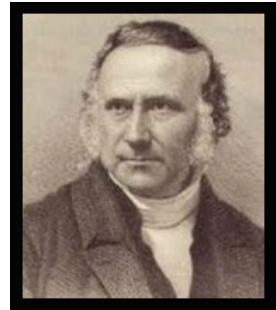


Unconditional Submission



One of the most distressing instances of anxiety about salvation, that I have ever known, was that of a married woman about thirty years of age, and of excellent character, as a wife, and mother, and neighbor. Her energy of character was her most remarkable trait. Her decision, penetration, and quickness were uncommon. She had had a religious education, and was now surrounded with religious influences. Most of her relatives and acquaintances were communicants in the church. Her husband had lately become a pious man.

She became concerned for her salvation; and seemed to me to have a peculiarly deep sense of her sins. She often expressed to me her wonder and astonishment, that God had not cut her down in her carelessness. She thought that her heart was more obstinate, than the heart of any other sinner could be. She was fully sensible of its enmity against God; and appeared to be fully determined to seek the Lord with all her heart. I thought, from this and from her ordinary decision of character, that she would soon find peace with God.

But, month after month, she lingered. At times, her distress of mind was inconceivably great. Many times I conversed with her, and in every possible way aimed to teach her the way of life. With all the ingenuity I could muster, I aimed to find out what was her hindrance, but I tried in vain. In her Bible I marked those passages, which I hoped would benefit

her. She studied them intensely. She prayed daily and with agony. But yet she attained no hope in Christ, no peace with God or with herself.

I expected, that the hopeful conversion of her husband, whose exercises of mind had very much resembled her own, would have a beneficial influence upon her mind. But when he told her of his hope and peace, and exhorted her to flee to Christ; she expressed her gladness, that he had become a Christian, but her own mind did not appear to be in the least altered.

She conversed with me apparently with entire freedom, told me all her heart, and begged to be told what she should do. All I could say to her appeared to be of no avail. Her mind continued as dark and distressed as ever. And this appeared the more strange to me, because, within a quarter of a mile of her house, there had been at least twenty hopeful conversions to Christ, after she began to strive for salvation; and she enjoyed precisely the same means and opportunities as they.

As week passed after week in this manner, I expected her anxieties would diminish, and the Holy Spirit .would depart from her. But her seriousness continued, and her determination to persevere in her attempt. After I had exhausted all my skill to do her good; fearing that I might have done her injury, I left her entirely alone for some weeks, not calling on her as I had been accustomed to do, not saying to her a single word about her religious condition. Still she continued in the same way. At one time, I requested some other persons to converse with her, which they did, but apparently in vain.

At length she became almost frantic with anxiety. Her distress seemed intolerable; and I seriously feared, that her reason would give way, and leave her to a maniac's gloom. She now began to despond. Salvation appeared an unattainable good to her; and the strange expressions of her despair, (a despair which I could no longer alleviate with the promises and

invitations of Christ,) were enough to make any heart bleed. I knew her endure the most horrid temptations, time after time—temptations, which I may not describe.

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I was now in the habit of calling upon her almost every day, as she desired. I parted with her one day in the afternoon, leaving her in much the same gloom and despair as she had endured for some weeks. On entering her house the next morning, I was struck with her altered appearance; and the first thought I had was, that her reason had fled. She appeared quite as solemn as ever; but there was a composure about her look,—a sort of fixedness and quietness of firm determination which I had never seen before. As I spoke to her, she answered me in few words, but quite rationally and calmly. There was no insanity there. I drew her into some conversation. She was rather more reserved than common, I thought; but evidently her distress of mind was diminished. She had no hope in Christ, she said, and never expected to have any. “Peace with God,” says she, “I know nothing about; but I have done quarrelling with him.” This expression led me to suppose, that she had come to the determination to dismiss religion from her thoughts. But in a moment afterwards, replying to an expression I had made, she said: “I mean to do all my duty.” I could not understand her. And after some half hour’s conversation, still as much in the dark as ever, I said to her:—“You seem to me, Mrs. S—, to be, after all, in a very different state of mind from what you were yesterday. How is it? what has brought you to this?”

“I will tell you, sir,” said she, (with a deep solemnity, and a kind of awfulness in look and manner, which I have never seen equalled;) “after you left me yesterday,—I had been praying to God, and thinking for how long a time the Holy Spirit had been striving with me, I came to the conclusion, that I could do nothing, and that there is no salvation for me! But I knew I was justly condemned. And I resolved to serve God as long as I live; to pray to him to help me do it; and resolved to live the rest of

my life for the glory of Christ, and commend him to others. I determined to do all my religious duties as well as I can, to the end of my life; and go to hell at last, as I deserve!"

"You will find it hard work," said I, "to get to hell in that way;" and immediately left her.

She now had no hope. I did not deem it my duty to give her any hope. And it was more than a week after this, before it ever entered into her thoughts, that she was reconciled to God. All this time she was calm, solemn, prayerful, contented. She had made up her mind that she must be lost. She knew it would be just,—that God. would do rightly,—and she was willing that he should reign. She determined to serve him till death,—to do all the good she could to others; and "go to hell at last."

But in a few days it struck her mind, that she was satisfied with God; that she no longer felt any enmity against him or his law; that, in fact, she loved him, his law, and his Christ. She then began to question whether this was not religion, after all; and gradually her mind was led to hope. She afterwards made a public profession of religion, and lived as one of the most determined Christians in the world.

In those gloomy months before she found rest, she was manifestly aiming, with a firmness and decision perfectly agreeing with her character, just to save herself, that is, to become a Christian by the power of her own will. And when she found it impossible, she as decidedly despaired. And then, as decidedly gave up all to God;—"I found I could do nothing more." God saved her, just when she ceased relying upon herself. True converts are born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

There may be more truth in the idea which some of the old Hopkinsians intended to express by "unconditional submission," than

many of their modem revilers suppose. It certainly is not needful, that when a sinner flings down the weapons of his rebellion and becomes reconciled to God, he should be without hope; for as soon as he does this, he has a promise of God to rest upon. But it certainly appears to be true, that at that time he is not, in every case, really relying upon it at all. He is exercising submission,—not faith. Or, if he is exercising faith at all, he may not be conscious of it, and therefore, may have only half the comforts of it. And it is quite conceivable, that one may have such a sense of sin and unworthiness, as to exclude all expectation of eternal life; while, at the same time, he is really “reconciled to God.” He has, in such a case, exercised submission, a gracious submission to God; and therefore, his agitations and torments of mind have ceased; but his faith has not yet been brought into lively and conscious exercise; and therefore, he has no hope. This would seem to be “unconditional submission,” a “giving up of all to God.” In this state of mind he certainly cannot be said to “be willing to be damned;” but it can be said of him, that he does not expect to be saved.

It may not be possible for human science and skill, to analyze conversion to Christ. The gospel has probably made the matter more plain, than anything else will ever make it. And there are not a few things in the gospel, which appear in place a surrendry before faith—yielding before trusting.

A poor Indian, of whom I once had some knowledge, who had been a very wicked man, but who became hopefully pious, was desired to give some account of his conversion—to tell how it was, that he had been led to his hope in Christ. He described it in this way, taking his figures from his way of life, as he had been accustomed to chase the deer and the bear, over mountains and through morasses:—Said he: “I was in the mud. I tried to get out; and I could not. I tried the harder; and the harder I tried, the faster I sunk. I found I must put forth all my strength; but I went down deeper, and deeper, and deeper. I found I was going allover in the

mire;—I gave the death yell, and found myself in the arms of Jesus Christ.” When he abandoned all attempt to save himself, Jesus Christ saved him. This was all he knew about it. And more, this was all there was about it. “Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great.” This verily seems like “unconditional submission.”—But there is too much metaphysics in that phrase, for the work of hearts. Affection, like faith, is seldom metaphysical. Its depth lies in its simplicity. All speculation, which does not bring round the matter just to that spot, is useless for all heart purposes, therefore for all faith purposes.