

Cleaving to the Lord

by H. A. Ironside

"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." Acts 11:22, 23.

The background and context of these verses is intensely interesting. Some years had elapsed since the glorious Pentecostal outpouring when the work of grace began in the city of Jerusalem. Our blessed Lord had instructed His disciples to begin there and go throughout Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth, proclaiming the wondrous story of His salvation; but, somehow, His disciples were very slow when it came to obeying the Word. They lingered in Jerusalem and Judea. One at last had faith enough to go to Samaria and was followed by two of the apostles, but there the work seemed to stop. They seemed not to have the spiritual energy to reach out among the Gentiles. So God shook them up. Persecution broke out, as a result of which the Christians were scattered. They went everywhere preaching the Word, but even then they preached only to Jews. Finally, some went as far as Antioch and launched out in a Gospel campaign among those called, in our Authorized Version, the "Grecians." Ordinarily, the Scriptures distinguish between "Greeks," the Gentiles, and "Grecians," the term used for the Jews born among the Gentiles. They were Greek-speaking Israelites and were characterized by many of the mannerisms of the Gentiles. That is the word used here in the Authorized Version, but actually, according to the best texts, it should be translated "Greeks," for these Jewish believers went to the Gentiles and preached Christ to those in Antioch who had been before worshipers of idols. The great work of God continued. It went on for months, and a great many were saved. Word of this great ministry was carried back to Jerusalem, and when the brethren heard about it they said, "We had better investigate. If God is working this way among the Gentiles, we had better find out." So they sent Barnabas, and when he saw for himself the

evidence of the grace of God working among the Gentiles, his soul was stirred and he began to exhort and try to help those who were already saved, telling them that with purpose of heart they should cleave to the Lord.

Now this verse came to me as I thought of the many who have had their hearts opened to their need of Christ and have trusted Him as their Saviour. We would not have you think conversion is actually the end of the Christian experience — it is only the beginning. When people come to Christ and put their trust in Him, that is just the start in the Christian life. When we receive the Lord Jesus we are born again but are only babes in Christ and need to grow. Certain things are important in the nurture of a babe — proper care, good food, constant cleansing, and fresh air. A great many things are required that the babe may develop and grow in a way that will cheer the hearts of the parents, relatives, and friends.

So, often, people are converted in great revival meetings, and years go by and they seem not to develop as Christians should, and unthinking people turn and blame the evangelist, saying, "People get converted but do not get anywhere or amount to anything for God," That is true if the converts are not built up in Christ afterwards, Barnabas realized that and went among these young converts and exhorted them, that "with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."

That is the exhortation we would bring to all today who have recently accepted Christ. We plead with you for your own soul's blessing that you cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. You have trusted Christ, have taken Him as your own personal Saviour. Now see to it that you set your mind on the work of glorifying God in everything. You could not be saved through any effort of your own, but now that you are saved it is necessary for you to put forward every effort you can to glorify Him. If you have been born again you have been bought with a price. The Apostle Peter wrote:

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass; and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which

by the gospel is preached unto you."

Salvation does not depend on a happy feeling or an emotional upset or signing a card or holding up your hand or rising from your seat and going to the inquiry room. All these things are right and proper in their places, but new birth depends upon having received the word of the truth of the Gospel. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth," and that Word speaks to the conscience, and the power of the Holy Ghost produces new life. If you believe the Gospel you begin as a babe in Christ. As a babe, you need food. You need with purpose of heart to acquire that food which will be for your spiritual nourishment and upbuilding. The Apostle Peter's first letter, chapter 2, opening verse, reads, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

You will never grow, you will never make progress, you will never really develop as a Christian if you neglect your Bible. With purpose of heart cleave to the Lord and let one evidence of your cleaving be that from now on you will never permit a day to go by that you do not spend some time over your Bible. And as you open it, lift your eyes to Him who wrote it (for "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost") and ask God to reveal His mind and will to you in His Word, and seek grace to walk in obedience to His will. There is no other way to make a success of the Christian life. Back in the Old Testament, in the book of Joshua, there is a verse I like to give to young converts, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:8). There you have it! You want to make your way prosperous? You want to have good success? You want your Christian life to count for God? Then do not neglect your Bible!

Some of you may say, "I have never been in the habit of reading the Bible. I do not know how to go about it. Frankly, there is so much in it I don't understand," Of course not! You can expect that in a book from God. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts

than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:2). But remember God, who wrote it, has given you the Holy Spirit. "After that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). The Holy Spirit has come to dwell in you. You who have trusted Christ, your body is now the temple of God and the spirit of God delights to take the things of God and show them to you. As you open your Bible, look up to Him and say, "I do not understand it all; but, Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit open it up to me," and you will be surprised how He will delight to do it.

Some of you may say, "Shall I take it as a whole or by certain sections?" I think if I were you I would begin immediately to read thoughtfully, prayerfully, through the Bible — from the first chapter in Genesis to the last chapter in Revelation, Perhaps take a chapter a day — it takes only a few minutes; and then after you read it, pray over it and look it over again and say, "What in this chapter is for me, what speaks to my own heart?" If you do not find something, look to the Lord to open it up, wait on Him. Perhaps He will answer another question. Ask Him or yourself this question, "In what way is Christ presented?" Take the first chapter of Genesis you are reading through. You ask, "In what way is Christ presented?" The first chapter says, "Let there be light." Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." You read God made the sun and Jesus is called the Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2). So wherever you go in your Bible you will always find something speaking of Him. Then look it over and say, "Is there anything here I should be careful to avoid or obey or against which I am warned? Is there anything God is showing me I ought to do?" So read your Bible, chapter by chapter, and you will find the more dependent you are on the Holy Spirit, the more it will open up to you.

I would like to suggest this to you. Besides reading through chapter by chapter, I think it will be a wise thing for you who have only recently accepted the Lord to take a book like the Gospel of John and read a chapter of that each day, because you know John's Gospel was given especially to make known the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. "These are written," John tells us, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (20:31). You will find wonderful truths which will make the things of God more and more real.

Then if you are able to set apart three periods a day, may I suggest another book. You want to learn to pray and praise. Read one of the Psalms daily and meditate on that Psalm. Ask the Spirit of God to open it up to you. I can promise you this, in a few weeks and months, though you may not realize it, others will see you are growing and developing as a Christian.

A second thing, you not only need to read your Bible in order to grow in grace and knowledge, but you need to set apart some time daily for prayer. Let me read a passage from Paul's epistle to the Philippians, chapter 4, verse 6, "Be careful for nothing [be not anxious about anything. It is natural for us to be anxious. There are so many things to worry and distract us]; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." And then he promises that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Now, you can be a Christian without giving yourself to a life of prayer, but you will never be a growing, healthy, useful Christian if you neglect prayer; and so I would urge upon you that with purpose of heart you cleave to the Lord in prayer — that just as you set aside a certain time every day for reading the Word, so, in connection with it, you take time to pray. Some of you may say, "I do not know how to pray." Perhaps you have not prayed since as a child you said, "Now I lay me down to sleep." Perhaps you were never even taught that. May I suggest, you could not find a better model than that given by our Lord in what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer. Until you can pray at liberty yourself, until the Holy Spirit opens your heart and lips so you can pour out your soul in intercession, take those words as a guide in prayer. He said, "When ye pray, say, Our Father." it is a wonderful thing to be able to say that. You who have accepted Christ, only now do you have the right to say that. You may have used the words before but now you are entitled to pray and say, "Our Father." As you think of that it would be well to say, "God is my Father — and just as I go to my earthly father and tell him what is in my heart, so I can tell Him how I long to live for Him, how I want guidance and help along the way, and the supply of my temporal and spiritual needs, for He says, "Be careful for nothing [be not anxious about anything]; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

"Hallowed be thy name." That is, He would have you enter into a spirit of worship and adoration as you come into His presence.

Pray for the extension of His work. "Thy kingdom come.

Pray for temporal things. "Give us this day our daily bread."

Pray for deliverance from trial and temptation. "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

And I would suggest that you accustom yourself to praying out loud when you get alone in your room where nobody will hear but God and you. Half of the victory in your prayer life is gained when you become accustomed to hearing your own voice. Many people cannot pray in public, because they have never become accustomed to hearing their own voices. If you have liberty in praying in secret, you will soon have liberty in praying in public. Because your words seem crude and seem not to come all at once, do not discontinue praying. Continue to cleave to the Lord and you will find He will open your lips and heart and really teach you to pray.

The last thing I want to say to you is this: The one who bore your sins is not only your Saviour but is your Lord and Master. Therefore you must recognize the fact that you are no longer your own. Before you were saved, you did what you pleased and went where you liked. That should be over now. You should say, "I am not my own. I belong to another. I have been bought with a price. Therefore I must be careful where I go, I must be careful in choosing my companions. I am called to serve the Lord Christ." In the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans there is a very important exhortation in the first verse:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Do not be discouraged because you are not all you hope to be at the beginning. Do not be discouraged if you find old things tugging at your heart and you do not see the immediate will of

God. As you become better acquainted with His Word and spend more time in prayer and walk with Him, the more clear all these things will become.

As young Christians you should also avail yourselves of the opportunity of coming together with the people of God, that you may get better acquainted with His Word. He wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth. He said, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10: 25) but to come together and wait upon God together "and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

So I can assure you of this — if in these things you with purpose of heart cleave to the Lord, your Christian life will bring joy and satisfaction, and you will be used in winning others to Christ.

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