

# *My Religious Life Before God Saved Me*

## Part 3

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There is a vast difference between the indwelling presence of Christ in the heart and life of a believer and the presence of a demon spirit filling only the mind of an individual. In the heart of the born again believer, as well as in his conscious mind, Christ is magnified. He is magnified as your Lord and your Saviour, God is magnified as your Father, and the Holy Spirit is constantly taking the things of Christ and revealing them to you (John 16:18-15). On the other hand, when the mind is filled with the presence of a demon spirit, that demon spirit is magnifying things, visions, experiences, dreams, and emotions, and ecstatic rapture. That demon spirit is praising "Jesus," and uses the word, "Hallelujah," or "Glory." That demon spirit magnifies certain portions of the Bible, and gives one a sense that everything is new and glorious. That demon spirit magnifies faith, and in the main gives the individual the wrong concept of the Christian life. In other words, everything is false, because it has no foundation to rest upon. The foundation of the believer's faith is the Word of God, and the Object of his faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. The individual whose mind is filled with the presence of Satan, or the presence of a demon spirit has a faith that rests upon emotions, feelings, joy, signs, and experiences.

My experience of the "baptism with the Holy Ghost" resulted in my mind being filled with the presence of a demon spirit, and as a result, I wanted to preach wherever I found a group of men and women. There was that desire and longing in my heart that they should experience what I had. There was a different power in my life, and I knew it. I believed that our church membership was saved, that they were Christians, but I thought they needed that same power in their lives, and I was constantly talking to them about it, asking them the question, "Have you been baptized with the Holy Ghost? Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? What about the gifts of the Holy Ghost? Do you have them? If not, why not?" That is what the individual thinks of; that is the course of his thoughts when he has experienced what is called, "the baptism of the Holy Ghost." However, the born again believer is brought down the way of grace and is made to see that he is a lost sinner, deserving hell, and he is made a new creature in Christ Jesus. Christ becomes his Lord and his Saviour. He moves and thinks in a different realm. His thoughts center around Christ. He magnifies Christ. He exalts Christ. He glorifies Christ as his Lord and Saviour.

After a few months went by, I found that these experiences could not be repeated. Then the so-called "speaking in unknown tongues" left me. I found that I was still just as empty as I had been before I ever experienced what I called "the baptism with fire" and "the baptism with the Holy Spirit." I can look back now and see how the Lord God of Heaven had His hand upon me, and how He took away those experiences and the speaking in "unknown tongues," because the fear of the Lord immediately gripped my heart. Days and nights passed, and that fear grew. Soon I realized that it was the same fear that had entered my heart the day I rose from that card table, shoved back those cards, and walked away from them never to touch them again. It was that

same fear that I had experienced back there in early boyhood when I walked out of that room, never again to deal with those demon spirits that I called "spooks." It was that same fear that had entered my heart at the age of twelve, which separated me from all kinds of intoxicating drinks. After carefully weighing the matter before me, and the fear that gripped my heart, I realized somewhat the danger I was in, and I walked out of it – or thought I did. One of the saving features about my whole religious life at that time was the fact that I had not changed (and I never did!) my doctrinal position of God's Word. As I weighed up these experiences against God's Word, they did not tally. I knew something was wrong somewhere, but I did not know what it was. The sad fact of it all was that I had become utterly demon-possessed, and of and by my own power I could not cast out the demons, and basically my whole life was controlled by visions, voices, and so-called experiences.

The next five years I continued preaching and teaching with that deep emptiness in my life until God, in His infinite mercy and grace, began to open my heart and mind to let me see that I was demon possessed, and that I had never been saved. In connection with this message, I wish you would read my book, "How and When God Saved a Baptist Preacher."

I faced the fall of 1938 with the same three questions that I had faced for years, "Why was not Christ real to my heart? Why weren't the promises of God's Word real to me? and why couldn't I lay hold of them? Third, why were those who made professions of faith under my ministry not living victorious lives and experiencing deliverance from the power of sin?" Many of them came out on professions of faith with glorious experiences, but after the experience died away, I saw there was no change of heart and mind. They would battle for a little while over sin, but then they would do one of two things – stay with the church and live under a veneer of religion the same old life they had lived before they came into the church, or else they would go back to the world. Observing that there was no power over sin in the lives of the so-called saved church members, I was faced with the question of whether the Bible was really the Word of God. This being the case, I could not preach that which I did not believe with all my heart, and, therefore, what was the use of preaching? In the midst of this situation, another factor entered the picture that disturbed me: several of the members of my church, among whom were the most spiritual, began to come to me saying, "Pastor, I have missed Christ; I do not know Him. I am a lost sinner." I did not know what to do with them. For me to admit that they were lost meant that I would have to admit that I was a lost sinner. Therefore, the only way that I could deal with them was to try to persuade them that they needed a new life of dedication, and I pled with them to dedicate their lives anew unto Christ. I began to preach on dedication and assurance, but I soon found that this didn't help the matter. They came back again and again saying, "Pastor, I have a fear in my heart that I don't know Christ, and dedicating my life to the Lord hasn't helped me one bit." Then I began to wake up to the fact that the members of my church didn't know Christ. He was not a living reality to them. This put me in an embarrassing position, yet not once did it ever occur to me that I was a lost sinner.

Some years previous to these stirring and heart-searching experiences, I had visited with Dr. A. Reilly Copeland, pastor of the Tabernacle Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, and he had told me over and again how the Lord had visited his people and how many of his church members had discovered they were lost and had come to know Christ. I said, "Oh, if he would but come here and preach to us, it might be the solution to our church problem." I asked the church to invite

him to hold a meeting in the spring of 1939, and they did. The Lord led him to accept the invitation, and he came and preached for us for six weeks on the new birth. Practically everyone in our church membership was awakened to the fact that they had missed Christ. They couldn't sleep; they couldn't eat. It was a quiet moving of the Holy Spirit on their hearts. It became a common thing for them to ask each other, "Have you been born again?" – and they didn't leave me out! Day after day they confronted me with the question, "Pastor, have you been born again?" I always answered, "Yes, have you?" until the last week of the meeting. I was riding up St. Charles Avenue with Dr. Copeland here in the city of New Orleans, when the Holy Spirit sent the arrow of conviction to my heart and raised the question, "Have you been born again?" There was no audible voice, but the question pierced my heart like a barbed arrow as if someone had personally spoken to my very innermost being, and I looked about to see who might have spoken to me. Then it dawned upon me for the first time, "This is the voice of the Holy Spirit!" It came with such authority that I couldn't throw it off. I wanted to get away from Bro. Copeland. I didn't want to attend services, but being the pastor I had to go. I wanted to run away, but I couldn't. I said nothing to anyone about it, and I was glad when the meeting closed. This was the first time that my salvation had ever been questioned, but it was questioned with such authority until I could not get away from its insistent demand for an answer. This was God crossing my will, and God crossing a sinner's will is what makes him so angry. I was glad when the meeting closed.

The whole church life was transformed. The vast majority of them came out on a profession of faith, and no doubt some of them came to know Christ, but so many missed the way of grace and the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. My whole ministry underwent a complete reformation. I began preaching with unusual liberty and power the old doctrines of the Bible. There came a renewed conviction and assurance that the Bible is the Word of God, yet there was still that aching void in my heart. When I preached and gave an invitation, I wanted to accept my own invitation, and many times I would open my mouth to admit that I was lost but was now trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. However, the Holy Spirit kept me from it, because accepting an invitation and making a profession of faith is not salvation, and the Lord prevented Satan from pulling this trick on me. Another year went by, and we invited Bro. Copeland back for another meeting. During this time I was moved very little, if any; the Lord was dealing with other problems in the church, and He did not deal directly with my heart during the meeting.

The year 1941 came, and at my suggestion the church invited Bro. Joe Granier to hold a meeting for us. Bro. Granier was one of our French missionaries who had been saved as a result of the meeting in 1939. The next move that I recall the Lord making, in dealing with me definitely, came one afternoon as I stood by the mimeograph machine. Someone had returned from Waco, Texas, and he was telling me that Bro. T. L. Daniel had been awakened to the fact that he was a lost sinner, and had come to realize that he was demon possessed. For several years Brother Daniel and I had been friends; he had been through similar experiences to those I have been relating. We had sat and talked for hours about those experiences, visions, and dreams, comparing notes. When this individual stated that Bro. Daniel had admitted that he was lost and demon possessed, the news hit me like a thunderbolt. The thought flashed through my mind immediately, "If Bro. Daniel, who has gone through similar experiences as I have, is lost and demon possessed, where does that put me?" I walked over and stood by the window, looking out; and cold, clammy sweat broke out all over my body. This was the first time that I began to

realize the nature of my true spiritual condition. I said nothing, because there was nothing to say. I realized that I was demon possessed.

Brother Joe Granier began the meeting around the first of September, 1941, and the storm center of the battleground in every one of his messages was, **"If you can't go back to the time and place that you became a lost sinner, you cannot rightly say that you are saved."** Bro. Granier had finished only the eighth grade in school, and he spoke broken English, as he was a native Frenchman. He put the statement in his own peculiar, broken English, "It's neder dis, it's neder dat. Christ died for sinners. Are you a sinner? Have you ever admitted in your heart before God that you are a lost sinner? Can you go back to the time and place that you admitted you were lost? If not, you are not saved." He hammered that great truth to our hearts for four weeks, and for four weeks I tried to find the time and place that I had ever admitted in my heart to God that I was a lost sinner. But I could not find it. Every night I lay awake until the early morning hours, going over and over every religious experience of my life, but I could not find the time or place that I had ever come to the knowledge of the fact, and admitted to God in my heart, that I was a lost sinner. He all but drove me crazy with that statement, "It's neder dis, it's neder dat. Christ died for sinners. Are you a sinner? Are you a lost sinner? Can you go back to the time and place that you admitted in your heart that you were lost? If not, then you are not saved." No matter what text he took, he invariably, somewhere in his message, made that statement, and drove home that truth. Then I would go over and over again all the ground that I had been in the realm of religious experiences until I would wear myself down, but I could not find one time that I had ever become a lost sinner in my own eyes before God.

I knew that I was facing the crisis of my life. One Friday afternoon during the meeting, I walked down into the kitchen where Mrs. Shelton was and said, "Darling, if what that man is preaching is so, then your husband is lost." I left home that weekend and went to Shreveport, Louisiana, to visit my brother, as I had a preaching engagement on Sunday morning and Sunday evening in one of the churches there. As I walked the sidewalks of Shreveport, I faced one question – I was a lost sinner! Somewhere there in Shreveport I admitted in my heart before God that I was lost. This was the first time in my whole life that I had ever come to the knowledge of the fact that I was a lost sinner. That night I sat in my brother's home knowing I was lost, knowing I was on the road to hell, and while thinking on this fact, a Scripture came to my mind, "He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." As I quoted that Scripture to myself, being demon possessed, Satan gave me a vision of Christ lifted up on the cross right there in front of me. There He was with the crown of thorns on His head, and then came that audible voice, "There He is; believe Him, and you are saved!" Not yet knowing the difference between the Holy Spirit and a demon spirit, I cried out, "I do believe Him!" Then that voice said again, "Your sins are forgiven." My, my, what a trickster Satan is!

Believing I was saved, I went ahead and preached the next day, which was Sunday, but I didn't make mention of it one time in my message. After the evening service I returned home. Riding on the train between Shreveport and New Orleans, the Holy Spirit brushed aside that whole vision and again made me realize that I was a lost sinner and demon possessed. When I arrived home Monday morning, I called my family together and told them that I was a lost sinner. Then I came before the church Monday night and told them of the battle I had had, but that the Holy Spirit had brought me to the place that I had admitted I was a lost sinner. So I took my place as a

lost sinner in the First Baptist Church, Algiers, New Orleans, where I had been preaching for fifteen years as pastor.

The services continued night after night, and the evangelist laid line upon line, showing the sinner's responsibility to come to Christ. In the midst of his message one night, Satan so took possession of my whole mind and body that, against my will, I was made to cry out, when he showed me another vision of Christ on the – cross, "I see Him! I see Him!" Immediately I realized it was Satan, and I slumped in my seat weeping my eyes out that I was so demon possessed. I had come to see the difference then between the Holy Spirit and the demon spirit.

Yes, I was demon possessed. I was held captive by Satan, and there seemed to be no way out – no hope. For days and nights I walked the floor, or the sidewalks, or the countryside, crying unto the Lord, pleading nothing but the shed blood of the Son of God for deliverance. I was not seeking the Holy Spirit now; I was seeking Christ as a lost sinner. I wanted Him. The Holy Spirit had brought me to the place that there was such a hunger and thirst, and a longing for Christ, the Son of God, as my Redeemer, as my Lord and my Saviour, that if I could not have Him, give me death. Slowly, but surely, the Holy Spirit kept throwing back the veil of my heart, opening the skylight of my soul, as it were, until I saw the wickedness of my own nature. He showed me that I was a sinner not only by practice but a sinner by nature, and that I deserved to go to hell. God ought to send me to hell, and I saw it, and acknowledged it to Him.

Under satanic conviction years before, I was made to give up things, confess sins, and make things right with individuals: that was as far as Satan had power to go. But now the Holy Spirit not only showed me my sins, but He turned the searchlight upon the law until I was made to gaze upon the designs of the law until I saw my sins and my transgressions of the law. I saw the spiritual side of the law, and it was the spiritual application of the law that revealed to me that I was a sinner BY NATURE. I was made to gaze upon my old original sin until sin became so exceeding sinful, so much so that I saw there was not one good thing within me. The fulness of the knowledge of myself was so manifested to my heart one morning as I was standing at the eastern window of my office looking out onto the little park across the street from the church building where sat three drunken derelicts. Their faces were bloated with liquor, and there they sat in their rags and filth. As I gazed upon them, there came the deep conviction of my heart by the Holy Spirit, "You are just as wicked as they are. Your old self-righteousness is more wicked than those three men on skidrow." I left the window and started down the stairs with one thought in mind – that I would go there where those three men sat and ask them to move over and make room for the fourth one on "skidrow." I saw that I was more wicked, in God's sight and in my own sight than they. The Lord stopped me, and I turned around and went back to my desk.

Then one night, after I had rolled and tossed nearly all night long as the Lord was showing me the wickedness of my old nature and the wickedness of sin, the sinfulness of sin, impressing that great fact upon my heart, He called to mind several characters that we had dealt with in the underworld and impressed upon my heart with such clearness, such positiveness, that I was no better than they. Thus He showed me that *"There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:22-23). It has been twenty-four years since God saved me, and I have never gotten away from the fact that I was a wicked, vile, hell-deserving sinner. When I judged myself guilty and deserving to go to hell, and by grace rested at His feet as a broken

sinner, then it was that the Holy Spirit through the Word lifted up Christ to my heart and mind as my Lord and my Saviour. It was not a vision; it was life. It was not an experience; it was a crisis. It was the translation from death unto life. It was a miracle of God's grace, in that He made me a new creature in Christ Jesus. It was not ecstatic rapture of a demon spirit, but it was the Holy Spirit raising a dead sinner to life in Christ, delivering me from the power of Satan and sin, and translating me into the kingdom of the Son of God. Amen, and amen!