

George Muller and His Second Conversion

IN the life of George Miller of Bristol there was an epoch, four years after his conversion, to which he ever after looked back, and of which he often spoke, as his entrance into the true Christian life.

In an address given to ministers and workers after his ninetieth birthday, he spoke thus of it himself: "That leads to another thought—the full surrender of the heart to God. *I was converted* in November 1825, *but I only came, into the full surrender of the heart* four years later, in July 1829. The love of money was gone, the love of place was gone, the love of position was gone, the love of worldly pleasures and engagements was gone. God, God, God alone became my portion. I found my all in Him; I wanted nothing else. And by the grace of God this has remained, and has made me a happy man, an exceedingly happy man, and it led me to care only about the things of God. I ask, affectionately, my beloved brethren, have you fully surrendered the heart to God, or is there this thing or that thing with which you are taken up irrespective of God? I read a little of the Scriptures before, but preferred other books, but since that time the revelation He has made of Himself has become unspeakably blessed to me, and I can say from my heart, God is an infinitely lovely Being. Oh! be not satisfied until in your inmost soul you can say, God is an infinitely lovely Being!"

The account he gives of this change in his journal is as follows. He speaks of one whom he had heard preach at Teignmouth, where he had gone for the sake of his health. "Though I did not like all he said, yet I saw a gravity and solemnity in him different from the rest. Through the instrumentality of this brother the Lord bestowed a great blessing upon me, for which I shall have cause to thank Him throughout eternity. God then began to show me that the Word of God alone is to be our standard of judgment in spiritual things; that it can only be explained by the Holy Spirit, and that in our day, as well as in former times, He is the Teacher of His people. *The office of the Holy Spirit I had not experimentally understood before that time.* I had not before seen that the Holy Spirit alone can teach us about our state by nature, show us our need of a Saviour, enable us to believe in Christ, explain to us the Scriptures, help us in preaching, etc.

"It was my beginning to understand this point in particular which had a great effect on me; for the Lord enabled me to put it to the test of experience by laying aside commentaries and almost every other book, and simply reading the Word of God and studying it. The result of this was that the first evening that I shut myself into my room to give myself to prayer and meditation over the Scriptures, I learned more in a few hours than I had done during a period of several months previously. *But the particular difference was that I received real strength in my soul in doing so.*

"In addition to this, it pleased the Lord to lead me to see a *higher standard of devotedness* than I had seen before. He led me, in a measure, to see what is my glory in this world, even to be despised, to be poor and mean with Christ . . . I returned to London much better in body. And as to my soul, the change was so great that it was like a second conversion."

In another passage he speaks thus: "I fell into the snare into which so many young believers fall, the reading of religious books is preferred to the Scriptures. Now the scriptural way of reasoning would have been: God Himself has condescended to become an author, and I am ignorant of that precious Book which His Holy Spirit has caused to be written; therefore I ought to read again this Book of books most earnestly, most prayerfully, and with much meditation. Instead of acting thus, and being led by my ignorance of the Word to study it more, my difficulty of understanding it made me careless of reading it, and then, like many believers, I practically preferred for the first four years of my Christian life, the works of uninspired men to the oracles of the Living God. The consequence was that I remained a babe, both in knowledge and grace. In

knowledge, I say, for all true knowledge must be derived by the Spirit from the Word. This lack of knowledge most sadly kept me back from walking steadily in the ways of God. For it is the truth makes us free, by delivering us from the slavery of the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. The Word proves it, the experience of the saints proves it, and also my own experience most decidedly proves it. For when it pleased the Lord, in August 1829, to bring me really to the Scriptures, my life and walk became very different.

"If anyone would ask me how he may read the Scriptures most profitably, I would answer him:—

1. Above all he must seek to have it settled in his own mind *that God alone, by the Holy spirit, can teach him*, and that, therefore, as God will be inquired for all blessings, it becomes him to seek for God's blessing previous to reading, and also while reading.
2. He should also have it settled in his mind that though *the Holy spirit is the best and sufficient Teacher*, yet that He does not always teach immediately when we desire it, and that, therefore, *we may have to entreat Him again and again* for the explanation of certain passages; but that *He will surely teach us at last*, if we will seek for light prayerfully, patiently, and for the glory of God."

Just one more passage, from an address given on his ninetieth birthday: "For sixty-nine years and ten months he had been a very happy man. That he attributed to two things. He had maintained a good conscience, not wilfully going on in a course he knew to be contrary to the mind of God; he did not, of course, mean that he was perfect; he was poor, weak, and sinful. Secondly, he attributed it to his love of Holy Scripture. Of late years his practice had been four times every year to read through the Scriptures, with application to his own heart, and with meditation; and that day he was a greater lover of God's Word than he was sixty-six years ago. It was this, and maintaining a good conscience, that had given him all these years peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

In connection with what has been said about the New Covenant being a ministration of the Spirit this narrative is most instructing. It shows us how George Miiller's power lay in God's revealing to him the work of the Holy Spirit. He writes that up to the time of that change he had "not experimentally understood the office of the Holy Spirit." We speak much of George Muller's power in prayer; it is of importance to remember that that power was entirely owing to his love of, and faith in, God's Word. But it is of still more importance to notice that his power to believe God's Word so fully was entirely owing to his having learned to know the Holy Spirit as his Teacher. When the words of God are explained to us, and made living within us by the Holy Spirit, they have a power to awaken faith which they otherwise have not. The Word then brings us into contact with God, comes to us as from God direct, and binds our whole life to Him.

When the Holy Spirit thus feeds us on the Word, our whole life comes under His power, and the fruit is seen, not only in the power of prayer, but as much in the power of obedience. Notice how Mr. Muller tells us this, that the two secrets of his great happiness were, his great love for God's Word, and his *ever maintaining a good conscience*, not knowingly doing anything against the will of God. In giving himself to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, as he tells us in his birthday address, he made a full surrender of the entire heart to God, to be ruled by the Word. He gave himself to obey that Word in everything, he believed that the Holy Spirit gave the grace to obey, and so he was able to maintain a walk free from knowingly transgressing God's law. This is a point he always insisted on. So he writes, in regard to a life of dependence upon God: "It will not do—it is not possible—to live in sin, and at the same time, by communion with God, to draw down from heaven everything one needs for the life that now is." Again, speaking of the strengthening of faith: "It is of the utmost importance that we seek to maintain an *upright heart and a good conscience*, and therefore do not knowingly and habitually indulge in those things which are contrary to the

mind of God. All my confidence in God, all my leaning upon Him in the hour of trial, will be gone if I have a guilty conscience, and do not seek to put away this guilty conscience, but still continue to do things which are contrary to His mind."

A careful perusal of this testimony will show us how the chief points usually insisted upon in connection with the second blessing are all found here. There is the full surrender of the heart to be taught and led alone by the Spirit of God. There is the higher standard of holiness which is at once set up. There is the tender desire in nothing to offend God, but to have at all times a good conscience, that testifies that we are pleasing to God. And there is the faith that where the Holy Spirit reveals to us in the Word the will of God, He gives the sufficient strength for the doing of it. "The particular difference," he says of reading with faith of the Holy Spirit's teaching, "was that I received real strength in my soul in doing so." No wonder that he said: ***The change was so great, that it was like a second conversion.***

All centres in this, that we believe in the New Covenant and its promises as a ministration of the Spirit. That belief may come to some suddenly, as to George Muller; or it may dawn upon others by degrees. Let all say to God that they are ready to put their whole heart and life under the rule of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, teaching them by the Word, and strengthening them by His grace. He enables us to live pleasing to God.