

Hannah Whitall Smith

a
Christian's
secret of a
HAPPY
Life



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Preface

This is not a theological book. I frankly confess I have not been trained in theological schools and do not understand their methods or their terms. But the Lord has taught me experimentally and practically certain lessons out of His Word that have greatly helped me in my Christian life and have made it a very happy one. I want to tell my secret, in the best way I can, in order that some others may be helped into a happy life also.

I do not seek to change the theological views of a single individual. I dare say most of my readers know far more about theology than I do myself, and perhaps they may discover an abundance of what will seem to be theological mistakes. But let me ask that these may be overlooked and that my reader will try, instead, to get at the experimental point of what I have tried to say. If my point proves practical and helpful, I pray they will forgive the blundering way in which it is expressed. I have tried to reach the absolute truth that lies at the foundation of all “creeds” and “views” and to bring the soul into the personal relationship with God that must exist alike in every form of religion, let the expression of them differ as they may.

I have committed my book to the Lord. I have asked Him to counteract all in it that is wrong and to let only what is true find entrance into any heart. It is sent out in tender sympathy and yearning love for all the struggling, weary ones in the church of Christ, and its message goes right from my heart to theirs. I have given the best I have, and I can do no more. May the blessed Holy Spirit use this text to teach some of my readers the true secret to a happy life!

—*Hannah Whitall Smith*
Germantown, Pennsylvania

God's Side and Man's Side

In introducing the subject of a happy Christian life, I desire, at the very outset, to clear away one misunderstanding that commonly arises and effectually hinders a clear apprehension of such teaching. This misunderstanding comes from the fact that the two sides of the subject (God's and man's) are rarely kept in view at the same time. People see distinctly the way in which one side is presented and dwell exclusively upon it

without even a thought of any other. It is no wonder that distorted views of the matter are the legitimate consequence.

The two very decided and distinct sides to this subject cannot be fully understood unless both of these sides are kept constantly in view: God's part in the work of sanctification and man's part in trusting God and His work. These are very distinct, and they contrast each other, but they are not contradictory (although, to a cursory observer, they may sometimes appear to be).

This was very strikingly illustrated to me not long ago. There were two teachers of this higher Christian life holding meetings in the same place, at alternate hours. One spoke only of God's part in the work, and the other dwelt exclusively upon man's part. They were both in perfect sympathy with one another and realized fully that they were each teaching different sides of the same great truth. This was also understood by a large proportion of their hearers. But with some of the hearers it was different. One lady said to me, in the greatest perplexity, "I cannot understand it at all. Here are two preachers undertaking to teach just the same truth, and yet to me they seem flatly to contradict one another." I felt at the time that she had expressed a puzzle that causes a great deal of difficulty in the minds of many honest inquirers after this truth.

Man's part is to trust God,
and His part is to work.

Suppose two friends go to see some celebrated building and return home to describe it. One has seen only the north side, and the other only the south. The first says, "The building was built in such a manner and has such and such stories and ornaments." "Oh, no!" says the other, interrupting him. "You are altogether mistaken. I saw the building, and it was built in quite a different manner, and its ornaments and stories

were so-and-so." A lively dispute would probably follow upon the truth of the respective descriptions until the two friends discover that they have been describing different sides of the building, and then all is reconciled at once.

I would like to state as clearly as I can what I see as two distinct sides in this matter. I would also like to show how looking at one without seeing the other is sure to create wrong impressions and incorrect views of the truth.

In brief, I would say that man's part is to trust, and God's part is to work. It can be seen at a glance how these two parts contrast and yet are not necessarily contradictory.

What I mean is this: There is a certain work to be accomplished. We are to be delivered from the power of sin and made perfect in every good work to do the will of God. "*Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,*" we are to be actually "*changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may "*prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*" (Romans 12:2). A real work is to be wrought in us and upon us. Troublesome sins are to be conquered. Evil habits are to be overcome. Wrong dispositions and feelings are to be rooted out and replaced with holy temperaments. A positive transformation is to take place; and either we must do it for ourselves, or another must do it for us. Most of us have tried to do it for ourselves at first and have grievously failed. Then we discover from the Scriptures and from our own experiences that it is a work we are utterly unable to do for ourselves but that the Lord Jesus Christ has come on purpose to do it, and He will do it for all who put themselves wholly into His hand and trust Him to do it.

Now, under these circumstances, what is the part of the believer and what is the part of the Lord? Plainly the believer can do nothing but trust, while the Lord, in whom he trusts, actually does the work entrusted to Him.

Trusting and doing are certainly contrasting things and often contradictory, but are they contradictory in this case? Obviously not, because it is two different parties that are concerned. If we were to say of one party in a transaction that he trusted his case to another and yet attended to it himself, it would seem as if we were stating a contradiction and an impossibility. But when we say of two parties in a transaction that one trusts the other to do something and that other goes to work and does it, we are making a statement that is perfectly simple and harmonious. When we say, therefore, that in this higher life, man's part is to trust and God does the thing entrusted to Him, we surely do not present any difficult or puzzling problem.

The preacher who is speaking on man's part in this matter cannot speak of anything but surrender and trust because this is positively all the man can do. We all agree about this, and yet such preachers are constantly criticized as though in saying this, they had meant to imply that there was no other part and that therefore nothing but trusting is done. Then the cry goes out that this doctrine of faith does away with all realities, that souls are just told to trust, and that is the end of it. They sit down from then on in a sort of religious easy chair, dreaming away a life fruitless of any actual results. All this misapprehension arises, of course, from the fact that either the preacher has neglected to state, or the hearer has failed to hear, the other side of the matter: When we trust, the Lord works, and a great deal is done—not by us, but by Him. Actual results are reached by our trusting because our Lord undertakes the thing trusted to Him and accomplishes it. We do not do anything, but He does it—and it is all the more effectively done because of that. The puzzle as to the preaching of faith disappears entirely as soon as this is clearly seen.

On the other hand, the preacher who dwells on God's side of the question is criticized on totally different grounds. He does not speak of trust, for the Lord's part is not to trust but to work. The Lord does the thing entrusted to Him. He disciplines and trains the soul by inward exercises and outward providences. He brings to bear all the resources of His wisdom and love upon the refining and purifying of that soul.

He makes everything in the life and circumstances of such a one subservient to the one great purpose of making him grow in grace and of conforming him, day by day and hour by hour, to the image of Christ. He carries him through a process of transformation, longer or shorter, as his particular case may require.

For instance, we have dared to reckon ourselves by faith, according to the command in Romans 6:11, as being "*dead indeed unto sin.*" The Lord makes this a reality and leads us to victory over self by the daily and hourly discipline of His providences. Our reckoning is available only because God makes it real. And yet the preacher who dwells upon this practical side of the matter and tells of God's processes for making faith's reckonings realities is accused of contradicting the preaching of faith altogether, declaring only a process of gradual sanctification by works, and setting before the soul an impossible and hopeless task.

When we trust, the Lord works.

Now, sanctification is both a sudden step of faith and also a gradual process of works. It is a step as far as man is concerned; as to God's part, it is a process. By a step of faith we are made new in Christ; by a process we are made to grow in Him. By a step of faith we put ourselves into the hands of the Divine Potter; by a gradual process He makes us into a vessel for His own honor, fit for His use and prepared to every good work.

To illustrate all this, suppose I were to describe to a person, who is entirely ignorant of the subject, the way in which a lump of clay is made into a beautiful vessel. I tell him first what part the clay plays. All I can say is that the clay is put into the potter's hands and then lies passive

there, submitting itself to all the turnings and overturnings of the potter's hands upon it. There is really nothing else to be said about the clay's part. But could my hearer argue from this that nothing else is done but what the clay does? If he is an intelligent hearer, he will not dream of doing so, but will say, "I understand. This is what the clay must do; but what must the potter do?"

"Ah," I answer, "now we come to the important part. The potter takes the clay thus abandoned to his working and begins to mold and fashion it according to his own will. He kneads and works it; he tears it apart and presses it together again; he wets it and then lets it dry. Sometimes he works at it for hours together; sometimes he lays it aside for days and does not touch it. And then, when by all these processes he has made it perfectly pliable in his hands, he proceeds to make it into the vessel he has purposed. He turns it upon the wheel, planes it and smooths it, dries it in the sun, bakes it in the oven, and finally turns it out of his workshop, a vessel to his honor and fit for his use."

Will my hearer be likely now to say that I am contradicting myself; that a little while ago I had said the clay had nothing to do but lie passive in the potter's hands, and that now I am putting upon it a great work that it is not able to perform? Will my hearer say that to make itself into such a vessel is an impossible and hopeless undertaking? Surely not. For he will see that, while before I was speaking of the clay's part in the matter, I am now speaking of the potter's part, and these two are necessarily contrasting but not in the least contradictory. He will see that the clay is not expected to do the potter's work but only to yield itself up to his working.

Nothing, it seems to me, could be clearer than the perfect harmony between these two apparently contradictory sorts of teaching on this subject. What can be said about man's part in this great work but that he must continually surrender himself and continually trust?

But when we come to God's side of the question, what is there that may not be said as to the manifold and wonderful ways in which He accomplishes the work entrusted to Him? It is here that the growing comes in. The lump of clay would never grow into a beautiful vessel if it

stayed in the clay pit for thousands of years. But once it is put into the hands of a skillful potter, it grows rapidly into a vessel to his honor. And so the soul, abandoned to the working of the heavenly Potter, is changed rapidly from glory to glory into the image of the Lord by His Spirit.

Having, therefore, taken the step of faith by which you have put yourself wholly and absolutely into His hands, you must now expect Him to begin to work. His way of accomplishing what you have entrusted to Him may be different from your way. But He knows, and you must be satisfied.

I knew a lady who had entered into this life of faith with a great outpouring of the Spirit and a wonderful flood of light and joy. She supposed, of course, this was a preparation for some great service and expected to be put forth immediately into the Lord's harvest field. Instead of this, almost at once her husband lost all his money, and she was shut up in her own house to attend to all sorts of domestic duties, with no time or strength left for any gospel work at all. She accepted the discipline and yielded herself up as heartily to sweep, dust, bake, and sew as she would have done to preach, pray, or write for the Lord. And the result was that through this very training He made her into a vessel *"meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work"* (2 Timothy 2:21).

Another lady, who had entered this life of faith under similar circumstances of wondrous blessing, and who also expected to be sent out to do some great work, was shut up with two obstinate invalid nieces to nurse, humor, and amuse all day long. Unlike the first lady, this one did not accept the training, but instead chafed and fretted and finally rebelled, lost all her blessing, and went back into a state of sad coldness and misery. She had understood her part of trusting to begin with, but not understanding the divine process of accomplishing what she had trusted for, she took herself out of the hands of the heavenly Potter, and the vessel was marred on the wheel.

I believe that many a vessel has been similarly marred by a lack of understanding in these things. The maturity of Christian experience cannot be reached in a moment; rather it is the result of the work of God's

Holy Spirit, who, by His energizing and transforming power, causes us to grow up into Christ in all things. We cannot hope to reach this maturity in any other way than by yielding ourselves up utterly and willingly to His mighty working. But the sanctification that the Scriptures urge upon all believers does not consist of maturity of growth, but rather of purity of heart, and this may be equally complete in both the babe in Christ and the veteran believer.

From the moment it comes under the transforming hand of the potter, the lump of clay is, during each day and each hour of the process, just what the potter wants it to be at that hour or on that day, and therefore it pleases him. But it is very far from being matured into the vessel he intends to make it in the future.

God's works are perfect.

The little babe may be all that a babe could be, or ought to be, and may therefore perfectly please its mother. And yet it is very far from being what that mother would wish it to be after some years have passed.

The apple in June is a perfect apple for June. It is the best apple that June can produce. But it is very different from the apple in October, which is a perfected apple.

God's works are perfect in every stage of their growth. Man's works are never perfect until they are in every respect complete.

All that we claim then in this life of sanctification is that, by a step of faith, we put ourselves into the hands of the Lord for Him to work in us all the good pleasure of His will and that by a continuous exercise of faith we keep ourselves there. This is our part in the matter. And when we do it, and while we do it, we are, in the Scripture sense, truly pleasing to God, although it may require years of training and discipline to

mature us into vessels that are in all respects to His honor and fitted to every good work.

Our part is to trust; it is His to accomplish the results. When we do our part, He never fails to do His, for no one ever trusted in the Lord and was confounded. Do not be afraid, then, that if you trust, or tell others to trust, the matter will end there. Trust is only the beginning and the continual foundation; when we trust, the Lord works, and His work is the important part of the whole matter.

This explains the apparent paradox that puzzles so many. They say, "In one breath you tell us to do nothing but trust, and in the next you tell us to do impossible things. How can you reconcile such contradictory statements?" They are to be reconciled just as we reconcile the statements concerning a saw in a carpenter's shop when we say at one moment that the saw has sawn asunder a log and the next moment declare that the carpenter has done it. The saw is the instrument used, the power that uses it is the carpenter's.

So we, yielding ourselves unto God, and presenting our limbs as instruments of righteousness unto Him, find that He works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure; and we can say with Paul, "*I laboured... yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*" (1 Corinthians 15:10). For we are to be His workmanship, not our own. (See Ephesians 2:10.) And in fact, only God, who created us at first, can re-create us, for He alone understands the work of His hands. All efforts of self-creation result in the marring of the vessel, and no soul can ever reach its highest fulfillment except through the working of Him who "*worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*" (Ephesians 1:11).

In this book I shall, of course, dwell mostly upon man's side in the matter, since I am writing for man and in the hope of teaching believers how to fulfill their part of the great work. But I wish it to be distinctly understood that, unless I believed with all my heart in God's effectual working on His side, not one word of this book would ever have been written.