

From an early age, about seven or eight years old, I knew that I needed to be safe from God. Fears would creep in at night when I was trying to fall asleep about death and eternity in hell. Every time these fears would come, I would promise the Lord that I would start being good and reading my bible if he would save me. I prayed this over and over again as a kid. When I was eight years old, I went through a church membership class and began taking communion. After this, my fears left me because I felt sure I had taken the proper steps to be a Christian. I was a fairly nice girl and tried to follow rules, and I was very proud of how "good" I was. I remained in this thoughtless state until coming to Christ church in February of 2009.

As soon as we came to the church, I was hungry to hear the word preached and my understanding of God increased. Pastor John was preaching on the attributes of God and my family started going to the Salvation in Full Color book study. It was not until October of that year that I began to come under conviction. I began to see the emptiness of my religion. My faith was not based on the character of God as He has revealed Himself in scripture, but on cultural tradition and a god that looked a lot like me. I saw that I was living in sin and that I was condemned before the Holy Judge. I was still unwilling to turn to Christ. I did not want to submit my will to His. I wanted to continue living for myself, and I sought in vain to muster up enough good works and to live a clean enough life to soothe my conscience. Unable to do even this, I became increasingly aware that my profession was worthless.

Mr. Roberts came to speak later that fall, and he pleaded for everyone who knew they were an enemy of God not to go to bed until they had peace with God. I knew he was talking to me, and I was resolved to have no rest until I had that peace. I went home to read my bible, and was asleep within twenty minutes. I was so ashamed of myself. It was the first time I realized I did not even want to know God. I was shocked at the coldness of my own heart. I knew that the Holy Spirit was going to have to give me a heart of flesh, and for weeks I pleaded for a new heart.

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." Ezekiel 36:26-27

The next few weeks were frightening and depressing. My heart was just so hard. Everything I read spoke only to my condemnation. In early January the Lord started showing me glimpses of Christ and what He accomplished for sinners. I could see that Christ was sufficient for other sinners, but in pride I felt sure that I was a special case. I thought that I needed to possess a certain amount of sorrow for my sin so that I could fully appreciate Christ's sacrifice. I wanted to bring enough sorrow to Christ in exchange for His blood and righteousness. There were people who showed me the error in hoping in my act of repentance. I was told that no one will ever feel the appropriate magnitude of grief over his sin. I knew that this was true, and after what I felt to be such a long period of distress my fears subsided. Looking back, I realize I was not repentant. The reason I did not hate my sin was because I still had no regard for Christ. I had come to the edge of beholding Christ, and had fallen back away. I thought that I had been converted, and was so relieved to be able to get on with life without

all the sadness. The Lord did not let me go. In His kindness, He left my heart restless until my joy was made complete in Him.

The next two years (2010-2011) were marked with periods of assurance and doubts. The Lord would show me where I was trusting in myself rather than in Christ alone, and I would repent but it would manifest itself in a different way shortly thereafter. After a point, I was just confused. In my heart, I wanted to love God and to be covered in Christ's righteousness alone, but I kept finding myself trusting in myself. Something I would note about this time was how small my desire for Christ was. I wanted enough of Him to cling to for safety from God, but I had no expectations of walking with Him and growing stronger in faith. A source of concern for me at this point was that my sense of assurance or lack of it was largely based on my performance and my sense of personal devotion to God. If I had been diligent to have regular quiet times, I felt that I was a Christian. And on the other hand, when I would go for spells without time in the scriptures and prayer is when doubts would arise again. At this point, the Lord was actively working in my heart. He was stripping away things that I was hoping in for salvation that were other than Christ. I was very unsure of whether or not I was a Christian, but a source of comfort at this point was Philippians 1:6.

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:6

I went to Pastor John last fall to express my concern and confusion, and he asked me what my motive was in seeking to have a relationship with Christ. At this point, my motivations were mixed. Yes, I knew Christ was worthy of all my love and praise and obedience, but I still felt strongly that really I was looking to Christ primarily to save me from condemnation, and had little to do with His worth. The spells of assurance and doubt continued for several more months after this.

I do not know at what point conversion happened for me. There was not an obvious emotional event, but recently for the first time I can truly see evidence of a changed life. I have been given that heart of flesh that I pleaded for years ago. The Holy Spirit has done the work in me that I never could do for myself. All the time I spent striving to produce good fruit brought nothing but bitterness and sadness, but the Spirit brings life abundantly.

The last several months have been a marked time of spiritual growth. I know that I truly believe "nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." I know that I do love Jesus, certainly not perfectly, but His name is sweet to me now. I want to walk with Him because I want to be like Him, and I want fellowship with the Father. I still sin, but I view it not as a disappointment to myself because I'm failing to be a good Christian. It grieves me because I know that it hurts fellowship with the Father, and that His honor is at stake. I find myself in prayer, lifting up needs to my Heavenly Father because I know that he is good and wise, and I have found that He is faithful in answering prayer. I know that these changes are not the product of anything in me, but they are the work of the Spirit.

"Jesus, Jesus, all-sufficient, beyond telling is Thy worth. In Thy name lie greater treasures than the richest found on earth. Such abundance, such abundance, is my portion with my God."