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Ever since I can remember, mom and dad were careful to teach and instruct me and my siblings in the Scriptures, and we rarely missed church or family devotionals. Growing up in church I heard a lot about being saved and why Jesus died on the cross, and I saw many of my friends walk down the aisle and then get baptized. So partly out of fear of hell, and partly because I knew it was good to do, I asked Jesus “into my heart” at the age of six. I answered all my parents’ questions correctly and was soon after baptized.

As I grew older I was not very outwardly rebellious. I read my Bible in the morning, sat still during the service, and became very self-righteous when I compared myself with my friends at church. When I got older, and more sins were presented to me and I began to allow room for these sins in my life. Soon I was leading some of my church friends in sin, making spiritual sounding excuses for why it wasn’t really sin. But my conscience wouldn’t leave me alone.

When I was about fourteen, mom and dad gave me a book called “Stuart’s Run to Faith”, a short story about a boy who is puzzled about Christ and salvation. A character from that book was talking about her conversion, and said that she had been baptized but not saved.

The idea that it is possible to be baptized and not saved shocked and scared me so bad that I barely read the rest of the book and put it away. I couldn’t even look at it on the bookshelf. God had used that book to crack the foundation on which I had built my righteousness. I told myself all was well, that Jesus was still “in my heart”, but every night that fear would visit me again, and I would ask Him into my heart, just in case.

But there was never any peace there, and I began to try to

ignore God's voice by indulging in my sins. If my conscience would ever protest, I would answer it, "I didn't ask Him to die for me. Why should I give up my sins?" While I believed in God and wanted to escape Hell, I convinced myself that I could always repent later, and that Christ's death did not make me owe Him anything. In my arrogance I thought I had God all figured out, and I wasn't impressed.

I believe the turning point came when we first began visiting Christ Church. From the first time I hated almost everything about it. The music was weird, the hymns were too sad or boring, and the sermons were way too long. What I couldn't stand most was the way people acted during worship. All the long prayers and conversation afterwards I saw as fake and hypocritical. I thought, "Surely this can't be real, because I know what Jesus is like, and He's not that wonderful." But that was just another wall I built to hide behind.

As we continued to come the Lord began to bother my heart. I heard Christ spoken of in ways that deeply disturbed me, through the sermons and conversations, as if He was the great attraction, not Heaven. I saw that people really did love this Jesus, not because He could save them from Hell, but for His own sake. I heard things like "He is all lovely", and it frightened me. It meant that I never really knew Him.

I tried to shrug this off and held onto the prayer I had prayed when I was six, hoping that it counted for something. I paid more attention to the sermons and prayers, but they were still empty to me. I knew something was wrong, but was too scared to think about it.

I had a habit of walking alone in the woods behind our house, just thinking about different things. The Lord began to use these walks to direct my heart and mind towards the things I wanted left alone. Every time He came near, I would quickly throw up a wall of whatever I thought made me righteous, and He would strip it away, and soon it seemed that everything I thought was secure was melting away.

I'm not sure exactly when it happened, probably soon after I turned sixteen, but God showed me across the course of several of these walks the love of Christ. This affected me greatly and made me curious, but I wasn't sure what to do with it. I was glad Jesus loved me, but that was really nothing new. Even though I felt a little guilty about my behavior, I still didn't see why I owed Him anything just because He loved me.

I remember one evening, either after church or hearing a sermon, I was walking in the woods feeling extra-spiritual and singing "It is Well With My Soul". When I reached the stanza "My sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to His cross and I bear it no more", I couldn't go on. The weight of that verse suddenly fell on me, and God showed me clearer than ever my filth and sin smeared all over the perfect sinless, loving and willing Christ. I experienced for the first but not last time the shock that Wesley expressed in his hymn: "Died He for me who caused His pain, For me who Him to death pursued?"

It was so shocking and powerful that all I could do was cry and protest in horror "Not for me, God! He's too good to die for me!" I felt the filth of sin covering me inside and out, but worse than that, I felt the eyes of Christ upon me in all my foulness. All I could do was hate myself and tremble.

But God did not leave me there. Having brought me to the end of myself, He turned my eyes towards the Cross, graciously filling me with the realization and peace of His love in spite of my filth. I saw that He still called me to come to Him, and found I could not refuse.

Since then it is difficult to describe what I have found in Christ. It is like a man blind from birth trying to describe a sky full of stars, but he doesn't have the vocabulary or understanding to do it. But with what limited means I have I can say, He has never been anything but good to me. He is enough even when I try to earn favor, or look for satisfaction in other things.

He still covers me even when I feel exposed before God.  
He is my surety even when I feel I have no assurance.  
He is the victor even when I feel undone by my sins.  
He pursues me even when I run the other way.  
He is mightier than my sins, even when they seem to be so strong.  
He stands before the Father, pleading His merits even in the midst of my sins, and He never abandons me to myself.

I have known what it is to be dead and made alive, to be brought from an enslaving self-worship to a glorious annihilation of self, my identity lost in His own. In Him I have found more delights and treasures than I could ever count or enjoy in an eternity, and He has given Himself to me freely when I deserved hell.