

Flashes of light in a Sin Darkened Soul

Like all people who have ever inhabited planet earth, I was born in a state of sin (Psalm 51 :5), utter depravity and total spiritual darkness until God, by His sovereign will and through His infinite grace and mercy, saw fit to turn that darkness into light (Psalm 18:28) by means of the regenerating work of His Holy Spirit in my life. Prior to the ultimate blinding light of truth which He eventually infused into my soul, that darkness was penetrated with periodic flashes of light for as far back in time as I can recall.

If I would be asked to point to one verse in the Bible that best represents God's saving work of grace in my life it would be I Corinthians 1:18, which reads, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Since the Scriptures teach that all Christians were "being saved", in the mind of God, long before we were born (Ephesians 1:4-5,11), I came to know through a study of the Bible why I never considered the message foolish. I always knew that Christians had it right, so to speak, but I simply chose to live another way.

For as far into the past as my memory takes me I have been present in some church on most Sunday mornings, my parents saw to that. However, it was not until I had passed my 34th birthday that I actually received Christ as my Savior and Lord. That was the time, June 28, 1970, which God chose to suddenly and profusely enlighten my soul with the truth of Christ. (II Corinthians 4:6). Prior to that glorious, life changing experience, my sin darkened soul had received flashes of spiritual light which gradually became the convicting luminance that changed my heart for good.

My first recollection of a flash was that which occurred one Sunday morning when I was six years old and observing an elder pray over the elements in the communion service. He actually wept as he recalled what the bread and the wine represented and how Christ had sacrificed Himself for each believer. He lamented the fact that he was totally unworthy to be in the good graces of God, apart from the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. He thanked God for the privilege of being His servant. I thought to myself, "What I wouldn't give to have that kind of faith and love for God."

Over the ensuing years, flashes would come during youth group meetings, weekend and summer church camping retreats, singing those old time hymns and listening to TV sermons

by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen with my mom. In my teens I met my future wife Kay through our mutual participation in her Methodist Youth Group's annual variety show. She was a majorette in the highschool band and was performing her baton twirling expertise while I was singing in a barbershop quartet. More flashes came while I was participating in her youth group activities over the following year.

Following graduation from highschool (1953) I matriculated to Hiram college, a Disciple of Christ institution in northeastern Ohio, where my child like faith was insidiously undermined through required religion courses, because the professors did not believe in the inerrancy, infallibility or inspiration of God's Word and summarily dismissed all biblical miracles. Furthermore I became enamored by the evolutionary teachings of my numerous science professors and was transformed into a convinced and avowed evolutionist. Of course being a pre-medical student science courses comprised the majority of my classes. Kay and I were married during my senior year in college. Four years at the Ohio State University College of Medicine and the four years spent in my internship and internal medicine residency did little to change my mind regarding evolution, or do anything to light up my sin darkened soul; in fact during those years my sinful life style became exponentially greater. By the time I graduated from medical school in June of 1961, we had three children; two girls and a boy.

Between my internship and medical residency I spent two years on active duty (1962-64) with the United States Air Force. Stationed in South Carolina and serving as a Flight Surgeon, I became involved in the Air Force chapel program where the flashes resumed in the midst of Sunday morning services, teaching a senior high Bible class, leading the Protestant Men of the Chapel and attending chapel sponsored spiritual retreats. On Sunday evenings we often heard testimonies by famous sports figures. Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee second baseman, who lived in nearby Sumter, SC was one of those who impressed me most.

After leaving the Air force and resuming my medical training as a resident,, the darkness again deepened, but was again attended by a brilliant flash of spiritual light in the summer of 1966. It occurred during an evangelistic crusade where Lane Adams, a former Billy Graham associate evangelist was the featured speaker. His testimony regarding his pre-conversion years was so reflective of my life that I fell under heavy conviction and nearly made a trip to the front when he encouraged his listeners to give their lives to Christ as the choir sang verse after verse of "Just As I Am." I did not respond to that outward call, and I now know why; God was not calling me inwardly as He would four years later, it was not according to his pre-

determined plan for my life. (Psalm 139:16)

As the years progressed, I finished my residency and settled down into a busy practice of medicine and Kay and I grew further and further apart. This placed a great strain on Kay's emotional and physical health. I was leading a life of abject hypocrisy. As an elder by then in my local church and a teacher of an adult Bible Class, I appeared to be a spiritually sound person. Nothing could have been further from the truth. As a successful and busy consulting physician, highly involved as a speaker for the cancer society, lung and heart associations, team physician for a local highschool, an officer in Rotary and a Flight Surgeon at a local Air Force Reserve base I had little time for Kay or our three children. This was not the family life that Kay had bargained for. She wanted a better life, having been abused and eventually abandoned by her drunken and mentally ill father.

In the spring of 1970 Kay's health began to fail precipitously and she was hospitalized on a couple of occasions. Following one of those trips to the hospital I foolishly and selfishly headed for Canada on a fishing trip and after three days was summoned home following Kay's emergency admission to the hospital. She had a toxic megacolon, the worst form of ulcerative colitis, which in those days carried a mortality rate of 50%. When I discovered by phone what the diagnosis was, as I was leaving Canada, I begged God to make her better, to spare her life, and I promised that if He did He could have mine. I knew that Kay was in that morbid state because of my sinful life and the guilt was over whelming.

Two days later, as I sat by Kay's bed, a pastor from a neighborhood church (Southern Baptist) came to visit Kay at her sister's behest. Kay prayed to receive Christ, and I felt good about that. The pastor did not speak with me about my spiritual condition. Later that day another pastor, from another church (Reformed Presbyterian) came in at a neighbor's request and asked if he could pray for Kay's recovery. He did and Kay began to show signs of an improved emotional state almost immediately. He did not speak with me either about my lack of saving faith but left a book for me to read entitled *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* by Hanna Whittle Smith.

As I read I learned that I was not alone in my sin, but that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. (Romans 3:23) I also learned that my sin had separated me from God (Isaiah 59:2) but that Christ's death on the cross was the way in which He vicariously paid penalty for that sin (Romans 6:23) and if I merely trusted Him for my salvation and received Him as

my Savior and Lord (John 1:12-13), my sins would forever be forgiven and erased from God's memory (Jeremiah 31:34). I could actually begin a new life in Christ with a clean slate. (II Corinthians 5:17)

It was during the reading of that little book that I was born again and made alive in Christ, having been dead in sin. (Ephesians 2:4-5) I also learned a verse that I will forever believe is the one which convinced me of my need to receive Christ. It is found in Paul's letter to the church at Colossi. It reads, "*For you died and your life is now hidden in Christ with God.*" (Colossians 3:3) The old chuck McGowen was dead (thanks be to God) and a new man was now alive and hidden in the arms of God with Christ. If anyone ever needed a place to hide, it was me in June of 1970.

I fell asleep reading that book and when awakened by my Christian sister-in-law, for the first time in my life I felt clean, free of guilt and hungry for the Word of God. That hunger for Scriptural truth, I would later discover, came about as a result of the spiritual gift of teaching which the Holy Spirit brought as He took up residence in my soul. I asked my sister-in-law to loan her Bible to me and I sat down to read the entire gospel of John, with understanding. Kay and I eventually joined that pastor's church and he began to disciple me. I will be eternally grateful for his visit to the hospital room that day, for his sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in leaving that book and for his friendship until God called him to his heavenly home.

In addition to the freedom from guilt and a hunger for His Word, God began to assure me that my answers to prayer were coming and that Kay would eventually recover completely from her near fatal illness. As such I began to pray to that end. My prayers were specific because I knew the signs that her physicians would be seeking as evidence of her gradual recovery. One by one those signs came about and after a three week stay in the hospital Kay came home. Her colon was completely recovered and to this day, with the surveillance of periodic colonoscopies it continues to look and act entirely normal.

From that first day to this, the light has shown ever more brightly as God has led me through and enabled me to comprehend the profound truths in His Holy Word. I am as excited about the truth of God's Word today, and my salvation experience, as I was that first summer night in 1970. I have come to believe that the Triune God is not only my Savior and Lord but my creator as well. In fact that belief in the Divine acts of creation, just the way Moses related them in the book of Genesis, led me to become a member of The Creation Research Society,

write two books (one in 1976 and a second in 2003) on that subject and to become an avid conference speaker and seminar teacher on Creation and Intelligent Design. I have been using my spiritual gift of teaching in a Sunday School Class for the past 32 years. With that gift I have led more than ten separate neighborhood Bible studies over the years, disciplined new believers and have written a book on heaven (2002) and one on the Apostles Creed (1994).

When we discover our spiritual gift, or gifts, it is essential that we respond by using that gift for the benefit of others and the glory of God. (I Peter 4:10-11) I do not write of those activities listed above to boast (God forbid) but merely to point out the fact that God has saved each one of us for a distinct purpose, and He has gifted us to perform those foreordained acts of good works for the furtherance of His kingdom on earth. (Ephesians 2:10)

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) spoke of the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit in one's life as "illumination." He readily admitted the fact that not everyone who sits in a pew on Sunday morning will be illuminated by the Holy Spirit, for not everyone who attends church is necessarily among God's chosen people. However, Edwards also said that one's chances of being among the elect, and ultimately illuminated by the in filling of the Holy Spirit are much greater if one is in the habit of presenting oneself for worship each Sunday morning.

It is my prayer that those who read this humble testimony of God's working in the life of one reprobate physician, and who may never have received Christ by faith, will be sensitive to whatever flashes of light he or she may be receiving. Based on my experience, it is very likely that one day in the not too distant future, those flashes will give way to a perpetual glow, through the new birth, that will grow brighter as those new believers grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For those who have already been born again and enlightened by the lamp of truth (Psalm 119:105), I would merely encourage you to continue in your regular worship, the intense study of God's Word, daily communion with God in prayer and abiding in joyful fellowship with those of like precious faith. Those spiritual habits are essential so that the light of truth will grow even brighter until such a time as we all meet around the throne of God where the sun is no longer needed in our surroundings because ". . .the glory of God gives it light. . ." (Revelation 21:23).

When we have reached heaven, that rather incomplete knowledge of God which has come through illumination and the Word, but has been so relatively minuscule, will become complete. (I Corinthians 13:12). In the meantime, the Lord Jesus has instructed all believers to use whatever light which they possess to shine the light of truth into this dark world and hopefully into some other sin darkened soul. Jesus said to his followers, “. . . you are the light of the world. . .” (Matthew 5:14) Jesus also said that He is the light of the world (John 8:12) and while that would appear to some to be a contradiction, it is not. Allow me to explain. Just as the sun lights the day, the moon lights the night by reflecting the sun’s light. The moon is lifeless and intrinsically dark and cold; it has no light of its own. That is just like our hearts before the light of Christ illumines and warms them; dead, cold and spiritually dark. Once that Divine light comes in, we are to grow ever more like Christ and become a reflection of that light. (II CORINTHIANS 3:18)

Not every person upon whom our light shines will be convinced of our faith or of the Person in whom our faith is placed. Jesus Himself taught that “. . .*Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light, and will not come into the light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*” (John 3:19-20) However, that truth does not alter every Christian’s responsibility for being light. In closing I would simply encourage you whose darkness has been turned into light to do as Jesus has said, “. . .*let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16)

Solo Deo Gloria.

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