

Personal Testimony of Dr. Ron Cobb

I grew up in Huntsville, Alabama and was fortunate to be born into a stable home. My parents were good, honest, hard-working people who instilled me with morals, values, and a positive work ethic. They made it clear to me from an early age that hard work and honesty were the keys to success in life. The problem was, the Lord was not brought into any part of the formative years of my life. My parents were known as “back-slidden Baptists”, angry at the church and unwilling to seek reconciliation with the church because of negative past events. As a result, I grew up as an unbeliever not comprehending the marvelous salvation that had been purchased for me through the death of Christ on the cross.

The only exposure I ever received to the gospel came through Billy Graham broadcasts on television. I listened to him preach, and I heard him extend invitations to receive Christ but, the gravity of my lost condition was not comprehensible to me. As an adolescent I went to sleep many nights thinking, “God, please do not let me die, I do not know where I would be for all eternity.” I believed then that one got into heaven by being good and I knew I was not very good.

When I was nineteen years old in my second year of college at the University of Alabama, I was invited to a student-led Bible study. For the first time in my life I remember understanding the Gospel. The Holy Spirit opened my eyes to the love of God for me and to the reality of my sinful condition and I literally ran to Christ for salvation. My years of torment and uncertainty were over; I knew through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit that I had become a child of God! I hungered for the Word of God; I absorbed the truth of the Bible like water on parched ground. During those early months of life in Christ I began to sense that God was calling me into the gospel ministry.

I abandoned my plans to become a lawyer and enrolled in a wonderful Bible College where I learned much Bible content. One of the major emphases of this college was victorious Christian living but somehow I missed the heart of the message. After graduation I worked as a youth minister for a brief time then started attending a wonderful seminary where I learned more Bible content. Sadly, during this time, I sensed that I was moving farther away from an intimate relationship with God. The Bible became like another textbook to me, prayer became a chore, and my daily walk with God was neglected. Unfortunately, things went this way for so long that lack of intimacy with God became the normal Christian life for me.

After graduation from seminary I plunged with fervor into the work of the ministry. I was full of zeal and determination, I had a good work ethic, and I was determined to do great things for God. I became the Associate Pastor of Education and Evangelism at a medium-size church in the metro Atlanta area and had an opportunity to

begin to put the things I had learned in seminary into practice. The church began to grow and I became more and more absorbed in the work of ministry. My delight was soon focused on the work of ministry rather than on the person of God. Though I was satisfied in my place of service I began to sense that God was moving me to be a senior pastor so I started to search for an opportunity to fulfill that desire.

Within months I became the pastor of a small suburban church in the metro Atlanta area. I learned a couple of valuable lessons while serving as pastor of this church. The first lesson was that one should not believe everything a pastor search committee tells him. Though the committee assured me several times of the churches desire to reach out into their community and grow I found that this was not true after I began my ministry with the church. The truth was that the church did not desire to grow and viewed the community around them as their enemies since the church had been there long before the new houses surrounding the church property had been inhabited. A second valuable lesson I learned was to think seriously before going to be the pastor of a church where the cemetery is larger than the parking lot! A church that places a bigger priority on parking the dead than the living is making a significant mission statement! In spite of these “negatives” the ministry at this church was productive and growth occurred. After a couple of years I sensed it was time for a change and I moved to a church with some unique challenges of its own.

In the next place of service I followed a man who died suddenly after having been the pastor for thirty-four years. Everywhere I turned I was in the shadow of the former

pastor. His wife was the church secretary, his daughter was the choir director, and his mother-in-law was the director of the children's department. Everything I did was compared to the former pastor. At this time God began to allow me to come to a place of brokenness (which I define as a realization of my own insufficiency and powerlessness). Less than a year into the pastorate at this church I broke down physically and emotionally. I ended up in the hospital for several days recovering from the effects of the stress I was placing on myself. After I got out of the hospital I went back to work even harder. The church began to grow, we relocated to a much bigger and better facility, and with a sense of victory I decided to move to another place of ministry. Weary of the demands of being a senior pastor I decided to go back on staff as an associate pastor at the church where I had served in the same capacity several years earlier.

At first my move back to a role as an associate on the staff of a large church seemed like just what I needed. The church was growing tremendously, there was a great sense of excitement in the church, and I did not have the pressure of being the senior pastor. I began to work hard putting in long hours because I was motivated by the success of the church. I made a renewed commitment to be a better teacher, preacher, and administrator to the church so I began working on a doctor's degree. I thought everything was fine until one day my wife stared me in the eyes and said, "What is wrong with you, what happened to the joy you used to have?" I was, by all outward appearances, a happy and successful minister. However, something was desperately

wrong with my spiritual life. It became painfully apparent to me that I was a bad husband, a bad dad, and a miserable Christian. I did not know what to do.

About this time a verse from the Psalms began to bother me. In Psalm 78:72 it says of David “he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart.” I felt condemned, like a man with no spiritual integrity. The word integrity means “complete, solid, sound, and honest” yet I did not sense that any of those words described me and the most important relationships in my life.

A few months before this my wife and I bought a new entertainment center for our den. It was huge; it took us most of one night to put it together. It looked great and worked great for a few months. Then one day I noticed the doors below the television would not open. Upon investigation I found that the weight of the television was causing the screws to rip out of the particle board which was holding the shelf supporting the television. What we thought was a solid wood entertainment center was instead made of particleboard covered by a thin layer of veneer. While repairing the shelf, God spoke to me in my heart. God clearly impressed on me that my spiritual life was like the entertainment center. I was a man who had no spiritual integrity. I was hard working and moral in my ministry but I had no spiritual integrity. I was a man with a particleboard heart covered with a thin layer of spiritual-looking veneer on the outside.

In the weeks ahead I grew more and more frustrated with my life. Finally one day in my office at church I came to a crisis of brokenness. I looked up at God, raised my fist toward Him and said, “God, if this is all there is to the Christian life I am disappointed.”

I was sick of self-effort and self-righteousness. God did not strike me dead, instead, I sensed Him make an impression on my heart that things were going to turn around for me spiritually. I had admitted my own inability to live the Christian life in my own strength; I was a broken man.

I believe God caused me to remember a book I had started to read several years before and had tossed aside. Underneath a pile of books at home I found the book that God would use to change my life. God used the book *Lifetime Guarantee* by Bill Gillham to lead me into an understanding of the Christ-like life (or Exchanged Life) concept. It was as if my eyes were opened and my heart was made to understand the essence of Christianity that

I had been missing for my entire Christian life. In rapid succession I began to devour everything about the exchanged life that I could get my hands on. In a matter of a few months I read *Grace Walk* by Steve McVey, *Classic Christianity* and *Growing in Grace* by Bob George, *Birthright* and *Alive for the First Time* by David Needham, and *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee. By His grace God enabled me to understand the important elements of the Christian life that I had failed to comprehend in the first twenty-three years of my life in Christ.

Through the authors listed above and through many others I began to understand why I was a miserable and frustrated Christian. I was trying to live the Christian life out of my own resources and out of my own strength. I thought it was all up to my self-effort if my Christian life was going to be a success. I was self-focused rather than Christ-

focused. By the grace of God I came to a place of total surrender to the Lord. God revealed to me the fleshly ways I had been trying to please Him and I renounced them all. Once again the Christian life became a delight instead of a duty. Instead of trying to live for God out of my own strength I began to trust Jesus to live His life through me and supply me with His strength. Several texts from the Bible quickly became favorites for me.

Like Hudson Taylor in the nineteenth century I began to see from Isaiah 40:31 that God would “renew me” or cause His very life to manifest supernatural strength through me. John 15:5 became precious to me as I realized that I could “do nothing” without the Lord but that He wanted to use me uniquely for His kingdom purposes. Galatians 2:20 spoke to me of my identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. It became clear to me that I had been functioning out of only half the gospel (I was functioning out of Christ’s crucifixion for me but not out of Christ’s resurrection for me). From the beginning of my life in Christ I understood that through Christ’s death on the cross I had been forgiven but I had never comprehended the wonderful truth that through Christ’s resurrection I had the very resurrection life of Christ dwelling in me as my source of victory.

In short order things began to come together for me in the Christian life. The joy returned, the peace returned, I became a better husband, a better dad, and a better minister not because I was trying harder but because I was trusting Jesus to be through me what I could not be in my own ability. The joy of ministry returned because I realized that all

the responsibility for success was not on me. I came to understand that it was the Lord's church, that it was the Lord's ministry, and that He delighted to do His work of grace in the lives of others through me. I comprehended the fact that my calling was to be faithful and allow the Lord to do the work of ministry through me. I was active, I still worked hard, but He was my source and my strength.

The last twenty-five years have been the happiest and most fulfilling years of my life. I say this in light of the fact that they have also been twenty-five of the hardest and most challenging years of my life. God has taught me to trust Him and yield to Him moment by moment every day of my walk with Him. As a result I am now a man of integrity not because of what I have learned but because of the truth of the Christ-like life that the Lord, in His faithfulness, has revealed to me. The Lord has taught me humility, transparency, and dependency.

In October of 1998 I became the Director of Discipleship Counseling at Grace Walk Ministries in Atlanta, Georgia. I never thought I would serve God out of the context of the local church but He clearly led me to this place of service. For over two years I had the privilege of sharing with hurting people on a daily basis the truth of the Christ-like life. By God's grace in 2002, and until 2016, He allowed me to become Coordinator of the Masters of Biblical Counseling program at Luther Rice Seminary. Since 2016 and until the present I have coordinated the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Luther Rice. Everyday I am involved in equipping current and future ministers with the life changing principles of the exchanged life. At the time of greatest

need in my Christian life I turned to God in utter frustration and He revealed the truth of the exchanged life to me. No longer do I serve the Lord out of a sense of duty; I serve Him joyfully out of a sense of delight in Him. I have been saved by grace and now I am being sanctified by that same grace. Every day is a new adventure in Him; truly, all praise, honor, and glory belong to the Lord .

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