

The excerpt - the story of Alonzo:

(A bit of "religious" jargon and thought scattered in ["saying prayers" and "christian duties" and the like - some of it removed], but an excellent expose' of the way one might go about fouling their conscience, and with Whom the Solution is found. This is an excerpt from a book - title and author unknown to me at present. While it is a tad long, you will see into your own heart as you read along. That is, if you'd like to do see into your heart in order to clean it up to make more room for Jesus, this will be helpful, I think. It may also help you to understand some "stages" that children go through in the "reasonings" of their Adamic unregenerate natures, prior to seeing the deep need for a Deliverer, a Messiah. This writing has been helpful to many, as I have heard.)

Modern child psychologists often tell us that the way to make a child happy is by teaching him how to love himself. The topic of sin is no longer beneficial to stress to a child according to psychologists; only 'positive" words should be used to build self-esteem.

Anyone who knows God or the Bible should already know that the major problem with fallen man is his tendency to love and esteem himself too much.

The real gospel of Christ talks in terms of surrendering ourselves to Jesus. Contrary to this truth stands the self-love crowd who is seeking to encourage our nation's youth to "think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think."

The story that follows gives any person a thorough understanding of the inner workings of a one's heart, its deceptions and corruption's, and its greatest need, which is to be freed from the guilt and burden of sin. The primary purpose of the story is to clarify that the greatest need of a child's heart (ANYONE'S HEART!) is to secure loving fellowship with Jesus Christ. It is not love of self that will satisfy the great longings of the heart. A child, or any person, becomes truly happy when he is brought to the place where he can see that the love of Christ is the only foundation for real peace and joy.

Alonzo was a young boy who lived in Vermont. His father owned a farm in one of those warm and verdant dells, which gave a charm to the scenery of the Green Mountains. The low, broad farmhouse, with its barns and sheds, hay stacks and high woodpiles, made almost a little village as they lay spread out in a sunny opening near the head of the glen. A winding road repeatedly crossing a brook, which meandered among the trees down through the valley, guided the traveler to the spot.

The wide yard was filled with domestic animals and the sheds were stored with utensils of the farm. Lilac trees and rose bushes ornamented the front of the dwelling, and from the midst of a little green lawn on one side of the house a deep clear spring, walled in with moss covered stones, poured up continually from below a full supply of cool, clear water. A group of willows hung over the spring and a well-trod footpath led to it from the house. A smooth flat stone lay before the "end door," as they called it, which led to the spring.

Here, when he was two years old, Alonzo might have been seen almost every sunny day, playing with buttercups and daisies, or digging with his little shovel in the earth before the door, or building houses out of corn cobs taken from the granary. The next summer, had you watched him, you might have observed that his range was wider and his plans of amusement a little more enlarged. He had a garden, two feet square, Where he stuck down green twigs broken from the shrubs around him; he would make stakes with a dull house knife partly for the pleasure of making them, and partly for the pleasure of driving them into the ground. He would ramble up and down the path a little way and sometimes go with his mother down to the

spring to see her dip the bright tin pail into the water and to gaze with astonishment at the effect of the commotion. The shimmering water made the stony wall of the spring seem always to be broken to pieces; its fragments waved and floated about in confusion until they gradually returned to their places of rest. This extraordinary phenomenon astonished him again and again.

One-day Alonzo's mother saw him going alone towards the spring. He had grabbed his pail and was going to try the wonderful experiment himself. His mother called him back and instructed him to never go there alone. "If you go there alone," she said, "you will fall in and be drowned."

Alonzo was not convinced by the reason, but he was awed by the command, and for many days he obeyed. At length, however, when his mother was occupied in another part of the house, he stole away softly down the path a little way.

There was sort of a struggle going on within him while he was doing this. "Alonzo, this is very wrong," said Conscience, for even at this early age Conscience had begun to be developed. Conscience is that little voice we hear in our heads that reminds us of what we already know to be right or wrong. It often sounds like the voice of those adults who teach us and love us, and speaks more loudly the more we want to defy it.

A deceitful heart wants to conquer Conscience, not by direct opposition but by evasion and deceit. And the deceiving and deceitful tendencies of the heart develop very early indeed.

"I am not going down to the spring," said Alonzo to himself. "I am only going down the path a little way."

"Alonzo," said Conscience, again, "this is wrong."

"Mother will not see me, and I shall not go quite down to the water, so that no harm will be done," said the child to himself in reply, and went hesitatingly on.

"Alonzo," said Conscience a third time, but with a feebler voice, "you should not go any further."

"My mother is too strict with me; there can be no harm in my walking as far as this."

He lingered a little while about halfway down the path, then slowly returned home, the dialogue between Conscience and his heart going on all the time. His heart had succeeded so well in deceiving his Conscience that when he came back he hardly knew whether he had done wrong or not. It did not seem quite right, and there was a sort of gnawing uneasiness within him, but his heart had succeeded by its evasions in making so much of a question of the whole transaction that he could not really say that it was clearly wrong. Alonzo had been taught that God had made him, and that He watched over him at all times, but some how or other he did not happen to think of Him at all during his disobedience. He had also understood something of his obligations to his mother, for her kindness and love to him; but he did not happen to think of her either while he was disobeying. The battle consisted simply, on one side, of the low murmurings of Conscience telling him sternly that he was wrong; and on the other, the turnings and shiftings of a deceitful heart trying to quiet, or at least to drown, Conscience's disruptive influences.

I have focused particularly upon the nature of this early sin, because this was the way in which Alonzo committed all his sins for many years afterwards. Conscience made him uncomfortable while he was transgressing, but his heart tricked him with such a variety of evasions and questions

that whenever he was doing anything wrong, he was never quite sure that it was clearly and positively wrong. For instance, a few days after the situation described above, his mother had gone away from home to run an errand. His sister, who had the care of him, had left him alone at the door. He took up the pail and began to walk slowly down the path. Conscience, defeated before and used to disobeying in little ways, allowed him to go without opposition for part of the way, but when she perceived that he was actually approaching the spring, she shook her head and renewed her low, solemn murmuring.

"Alonzo, Alonzo, you must not go there."

"I know I shall not fall in," said Alonzo to himself.

"Alonzo," said Conscience again, "you must not disobey."

Alonzo tried not to hear her, and instead of answering, he said to himself, "It was many days ago that she told me not to go. She did not mean never."

This was true, yet it may seem surprising that Alonzo could for one instant deceive himself with such an argument. But anything will do to deceive ourselves when we are in the mood. When we are committing sin we love to be deceived about it. Hence, it is very easy for a corrupted heart to justify wrong.

While saying that his mother could not have meant that he must never go, Alonzo leaned over the spring and tremblingly plunged in his pail. The special effect in the water was produced. The stones and moss waved and quivered, to Alonzo's inexpressible delight. His mind was in a state of feverish excitement: Conscience calling upon him, in vain trying to make him hear; Fear whispering eagerly, that he might be seen; Curiosity urging him again and again to repeat his wonderful experiment.

Alonzo was a very little child. And while all of these words may not have been used in his head, they do accurately describe what and how he was thinking and feeling in his heart.

At length, he hastily drew out his pail and went back to the house. Conscience tried, when the excitement of the experiment was over, to gain his attention. But she could not. His heart was still bent on deceiving and being deceived.

"My mother said," thought he, "that I should fall in and be drowned if I went there, and I did not fall in. I knew I would not fall in."

Thus, instead of thinking of his guilt and disobedience, he was occupied with the thought that he knew more than his mother did. That is, the heart which should have been sorry and humbled under the burden of sin was covering its guilt with deceit and pride.

Year after year passed on, and Alonzo grew in strength and stature; but he continued about the same in heart. Instead of playing on the round, flat door stone, he at length might be seen riding on his father's plough, or tossing about the drying grass in the mowing field, or gathering berries upon the hill side, on some summer afternoon. He was continually committing sins in the manner already described. These sins were different in circumstance and character as he grew older, but their natures, so far as the feelings of the heart were concerned, were the same. There was the same murmuring of Conscience, the same windings and evasions of his heart, the same self-deception, and the same success in leading himself to doubt,

whether the act of transgression which he was committing, was right or wrong.

His parents brought him up well, at least as far as socially acceptable behavior goes. They taught him the difference between doing right and wrong (by the opinion of most), and when they knew that he did wrong, they disciplined him seriously. But since they did not know to teach him how to understand his own heart, that is, why he choose to do what he did, most of what he did was out of habit not conviction. Thus his Conscience was taught to judge by outward actions alone. The voice of his Conscience kept him from doing much that was externally wrong, but in his heart he never knew for sure why he did or did not do things.

Therefore, other things, equally sinful, he did without giving them a second thought. For example, he would have shuddered at stealing even a pin from his sister, but he would by unreasonable wishes and demands give her as much trouble, and cause her as much loss of enjoyment, as if he had stolen a very valuable thing from her. If he had undertaken to steal a little picture from her desk, Conscience would have thundered so terribly that he could not possibly have proceeded, but he could tease and annoy her by his unreasonable and selfish conduct without any regret. If his heart had been honest and sharp in discovering its own real character, these cases would have taught him that his honesty was based on habit and was situational, and did not rest on any true foundation. But his heart was neither honest nor sharp in respect to itself; it loved to be deceived. When he read of a theft in a good storybook, he took great pleasure in thinking what a good honest boy he was in comparison.

He would not have forgotten to "say prayers", both morning and night. But, whenever he committed sin during the course of the day, he never thought of going away alone before God to confess it and to ask forgiveness. If his heart had been honest and sharp in discovering his own character, this would have taught him that his goodness was all mere form, and that he had no real affection for God. A relationship with God was "something externally done", not something personal from one heart to another, as to a trusted Friend. His heart, however, was not honest, and though he never thought much about it, he still had an impression on his mind that he was the friend of God and that he regularly worshipped Him. He knew very well that he sometimes committed sin, but he did not suppose that it was often. He often succeeded in blinding or misleading Conscience to make it doubtful. If he could succeed in making a question of it, he would go and commit the sin, with a half-formed idea of examining the case afterwards. But then when the pleasure of the sin was over, he found the true moral character of the transaction to be rather a disagreeable subject to think about; so he left it in his memory to fester and rankle there. Though there were many of these memories to bother him and make him uneasy he still tricked himself into believing that he was a very virtuous and promising young man.

When he was about twelve years old, Alonzo made a discovery which startled and alarmed him. Some young men had formed a plan of ascending a certain mountain summit which projected like a spur from the main range, and which reared its rocky head among the clouds, in full view of his father's farm. His companions were of the sordid type and far less than ideal for a young man that would hope to grow to be strong and wise and useful. And yet, how could he hope to influence these unfortunates if he did not run with them and pretend to be one of their own? It was "of course" a strategy and "not at all for fun." This excuse for his wanting to go seemed a good one to him, but Alonzo had some doubts whether his mother and father would think it good as well. One thing was in his favor, however: his father was away, having been absent on some business for the town for several days. Alonzo, certain that his father would be the harder one to convince, felt he could persuade his mother without his father there to help her. Alonzo thought that if he begged and pleaded his mother would give him permission, even if she thought his reasons for wanting to go were wrong. At any rate, he thought it was worth a try.

He came in on Saturday afternoon, and standing by the side of his mother, who was finishing some sewing he nervously presented his request. She listened to him with surprise, and then told him he must not go.

"It would be very wrong," she said.

"But mother, we shall walk along very still. We will not laugh or play. It will only be taking a little walk after sundown and I will be a good influence."

Alonzo's mother was silent.

"Come, mother," said the boy, hoping that he had made some impression, "do let me go. Do say yes, just this once."

After a moment's pause, she replied:

"Some people do indeed attempt to rationalize away God's Commands to avoid bad company and wanting to be friends with those who have no desire to obey God. But we cannot shift and change the laws of God to suit our pleasures. Now, even though you have promised to walk along without laughing and playing, I know very well that is just an excuse. Actually, such an expedition, with such companions, will not be anything more than a chance to indulge your flesh. Why do you come to me and ask that I let you disobey that which you know God plainly does not allow? It is impossible for me to give you permission."

While his mother was saying these words, emotions of anger and rage began to rise and swell in Alonzo's heart. Foreseeing how the sentence would end, he began to walk off towards the door and, just before the last words were uttered, he was gone. He shut the door violently, muttering to himself, "She never lets me do anything that I want."

In a state of wretchedness and sin (which I'm sure all my readers can relate to), he walked out of the house and sank down upon a bench, which he had made in the little orchard. Here he stopped pretending that he had self-control and allowed all the stored up rage and anger of selfishness to burst out of his heart. In a short time, however, when his anger calmed down a little, he was able to see the wickedness of his heart more clearly than ever before.

Something within him seemed to say, "What an unreasonable, ungrateful, wicked boy you are, Alonzo. Here is your mother, as kind a mother as ever lived. You owe her your very life. She has taken care of you for years, without expecting anything in return, and has done everything to make you happy; and now, because she will not let you do what is most clearly wrong, your heart is full of anger, malice, and revenge. What a wicked heart! Love and trust are forgotten, and every feeling of gratitude for long years of kindness is shattered because she has said "NO!" to your wicked desires."

Alonzo saw himself clearly, as one looking in a mirror. But he was only willing to look honestly for a moment. Then he turned his eyes away letting the thought pass and chose to let the dark, heavy clouds of anger roll over his soul again. He sat upon the bench in moody silence.

After several minutes, the thought returned and he again began to see that he was very wrong; such feelings towards his mother were, he knew, unreasonable and sinful, and he determined that he would not indulge them. So he rose and walked through a small gate into the yard where large piles of long logs were lying, one of which had been rolled down and partly cut off. He took up the ax and went to work. **But he soon learned that it**

was one thing to see that his feelings were wrong, and another thing to feel right. Such is the nature of sin. To acknowledge sin for what it is, is not the same thing as repentance of it; anymore than seeing garbage under your sink is the same as taking it out to the trashcan. His mind was in a sort of chaos. Floating visions of the party ascending the hill, aggravation at his disappointment, uneasiness at the thought of how he treated his mother, all mingled together in his soul. "I wish I could feel right towards mother about this"; he said to himself; but his heart still felt a moodiness and frustration that would not go away. Because the truth was he wanted to have the feeling of closeness to his mother without having to say he was sorry or let go of the right to his selfish request. Instead of repenting, he concluded it was best to forget the whole affair for the present. So, he laid down the ax and began to pick up some chips and sticks to carry in for kindling the morning fire. He secretly determined that when he went in and met his mother again he would not show his impatience and anger, but would act "just as if nothing had happened."

Just as if nothing had happened! How, after such an act of disrespect, ingratitude, and disobedience, could he act as if nothing had happened! One would think that Alonzo would have great trouble with this self-centered plan.

But Alonzo had already decided to look away from his face in the mirror. His heart clung to his sin and loved to be deceived by it. It seemed to him impossible to feel the softening of true, heartfelt repentance, the love and gratitude which he knew his mother deserved, and especially that cheerful submission to her decision which he knew he ought to feel. So he concluded to forget all about it. The poisoned fountain of selfishness which had so suddenly burst forth in his heart was covered up again, smoothed over, yet ready to boil out again at any resistance to its demands.

This and a few other similar occurrences led Alonzo to think that his sin and selfishness might go deeper than he ever imagined, but he tried not to think much about it. His life passed on without much thought or regard for his character or his prospects as a moral being. He had, however, a sort of standing suspicion that there was something wrong, but he did not stop to examine the case. The little uneasiness which this suspicion caused was soothed and quieted a good deal by a sort of prevailing idea: that there was a great deal that was very excellent in his conduct and character. He was generally considered a good boy. He took great pride in this thought. One of the grossest forms of deceitfulness which the heart assumes is to believe that we deserve all that others give us credit for. This is especially true concerning our "good qualities" which we know to be based more on training and habit than on the true disposition of our heart. There is no one quiet so foolish as one who fools himself.

An incident occurred about this time which almost opened Alonzo's eyes to the true character of some of his virtues. During the winter months he went to school, and the good qualities which he fancied he exhibited there were among those on which he most prided himself. One afternoon, as he was walking home with a green satchel full of books slung over his shoulder, he stopped a few minutes at the brook which crossed the road and looked down over the bridge upon the smooth dark colored ice which covered the deep water. It looked so clear and beautiful; he went down and cautiously stepped upon it. It was so transparent that it seemed impossible that it could be strong. (*Note: Interesting observation. To one whose heart is closed, that is, "opaque", transparency is seen as weakness, not strength.*) He sat down on a stone, which projected out of the water, and while he was there his teacher came along, and stopping on the bridge he began to talk with him. Alonzo and the teacher were on very good terms, and after talking together a few minutes at the brook they both walked along together.

Their way was a cross path through the woods, which led by a shorter course than the main road, to the part of the town where they were both going.

As they were stepping over a low place in the log fence where their path diverged from the road, the teacher said, to Alonzo, "I am glad to see you carrying your books home."

"I like to study my lessons at home in the evenings," said Alonzo with a feeling of secret satisfaction.

"Well, Alonzo, what would you say if I should tell you I could guess exactly what books you have in your satchel?"

"I don't know," Alonzo replied, "perhaps you saw me put them in."

"No, I did not."

"Well, you can tell by the shape of the books which you can see by looking at the satchel."

"No," said the teacher, "I see you have either your writing book or your Atlas, but I could not tell which by the appearance of the satchel. I see that there is by the size of it one middle sized book, too, but merely its size will not tell whether it is your Arithmetic, your Geography, or your Grammar."

"Well, what do you think they are?"

"I think they are your writing book and your spelling book."

There was in Alonzo's countenance an appearance of surprise and curiosity. He said the teacher was right, and asked him how he knew.

"I know by your character."

"By my character!" said Alonzo, "what do you mean by that?"

"I will tell you, though I think it will give you pain rather than pleasure. You are one of the best boys in my school, you give me very little trouble, and you are generally diligent in your duties - obedient and faithful. Now, have you ever thought what your motives are for this?"

"No sir, I have never thought about them particularly. I want to improve my time and learn as much as I can, so as to be useful when I am a man."

Alonzo thought that ought to be his motive, and so he fancied that it was. He did not mean to tell a falsehood. He did not say it because he wished to deceive his teacher. But while Alonzo was not consciously telling a lie, he was not a boy *who made effort to consciously tell the truth*. So, his heart had deceived him. It is so with us all.

"You think so, I have no doubt. But now I wish to ask you one question. What two studies do you think you are most perfect in?"

Alonzo did not want to answer; he knew that he prided himself much on his handsome writing and on his being almost always at the head of his class in spelling. At length he said, with a modest air, that he thought he "took as much interest in his writing and in his spelling lessons, as in anything."

"Are there any studies that you are less advanced in than these?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well," said the teacher, "now I want to ask you another question. How is it that the writing book and the spelling book, which represent the two studies you are best at, and in which you, of course, you need the least amount of practice, are the very ones which you are bringing home to work on in the evenings?"

Alonzo did not answer immediately. In fact, he had no answer at hand. He thought that if he was inclined to study out of school hours, he had a right to take any books home that he pleased; however, he did not say so.

"And I should like to ask you one more question," said the teacher. "In what study do you think you are most deficient?"

"I suppose it is my Arithmetic," replied Alonzo, recollecting how he disliked, and avoided as much as possible, everything connected with calculation.

"And do you ever carry home your Arithmetic to study in the evening?"

Alonzo shook his head, "no".

"Now you know that there are few subjects more important to a man than a knowledge of figures. How does it happen then, if your motive is to fit yourself for usefulness and happiness when a man, that the very subject in which you need the most improvement is the very one in which you never make any voluntary effort?"

There was a little pause, during which Alonzo looked serious. He felt very unhappy. It seemed to him that his teacher was unkind. He was purposely bringing his books home to study his lessons for the next day in order to please the teacher, and to be blamed just because he had not planned to bring his arithmetic instead of his spelling was very hard. Tears came to his eyes, but he strove to suppress them and said nothing.

"I know, Alonzo," continued the teacher, "that these questions of mine shall trouble you. I have not, however, asked them for the sake of troubling you, but for the purpose of letting you see into your heart and learn a lesson of its deceitfulness. I want you to think of this tonight when you are alone, and perhaps I will some day talk with you again."

So saying, they came out into the road again near the teacher's residence. They bid one another goodbye, and Alonzo walked on alone.

"He means," thought Alonzo, "that if I honestly wanted to improve, I should take greater interest in the studies in which I am deficient." As this thought floated through his mind it brought after it a dim, momentary vision of the pride, vanity, and love of praise which he suddenly saw revealed as the secret spring of all his efforts at school on which he had prided himself. But seeing all those *unreal virtues* of hard work, love of learning, and desire to be conscientious and faithful, turn to filthy rags at once because of two simple questions, made him very sad to think about. He was, therefore, glad to see a load of wood coming into his father's yard as he approached it, and he hastened to help him unload it. He thus managed, once again, upon seeing his true face in the mirror, to distract himself with the busyness of life without actually deciding whether the teacher was right or wrong.

The conversation with his teacher, however, shook and weakened his faith in the "good traits" of his character. He did not decide that all of these traits were hollow and superficial, but he had a sort of vague fear that they might actually be. This was another sort of uneasiness laid up in his heart; a part of the burden of sin which he bore without thinking much of it.

Thus Alonzo lived. From twelve he passed on to fifteen, and from fifteen to twenty. He became a strong, athletic young man, known and esteemed for his industry, frugality, and steadiness of character. The time drew near for him to be recognized by all as an adult, and at this age his moral condition might be summed up thus:

First, the praiseworthy qualities of his character had been molded from without instead of having flowed from within. He was a product of the environment around him, not from the life (God's Life) within him. His behavior, priorities and values resulted only from the restraints imposed by the opinions of those around him, from the influence of his conscience which had been cultivated by his parent's external sense of "right and wrong", and ultimately from the discomfort he felt when he did things differently than how he was used to doing them (that is, different from habit or "tradition"). His stability and self-restraint, for instance, were based mainly on the first, his regard for the Commands of God upon the second, and his sense of hard work based upon the last.

Second, he made no real effort to improve his character. In fact, he felt little interest or motivation to do so. When it was time to learn and work, for example on his father's farm, he did so with his mind and strength, but all the while his *heart* was elsewhere. His heart was more interested in the various fleshly amusements with which the other young people of the neighborhood had involved themselves in the hours when work was done: the sleigh ride, the singing school, the fishing party, and the hiking. In the evening he was occupied with some one of these enjoyments, and the next day at his work he was busy planning the next. Thus life slipped by as one pleasure-seeking opportunity after another. I do not mean that he was entirely without concern for the shallowness of his character. Such discoveries as I have already described gave him an occasional glimpse of the secrets of his heart. And what he saw there made him desirous of change for a moment. But even though he knew that the "goodness" of his character was in form only, he valued more the praise he received from others than to honestly confront the vanities of his deceitful heart. He could not be honest with himself, that his righteousness was as "filthy rags", without being equally honest with those whose praise he might lose. So, he passed quietly along and thought about other things.

Finally, there was no spiritual connection between his soul and God. I mean no love-connection, no communion, and no interchange of thought or feeling. He had been essentially taught that a relationship with God was a matter of external form alone, and not of an inward reality. Much like a young man might be taught that being a "good husband" was a matter of "what you do" alone, though love in his heart for his bride is totally absent. For example, he was taught to repeat a prayer morning and evening, and this practice he continued, considering it one of his "duties". As he grew up from boyhood, however, he often neglected it in the morning, until at length he omitted it altogether; and he gradually found an increasing reluctance to say it at night. He often omitted it, not intentionally, exactly - he simply forgot it; or, he was very tired and went immediately to sleep. These omissions, however (which, by the way, were far more frequent than he imagined), did not trouble him too much, and he began to think that the practice was intended for children and that he was getting too mature for such things. The well of his heart, which should have been deep and full with God's love, was dry from lack of knowing Him. There was no Living Water from which to draw his prayers. No wonder they were forgotten. And when he did remember to pray, it was only a dry form. There was no communion or connection between him and God. So far as the feelings of his heart were concerned, he lived in independence of his Maker. God was irrelevant.

Such was Alonzo's condition during the winter before he was to be twenty-one. One evening during that winter he sat in on a religious meeting at a local schoolhouse. A stranger, who had touched hearts the previous year, was returning to town. It was anticipated that, if the people would be in one place, perhaps God would be heard. The stranger did, in fact, have some thoughts he wanted to share. People from the local farming families came for several miles around. Their motives for coming were mixed and many. There was curiosity about the stranger, the pleasure of a winter evening's expedition, the light from the great blazing wood fire beaming upon a hundred bright and cheerful countenances, and in at least some cases, an honest desire to know and do God's Will. Alonzo harnessed a strong, fleet, well-fed horse onto a colorfully painted sleigh, helped his father and mother into the back seat, and mounted himself upon a higher one in front; away they went jingling down the valley. They soon rode out of sight by the turnings of the road among the trees, and the sleigh-bells, sounding fainter and fainter, soon died away upon the ear.

A little before ten, Alonzo might have been seen returning slowly up the valley. The moon had risen and it shone through the trees, casting a beautiful white light upon the snowy wreaths which hung upon them. The horse walked along slowly; and Alonzo was making crosses with his whiplash upon the smooth surface of the snow which bordered the road. He was lost in thought. The subject of the Stranger's teaching was the importance of preparation for another world. It just so happened, from some cause or other, that Alonzo's mind was in such a calm, contemplative state that evening that the teaching made a strong impression. It was not that the Stranger was an extraordinary speaker, or that Alonzo had never heard such words before. But tonight God's Word had come with power; power to penetrate the ear and reach the heart. He came out of the meeting thoughtful. He rode home silently. There seemed to be a new understanding opened before his mind. The spiritual world seemed real to him for the first time. So real, in fact, that he wondered why he was not preparing for it. His father and mother rode in silence, too, each unconscious of the thoughts of the other but both thinking of their son. A rare and divine influence was moving upon the hearts of all.

Alonzo allowed these thoughts, too, to pass away the next day, but they left behind a more distinct impression than he had been accustomed to feel: that he had a great work to do before he left the world, and that this work had not yet begun.

He was careful to say the prayer of his childhood that night, with great seriousness, and he made a great effort to think about what it meant while he was repeating it. But there is a vast difference between understanding the words in your head and "knowing" their meaning in your heart. While human effort may grasp the meaning of words (and that only in small part), God ALONE can reveal their deeper meaning and lay bare the motives of our hearts. And this He is willing to do for a heart that earnestly seeks Him. But Alonzo did not have such a heart. He was content to consider what the prayer meant, without allowing it to lay his heart bare. It was enough to satisfy a deceiving and deceitful heart, and Alonzo dismissed his cares on the subject of the salvation of his soul as he went to sleep, feeling that he had made a good beginning.

Alonzo's attention was occupied early the next morning by an excursion into the forest for a load of wood with his father, and he entirely forgot God's whisperings in his heart the evening before. This discouraged him a little. However, he again offered his prayer with an effort to keep its meaning in his mind, though that effort was less successful than on the evening before. His thoughts would slip away from his control, and while he was saying, "my sins have been numerous and aggravated," or "lead me not into temptation," he would find that his mind was dwelling upon the past scenes of the day; it would be off in the forest where he had been at work or surveying the smooth slopes of hay in the barn loft or dwelling with pleasure upon his favorite horse feeding in the stall.

Alonzo was so dissatisfied with his prayer that he began again before he got through, though with not much better success than before. He was upset with himself that he could not keep his thoughts from wandering. He did not understand the nature of his problem. The obvious explanation was a heart alienated from God and governed by its own spontaneous tendencies. Willingly deceived, he was spiritually blind.

However, Alonzo's deceitful heart had succeeded so well that he thought his second prayer would do, and he gradually fell asleep.

Weeks passed on, and Alonzo made feeble efforts to be a religious man. He said nothing of his feelings to anyone. In fact, he would not have anybody know that he was trying to take "serving God" more seriously. Whether it was because he was ashamed to be seen in the service of such a Master, or because he thought that his new-found seriousness required a greater degree of humility, we do not say. He was, at any rate, very careful to conceal it.

Naturally, he made little progress. Weeks and months passed away, and it seemed to him that he remained in the same place. The truth was that there was a current carrying him downstream which he did not perceive, but whose effects, if viewed over time, were very evident. His efforts were like the little water skipper (bug) whose motions he had often watched on his father's stream. The skipper would now and then make a convulsive and momentary effort to swim upstream but it kept being pulled backwards by a current, steady and unceasing in its flow. The effect was that a constant effort was needed just to maintain the ground it gained, and to stop trying was to be swept down into the falls below.

Alonzo was also like the skipper in other respects. He distinctly saw his own repeated efforts, but he did not see the slow, gentle, continual operation of the current pulling him down. His face was turned up the stream, too, where all was smooth and sunny and beautiful. He did not see the dark gulf that yawned behind. He did not want to see.

Alonzo, his heart dull to this reality, made little progress. The work was all uphill. He perceived that on the whole he was not gaining ground, and yet he could scarcely tell why. There were several difficulties, the operation of which he felt, but there was something mysterious and unaccountable about them.

First, he was continually forgetting all his good intentions. He would, for example, reflect on certain days of the week - upon his duties and obligations, and would resolve to be watchful all the coming week to guard against sin and to keep his heart right. But he found it very hard to control the conduct of one day by the resolutions of the day before. Saturday night would come and he would wake up, as it were, from his dream of business and pleasure and find that his "spiritual work" had been entirely neglected and forgotten during the week. Half-ashamed and half-mad at himself, he would decide to begin again and be more committed this time. But, his renewed convictions were always short-lived, and the "good deeds" he had planned once again slipped by forgotten. What could he do? There was no lack of good intentions. But how could he make these intentions last through the busyness of his week? How could he make his convictions, or rather the emotion he felt to "do the right thing", at the start of his week guide all his behavior throughout the week? This was a great frustration to him. If he did not think of his resolutions at the right time, of course he could not keep them, and he was unable to discipline his soul so it would think of them at the right time.

There was another difficulty which very much perplexed and troubled Alonzo in his attempts to reform himself. Sometimes it seemed impossible for him to control his wrong feelings. When he became upset and irritated, as he sometimes did about his work, or when it felt like his mother placed some unfair restriction on him, he was conscious that his feelings were wrong and he would struggle against them with all his strength, but he could not conquer them. But since Alonzo was still more concerned with feeling good about himself than truly finding God, he continued to find ways to deceive himself. So, this problem was always worse than he supposed. When he managed to control his behavior, and not express his anger or frustration, he would suppose that all was made right. But he would ignore the undealt with feelings that still burned within his heart. At other times, he would give in to self-pity and become depressed. But instead of crying out to God from an honest heart, he would console himself with thoughts

like, "How can I be blamed for thoughts I can't control?"

Thus, in small temptations Alonzo would not remember his convictions, and in bigger ones he did not have the strength of character to keep them. He did not know what to do, yet he was not very concerned about it. There was indeed a vague idea floating in his mind that there was a great work that God expected him to do; a great task or effort, that once performed would solve all his problems. He had only to focus his mind and energy to accomplish it. He decided to devote himself to it soon. But one thing after another seemed to postpone his whole-hearted pursuit. The winter was so cold that he could not conveniently spend as much time alone as he wished. He thought that when the warm spring evenings came he could enjoy more solitude. Spring, he decided, would be a more *convenient* season. When spring came they were pressed with work, and Alonzo looked forward for a time of a little greater leisure. But when planting was done there was haying, and after haying, harvesting. Then Alonzo thought that in a few months he should be free, and that he would make sure to have more "quiet time". Thus time passed on. Alonzo convinced himself that he was simply watching for an opportunity to follow and obey God. But he was deceived. The truth was an innate dislike for looking honestly into his heart, repenting of what he might find there, and turning to God with sincerity and obedience.

There was a strange inconsistency in his ideas. When he tried to purify and reform his heart, he found that he could not do it. Still, he had an impression, vague and undefined yet confident, that he could perform the task easily at any time. Therefore, it did matter that he waited for a more convenient season. His procrastination did not make him feel uneasy or concerned, for he felt certain that though he was not doing as much as he could, he was not entirely neglecting it. In truth, Alonzo was not really trying at all. And he misunderstood that God looks at the attitudes of our hearts more than "how much we do" anyway.

Alonzo's father had purchased for him a small farm a mile or two from his own. For some months, Alonzo had been very interested in his preparations for taking possession of it when he turned twenty-one; then, for many months afterwards, his whole soul was engrossed in his plans and labors for repairing the premises, getting his stock in good order, and putting the first seed into the ground. During these months he remained a member of his father's family, his own little farmhouse being empty and desolate. Occasionally, however, a piece of furniture was brought there and he would carry it in and fit it in its place, and then survey it again with a look of satisfaction. First came a stained birch bureau, then a half dozen chairs, then a bed; a few simple implements for the kitchen followed, and a load of wood was piled up in the yard. In a short time, the house began to look as if it was really intended to be occupied.

Finally, lights were seen one evening by the distant neighbors in both the rooms, for there were but two. Busy preparations were going forward, and at eight o'clock Alonzo drove up to his door in his own sleigh and handed out, first his sister, and then the bride, whom he had brought to share with him the responsibilities of his new home.

Alonzo led his horse away to the barn, took off the harness, and fastened him to his crib, previously filled to the top with hay. While doing this, he could not help thinking of his "duty" to God for giving him such prosperity, and allowing he and his bride such happiness in their new home. He thought he ought to be grateful. But this, as he afterwards found, was a different thing from actually being grateful. At any rate, since a feeling of "duty" was all he could muster for a God he did not know, this reminded him of the question whether he should begin this first night as a family by praying with his new wife. Remember, for Alonzo, knowing God was more about what you do for Him, than responding to him as a Friend and Father.

"It is your duty to do it," said Conscience.

"You will not do it properly. You will be embarrassed and perplexed; you cannot begin tonight," said Distrust.

"Still," said Conscience again, "it is your duty to do it."

"You had better wait a day or two until you get settled. It will be much easier, and more pleasant then," said a lying spirit of evasion and delay.

"It is your duty to do it tonight," murmured Conscience again.

Distracted by the conflicting thoughts within him, Alonzo cut short their clamor by saying to himself that he could not begin that night, and hurried in; and the murmurs of Conscience grew feebler, and soon died completely away.

Alonzo did not mean to be double-minded; he did not mean to shrink back from embarrassment, or to consider such things as prayer a duty and a trial. However, he had allowed it to be the way he lived, the very air he breathed, for so long, he almost could not have responded in any other way. But if he had cultivated a *real* relationship with God, one based on simple honesty, integrity, trust and obedience, what might seem the hardest task in the world would not only be surmountable, but food to his spirit.

Alonzo found it harder and harder to begin, the longer he postponed it. A month passed away, and the "duty" continued to be neglected. It was his plan to read the Bible every day, but it seemed rather awkward to sit down before his wife and read it silently and alone, so he gradually neglected that, as well. At night as he went to bed he usually offered a brief prayer, which was a sort of compromise to Conscience to induce her to let him rest in peace. He did not, however, feel happy with his life, living in constant compromise. Uneasiness and anxiety rankled in his heart more and more. One evening, an acquaintance who lived near his farm passed by to say hello. He shared with Alonzo plain and heartfelt truths. Alonzo worked up the courage and effort to ask his neighbor if he could come and visit with him and whatever friends the man may have that could help him to know God's ways more clearly. The man was delighted to invite him to stop by the next evening to further discuss these matters of Life.

Alonzo and his wife both resolved to go, and early in the evening they arrived and found that there were a good number of others already there. While this, at first, seemed awkward, that others might know of their need, they soon resolved without discussion between them that earthly matters of pride would not deter anything so profoundly and infinitely important. The involvement of those that they had not previously known would only be an advantage, if they also were friends of God.

Soon, one man offered a thought that had occurred to him as he had spoken with Father about the time they were to share that evening.

"The most important question which you can ask about yourselves is, 'Am I the friend or the enemy of my Maker?' Now, there is probably not one here who really feels that he is his Maker's enemy, and yet, it is very possible that there is at least some here who are truly God's enemies.

"God justly requires us all to love Him; that is, to feel a personal affection for Him and to act under the influence of it. They who do not, He considers as not belonging to His spiritual family. They are His enemies. Not that they are employed directly and intentionally to oppose Him - they make perhaps no demonstrations of actual hostility - but in heart they dislike Him. To determine, therefore, whether we are the friends or the enemies of God, we must ascertain whether our secret hearts are in a state of love or of dislike towards Him.

"Perhaps some of you are saying to yourselves while I make these remarks, 'I am sure I love God in some degree, though I know I do not love Him as much as I should. I pray to Him, I try in some things to do my duty, I am (in some degree at least) grateful for his goodness, and I cannot perceive in myself any evidence of a feeling of dislike or hostility.'"

The man was right, at least in one instance, for these were exactly the thoughts which were passing through Alonzo's mind.

"Now, it is a difficult thing to tell," he continued, "what the state of our hearts is; or rather, it is a very common thing to be deceived about it. I will tell you how,

"First, we mistake approval for love. We cannot help approving God's character. We cannot deny His excellence of justice, mercy, and holiness, any more than we can the directness of a straight line which we look upon. This kind of approval is the decision of the intellect or of the moral sense, which is entirely independent from the convictions of the heart. I once asked a young man whether he thought he loved God, 'O yes' he said, 'I certainly think our Maker is worthy of all our praise and gratitude.' He was completely blind to the distinction, you see. He thought his Maker was worthy. Of course, he could not help thinking so. The question is not whether God is worthy of love and gratitude, but whether we *really have these feelings in our hearts*. Now, it is very possible that if you look honestly into your hearts, you will find that all your supposed love for God is only a cold, intellectual admission of the excellence of His character. This may exist without any personal feelings of affection towards Him.

"The second delusion is similar. We pray and we make an effort to confine our attention to our prayers, or as we term it, to think of what we are saying. This we mistake for really feeling the desires which we express. I do not doubt that many of you are in the habit of prayer, and that you often strive to confine your mind to what you are saying. Now you may do all this, without having in the heart any real desire for the forgiveness, the holiness, and the other blessings you seek. In fact, the very effort you make to confine your mind proves, or rather indicates very strongly, that the heart is somewhere else; for the mind goes easily where the heart is, and stays there with very little effort.

"There is another delusion, similar to the previous one. That is, thanking God without gratitude. We see that He is our Protector and the "Giver of all good things" and that He deserves our gratitude. We say this and feel satisfied with it, never reflecting that this is a very different thing from actually feeling gratitude,

'For instance, we may rise in the morning, look out upon the pleasant landscape before us, and think of our comfortable home, our friends, and all our means of happiness, which we are now to enjoy for another day. We feel a kind of satisfaction in them which, connected with our knowing that they come from God, we mistake for gratitude. We thus often think we are grateful, when the only feeling is a pleasant recognition of the good enjoyed. We can tell the difference in this way. False gratitude has no effect upon the conduct, whereas real gratitude will lead us to take pleasure in doing our Benefactor's will. Even a painful duty will become a pleasant one, for we always love to make a sacrifice for one who has been kind to us, if we are truly grateful to him."

Alonzo here recollected the evening when he moved in to his new home. He thought that he was grateful to God, but he could not bring himself to tell Him so. Either in prayer that evening with his new wife, or in the quiet place of his heart.

"In a word," continued the man; "we mistake the convictions of our mind and the stirrings of our emotions for a true movement of our hearts, or

spirits. I will tell you now some of the indications that a person dislikes God in his heart, even if his mind is right to respect His character and His goodness.

"He dislikes God when his feelings do not go forth spontaneously and pleasantly towards Him. A parent once said to his child, 'Have you ever felt, when thinking of some person whom you loved and who was away from you, as if your heart went out to that person? It seemed as if the distance between you was lessened, though it was not in reality? On the other hand, when you think of a person whom you do not like, your heart draws back and shrinks coldly from him.' Now tell me, in which of these ways is your heart affected when you think of God?"

Alonzo recollected how readily, when he was at work on the hillside or in the distant forest, his thoughts and affections would roam away to his wife and his home, and hover there. He saw clearly that his heart never once sought God in this manner.

"Another evidence of our disliking God is when we escape from His presence as soon as we can. We cut short our time with Him in prayer, and our thoughts come back with a spring to our business or our pleasures as if we had kept them on God for a few minutes by force. Likewise, when obeying God is a weariness, and secret communion with God is a hassle."

Alonzo felt that this wise man was describing his feelings, exactly.

"Also, it is evidenced when we hold back a little from quick acceptance of God's justice and His fearful decision to punish sin. Instead, we claim the right to judge a Righteous God's actions as cruel or unjust. This stems from not seeing our wickedness clearly, and allowing our perspective to be the standard of right and wrong. Much like a condemned prisoner is shocked at what he calls the cruelty of the government in executing a convicted felon.

"Now do you, when examined by these tests, love God or dislike him?"

It was plain from the reactions of most there that they felt condemned. The man perceived that they pleaded guilty. He finished his thoughts with these words: "You ought to love God. He commands you to do it. You should have loved Him all your lives; you ought to love Him now. He will forgive all the past for His Son's sake, and make His home in you for the future through His Life-Giving Spirit, if you will now simply turn your hearts to Him. Seek peace with your Maker without delay."

"I will do it," thought Alonzo, as they kneeled once more to pray together. Another man uttered expressions of penitence, gratitude, and affection, but Alonzo perceived that his heart did not follow, despite his determination. The more he tried to force himself to love God, the more clearly he understood the distinctions which the man had been drawing, and the more painfully evident it was to him that he had no heart to love God. He rose from his knees with a thought, half impatience and half despair: "I do not love Him, and I cannot love Him. What shall I do?"

For many weeks, Alonzo was quite discouraged and distressed. He saw more and more clearly that he did not love God, and that he never had loved Him. Conscience scolded him and he had little peace. Yet he would not come and yield his heart to his Maker. He thought he wished to do it, as if it were possible for a person to wish to love, without loving. He struggled, but struggling did no good. *What God commands us to do is to love Him, not to struggle against our hatred of Him.* He set a double watch over his conduct: he was more regular in his prayers, more attentive to the Scriptures, and to every means of instruction; but all seemed to do no good. His heart was still alienated from God, and it seemed to him to become alienated

more and more.

There were three great difficulties which he experienced, and which perplexed and troubled him exceedingly.

First, it really seemed to him that he could not change his heart; he could not force himself to love God and repent of sin. He also could not help the wrong and wicked feelings, which often raged within him, on occasions of temptation. It really seemed to Alonzo that his wicked heart was too strong for him. This thought, however, did not make him comfortable. Conscience scolded him all the more for being in such a state of heart towards God.

Second, the more he thought of the subject, and the more he tried to make himself fit for heaven, the more hollow and superficial and hypocritical he found all his supposed goodness to be. Alonzo's eyes had been opened to the righteous standard of God and his heart was failing the test. His supposed gratitude and penitence, his prayers, and all the virtues on which he had prided himself showed themselves to be born of flesh, not of spirit. They flowed from a depraved mind and will, not a humble servant of the Most High God.

Third, as he tried to correct his sinful habits, he discovered that his sin went deeper than he could have imagined. For every sin he tried to uproot brought with it the alarming realization of a dozen more. In fact, the Spirit of God had come home to him, and as a light makes apparent the smallest defects which were seemingly invisible in the dark, the Spirit exposed corruption's and sins in his heart which he had never supposed to be slumbering there. He was alive without the Law once, but when the Commandment came, sin revived and he died. His heart sunk within him as he saw his sad spiritual condition. In a word, God had opened Alonzo's eyes to the fact that the excellent qualities of character which his environment had produced in him were external and superficial, and that he was in heart the enemy of God and the miserable, helpless slave of sin.

Though he was thus, in some degree, aware of the condition of his heart, that condition did not alter. The trouble with him was that he still disliked God and loved the world and sin, but he feared a judgment to come. However, instead of throwing himself fully upon God and giving Him his heart, he still kept away, alienated and miserable. He had certain excuses, with which he unconsciously deceived himself, and he was gradually lulling his conscience to rest. Then one day, he spoke with a man who was a friend of God and knew Him well. He presented his excuses and they were answered. These excuses, and the replies made to them, were in substance somewhat as follows:

"Sir, I do feel that I am a most miserable sinner, but I do not know what to do. I have been seeking God for many years, and the more I seek Him the further I seem to be from Him."

"What more can you do?" said the friend.

"I am sure I can do no more," responded Alonzo.

"Then why does your heart fail to rest quietly in the consciousness of having been faithful to all that God has asked of you? God requires no more."

Alonzo hung his head. He perceived the absurdity of his excuse. For God will be found by those who earnestly seek Him - who *truly* seek Him.

"No," said his trusted friend, "you show by that remark how easily and completely your heart has deceived you. Even though your conscience

testifies that you dislike and disobey God, and your guilt is continually on your mind so that you can not rest, still you are able to say to me that you have done and are doing all which God requires."

Alonzo sighed. It was too true.

"I know it," he said. "What you say is true. I continually find some new proof of the corruption and deceitfulness of my heart. I *really want* to change it, but it seems to me that I cannot"

"You speak as if your heart were one person and you another. Therefore, *you* are innocent, and all the blame rests upon your heart, which has corrupted you beyond your will. But that can not be true. After all, what is your "heart"? It is no different than yourself, your moral character and moral feelings, they are one and the same. To talk of a struggle between yourself and your heart is a complete absurdity, for they are the same person. The real struggle, if there is any, is between yourself and God and His Ways. He commands you to give Him your heart - that is, your heart, soul, mind, and strength - and the truth is, that you do not want to."

"I understand what you are saying, but it seems to me that I cannot help it. I know that my affections are not given to God, that they still crave the world and sin, but I cannot seem to help it," cried Alonzo.

"These affections, which you cannot help, you admit that they are wrong feelings?" said the man.

"Yes sir, I feel and know they are wrong, and that is what makes me miserable."

"Then you are more guilty than I supposed. What would you say if you knew of a man who said that he had such an uncontrollable desire to steal or to kill that he could not help but continually commit these crimes? Would you think him worse or better than those who sinned occasionally under strong temptation?"

"But I struggle against the feelings, and cannot conquer them," said Alonzo.

"And suppose such a man as I have described should meet you in a secluded place, and should tell you that he must rob and murder you; that he had been struggling against the urge but it was too strong for him. What would you think of him?"

Why plainly, that he was a man of extraordinary depravity. The greater the struggle, the greater the evidence of the wickedness which could not be overcome. You need to concentrate on obeying God, and not so much on how you *feel*." responded the man.

"I believe you are right. But what can I do to change? It does seem to me that I want to repent of sin and forsake it... but..."

"But you do not, and therefore it is not true that you *really* want to. You are not being forced to give in to your sinful nature, you are *choosing* to obey your flesh. Saying you want to repent, without repenting, is as much a contradiction as saying that you want to be sorry for something which really makes you glad. Again, your heart is deceiving you. What you *really* want are the **benefits** of repentance without the **cost** of repentance. The thought of being filled with the Father's life-changing Spirit, free from the guilt of sin and being able to walk in peace, sounds good to you. But

having to see your face in the mirror, humbly admit your need for a Savior, and *actually give up* the temporary pleasure of that sin to obey Jesus is repulsive to you. And because you can not have one without the other, you are troubled and distressed."

Alonzo looked into his heart and saw at once this was true. He longed for peace of mind, relief from his nagging conscience, the reputation of being a strong, mature Christian, and assurance of safety and happiness after death. But, in truth, he realized that he did not long for repentance itself; that is, obtaining a right relationship with God. It was a disagreeable means of obtaining a desirable end. He was silent for a few moments, and then he said with a sigh, "Oh, how I wish I could start my life over again. I would live it in a very different way than I have done."

"That remark shows how little you know of what life is about or what it means to have a relationship with God. God is not interested in our "getting it right" the first time, for we can not present ourselves perfect enough to earn God's favor. He wants us to *recognize* our need of Him, and turn to Him humbly.

If you were to begin your life over again, undoubtedly you would end up just as you are now," said his friend.

Alonzo saw that this was true. He was ashamed that he had expressed such a wish, and at length asked, in a sorrowful tone, whether this man could say anything to aid or guide him.

"I do not know that I can," was the reply. "It does not matter how much you know. If your desire is to live in sin and self-deception, then no amount of good advice can change you. It is not your understanding that needs to change, but your heart."

"However;" continued the man, "I will ask you one question. Do you clearly understand what this verse means: "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for every one who believes." (Romans 10:3-4)

"No sir, I have never thought of it particularly," said Alonzo,

"You feel in some degree the hopelessness of your condition if God should leave you to yourself. You have been neglecting God's calling for you all your days. Instead of seeking Him with a humble heart you have actually been trying to perfect yourself to earn His favor. You have been discouraged and disheartened by this hopeless labor, for the deeper you go in your efforts to repair your character, the deeper and more far reaching still is its inherent corruption and depravity.

"You are like the man attempting to repair a house gone thoroughly to decay," continued the man, and as he said these words he took down from a little set of shelves behind him a small volume from which he read the following passage:

The sinner going about to establish a righteousness of his own, is like a man endeavoring to repair his house which has thoroughly gone to decay. When he begins there is a tolerably fair exterior. It appears as if a few nails to tighten what is loose, a little new flooring, and here and there a fresh sill, will render all snug again; and that by adding these, together with wallpaper and paint to give the proper superficial decoration, all will be well, or at least, that his building will be as good as his neighbor's. When he begins, however, he finds that there is a little more to be done than he had expected. The first board that he removes in order to replace it with a better, reveals one in a worse condition behind it. He drives a nail to tighten

clapboard, and it slumps into decayed wood behind, taking no hold. He takes away more, a little at a time, hoping at every removal to come to the end of what is defective, but he finds that the more he does, the more disheartened and discouraged he feels. He is not able to make the repairs as fast as he is able to find new ones. At last he finds to his disappointment that every beam is gone, every rafter worm-eaten and decayed, the posts pulverized by dry rot, and the foundation cracked and tottering. There is no solid point to start from for making his repairs; no foundation to build upon. The restoration of the house to strength and beauty can never be accomplished; if it could, the expense would far exceed his financial means. His building only looks the worse for his having broken its superficial continuity. He has but revealed the corruption which he never can remove or repair. The only hope at this point is to tear down the house, lay a new foundation, and build the house the right way from the very beginning.

"Now does this describe your efforts and disappointments during the last few months?"

"Exactly," said Alonzo.

"And your case is hopeless if God leaves you to yourself. You cannot be saved. It is not that you cannot come and be the child of God if you wish to, but you cannot come because you do not possess the will to love Him.

"Now, this being your condition, you need a Savior. There is one for you. If you wish, you can come and unite yourself with Him. If you do, through His sufferings and death you will be freely forgiven. The responsibility, the liability so to speak, for the past will be cut off. The Savior assumes all that burden and you may go free. By coming and giving yourself up wholly to Him you bring your past life to a close, and begin a new spiritual life, which comes from union with Him. The burden of past guilt is like a heavy chain which you have been dragging along until it is too heavy to be borne any longer. Union with Christ cuts it off at a blow, and you go forward free and happy, forgiven for all the past, and for the future enjoying a new spiritual life which you will draw from Him. In a word, you abandon your own character; with the feelings with which a man would abandon a wreck, and take refuge with Jesus Christ who will give you the power to receive Him and obtain for you forgiveness for the past and strength for the future, by means of His own righteousness and sufferings."

Alonzo had heard the way of salvation by Christ explained a hundred times before, but it always seemed a mystery to him, as it always does to those who have never seen their sins and felt the utter hopelessness of their moral condition. As long as man is deceived about his true character, he desires no Savior. But when his eyes are opened by God and his deep seated corruption's are exposed, when he feels the chains of sin holding him with a relentless grip in hopeless bondage, then he finds that utter self-abandonment and humble reliance upon a Divine Redeemer whose past sufferings ransomed him, and who will supply new spiritual life to guide him in the future. He finds this prospect opens to him a refuge just such as he needs.

Alonzo dropped, face on the ground, and called out for the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth to forgive his evil, heal his wretched heart, and take over his life in every area. He saw now that he was unfit, and the Master is strong, loving, and wise. He understood the feelings that the Ethiopian ruler must have felt as he had encountered the Story and Call of the Suffering Servant and desire to begin again engulfed him. Like the Ethiopian, he longed to make a covenant with Jesus through baptism, not simply because it was his "duty", but because he loved Him and wanted to lose himself in the One he so admired.

As Alonzo walked home that night, washed clean and "genetically" changed into a new creation, his heart dwelt with delight on the love of Christ to men in thus making arrangements for taking lost sinners into such a union with Him. His heart was full. There was no struggling to feel this love and gratitude. It was the warm, spontaneous movement of his soul which no struggling could have suppressed. He longed for an occasion to do something

to evidence his gratitude. It was evening, and he looked forward with delight to the opportunity of calling together his family to speak to God with him. He longed to tell his family about the new spirit of love which burned within him, regardless of the consequences.

As he walked along, his heart clung to the Savior with a feeling of quiet happiness. In former days, he thought he loved Him; now he knew he did. He saw "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," and the Savior whom he saw there was all in all.

When he opened his Bible, old familiar passages which had always seemed strange and unintelligible to him, shone with new meaning:

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God by our Lord Jesus Christ." "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, but the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Alonzo made greater efforts to obey God after this than he did before, but it was for a different object and in a different way. Then, he was trying to establish his own righteousness, so as to fit himself for heaven. He abandoned this altogether now, having hope only in Christ - undeserved mercy in Christ. He made great efforts to grow in grace and to do good to others, but it was now simply because he loved to do it. Previously, he made these efforts as an unpleasant but a supposed necessary means to a desired end. Now, he hoped to secure that end in another way, and he made these efforts because they were delightful on their own account. He was, in fact, a new creature - a "new creature in Christ Jesus"; changed not by his vain efforts to establish his own righteousness, but by the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, altering fundamentally the desires and affections of his inmost soul.

If your aim is secretly or openly to fit yourself by your good deeds for the approval of God, and thus to obtain a pardon for your sins; the farther you go and the greater the effort you make, the more discouraged and disheartened you will be. Your progress in discovering the corruption and depravity of your heart will keep far in advance of your success in correcting or repairing it. The hopeless task may as well be abandoned in the beginning as at the end. Come first to the Savior. Give up yourself, your character, and all the hopes you may have founded upon it. Unite yourself with Christ as the branch is united to the vine; to be sustained by one common vitality. This will of course be a new life to you, a spiritual life without which all excellence is superficial, all hopes of eternal happiness baseless, and all real peace and enjoyment unknown.