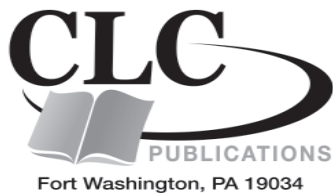


The
Higher
Christian Life

W.E. BOARDMAN



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*This edition of the original 1858 book
has been edited for today's reader.*

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Foreword

WHEN W.E. Boardman's classic *The Higher Christian Life* appeared in 1858, it became a catalyst for revival, influencing many great Christian leaders.

His fresh approach to holiness from a Reformed perspective and his emphasis on the sanctifying power of the Spirit caught fire. This vital book can stir believers today to experience a higher dimension of Christian living in faith and the power of the Spirit, soaring like eagles as God intended.

William Edward Boardman (1810-1886), a Presbyterian minister, wrote this book after serving in pastoral ministry and with the American Sunday School Union (1852-1859). Beginning about 1870, Boardman became a leader in the holiness movement and, along with others, helped to found the Keswick movement, which advocated the "rest of faith," claiming the promises of God, and appropriating the power of Christ.

After reading Boardman's book, A.B. Simpson received a sanctifying baptism in the Spirit in 1874. His understanding of the life-transforming power of the indwelling Christ became one of the vital principles on which he founded The Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Other noted leaders of the holiness movement influenced by Boardman include:

- Andrew Murray, a highly respected South African Dutch Reformed leader, who became a Keswick leader and writer on the abiding life in Christ.
- Hannah Whitall Smith, who in the 1870s published *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* on the “Higher Christian Life,” which she also called the “life of faith.”
- R. Kelso Carter, an associate of Simpson and the writer of the hymn “Standing on the Promises.”
- A.T. Pierson, who wrote on the higher Christian life, became a leader in the Keswick movement, and became interim preaching pastor at Metropolitan Tabernacle after Spurgeon’s death.

Whether one calls the experience the filling of the Spirit, the baptism in the Spirit, the crisis of sanctification, the second blessing, or another term, Boardman explains it as a higher plane in Christian living. He encourages believers to receive Christ as our sanctification by faith, not by our own efforts or legalism.

Though written a century and a half ago, the concepts of this book are just as valuable to Christian growth today.

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PART ONE

What Is the Higher Christian Life?

*And of His fullness we have all
received, and grace for grace.*

— John 1:16

*As you have therefore received
Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.*

— Colossians 2:6

1

The Book People Want

Prepare the way for the people.

— Isaiah 62:10

SOME Christians live their whole lives under condemnation and don't know any better. They've always had doubts and think they always will. They lead lives full of ups and downs, and assume that is the best God has for them in this world.

Occasionally they reach a peak in their spiritual walk, and through the trees they catch a glimpse of the River of Life, gleaming in the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, and are filled with gladness. But soon they find themselves back in the lowland of unbelief, wrapped up in a fog of doubt, chilled by the mist of this world's concerns.

To someone like this, a book which could show them the brighter side of the Christian life—a higher Christian life, an experience of Jesus that would make them like a fruitful vineyard on a southern slope—such a book would be hailed as good news from God!

Most Christians believe there is something more to the Christian life than what they have found but are afraid to go after it, thinking it would be too hard to attain. Like the

Israelites in the wilderness, they see the land of milk and honey offered by the promises of God, but they believe the bad report of the spies that there are “giants in the land.”

Some are afraid of going off the deep end. They may have heard teaching about “perfection” and “sanctification” that conflicted with the Bible, or they may have known people who lost their faith after getting caught up in some wild, extreme practice. The ghost of these grim errors rises up to frighten them from taking even the first step in that direction. A book that could clearly point out what Scripture teaches on this subject, and show it in plain contrast with what is condemned by the Bible, would be as welcome as an angel from heaven.

A few believers—probably more than we know—are convinced that they need something more, but they don’t know what. They are like a man in a dark room, feeling around for the light switch. His outstretched hand finds only a cold, dead wall, and he recoils from it with a chill, only to reach out again and withdraw once more in disappointment. Such struggling Christians would devour a book that could show them the right way, while also pointing out the false roads they have to avoid to gain the true path.

Some have already found the way and are enjoying the journey. They are on the sunny side, and would love to read a book about how to progress further in this blessed Christian life and how to grow in Christian service. More importantly, they would be thankful to have a book like this to give to others, without having to warn them against false theories, wrong terms, or evil tendencies.

Here is a book seeking to set forth the truth with the clear, fearless ring of a trumpet that makes no uncertain sound.

The phrase I have used to describe this experience is the same as the book's title, "the higher Christian life." My second choice for a title would have been "full trust and full salvation." I say full *trust*, rather than full *faith*, because faith has been so philosophized into a hundred shades of meaning and become so overused that it has lost its significance. Trust is perhaps the only other word that conveys the original meaning of faith. *Jesus is the way; full trust the means.* Therefore, to inspire confidence in Jesus, my aim is to describe—clearly, fully and simply—the relationship of Jesus to the soul and of the soul to Jesus.

In the use of terms I have tried to follow the Bible, which is not overly strict. Some may object, for example, to the use of the phrase "second conversion"¹ to describe this higher Christian life. Of course, *it is not intended to convey the idea of a second regeneration*, but of a deeper life attained after conversion.

Anyone who thinks such an experience is beyond the reach of all Christians should test it by the Word—the only infallible criterion. If the Bible does not warrant it, reject it! But if it stands the test of Scripture, then seize it as a treasure greater than rubies. And if you believe this truth, but choose to use other terms and methods, remember that while truth is one, methods are many. If truth is taught and received, it is of very little consequence whether our own comfortable theories and terms are associated with it or not. If it is God's truth, fitly spoken, and has His blessing, it will stand; otherwise let it fall to the ground.

Throughout this book, the main points are illustrated with examples of those who have experienced the higher Christian life. Some are from the pages of Scripture, but

many are from more recent history. The Bible often teaches its truths through example. In God's Holy Word sin and holiness pass before us in living forms, rather than in abstract teachings. Truth and falsehood are first lived out and then recorded for the world's instruction. The mercies and judgments of God are set before us in striking examples: the rescue of Noah, saved amidst the desolation of a world drowned in the flood; Lot, delivered from the devouring fires which reduced Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes; the children of Israel safely crossing the Red Sea on dry land, while Pharaoh and his host sank as lead in the mighty waters.

Men and nations are raised up, live out their lives and die, and their history is written to stand forever. Lessons taught in this way traverse the globe, never to be forgotten. There is no treatise on faith like the simple story of Abraham's life, none on patience like the story of Job, none on courage like the story of Daniel, none on meekness like the life of Moses, none on zeal like the life of Paul. This is God's method, and it is the best.

Let's take a look at a few examples of the higher Christian life, or full trust and full salvation. We will begin with one from hundreds of years ago: Martin Luther.

2

Examples from History

Lift up a banner for the peoples.

— Isaiah 62:10

WHEN, as a young boy, Martin Luther carried the firewood for his father's iron refining furnace, who would have thought that God designed him to become the bearer of fuel for the great fire of the Reformation, to refine the hearts of millions and recast the shape of the world? As yet, however, this boy's heart and life were as hard and impure as the ore of the mine, and only the fires of Divine love could refine it. His mother spoiled him, but his father was severe and never spared the rod.

We know that he was no angel in his youth, for he himself tells of being whipped fifteen times in one day in his first school. Such discipline did not beat grace into his heart, though it may have beaten learning into his head. He made brilliant progress in study and at twenty years old received his bachelor of arts degree at the local university.

Up to this time his heart was in the world. His father planned a law career for him, and he probably looked forward to the honor and prestige of that line of life. But God had other plans. Just as he was about to take that critical next

step that would be the first in a lifelong profession, his friend Alexis, as close to him as a brother, was murdered.

When Luther heard about this tragedy, he hurried to the spot and saw it with his own eyes. Often before, his conscience had urged him to consider a religious life in preparation for death and judgment. Now, as he gazed upon his friend's bloody body, he thought of how Alexis had been summoned from earth—prepared or unprepared—with no advance notice. He asked himself the question, “What would become of me if I were suddenly called away?”

Taking advantage of the summer break from his studies in A.D. 1505, Luther, now twenty-one years old, paid a visit to Mansfeldt, his hometown. A plan was forming in his heart to pursue a life of devotion to God, and the only such life known to him was that of a monk. But while visiting his family, he told them nothing—either because he had not made a final decision or because he dreaded his father's displeasure. The fire burned in his heart, but the young man kept it hidden, even from those who cared most deeply about him.

On his way back to the university, he was overtaken by a terrible storm. When a thunderbolt struck the ground next to him, Luther fell to his knees, thinking his life was over. He later wrote of this experience that he felt surrounded with the anguish and terror of death, and vowed that if God would deliver him from this danger, he would give up the world, and devote himself to His service.

As he rose from his knees, he began to question what he should do next. How could he, with a polluted soul, appear before God? He must become holy—and the only way to do that, he decided, was to become a monk.

This event in his life has been compared to that of Saul

of Tarsus on the Damascus road, but there were broad differences between the two. Saul was relieved of his blindness after only three days, but Luther went through months of monastic groping before his eyes were opened to receive the Lord Jesus as his All in All. Like the man Jesus healed of blindness, Luther's eyes saw only "men like trees, walking" at the Master's first touch, and not till afterwards, when touched again, did he see clearly (Mark 8:22-25).

It was a terrible blow to his parents and a great surprise to his friends when Luther entered the monastery at Erfurt. And, as it proved in the end, it was a painful and fruitless attempt to gain salvation. Only Christ can pardon sin, but Luther had yet to learn that. He believed the only way to become holy was to shut himself up within holy walls, among a holy brotherhood, and perform holy rituals. God designed him to be the foremost Reformer of the church, and so He led him through all the religious practices of the church, to show him their emptiness and vanity.

But in this instance we want to look at Luther's experience as a Christian, rather than as a Reformer—to see how the Lord brought him out of bondage into liberty, out of church rituals and the ways of his own devising to take the Lord Jesus as his All in All.

Buried in the monastery at Erfurt, he worked in vain for two terrible years, seeking salvation. He became emaciated, downcast, hopeless. The first to shed any light on Luther's dark and troubled mind was Staupitz, head of the Augustine order in Thuringia. He pointed Luther to the Word of God and the grace of Christ, giving him some hope. But his struggles continued, and eventually he was seized with an illness that threatened his life.

One day an elderly monk came into his cell, and Luther opened his heart to him, expressing his despair. The good old man pointed him to the Apostles' Creed, which Luther had learned in childhood and had recited thousands of times. But when the monk repeated to him the words, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," he added, "You must believe not merely that David's sins or Peter's are forgiven; the demons believe that. The commandment of God is that we believe *our own* sins are forgiven. St. Bernard says, 'The testimony of the Holy Spirit to your heart is: your sins are forgiven you.'

Luther believed, and joy filled his soul. He rose quickly from the depths of despair—and from the bed of sickness. From that time on, the forgiveness of sins was a living article in his faith and not a dead letter in the Apostles' Creed. He knew and was a witness to others that the greatest sinner may be forgiven. But the great underlying principle behind that truth—justification by faith—was at this point still hidden to him.

The noble Staupitz and the good old monk knew as much as Luther had now learned, and more. And all this Luther himself might have known and yet remained a monk all his days. He might have taught all this the rest of his life, with the burning zeal of Paul and the commanding eloquence of Apollos, without causing the foundation of Rome to tremble, without even enjoying himself the blessings of full trust and full salvation. But God had greater things in store for him and greater lessons to teach him. The next step in his education was to be brought about not by circumstances or men but by the Word of God.

Luther had no Bible of his own. He had access to one in Latin chained to a stone pillar in the monastery (a striking

metaphor of the Bible in that day: locked in a dead language and shackled to a cold post; and yet, thank God, His Word is never truly dead or bound). Another Latin Bible could be read at the university library, and a third was available to read in a brother monk's cell. But a Bible all his own was a prize beyond his wildest dreams.

And yet God gave him one! Staupitz brought him a Latin Bible and presented it to him to be all his own. What a treasure! He eagerly read it, delighted by its pages. Though he didn't know it at the time, he would be used of God to free the Bible from the chains of Latin (which only the monks could read) and put it in good, honest German, bringing light to millions of dark souls. Even before he translated the Word of God, he learned from it the fullness of the blessings of the gospel of peace and became the foremost Bible teacher in the world.

Soon he was ordained as a priest and not much later was appointed professor of philosophy at the University of Witten-berg. Outside of his professorial duties, he began giving lectures on the Bible—first the Psalms, then Romans. It was a new thing, and his lectures were clear, warm, stirring, eloquent and powerful. His fame spread; students gathered to hear him. Later he was appointed a doctor of theology, sworn to defend the gospel—the work designed for him from the first. But though Luther had come to faith in the forgiveness of his sins, his full freedom of soul through faith in the Lord Jesus was yet to come.

One day, while studying Romans for a lecture, the words of the prophet Habakkuk, as quoted by Paul—"The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17)—struck their light through his soul. Here was the great principle of life and righteous-

ness. He saw it, grasped it, rejoiced in it and began teaching it with all the force and fire of his eloquence and genius. There were applications of this great principle which he was not yet able to see and apply to the practices of the church or to his own life, but justification by faith was no longer a hidden truth, and it infused new life and power into his soul and teachings.

Not long after this he was selected to go to Rome on church business, where he saw for himself the corrupt and hypocritical practices of the church. On the way he became seriously ill and his sins troubled him, just as they had before. But in the midst of it came the words of the prophet, "The just shall live by faith," with a new force which filled him with the light of heaven.

While in Rome, he was almost overwhelmed by the conviction that the "holy" city would pass away and lie in ashes. But the same words came to his relief and comfort again: "The just shall live by faith." The church will live even if Rome dies. Christ lives, and the gates of hell will never prevail against His church.

Still, Luther had not yet learned to take the Lord Jesus for his sanctification. He had one process for the forgiveness of sins, faith, and another for the pursuit of holiness, works. He believed in Jesus and trusted that because Jesus had died and risen again, his sins were all freely forgiven. But he longed for a holy heart and life, and sought them by human effort, not by faith. He had accepted Christ for his salvation but not for his sanctification.

At Rome he visited every sacred place, hungering and thirsting after righteousness. One day he sought to get a special blessing by climbing a stone structure called "Pilate's

Staircase” on his knees. As Luther crept painfully upward from stone to stone, he suddenly heard a voice of thunder in the depths of his heart: “The just shall *live* by faith.” These words had often before told him that the just are made alive by faith, but now they thundered through his soul the truth that “the just shall *live* [be kept alive] by faith.” Through faith they are kept by the power of God and make progress onward and upward; by faith their sins are forgiven, and their hearts and lives are made holy.

When this word echoed with new force through his soul, it is no wonder that Luther sprang to his feet on the stone steps up which he had been crawling like a worm and fled from the scene of his folly. This is how he described his experience:

Then I felt myself born again as a new man, and I entered by an open door into the very paradise of God. From that hour I saw the precious and holy Scriptures with new eyes. I went through the whole Bible. I collected a multitude of passages which taught me what the work of God was. Truly this text of St. Paul was to me the very gate of heaven.

The experience of Luther has been recounted at length because the great Reformer stands at the forefront of Protestantism. Luther was not just a special case—a unique instrument of God uniquely endowed. As far as salvation is concerned, Luther stood with us completely. He was a sinner, as we all are. Faith was the same thing for him as it is for us, and Jesus is the same to all believers in all times.

Notice that Luther’s first understanding was the forgiveness of sins; and the last and greatest was the full understanding of Christ as his sanctification. The same progression occurs in the experiences of other believers, as we will see.

Some may argue that Luther, having been raised in a pre-Protestant Catholicism, had a second shell to break through after he was out of the first, so that his example is not valid. So let's look at another example from the ranks of those in the full light of Protestantism, three centuries after Luther's time.

D'Aubigne

J. H. Merle d'Aubigne (1794-1872), a noted author and church historian, was born into a French family in exile in Geneva, the home of Calvin and the stronghold of the Reformation. Calvin himself is no better representative or nobler champion of the reformed Christianity than d'Aubigne.

While studying at the university in Geneva, he was converted through the ministry of the Scottish nobleman and evangelist Robert Haldane. Haldane had a reputation for talking about the Bible, which seemed very strange to d'Aubigne and his friends, who didn't think the Bible was relevant. The students met Mr. Haldane at a private home and heard him read from Romans about the sinfulness of man. D'Aubigne had never been taught this doctrine and was astonished to hear of men being sinful by nature, but he was clearly convinced by the passages read to him.

He said to Mr. Haldane, "Now I do indeed see this doctrine in the Bible."

"Yes," Haldane replied, "but do you see it in your own heart?"

It was a simple question, but it hit home, pricking his conscience sharply. He realized that his heart was corrupt, and knew from the Word of God that he could be saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

The conversion of d'Aubigne was decided, clear and unmistakable, and he wrote of it in these explicit words: "I had been seized by the Word of God. . . . I believed in the divinity of Christ, in original sin (the power of which I had experienced in my own heart) and in justification by faith. I had experienced the joys of the new birth." However, he was to experience an even deeper work several years later in Germany, which he described just as explicitly.

After his conversion, d'Aubigne completed his course at the university at Geneva, was ordained and went to Germany. There he pursued further academic achievements, first at Leipzig, then at Berlin, and spent four years as the pastor of a French church at Hamburg. Several years had passed before he came to the point where the Lord gave him the final full knowledge of Jesus as All in All.

This occurred when d'Aubigne joined two former classmates and fellow converts at an inn in Kiel to begin a trip to Copenhagen. Steamboats were irregular, which meant they were detained at the hotel for a few days. While waiting for the steamboat, they devoted part of their time to reading the Word of God together.

D'Aubigne was at that time in the midst of a deep spiritual struggle, though he had not revealed it to his friends. Instead he had confided his doubts to a Bible professor at the university in Kiel. D'Aubigne says, "I asked him to explain several passages of Scripture for my satisfaction. The old doctor would not enter into any detailed solution of my difficulties. 'If I succeeded in ridding you of them,' he said to me, 'others would soon arise; there is a shorter, deeper, more complete way of annihilating them. Let Christ really be the Son of God to you, the Savior, the Author of eternal life!

Be firmly settled in His grace, and then these difficulties of detail will never stop you! The light of Christ will chase away all your darkness.’ The old doctor had shown me the way: I saw it was the right one, but to follow it was a hard task.”

D’Aubigne and his friends began studying Ephesians at the inn at Kiel and eventually reached the end of the third chapter. As he read verse 20, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,” d’Aubigne realized that this was the truth he needed to claim.

“This expression fell on my soul as a revelation from God. ‘He can do by His power,’ I said to myself, ‘above all we ask, above all that we even think—no, *exceedingly abundantly* above all!’ A full trust in Christ for the work to be done in my poor heart now filled my soul.” The three friends knelt down and prayed for d’Aubigne.

“From that time forward,” he concluded, “I understood that all my own efforts were of no use; that Christ was able to do all by His ‘power that works in us’; and the habitual attitude of my soul was to lie at the foot of the cross, crying to Him, ‘Here am I, tied hand and foot, unable to move, unable to do the least thing to get away from the enemy who oppresses me. Do all Yourself. I know that You will do it. . .’ I was not disappointed.”

No Claim to Perfection

One thing should be noted about the experience of Luther, the great Reformer, and d’Aubigne, the great historian of the Reformation: neither of them claimed to have achieved a state of perfection. In fact, Luther specifically denied it, and d’Aubigne recorded the denial in his historical

writings. Yet for both of them, the core of their experience was that they took the Lord Jesus as their righteousness for their sanctification, just as they had earlier taken Him as their righteousness for their justification. Both justification and sanctification are included in the term “righteousness of God” as used by Paul; in both, Christ is complete to the believer, and the believer is complete in Christ.

Both Luther and d’Aubigne hungered after righteousness and true holiness; both struggled in vain, until they gave up their own way, taking the Lord Jesus as THE WAY. God taught them the sweet truth uttered by the beloved disciple, “This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4). By faith, by *full* trust in Jesus, both gained a higher Christian life.

To these examples many more could be added of those who gave themselves wholly to Jesus and took Jesus wholly to themselves, and found the lasting sunshine of full salvation—and yet, like Luther and d’Aubigne, never claimed to achieve perfection. The same testimony is found in the memoirs of many great believers, such as Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards and his wife Sarah, W.H. Hewitson, Robert Murray McCheyne, and others.

In every case the experience has been the same: a long and severe struggle, sometimes years after conversion, which finally ended with receiving Christ in His fullness. Even if, as in the case of Jonathan Edwards, the moment of the experience is less distinct, the same fullness of faith and the same results are clearly seen.

We have no space even to list the many great saints throughout history who claimed this experience, much less to record their experiences in detail. They may differ in the use

of terms and in the theology of the experience described, but aside from this, they agree in the essentials of the experience.

Those mentioned up to this point represent Calvinism, but many Wesleyans also testify to this experience, including Benjamin Carvasso, a minister to condemned prisoners in Australia in the early 1800s; William Bramwell, an early Methodist revivalist; Hester Ann Rogers, an early Methodist leader put under house arrest for her faith; and Mary Fletcher, an 18th-century Methodist preacher. They opened the eyes of thousands to the higher Christian life and inspired tens of thousands to seek it.

When all is said and done, there is no essential difference between the Wesleyans' experience and those of Luther and d'Aubigne, Baxter and Edwards. All began with a conviction of guilt and sooner or later came to a sense of sins forgiven, blotted out in the blood of Jesus. Then later, in every case, they began hungering and thirsting for true holiness, and after many struggles, found in Christ the end of the law for sanctification.

This unity of experience is apparent if we place any two of them side by side. For instance, here are the testimonies of Hester Ann Rogers (a Wesleyan) and d'Aubigne (a Calvinist) in their own words, describing their views and feelings at the moment that their struggles ended with full trust in Jesus.

D'Aubigne

After describing his conversion and subsequent struggles, d'Aubigne testified how he received spiritual counsel from his professor at Kiel and then prayed with his two friends after reading the Word. The two last verses of Ephesians 3 touched his heart, and he later wrote, "When I arose, in that inn-room at Kiel, I felt as if my 'wings were renewed as the wings of eagles.' From that time forward, I understood that my own efforts were worthless; that Christ was to do all by His 'power that worketh in us'; and the habitual attitude of my soul was to lie at the foot of the cross, crying to Him, 'Here am I, tied hand and foot, unable to move, unable to do the least thing to get away from the enemy that oppresses me. Do all Yourself. I know that You will do it. . . .' I was not disappointed."

Hester Ann Rogers

After describing her earlier experience of sins forgiven, followed by a period of heart-searching, doubting, fear, and efforts for true holiness, she told of the moment when she saw Christ to be All in All, and received Him. She wrote, "Lord, my soul is delivered of its burden. I am emptied of all. I am at Your feet, a helpless, worthless worm; but I take hold of You as my fullness! Everything that I want, You are. You are wisdom, strength, love, holiness: yes, and You are mine! I am conquered and subdued by love. Your love sinks me into nothing; it overflows my soul. O, my Jesus, You are All in All! In You I behold and feel that all the fullness of the Godhead is mine I am now one with God . . . and God is all my own."

Like d'Aubigne, Mrs. Rogers described this experience as not merely temporary but as the habitual attitude of the soul at the foot of the cross. She expressed her feelings more fervently and poetically than d'Aubigne, but in all that is essential there is not a single difference. Both were self-emptied and prostrate in the dust at the foot of the cross; both accepted Jesus as All in All, and found themselves more than conquerors through faith in His name.