



My Conversion to God

by *Harry A. Ironside*

(Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.)

From a very early age, God began to speak to me through His Word. I doubt if I could go back to the first time when, to my recollection, I felt something of the reality of eternal things.

My father was taken from me, before his features were impressed upon my infant mind. But I never have heard him spoken of other than as a man of God. He was known in Toronto (my birthplace) to many as “The Eternity Man.” His Bible, marked in many places, was a precious legacy to me; and from it, I learned to recite my first verse of Scripture at the age of four. I distinctly recall learning the blessed words of Luke 19:10, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” That I was lost and that Christ Jesus came from heaven to save me were the first divine truths impressed on my young heart.

My widowed mother was, it seems to me, one of a thousand. I remember yet how I would be thrilled as she knelt with me as a child and prayed, “Father, keep my boy from ever desiring anything greater than to live for Thee. Save him early, and make him a devoted street-preacher as his father was. Make him willing to suffer for Jesus’ sake, to gladly endure persecution and rejection by the world that cast out Thy Son, and keep him from what would dishonor Thee.” The words were not always the same, but I have heard the sentiment times without number.

To our home there often came servants of Christ—plain, godly men, who seemed to me to carry with them the atmosphere of eternity. Yet in a very real sense, they were the bane of my boyhood. Their searching, “Henry, lad, are you born again yet?” or the equally impressive, “Are you certain that your soul is saved?” often brought me to a standstill; but I knew not how to reply.

California had become my home before I was clear as to being a child of God. In Los Angeles, I first began to learn the love of the world and was impatient of restraint. Yet I had almost continual concern as to the great matter of my salvation.

I was but twelve years old when I began a Sunday school and set up to try to help the boys and girls of the neighborhood to a knowledge of the Book I had read ten times through, but which had still left me without assurance of salvation.

To Timothy, Paul wrote, “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). It was this latter that I lacked. I had, it seemed to me, always believed, yet I dared not say I was saved. I know now that I had always believed about Jesus. I had not really believed in Him as my personal Savior. Between the two, there is all the difference that there is between being saved and lost, between an eternity in heaven and endless ages in the lake of fire.

As I have said, I was not without considerable anxiety as to my soul; and though I longed to break into the world, and was indeed guilty of much that was vile and wicked, I ever felt a restraining hand upon me, keeping me from many things that I would otherwise have gone into; and a certain religiousness became, I suppose, characteristic. But religion is not salvation.

I was nearly fourteen years old when, upon returning one day from school, I learned that a servant of Christ from Canada, well known to me, had arrived for meetings. I knew, before I saw him, how he would greet me; for I remembered him well and his searching questions, when I was younger. Therefore I was not surprised but embarrassed nevertheless when he exclaimed, “Well, Harry, lad, I am glad to see you. And are you born again yet?”

The blood mantled my face; I hung my head and could find no words to reply. An uncle present said, “You know, Mr. M—, he preaches himself now a bit and conducts a Sunday-school!”

“Indeed!” was the answer. “Will you get your Bible, Harry?”

I was glad to get out of the room and so went at once for my Bible and returned after remaining out as long as seemed decent, hoping thereby to recover myself. Upon my reentering the room, he said kindly, but seriously, “Will you turn to Romans 3:19 and read it aloud?”

Slowly I read, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” I felt the application and was at a loss for words. The evangelist went on to tell me that he too had been once a religious sinner till God stopped his mouth and then gave him a sight of Christ. He pressed on me the importance of getting to the same place before I tried to teach others.

The words had their effect. From that time till I was sure I was saved, I refrained from talking of these things, and I gave up my Sunday school work. But now Satan, who was seeking my soul’s destruction, suggested to me, “If lost and unfit to speak of religious things to others, why not enjoy all the world has to offer, so far as you are able to avail yourself of it?”

I listened only too eagerly to his words, and for the next six months or thereabouts no one was more anxious for folly than I, though always with a smarting conscience.

At last, on a Thursday evening in February 1890, God spoke to me in tremendous power while out at a party with a lot of other young people, mostly older than myself, intent only on an evening’s amusement. I remember now that I had withdrawn from the parlor for a few moments to obtain a cooling drink in the next room. Standing alone by a refreshment table, there came home to my inmost soul, in startling clearness, some verses of Scripture I had learned months before. They are found in the first chapter of Proverbs, beginning with verse 24 and going on to verse 32. Here wisdom is represented as laughing at the calamity of the one who refused to heed instruction, and mocking when his fear cometh. Every word seemed to burn its way into my heart. I saw as never before my dreadful guilt in having so long refused to trust Christ for myself and in having preferred my own willful way to that of Him who had died for me.

I went back to the parlor and tried to join with the rest in their empty follies. But all seemed utterly hollow, and the tinsel was gone. The light of eternity was shining into the room, and I wondered how any could laugh with God’s judgment hanging over us like a Damocles’ sword suspended by a hair. We seemed like people sporting with closed eyes on the edge of a precipice, and I the most careless of all, till grace had made me see.

That night, when all was over, I hurried home and crept upstairs to my room. There, after lighting a lamp, I took my Bible, and with it before me, fell upon my knees.

I had an undefined feeling that I had better pray. But the thought came, “What shall I pray for?” Clearly and distinctly came back the answer, “For what God has been offering me for years. Why not then receive it, and thank Him?”

My dear mother had often said, “The place to begin with God is at Romans 3 or John 3.” To both these Scriptures, I turned and read them carefully. Clearly, I saw I was a helpless sinner, but that for me Christ had died and that salvation was offered freely to all who trusted in Him. Reading John 3:16 the second time, I said, “That will do. O God, I thank Thee that Thou hast loved me, and given Thy Son for me. I trust Him now as my Savior, and I rest on Thy Word, which tells me I have everlasting life.”

Then I expected to feel a thrill of joy. It did not come. I wondered if I could be mistaken. I expected a sudden rush of love for Christ. It did not come either. I feared I could not be really saved with so little emotion.

I read the words again. There could be no mistake. God loved the world of which I formed a part. God gave His Son to save all believers. I believed in Him as my Savior. Therefore, I must have everlasting life. Again, I thanked Him and rose from my knees to begin the walk of faith. God could not lie. I knew I must be saved.

From *Holiness, the False and the True* by H. A. Ironside (originally published in 1912; now in the public domain). Henry (Harry) Allan Ironside (1876-1951) was an American Bible teacher, pastor, and author. Authored more than 60 volumes as well as many pamphlets and articles on Bible subjects. For 18 of his 50 years of ministry, he was pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. He is buried in Purewa Cemetery, Auckland, New Zealand.