



Cathy NEWTON

How God Saved a Preacher's Kid

My father entered his first pastorate two months before I was born. For the next 30 years or so, he pastored churches in New York, Maine, and Pennsylvania. I never knew any other life than that of a "preacher's kid." Being raised almost literally "in church," I became gospel hardened. I wasn't exactly grateful for the godly influences in my life. The world looked pretty good to me, and by the time I was twelve I'd developed a charade to help me get out into that world without my parents' knowledge.

My father started out as an Arminian, meaning that he believed that all sinners have the free will to choose Christ or reject Him. An Arminian rejects the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. This sort of belief system allows a sinner to accept Christ's salvation if he chooses to, and to later choose to make Christ Lord of his life...or not. Although my father later came to understand and embrace the Doctrines of Grace, I think he subconsciously kept some of his Arminian thinking. I say this because I don't remember him ever confronting me about the possibility of my not being truly saved once I made a profession of faith.

I had made a profession of faith, and had been baptized at the age of twelve. I remember clearly making a conscious decision to do this in order to deceive my church. I wanted people to think I was saved so that they would leave me alone about the whole matter. All along I knew I was not saved, nor did I wish to be. Of course, I did not want to go to hell, but I was willing to take my chances because I did not want to live the Christian life. So I began a path of deception that would last another eight years.

During my teen years, I developed a strategy of acting "Christian" around Christians, and being my own wicked worldly self around everyone else. At church, and around church people, I was the model Christian Teen: a good example to the younger children, substitute Sunday school teacher, camp counselor, etc. At school, on the bus, and around my non-Christian friends, I lived the worldly life I loved.

The deception was harder to pull off at home. I made life miserable for my mother by insisting on having my own way and making my own decisions. I didn't want my parents telling me what I could or could not do. I listened to rock music on the school bus and at my friends' homes, and one song in particular became my theme: "I don't care what you say anymore, 'cause it's my life...." I pushed all the rules past the limit, and getting caught only made me try to do the same thing again so as to not get caught. During these years my parents never once doubted my salvation; nor did they ask me why my life did not match my words.

Although they tried to discipline me for my rebellion and lying, they never questioned my testimony.

In spite of my lust for the world and its passions, I had a great love and respect for my father and never wanted to do anything to hurt him or his ministry. I believe God used this love and respect to keep me from many a sin. I wanted the world so badly, but I couldn't figure out how to get it without hurting my father. At times I got a taste of it when I was sure my father would never find out, but it wasn't enough.

The summer I was 16, I was asked to be a counselor at a Christian youth camp. I could not refuse without "blowing my cover" and confessing that I was lost. I spent a miserable week with twelve 9-12-year-old girls, most of whom had come to camp for the first time. Everyone thought I was having a rough time because I'd never been a counselor before, but I knew that the real reason was that I had nothing of any spiritual value to offer them.

During the next year, I did a lot of soul searching. I began to be seriously concerned about my spiritual state. I tried to make myself believe that maybe, after all, I really was saved. I had "prayed a prayer" at the age of six; maybe I would be all right in the end. I tried to ease my conscience about this by saying if-I'm-not-saved-please-save-me-now prayers. I confided my struggles to a friend, who promptly told our Christian school principal. She talked to me privately, sharing some Scripture with me that she felt would "give me assurance." She told me that I really was saved, but that I only needed assurance.

I read those verses, but I was not "assured." Deep down I knew this was because I still did not want to fully yield my life to Christ. I was doubling up on my school work in order to graduate a year early, and looked forward to getting out from under my parents' roof so I could "cut loose." I dreamed about all I could experience once I left home. The only problem I saw was that my father wanted me to go for at least one year of Bible college. The only college I thought I could attend was the same one my older brother and sister attended. How could I do my own thing there, with them to see and write home about me?

The summer after my high school graduation, I was again asked to be a camp counselor at the same Christian youth camp. Although I again agreed rather than confess to my deception, this time I knew I'd have to deal with myself. I cautiously approached another counselor, a good friend who was older and wiser. I was half afraid she'd try to "assure" me as my principal had, and half afraid she'd blow the whistle on me. She did neither. When I told her I thought I might not be saved, she wisely (and rather bluntly) said, "Well, you'd better go pray and find out!"

She could not have given me better advice. Only the Holy Spirit can give a true witness to a sinner that he or she has been converted. I did pray that day, and often throughout that week. I believe I was converted then, though not everything changed overnight. During the next three years I began to grow more in the knowledge Christ. The growth was slow and gradual, but it was there. I prayed a lot, and read my Bible a lot. I did go to Bible college, where I learned a lot more from fellow Christian students than from any of my professors.

There was one problem--I still had not come clean before my parents and my church. The deception was still there, though it had changed form. I was embarrassed and ashamed to confess that big lie to all those people. I wanted to think that it was okay for them to think I really was saved when I was baptized at age twelve. After all, I was saved now, and had been baptized; did it really matter that much that the baptism had come first?

The Bible college I attended was Presbyterian. In my Bible doctrine class, a debate came up over infant baptism vs. believer's baptism. Not recognizing myself as the hypocrite I was, I argued fiercely for believer's baptism. Not until I transferred to a Brethren college where I attended a believer's baptism service did I realize my own need to obey God in this matter. The more I prayed about it, the more I was convinced that I needed to go back to my home

church and make this right. I talked to my parents about it, confessing to them the lie I had been living, and asked my father to baptize me again.

Going before my church was not nearly as hard as I had expected it to be. In fact, it was a huge relief and a source of great joy. People I'd known who no longer attended my church brought their families to witness my baptism. This meant a lot to me because I had always been considered the "big sister" to their children, and I had not always been the good example to them that their parents thought I'd been. I was thankful for the opportunity to tell these children the truth myself and to apologize to them publicly for failing to point them to Christ as I should have.

At the same time that the Lord dealt with me concerning my baptism, He also showed me plainly another path He wanted me to follow. I was increasingly becoming dissatisfied with college, and was doing badly in all my classes. I had never really wanted a career, and couldn't see the point in continuing to pursue a degree in elementary education. My heart's desire was to be a stay-at-home wife and mother. The only problem I had was that I didn't know anyone I really wanted to marry. After much prayer, it became clear to me that God wanted me to quit college, go home and live with my parents, and wait for Him to bring me the man He wanted me to marry.

In May 1986, I came home from college. Along with the baptism issue, I needed to explain to my parents why I was not going back to college. They accepted this better than I thought they would. Other people were not so readily accepting, but one couple saw the hand of the Lord in this and decided to help me out. Largely through their arranging of things, Tom Newton and I got together. We had our first date in June, and were married the following November. Several people protested to my mother that we had not known each other long enough, but she reminded them of Isaac and Rebekah, who had never met until the day they were married. She said that God had clearly brought us together, and that He would see us through.

And He has seen us through. We have been happily married for almost 19 years (at this writing in 2005) and God has blessed us with eight children. From the beginning He knit our hearts together with a desire to serve Him with our lives and our service. The path He picked for us has not been an easy one. I've often failed Him and have had to learn many bitter lessons the hard way. But God is faithful, and I trust Him to finish the work He has begun in me.

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).