

The Testimonies of Francis & Badriyyah Florentino

Part 1

The Reconciliation of a Former Persecutor Turned Friend

By: Francis Florentino

With Introduction by: Ryan Ringnald

Introduction:

Below is the wondrous story of Francis and Badriyyah Florentino: their respective Christian salvations, subsequent tribulations, and marvelous reconciliations. We believe that both sides of their account must be heard in order to properly understand what great things the Lord has done for them, thus we are publishing their written testimonies in a 2-part series. We encourage all to read Francis' testimony first, "The Reconciliation of a Former Persecutor Turned Friend", followed by Badriyyah's testimony, "Setting the Captives Free: The Testimony of Badriyyah Florentino's Refusal to Deny Jesus Christ". One will quickly see that the Florentinos have endured much hardship since their conversions and subsequent marriage - Badriyyah has unavoidably and separately been stripped of her husband and children for the sake of Christ and a good conscience, only to win them again, whereas Francis has fallen into sin almost to the point of no return, only to be inexplicably recovered from the snare of the devil, to the praise of our great God. Both the Florentinos currently dwell in Texas with the Church of Wells, having their conversations in heaven, alongside a life of holiness in heartfelt obedience to all the known will of God, ever striving after His deserved glory. They are a blessing, I trust, to all true wayfaring saints that know them, and we pray that their testimony will be a blessing and edification to all.

One controversial issue that this testimony brings up is that of a wife leaving her husband in obedience to Christ. One might ask of the lawfulness of such behavior according to the Scripture. We believe that the answer is that in the right circumstance, such an act of leaving your unsaved spouse is not only lawful but is unequivocally necessary, lest the Lordship of Christ be defied. Badriyyah's situation, detailed in the following two testimonies, is one such impasse with all the proper conditions to demand that a wife lawfully leave her husband or be forced to deny her only Savior and King, Jesus Christ, who Badriyyah refused to deny. As you will see, in seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, Badriyyah was forced to flee from the sinking ship of her all but fallen head, into the ever-blessed will of Jesus Christ, her preemptive Head, lest they both fall into the everlasting ditch of sin. As it is written, "*Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the*

ditch;” “... for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage;” “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Mat. 15:14; 2Pe. 2:19b; Rom. 6:16)

Time would fail me to share all the exceeding surplus of Scriptural proof for such doctrine, but I will share a solid passage justifying the biblical lawfulness that all people have to obey Jesus Christ in superseding precedence over a rebellious earthly head. 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 & 15 says, *“But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him...But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.”* This passage clearly teaches that the spiritual condition of the believing spouse is to always remain the same; he or she is to be obedient to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and if the unbelieving spouse is pleased with this invariable spiritual authority in the believing spouse's life, then, he or she can fulfill their desire to continue to dwell with their believing spouse. NOTE: the condition of the believing spouse's obedience to Jesus Christ is never changed or altered. One question remains: is the unbelieving spouse pleased to continue with the believing spouse as the believing spouse lives a life surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ?

The specific application of this passage to Badriyyah's case is simple. Francis and Badriyyah were warned by the Lord Jesus Christ to flee from NYC (as the reader will see), lest they be overtaken in the pollutions therein. Francis apostatized from this revealed will of God and thus fell into the depths of sin for months. Yet God's will never changed, thus Badriyyah, being compelled, lawfully obeyed her ultimate Head, Jesus Christ, in coming to Texas rather than sink into the abyss of rebellion with her fallen head. It was her reasonable service to honor her Maker's will; therefore, God, being honored preeminently as King, has not only given her both children back, but saved the soul of her formerly ensnared husband from hell. He is now a blessed husband to her, leading her in the paths of righteousness to the glory of his presently reconciled Head, Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord! Please see Sean Morris's document, “The Doctrine of Judgment,” for a much more thorough Scriptural account of the Biblical legality of obeying Jesus Christ above all.

*Sincerely desirous for the glory of Jesus Christ,
Ryan Ringnald*

I. Background

I grew up in a Hispanic household in the Bronx, NY with both my parents and my two brothers. My parents emigrated to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic and though they lacked any true faith they identified with Roman Catholicism. The majority of my mother's side of the family lived in the same apartment building as I did and also shared the same beliefs. One of these beliefs was that just about everyone goes to heaven. Since this was the case I was assured that I'd make it to heaven, especially because I was deemed "the good one" in the family. No matter what I did I was always seen as the "good child", even while I was listening to vulgar music, cursing, and having sinful relationships. While all of this was going on I didn't even think about God or eternity, and I definitely didn't ever consider that there was a possibility I could be going to hell.

I loved the world and everything the world had to offer. I was addicted to sports, music and the vanities of this life. My favorite sport was basketball followed by football and baseball. I would spend hours on a consistent basis watching games and following headlines of games I had missed online. But it didn't end there, if I wasn't watching or reading I was out playing. Next came my music, I listened to rap, hip-hop, r&b, merengue, bachata and salsa. All of these are common in the neighborhood I grew up in, however they are tightly intertwined with messages of lust, fornication, murder, etc. As for the vanities of this life, I strove to be successful in school. From early on I was always pushing for good grades in order to get a good job when I got out of school. In high school I graduated in the top 5% of my class and used that as a platform to get into one of the best schools New York State had to offer. This eventually carried over into the majority of my years in college (wherein my blatant sin/rebellion reached new heights); and into my career.

In my first job after college, for over a year I sat beside one particular co-worker who eventually introduced me to her sister, Badriyyah; little did I know at the time she would be my wife. She began working at the company I was a part of in March 2009, but we didn't communicate much until a few months later. Though upon seeing her I was attracted to her physically, when the lines of communication were opened I really began to like her and we eventually began dating. Sometime in the summer of 2009 I met her other sister, Liynaa'a (Lena) and Liynaa'a's husband Matthew. By 2010 Matthew and Liynaa'a had been saved through the preaching of two pastors from the Church of Wells. Although I'm not exactly sure when, they began sharing the Word with Badriyyah, and she eventually invited me to some meetings.

II. Awakened, Seeking, Saved, and Baptized

In the beginning I didn't want to be a part of these bible studies/meetings. Matthew began by showing me how the movies that were being released were wicked. The one he touched on in

particular was Transformers. That bothered me a little because that was the movie my then-girlfriend and I had gone to see on our first date. I can see now that this was the Lord using Matthew to prick my conscience not only concerning the movies I was watching, but also my sinful relationship with Badriyyah.

A few months had elapsed, by that time Badriyyah and I had gotten engaged. I continued going to the meetings, but as I stated, I didn't take them seriously. By this point, I was just going in order to do what I could to please my fiancée. That is, until I met Sean Morris – one of the pastors from the Church of Wells. I sat down with him to speak in Matthew and Liynaa's apartment in Manhattan. At first, in my heart I was mocking and scorning the conversation, but by the end I was gripped by the things he was speaking. I had gone to catholic school from 2nd grade through high school and never heard anything about salvation, being born again or anything else he spoke on for that matter. Everything began to make me wonder if I could really go to hell, and in the coming days I was getting increasingly terrified that that was where I would spend eternity.

After this initial interaction with Sean, Matthew and I went for a walk up to Best Buy in Union Square. While there, Matthew asked me if I was trying to seek God in order to keep Badriyyah or to know Him for myself. I told him that initially I was just trying to keep my fiancée, but now I was actually seeking to know God. After this conversation I began to seek God through reading the bible and prayer simply to know Him. Every day on my way home from work I would use the time to cry out to God to save me, to speak to me, not to let me perish; everything an awakened sinner would desire. My commute from Westchester to Brooklyn would take up to 3 hours in the evenings with the rush hour traffic, and the Lord would meet with me in my car, frequently bringing me to tears as I begged and pleaded with him. One day as I was driving home something amazing happened. On this particular night, I had a vision while I was driving down Pennsylvania Avenue in Brooklyn. Everything became pitch black and in the top left corner I saw a bright light that softly whispered to me "Si me quieres, cojeme"; which is Spanish for: "if you want me, take me". When I came out of this, I was several blocks down the road apparently having moved with traffic seamlessly, even through traffic lights. When this happened I was so taken back that I didn't know what to think, I even began wondering if this had actually happened. After a couple of days I began to believe that the Lord had saved me. However, I couldn't bring myself to tell anyone about this for fear they'd think that I was lying. Until one day when I was able to share the vision with Badriyyah, but not that I believed I had gotten saved.

A few weeks later, Sean came back to NY for another visit. When he came back, he was asking how things were going and I'm not sure why, but I told him about the vision and my belief that I was saved. He proceeded to search out my heart with questions and examples from the bible and confirmed that he believed the Lord had done a work in me. The next day, he came over to our apartment in Brooklyn and conducted a bible study with Badriyyah and I. He spoke with us concerning counting the cost to follow Christ and what it means to be a true Christian, not

some counterfeit “Christian” that uses the title, but lacks the zeal of the Holy Ghost. Soon after the meeting, we were baptized.

III. Changed, Married, and Preparing to Move

When I was saved, I was being utterly convicted about living with Badriyyah, since we were not married. Being that I was financially responsible for the apartment, we thought at first that if we slept in different rooms this would suffice. Yet, we did not have peace even with that living arrangement and I packed up all my belongings and moved out of the apartment. When I left, I had nowhere to go but to my parents’ house. While there I felt like some sort of alien, all the things they were doing were of no interest to me anymore – they were listening to music and carrying on with conversations laden with foul language and sexual jokes (bear in mind that these were things that I not only took part in before my conversion, but enjoyed doing with them). My family noticed and questioned me as to what happened – my younger brother even asked “What’s wrong with you? Why don’t you curse anymore?” Though I wasn’t bold enough to tell him then, the answer was: because I’m a Christian.

The changes I experienced in my walk with the Lord weren’t only at home; they were also evident at work. I was employed as a Human Resources Specialist at a local casino. While there, I would spend every chance I could get reading my bible. I would immerse myself so much in the Word at work that under the mask of some ambiguous “departmental policy” my manager asked me to stop. Had I not been saved I would’ve given up there, but the Lord led me to a King James Bible website that I’d pull up several times a day. Many days I felt as if I were dying at work being surrounded by all manner of blatant sin/rebellion, and being able to read the Word on this website literally kept my soul alive, even during the most terrible of days at work. I became so dependent on the bible, and the life it gave me, that I wanted to print out the entire bible, or at least whatever book I was working on, and hide it among all the other stacks of paper I had on my desk. In addition to this website, I thought I had found another true Christian at work. She would always come and speak with me about the Word; however, as time passed I began to see she was a false convert. I was only able to make this determination by the fruit (Matthew 7:16a) she was bearing. Sadly, some of these fruits consisted of consistently lewd conversations, and provocative apparel, which are not of the Spirit, but of the flesh.

During the time wherein I was living with my parents, the Lord began to break me of carnal affections for Badriyyah and I began to love her passion for the Lord. She often provoked me to share what the Lord had been showing me and would share with me also. In doing so we were adhering to the command Paul gives in Hebrews 3:13, calling us to exhort one another daily. As these interactions with one another continued, I began to believe that it was the Lord’s will for us to be married, for the sake of both of our souls (as you will surely see in the coming

pages). With this Word from God and a willingness to obey it, on January 31, 2011 we went to City Hall and were married.

A few months later, after several failed attempts at finding a true church, we began to realize that we needed to unify ourselves with the small body of Christ the Lord used to save us. The Lord showed us that having been recently converted, we were as infants trying to survive in the “wilderness” among “wolves”. We were in the midst of a city known for its riches and nightlife, where profanity and immorality were openly encouraged. Where partaking in all the fruits of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21) and running away from anything related to the Lord and righteousness was not only common place, it was expected. Although we had grown up there our entire lives, we had something we didn’t have before – an awakened conscience and spiritual eyes to see all the iniquity abounding. The Lord was speaking to us mightily and for the sake of our souls we had to flee – *“Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession be unclean, then pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the LORD, wherein the LORD’S tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the LORD, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the LORD our God”* (Joshua 22:19).

Badriyyah and I had spoken quite often about moving to Texas to be with the brethren, but my job was a main reason for our delaying. Prior to my conversion I enjoyed my job. All of the lights on the casino floor, the authority I was given; it was a place where all my friends wanted to work or at least hangout. However, after the Lord pulled me out of spiritual darkness, I began to utterly hate this job. It became the source of a huge internal conflict – it was my flesh verses my spirit. Though I was pursuing the Lord at work as mentioned earlier, I was constantly around foul language, greed and everything else that is at enmity against God. All the while I would try to keep my eyes fixed on God, but was being tempted to do these things. It became clearer and clearer that I had to leave this job in order to preserve my soul and spiritual wellbeing. 2 Peter 2:6-9 recounts the reasons behind Lot having to leave his place of comfort and familiarity (which is why it was hard for me to leave this job) - *“...And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)...”* I ended up quitting my job on June 25, 2011; this enabled me to make all the necessary preparations to move to Texas. Earlier that month brethren from Texas had come to NY, and were still there. They were willing to help us move and drive down with us on or around July 15th, which was the target date for my family to get out of New York City.

IV. Chastened and Hardened, Snared and Backslidden

When I quit my job we had reached “the point of no return” regarding this move. I had literally forsaken all to follow Christ – my family’s financial security, my family of origin, really everything that had previously mattered to me before my Savior took preeminence. God was in

the forefront of my life, I knew that He was Creator of all things and all things were in His power. However, I was not sensitive enough to spiritual matters to understand God's divine will or see when I was failing the Lord. That said, I could not tell when it was His chastening that was coming upon me or the buffetings of Satan.

A prime example of this (to the grief of my soul) would be the dealings I had with my brother-in-law. We had a tumultuous relationship guided by flesh and pride more than anything else. Our relationship was grievous before the eyes of the Lord and I'm sure would have come to physical fights had not the hand of God restrained us. There are several causes that I can identify now for such actions and thoughts including: 1) a lack of headship to keep us in line and accountable before the Lord (I didn't know what being accountable before God was at the time), 2) a lack of charity and failure to mortify the flesh **daily** on all accounts. We would constantly argue and would really never be able to truly walk in the light as a unit, let alone resolve anything until much heartache, anger and frustration had come to pass first. *"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"* (1 Cor. 3:3). As you can see we were walking after the flesh, being driven by emotions rather than inquiring of God for instruction and wisdom. This led to the only legitimate course of action that any father would take with his son that's doing wrong, and that was to correct me. However, due to my lack of understanding I could not see that it was in His love and mercy that these things were happening. I absolutely despised the chastening of God in ignorance. We are explicitly called not to be foolish in this way in several places in the bible, the one that comes to mind being Hebrews 12:5: *"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him."*

To this point the Lord had been merciful toward me and my various follies. In hindsight, it's clear He was feeding me with milk, and not with meat: for I was not yet able to bear it (1 Cor. 3:2). Even so, back then I thought I was past this infancy and knew something, but I learned the hard way that I knew nothing. After all these interactions with my brother-in-law I believed that I knew how to walk with God, and that he didn't. Yet as that same infant that would try to eat solid food too soon – when the time came to be tested, to see if I would be steadfast to the end - I choked. When this happened the Lord had to chasten me sore, my flesh and ego were getting out of control. If he hadn't, it would have been evident that he didn't love me (Pro. 13:24), but bless His name, He did and still does!

The way in which the Lord brought forth the rod of correction was broken down into two instances, I believe. The first instance was my in-laws being unable to move as soon as I was. I agreed to wait (with hesitation in my heart) for them so we could all move together. In the ensuing weeks, my wife and I were able to find shipping and storage for our belongings and sent almost everything we had to Arlington, TX (where the church originated). We were living in an apartment with not much more than an air mattress on the floor, but we had great joy

knowing that soon we'd be with the brethren. Though I was very happy at the thought of joining the brethren, I still began to doubt whether this move would be possible.

As more time elapsed, the second instance came to pass. I have a 6 year old step-son, Ariel, that my wife had approximately 2 years before we met. When my wife spoke to his biological father, he was absolutely enraged and determined to prevent us from moving. He used family court to issue an order preventing my step-son from leaving the state of NY without his written consent, or a court order. It's clear now that my response should have been putting on the full armor of God. *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"* (Eph. 6:12). Notwithstanding, I began to look at my circumstances rather than God. I did not properly see myself as Ariel's father and spiritual mentor, but merely as his friend. Therefore I was not taking my responsibility of raising him as my child seriously (in light of the Scriptures, that is). Due to this, when the court issued its ruling that Ariel was to stay in NY, it was a blow to my core. I dropped my hands in this fight and could not defend myself against the wiles of Satan any longer; I began to waiver and to doubt God. James 1:8 states that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways, and I was most assuredly becoming just that. I knew God was real and I knew that he created all things, but at the same time I was thinking that this was out of His control. Quickly, the time I spent truly seeking and communing with the Lord greatly began diminishing. I was being overtaken in unbelief and my heart was departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12). An initial evidence of this is my liquidation of all my financial accounts (401k and savings) so we could have some financial stability once we were in Texas. I was not seeking first the kingdom of God, and therefore could not believe that He would add my earthly needs to me (Matt. 6:33).

In August of 2011 my in-laws (being explicitly led of the Lord) were able to pack up and leave NY, this coupled with the relationship we had, caused me to despise them both. I deceived myself into believing I was more worthy of moving first, when in fact I didn't deserve anything (1 Cor. 8:2). I was enraged beyond measure, but kept this to some degree within myself. I took the form of a Pharisee and had a clean outward appearance but was absolutely filthy within, having an evil heart from which *"proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man"* (Mark 7:21-23). In this hardened estate, I even helped my brother-in-law pack up his belongings and load them in his car. I thought that I was being a better Christian by doing this all the while hoping and waiting for the day that he arrived in Arlington; hoping that he would be rebuked harshly by the church for leaving us. Had I not been so consumed with my own pride I would have taken heed to Matthew 7:1-5, *"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."*

At the time they left, my wife was 3 months pregnant, we were alone in NYC, I didn't have a job, and we didn't even have a bed in our apartment. I believe the Lord allowed all these things: Firstly, to break us (possibly more so myself) of all the cares and comforts of this world, and secondly, because of my backslidden estate before God at this time.

By this time, I was not trusting in the Lord but rather was relying on myself and thus tried to take matters into my own hands. I decided that leaning on something tangible rather than the grace of God would give me the comfort and results I was looking for. I convinced myself that having our things shipped back would help ease many issues we were dealing with, so I forced myself to ask my grandmother for money to have our belongings shipped back to New York. I was essentially making it impossible to be able to say "the Lord is mine helper" (Heb. 13:6); the truth of the matter was that I both didn't want Him to be my helper, nor did I believe that he could be.

Truly, the Lord was calling us to be without all of our earthly comforts and be prepared to leave at anytime (as he instructed the Israelites in Exodus 12:11). However, my heart became exceedingly hard, to the point where I was convincing myself that there was a limit to God's power. I was not believing that He is God nor that he would reward me had I set myself to seek Him whole heartedly (Hebrews 11:6). Meanwhile, my wife was thirsting as much as ever to obey God. Thus, as time continued to pass, my wife and I began drifting apart. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, "...for *what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*" She was light, just wanting to obey God; and I was darkness. I was concerned with doing the things "a man is supposed to do" all the while not walking, but running off "the straight path" into the broad way that leads to destruction.

After 4 months of being unemployed, our finances dwindling and soaring credit card debt, we agreed that I needed to get a job. After spending countless hours vainly searching for jobs online, I was able to secure a position at a very reputable hospital in Manhattan and yet I refused to acknowledge the Lord in this gift, or in anything else for that matter. I did not believe the Lord owned the cattle upon a thousand hills anymore (Psalm 50:10), let alone that He'd sell one to provide for my needs.

Once I began working I was enthralled with making as much money as I could and picking up my career where I left off. This included days that I would work 12 – 13 hours for the purpose of possibly securing lasting employment. At the time, God was the least of my priorities, and the impending birth of my first (biological) child was my main concern. I was set to do everything I could to make sure I was offered a permanent position in this hospital so that I could use it as a launch pad for my career and "take care" of my son. I was convinced that if I could secure this job I could provide everything my family needed; e.g. health insurance, steady income, etc. "*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my*

helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6). I failed on all points here, my thoughts, conversation...everything about me was fueled by covetousness. I saw what I lacked tangibly and looked for my own way to amass these treasures on earth. Godliness with contentment was a concept for fools in my marred state and gain was the only way to live and be happy.

In the midst of all this I thrust my wife to the “backseat” whom I was called to love “... *even as Christ also loved the church...*” (Eph 5:25). Rather than submit to that calling, I focused on work and the child she was carrying. I convinced myself that I still loved my wife, but hated the Spirit of Christ that was abiding in her. Our marriage was deteriorating so quickly that very soon we would hardly even speak – this due to my wanting to talk about things at work and the lusts of my flesh, whereas she wanted to speak about the Word of God. By this point, I had fallen so far that I began to hate the Lord that saved me from darkness and hell, thrusting me into the light of God’s dear Son just months prior. I was murdering my wife in my heart, but the greater sin was my crucifying of Christ again and putting him to an open shame (Heb. 6:6).

This downward spiral continued for a couple of months. One stipulation I was forced to agree with when I took that job was only receiving pay for days I actually worked (including no pay on national holidays). Due to my own greed, I was convinced that I had to go to work or face losing a significant amount of money on my next check. “*For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*” (1 Tim. 6:10). I had fallen in love with money, sacrificing time so I could avoid losing a day of pay. One instance that comes to mind was on January 2, 2012. This was the celebrated day for the New Year and even the Director of my department asked me to take the day off, his reasoning was that it was a good day to spend at home with my family – particularly my wife. Regardless of what he said, I refused due to salivating at the prospect of making overtime pay all day. I drove in to work and all things seemed as normal as they did on any other day. However, when I left work I got into a car accident that caused over \$6,000 worth of damage to my car. My car was totaled, three cars were involved in the accident having little to no damage, yet my car was the only one having any significant damages which could have cost me my life. I didn’t have any major injuries, but had difficulty breathing for days due to the airbag hitting me. I called my wife right after and she began praising God for allowing me to escape the accident alive. Badriyyah shared with me that she believed this accident happened by God’s hand and that I should repent. Even so, while she was doing that I was cursing God for allowing this to happen, not to me but to my car. He had touched one of my other idols (this car) and I couldn’t forgive Him for that. Looking back I believe the Lord was trying to show me that at any moment my life could end, but all I was able to see was that I didn’t die. It seems my backsliding knew no bounds.

V. Wife Flees, Husband Persecutes

Later that same month, my wife approached me stating that she believed the Lord was opening a door for us to move in May. I gave a false impression that I would consider moving again, but was really ignoring all she said although I knew prior to my fall that it was the Lord's will for us to move. A few weeks later my son, Jeremiah, was born and my idolatry reached new heights. My wife and older son were not a remote concern for me. I would often times come home and ignore both of them and run to see him, even if he was asleep. I believed that I could not function if I didn't see him. Things had gotten so bad with chasing after Jeremiah that I would get frustrated and angry with my wife when she would take him in order to feed him – all because he was being taken out of my arms. Even now, as I consider these things, my heart is vexed with grief.

Three months later, on April 9, 2012 my wife told me that we had to leave NYC because it was killing her spiritually to live there. I responded by telling her that she needed to wait until I found a job. This was something that I had stated to my wife on numerous occasions previously, but I never took it seriously. I may have only actually looked for a job 2-3 times and applied to about as many jobs. After continuing the conversation for some time (via text), I told her she can go ahead if she needs to but she'd have to leave Jeremiah with me. She, like any mother, was shocked by this and pled with me for all of us to go together. At this point, I was so heavily opposing this that I threatened to take custody of my Jeremiah should she attempt to take him. She couldn't believe I said that and continued to plead with me. I didn't apologize or try to take my threat back and by the time I got home from work she and both my sons were gone.

Proverbs 17:12 says *“Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly”*. When I realized what happened I became as a raging lunatic, searching for her everywhere I thought she might be. I went to her grandmother's house, called her sister and her mother and even sought help from Ariel's biological father. Due to him having a court order that she could not take Ariel out of the state, I tried to get him to have a warrant put out for her arrest (FYI - she did not at any point violate the family court order by leaving NYC with Ariel). He wouldn't help me and after hours searching for her I went home, defeated and destroyed. Several days had gone by and I hadn't heard from her, I couldn't eat, sleep or really function at all. I experienced a dramatic change in my mindset, and now even began to hate my wife outwardly. *“But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh **in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes**”* (1 Jn. 2:11). Already blind to all things spiritual, it is with no amazement that I couldn't see my multiple failures as a husband, specifically a “Christian” husband. 1 John 3:8 says, *“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning”*. I had reverted back to having an overtly and outwardly sinful heart, trampled underfoot the blood of Christ, and became a fierce persecutor of Jesus Christ and His people. I had fallen from the grace I had once known and was in an unclean state before God.

“I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.” 1 Corinthians 6:5-8

Once my wife left New York, to my deepest dismay, I followed through on my threat and hardened myself against my own conscience. I went to family court and filed a petition for custody of my son, in order to legally force Baadriyyah to come back to New York. I was told at the court that since I didn't have an address for her, they couldn't serve her and therefore no case could be scheduled. A few days later my wife responded to my e-mails and was trying to explain to me that she wanted me to come with her and obey the Word of God for the sake of my soul. I lied saying that I was making attempts to come there, but didn't know where to go. After continuing this charade, I asked to meet with her in person in Texas. She told me to come, and I got on the road the same morning, court petition in hand in case things didn't work out. I drove day and night only having slept approximately 30 minutes; the majority of the time I was driving I was devising a plan wherein I could find a way to escape the state with my son. I arrived in Dallas at about 3 pm the following day and could not get in contact with her. I believe the Lord showed the church that at the very least, I had come to Texas with evil intentions in my heart. I spent that night in a hotel and immediately got back on the road to New York. I was more enraged than I had ever been, everyone that I spoke with on the phone during that drive was hearing me cursing my wife and detailing how I'm going to get my son and have her arrested. All this was in addition to slandering, shamelessly, the church and making threats of physical harm against them.

“They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them?” Psalm 64:5

I arrived back in New York on a Monday night and immediately began searching for a way to find her address so I could serve her. I exhausted every legal avenue I could surmise, and to my darkened surprise, I found the house where she was staying. I was told where it was and I had all manner of evil intentions, including breaking into the house in order to get information on the whereabouts of my son. However, I still faced the challenge of serving her. When this hurdle came up, I began looking for a lawyer in hopes that they could do something to help me. I scheduled several paid and free consultations, but was having some difficulty in narrowing down my choices. I had one final “in person” consultation that I needed to complete and he convinced me that he cared about my case and not my money (I was deceived). At this time I even came to the point of doubting if there really was a God, but that didn't stop me from crying out on my way home and saying “God, if you're real have Badriyyah contact me”. I got home and after some time contemplating if I should hire this lawyer, forgot about my plea. The next day I was getting ready to make an early morning stop at the attorney's office so that I could officially hire the lawyer, however, an hour before I left the Lord answered that prayer

and Badriyyah called me. I was so taken aback by the fact she called me (which I didn't deserve) that I was contemplating not going to my appointment with the lawyer. I began to plead with my wife asking her why she'd do all these things and then I heard my son crying in the background – I immediately assumed the worst. *“The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes” (Prov. 21:10)*. Shortly thereafter Badriyyah told me that I needed to repent and come to Texas, that was enough to set me off. I began making my way to the car and headed out to the lawyer's office. During that meeting I signed off on the contract, paid him thousands of dollars I had borrowed, and made sure he got to work as soon as possible.

As time progressed I became more and more incensed with the Church of Wells and God Himself. It seems like a whirlwind took hold of me and by the time it passed, I was left dazed and confused. I began to openly profess to friends and family “God cannot be real if this was happening to me”. Many of those who heard me say this took a step back and told me not to go that far. Even those who did not have any inclination or softness toward spiritual matters had more light than I did. An old proverbial expression makes me afraid for such like persecutors of true Christians, “If you are weary of your life, persecute the Christians.”

Beyond that horrible and foolish (Ps. 53:1) profession, I also wrote horrible lies about my wife and the rest of the church. I wrote as detailed of a summary of events as I could, and when my lawyer “tweaked” these documents I did not hesitate to approve any changes. This included my own willful referring to Christ as “her god” – I shamelessly denied and denounced the name of the Christ that had so recently set me free. At this time I was abounding in fruits – but they were the fruits of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). My backslidings continued and I began to make threats of physical harm against the congregation of this church. I had murder in my heart and consciously on my mind. My heart was as that of the Apostle Paul before conversion, *“And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4)*.

At one particular hearing, my lawyer was able to convince the judge to allow us to serve my wife through a legal technicality. This forced Badriyyah to come back to New York on May 9 for the next hearing, or have a warrant issued for her arrest. On that day I got to the court early and about 25 minutes before the doors opened I saw my wife come out of a car with my son and some girl I had never seen. I began speaking roughly, telling her if she had just spoken to me none of this had to happen. I really convinced myself that I was something and that I had the power to control things from that point forward (Gal. 6:3). Over the course of this hearing, my wife stood firm using God as her defense. At the same time I was rejoicing within myself because she was making herself sound as crazy (from an antichristian viewpoint) as the documents my lawyer and I submitted to the court said she was. When it was my lawyer's turn, he began further making a case against her mental health and berated her for not having received higher education.

When it was all said and done, I was given over to the lusts of my own heart (*Ps. 78:18, 29-31*), and awarded temporary custody of my son via the court system. I believed that I had gotten custody of him as payback from God for her taking him away from me. I was elated to see him and to hold him again, but there was still something missing; something I didn't understand. I tried to analyze myself and what it could possibly be, but I drew a blank. I couldn't see that it was the Lord. My wife was granted visits (every Saturday from 10am-6pm); this was when the Lord began working on me in ways that I was incapable of detecting.

She had to endure constant travel between New York and Texas (funded by the church and terribly taxing on her body). In the beginning, I was so set against God and His people that I didn't want her traveling companion with her (a sister). I was also convinced that my wife and the traveling sister were trying to kidnap my son and that she was cheating on me, all without a cause. Even with my fall from grace and my hard heart, the Lord was still using my wife to soften me.

VI. Prayer Avails, Heart Softens, Persecution Ends, Reconciliation Begins

Week after week, I believe the Lord was working through my wife. The fallow ground (*Hos. 10:12*) of my heart was slowly starting to be broken up. One weekend in particular my wife noticed that I had some discoloration on my right hand. I ignored it and attributed it to odd shading under a tree. This soon began to spread over the rest of my arm and beyond. I began getting scared about what this was; even in my state the Lord had shown me that it was a judgment from Him. To this day, I'm not sure what this skin condition is exactly (it could be as serious as cancer or possibly something else), but bless the Lord if this is my "thorn in the flesh" (*2 Cor. 12:9*) to keep me abased and cleaving to Him!

After about 2 months of having custody of my son and this skin condition worsening, I was truly reaching the end of myself. I didn't know what to do anymore. My wife continually tried to set up meetings between myself and people from the church. One weekend I declined a meeting with Ryan Ringnald (a pastor, the only one I had never met), but the following weekend, my wife set up a meeting for me with another pastor of the church, Jake Gardner. This meeting was a very big deal as the Lord was there (I couldn't perceive it at the time, but I know now that He was). Jake by the Lord's grace, cast down every accusation and lie I fabricated in my mind. It was a blessing – I was so broken over my own wickedness that I sent a text to my wife asking her to ask Jake and Hannah for forgiveness on my behalf. After this conversation I had no reason left to stay in New York and be separated from my wife. I told my manager that I had to quit at the end of the week, told my family (with whom I was living with during this whole ordeal) that I was leaving, and I packed everything my son and I had and was on my way June 30th. My wife agreed to travel with me to Texas, and flew to Philadelphia where I picked her up at the airport.

Upon my arrival in Wells, even with knowledge of the things I had said and done, the members of the Church of Wells treated me no different than if I was someone who hadn't come against them so strongly. At first I didn't know if I should believe the sincerity and love I was seeing, but time after time they continually shared their earnest desire to see me reconciled with God. During the first week that I was in Wells, I was given a dream (I believe of the Lord) wherein I was in utter darkness – a darkness like I had never experienced before, but out of the darkness there was a square shaped opening from which a blinding white light began pouring out. I believe this dream was referring to the overwhelming spiritual darkness that I was living under in New York; with the light being God's presence via his saints. Shortly thereafter I had another dream wherein there was a large truck parked on a street and my only instruction was to hold on to this truck regardless of how painful the ride may be. I perceived this truck to be Christ whom God was telling me to hold onto no matter the cost, and I was open to seeking God again.

The Lord began striving with me, leading me to scriptures I had either never read or had completely forgotten about. He led me first to Jeremiah 2:4-12, which is my son's name and birthday (the Lord used my own idol to show me my faults). This passage was showing me the places I had failed as the head of my household. The very same day, I was led to read Acts 8:1, "*And Saul was consenting to his death...*" this scripture was terrifying. I saw that I was basically consenting to my own death by pursuing my wife and the Church of Wells with evil in my heart.* The next verse that was given to me was Acts 9:6, "*And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*" In reading this verse, the Lord showed me that although I believed I was coming to Texas to reconcile with my wife – I was in fact brought here to seek Him for mercy and to be reconciled to my God. Within the next day or so, I was led to read Isaiah 21:9, "*And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.*" I submitted this verse to the pastors and was given the interpretation that the Lord will need to destroy the idols I have hidden in my heart (Eze. 14:3-6) in order for Him to be able to reveal Himself to me. At this point I was resolved to seek and find the Lord. However, I was not seeking Him the right way.

*"*The Church's motto may be, he that assails me does it at his peril.*" (Matthew Henry)

I believed that if I did enough "good works" I would be forgiven, not taking into consideration Ephesians 2:8-9 "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*" Isaiah 66:3 states "*He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.*" I chose my own way and began to read my bible, pray and I went as far as fasting, I knew that Christians were supposed to do these things, so I went

forward with doing what I thought was right and not seeking counsel from the Lord.

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

Proverbs 14:12

I continued down this road until I heard some very fearful preaching from two of the dear brothers at the church. I saw that I was still on the road to destruction. Before this meeting I thought I was on the right track and deserving of being restored. I was deceived; I forgot what manner of man I was prior to my conversion (Jas. 1: 24) and just how depraved and wicked I could be. I was told several times that the sacrifices of God “are a broken and contrite spirit”, but did not fully understand what this meant until the Lord had utterly cast me down and given me no place to turn but to Him. The Lord was merciful enough to put me in that state that I might seek Him as I ought. I was finally able to see what I could not see for a long time, that truly in me dwells no good thing and shortly thereafter, I was given another dream that was recurring the entire night. In this particular dream it was dark again, but there was a voice saying “Come thou, make thee clean”. I presented this to one of the pastors of the church as well and he felt led to share 1 Corinthians 6:1, *“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?”* He felt led to share this to show the grievousness of my sins as well as how they could be forgiven (later in the chapter). I believe this was in God’s mercy to allow me to continue to be hopeful that he could in fact save me from destruction. He shared some other chapters such as 1 Corinthians 13 and 2 Corinthians 7 in order for me to honestly examine myself. That same night, the Lord met with me mightily and had given me a scripture that I was not remotely familiar with - Romans 6:6 *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin...”* Upon reading this verse in the morning, I was able to believe God’s word having saving faith in His gospel. I was anxious to submit this work I believed God wrought in my heart to Ryan, but he was hesitant to meet with me alone as there is safety in the multitudes of counselors (Prov. 11:14) and only by the mouths of 2 or 3 witnesses can every word be established (2 Cor. 13:1). I ended up meeting with he and Jake; at the end of this meeting, by His grace, unfathomable mercy, and the continual fervent prayers of this congregation the Lord turned away his wrath from me and restored my soul. This was confirmed by the fruit wrought in my life and heart as measured by the written word of God and is a work of holiness still active today!

I openly without hesitation, but with much sorrow, admit that I was the chief persecutor of this church. I was guilty of spreading many of the slanderous words and lies spoken against this church and urge you, I beg you! Please come or call the pastors of this church to speak about all forms of evil communications that have come against them unrighteously. The past and continual work God has wrought through these men and other members of the church only further proves that “this work be not of man but of God” (Acts 5:38-39). Matthew 7:16-18 declares *“Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot*

bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” Matthew 7:20 concludes, *“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”* My reconciliation with God, my renewed love for the brethren, and a burning desire to see everyone in my life saved are all “good fruit” according to God’s Word. This fruit could not have been borne from this tree (the Church of Wells) were it not a good tree, as a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

I pray this testimony will provoke all to love and good works, and that many will be pressed no longer to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness like I did, but rather a life of universal holiness before the living God.

The Testimonies of Francis & Badriyyah Florentino

Part 2

Setting the Captives Free: The Testimony of Badriyyah Florentino's Refusal to Deny Jesus Christ

By: Badriyyah Florentino

Important Note: Please read the Introduction to this 2-part series, and Part 1 entitled, “**A Former Persecutor Turned Friend**”, first, to have a more comprehensive understanding of this great testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Luke 14:26-28)

I. Pre-Conversion Background: A Rough Childhood

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” (Titus 3:3)

I did not grow up a Christian, nor was I raised to know the power and beauty of a thrice Holy God. I was raised by my grandmother in New York City in a heavily Roman Catholic Hispanic household. I believed that in order to be a good person, you must not lie unless you have to, don't steal, don't curse in front of adults, be faithful to good friends, respect older people, and drinking is okay as long as you don't drink every single day. Growing up, I was used to seeing much violence, alcohol, and drugs. At the age of about five to six I watched my uncle die bleeding to death from gunshot wounds. My grandmother and I were always moving after that, and every neighborhood just seemed to be worse than the last. I was so torn inside as a child that all I would like to do was play pretend, anything that would take me out of reality. All I knew was the vain teachings of a crooked and perverse world. I grew up very confused. I knew there was a God, someone listening to a broken child's prayers. The question was, where and how could I find Him? I started becoming serious about seeking after God when I was fifteen.

At this time I began being influenced by my Mom's religious practices. After a while I began to grow weary because I had still had not found God in truth. On the one hand, my grandmother

would tell me that one sin can take me to hell and that there was no hope for me after that. And on the other hand, my mom would oftentimes change her religious beliefs, and I believed everything she believed. My mom's beliefs seemed to be more fun to me because they didn't have the frightening consequences of hell. If I did badly in this life, I would have another try until I got it right. So I became fascinated with the mystical realm and witchcraft. I was excited about the thought that I could have power over my life and that I could possibly change my circumstances. The biggest impact of this in my life was when my brother and mother began practicing Santeria. At the time they believed that god was in this religion and that they could help defenseless people against the powers of hell and demonic activities. I began to believe that this may be my calling. I was deeply depressed looking for God in this false religion which required thousands of dollars for rituals and ceremonial purposes. All I saw was evil around me continuously. In this religion you can drink, curse, do drugs, hate, kill, and still be called "a good person." I had trouble with this, because though I knew nothing of the Lord Jesus Christ in truth, I strongly held on to one thing: that God was perfect. My family did not know that I was struggling within myself, completely opposing this god of witchcraft. My life was going downhill fast; I felt as if I would never find the true God. I did not know how to cope with my void, so I began drinking, being immoral, cursing more, and hating many people. I began pointing the finger at everyone's faults and seeing myself as a "good person." Little did I know I was no better than a murderer. I hated my life, and I wanted to die; I cried out for months and agonized at my state. I knew something was wrong...I just didn't know it was me.

II. The Great Change: Marriage with a Church and a Man

"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:16-17)

*"And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and **consorted** [United in marriage] with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few." (Acts 17:2-4)*

In the year of 2010, my life utterly changed. My sister Liynaa'a and her husband Matthew were Christians and part of a church called the Church of Arlington (now known as the Church of Wells). Previous to this time, the elders of this church had been traveling evangelists and had met Matthew and Liynaa'a in New York City. Matthew and Liynaa'a were saved through the ministry of these men and were desirous to move to Texas to be with the church, which God had established under these men's hands, in fullness. They took me in and began preaching to me. *After many years of confusion and false beliefs, I found my Lord, and His name*

was Jesus Christ. In November of 2010, I was saved - made a new creature - and baptized by a blessed man of God, Sean Morris, now one of the pastors of the Church of Wells. Sean also baptized my best friend at the time, Francis Florentino. We were baptized not only in the flesh, but into the baptism of the Spirit through salvation uniting us with these men and all true saints of God. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”.* We were both, now, under the spiritual authority of Jesus Christ through the church, but had not moved from New York to Texas yet.

On January 31, 2011, Francis Florentino and I were married and began our life together with Ariel (my son from a previous relationship). We were in communion with the brothers of the church and opened our home many times to brethren we had never met. However, these men had proven themselves to be godly, meek, broken, and zealous for God to save souls by the preaching of the Word. Brethren of the church would travel, call, e-mail, and use many means of communication to exhort and keep us united with the body of Christ. For the Scripture says in Hebrews, *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13).* We would fellowship with my sister and her husband in New York as well. Regardless of all this, we were suffering from spiritual deprivation in New York City; we were in desperate need of leadership and a biblical local church of true believers. Through much prayer and counseling, we and the elders through the Word and many undeniable confirmations believed it was the Lord’s will for us to move to Texas. Our move would enable us to have a proper covering and unity with a biblical church of God. Truly, the Lord gave us all many frightening dreams that we must flee the wicked city of New York, even as righteous Lot fled the city of Sodom.

III. Snared by the Devil in New York City

*“Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:18)*

In the month of May 2011, my husband and I were blessed to be expecting our first child together. In July, a leader from the church, Jacob Gardner, and several brethren came to New York with a burden from the Lord for us, as well as to preach throughout the city even as the Apostle Paul says, *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).* The primary burden was for our souls, and we unanimously agreed, having spoken about this for many months prior, that we must all leave New York City and join the congregation locally that month. My husband, in an effort to obey the Lord, quit his job and shipped all of our things to Texas within two weeks. My sister and brother-in-law were at first hesitant to leave in haste but in a moment the Lord provided all the

financial resources necessary to prepare them and their children to go to Texas. They ended up leaving in the month of August. Sadly, though my husband and I were ready in the month of July, I was taken to court by Ariel's biological father, and the court ordered me to stay in New York City to provide visitation rights to his father.

Months passed, and there was much fear and travail of soul on my part. I was aware that the commandment of the Lord was for us to leave this city of destruction. There was so much evil on every side - women wearing close to nothing, drugs, gangs, pornographic photos on huge billboards everywhere, cursing, and all forms of wickedness of which I cannot even speak.

More dangerous than this, my husband was beginning to get hardened to the Word through the deceitfulness of sin. Because iniquity was abounding all around, his heart was growing cold. I began pleading through the Scriptures with him, trying to exhort him to good works, but after many attempts I would get wearisome at times. *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works"* (Heb. 10:24). Several congregants would communicate with us and remind us of the calling in which we were chosen to walk - that we should walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). I struggled constantly with my own sin; I began to get aggravated with my husband. I was very young in the faith and without knowledge of the mercy of God. I failed to see how Christ walked, being hated of all men, but He reviled not against them, as it is written, *"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously"* (1 Pe. 2:23). I was not trusting in the Lord to deal with my husband as He saw fit. Romans 12:18-19 says, *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."* I did not know how to suffer all things and endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3). I was constantly trying to defend myself. This was a grief unto the Lord, and not becoming of a woman of Christ. It is written in 1 Peter 3:1-5: *"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands."* At the time I could not wrap my heart around these scriptures; they were a mystery unto me, a sealed treasure I could not attain. I needed a shepherd to guide me, to teach me what was becoming for a Christian woman - I needed the body of Christ.

Everything seemed completely against us being able to make it to Texas, but somehow the Lord gave me faith to believe in His goodness. I was tempted many times to fear being trapped in New York, but the Lord remained faithful still. The church had many prayer meetings and prayed throughout the nights on our behalf; we communicated as best as the circumstances allowed us. As the months went on I felt like I was dying spiritually. In fact I was; I knew very

little about the Lord and felt defenseless standing all but alone in a dark city plagued with sin. My husband began looking for work rigorously in New York. We had no money, a child on the way, and a four-year-old to care for, along with many other expenses. I began praying for my husband to find a temporary job just to cover us until the Lord prepared our deliverance. After a couple of months the Lord answered my prayers and my husband was offered a temporary job working in a hospital.

I continued crying out for my husband's soul and for our escape from this spiritual Egypt. We had made a vow to follow through with God and His people for better or for worse - I was afraid to disobey the Lord, for it is written in Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, *"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay"*. At this point my husband would not communicate with the church and was frustrated if I spoke of the Lord. Our marriage was suffering greatly; we began communicating less, he began working overtime, and his weekends were mostly spent with his family.

IV. A Disobedient Husband and a Great Void

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

In January 2012, I spoke with my husband and told him that I believed it was the will of the Lord for us to move in May 2012. He was not pleased and would not make arrangements to talk things through or make preparations for this. However, while praying one day I was given a strong word from the angel of the Lord which said, *"Touch not the unclean thing and be ye separate, saith the Lord"* (from 2 Corinthians 6:17). I didn't know what this meant at the time or where it was in the Bible, so I sought counsel from the Church and the Scriptures. Following this, I had a dream in which I was climbing a narrow tower. My husband was on my back and I was struggling to climb up, barely making it. My husband began mocking and tempting the Lord saying: "Go ahead; see if He can carry me and you". I began to cry out with a loud voice, "Lord, see Thou what he is doing tempting Thee. Thou God of Jacob, Moses, and Abraham, please help me". Then he fell off my back, and I was able to climb to the top of the tower. At the top of the tower I sat in a space that fit only me. I looked down, crying violently, and saw my husband in darkness on the ground with his eyes closed, but he was not dead. The scene then changed and I walked up to my husband and son Ariel sitting on a wooden bench beside an illuminated fruit tree. And that is the sum of the dream. I wasn't fully aware of what the dream in its entirety meant either, but I believed that the Lord was preparing me to be alone for a time. On February 4, 2012, I gave birth to our son Jeremiah. My husband quickly began

idolizing our son and highly esteeming him. It was then that our lines of communication were seared; he began isolating himself from me, and our marriage was at its worst.

I was absolutely miserable; my husband would buy things for me, and I looked for ways to cope with my distress. But I could do nothing to fill this great void. Though I would eat my favorite food, clean the house, do my hair, all these things that once kept me going, nothing mattered. No matter what, I was unhappy because I knew I needed God. I knew I needed, by faith, to obey Him. If it wasn't for God's merciful hand restraining me I would have been consumed in my sin. Luke 9:23-26 says, *"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."* Luke 9:62, *"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* I was getting by, merely by the skin of my teeth, by the Lord's grace.

V. My Exodus: The Flight from Spiritual Egypt

"Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well." (Exodus 2:15)

Although we were still living together, as I touched on above, we were not communicating as we ought to have been. He was working late hours at the hospital, and on April 9, 2012, I texted my husband a vital message after months of emailing back and forth about going through with the move. The text stated that I was dying spiritually and had reached my end, and that we could not stay in New York any longer. In our last email I had asked if he would agree to move to Texas upon which he had consented to move. Regardless of his agreement to move, he replied back in a text message stating that I could go but he would have to petition me to court for custody of our son Jeremiah until he was ready. This, meaning until he found a job in Texas and other arbitrary conditions were met. But, he refused help from me or the church in satisfying any of his conditions. Further, he was unwilling to leave his unsaved family though he knew it was the will of the Lord to do so.

I felt betrayed; this went against the long-standing and undeniable commandment of the Lord for us to leave, and against our marital vows. This was enduring willful sin against the light of God's Spirit and that in spite of the fact that Hebrews 10:26-27 says, *"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries"*. My husband was blinded to the fact that he was sending our family on a fast lane to hell. He refused to be

subject to the written Word of God and the church God had placed us under in saving us thereby (1 Cor. 9:2); he refused to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. He was not open to sound reason, the pleadings of his brethren, and he would not hear me. I had a choice to make, seek first the Lord and give him preeminence in my life or obey my fallen head - making me, by association, a partaker of his sin (Eph. 5:11; 2 Jn. 9-11; Rev. 18:4). On top of this was the fact that I was spiritually rotting and in need of spiritual nourishment.

Truly, I loved him very much but not more than God, who I refused to disobey. The Bible clearly teaches to put God before family and all things. There is nothing in the Word that calls someone to follow a fallen head spiritually above Jesus Christ, even if that head was for a time under the authority of Christ but has forsaken Him, like for instance, Satan; he was at one point a high ranking Holy Angel, but when he rebelled against the authority of God the angels who had formerly been under him had no right to join in his rebellion under pain of death! Well, they did and were sentenced to chains of everlasting darkness along with him (see more on scripture about this principal in the "Foreword" to this Testimony). Also, the Lord taught his disciples against following fallen leaders spiritually, saying, "*Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch*" (Mat. 15:14). Finally, it is written by the Apostle Paul in reference to a person's unrepentant unsaved spouse, "*But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace*" (1 Cor. 7:15). This passage is simply saying that if an unbelieving family member turns from the Truth or the revealed will of Jesus Christ, you are not bound to go with them contrary the Lord Jesus Christ, but have been called to peace which is in the will of God.

Therefore, in fear and trembling with sadness of heart, obeying Scripture, my conscience, the Holy Spirit, and the church, I packed up a few things and left the house with my two sons, Ariel and Jeremiah. There was a court order against me taking Ariel out of the state of New York. Therefore I had to do one of the hardest things I had ever done in my short walk with Christ. I had to deny myself and give up my firstborn son to his father. Matthew 10:34-39, "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*". I laid him upon a spiritual altar before God, even as Abraham laid down Isaac in Genesis 22:9, "*And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.*" I gave Ariel unto the Lord believing that if I honored God He would honor me in due time. 1 Samuel 2:30 says, "*...them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*" Matthew 6:33 further says, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

I called Ariel's biological father, who already knew of my heart to do the will of the Lord. He thought I was absolutely crazy for wanting God in such a way no matter the cost. I gave up my son, and my soul wept in secret places. I was comforted in knowing that this is the true walk of a Christian, namely, "*in all thy ways [to] acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths*" (Pro. 3:6). Did not Christ suffer many things in obedience to His Father? True men and women of the Bible freely gave of themselves, even their bodies unto death, that God might have preeminence and Lordship in their lives. That was all my desire, that Jesus Christ might fulfill His will in me. Philippians 3:7-9, "*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*" I left for Texas, by sight having lost my husband, whom I loved dearly, and my firstborn son, but not by faith (2 Cor. 5:7).

V. The Hot Pursuit of a Husband Gone Astray

"And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me?" (Genesis 31:36)

My husband was on a hot pursuit after me. He spoke with both of our families at this point about my leaving, representing me in the worst light. They were very displeased with me and quickly I lost almost everyone: kindred, friends, and dear ones. Though they forsook me, my brethren from the Church of Wells were with me in bonds through this trial and so was the Lord. Psalm 68:5-6 declares of the faithfulness of God to those that obey him: "*A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.*" They took me in when many were unwilling to stand up for righteousness, which is to follow the voice of Jesus. They cared for Jeremiah and me. During this time, my husband and I would communicate via email. I still pled with him to repent and to come to Texas that we might obey the revealed and formerly accepted will of the Lord and seek first his Kingdom as opposed to our own, together. He would not come, though, and greatly hardened his heart more and more to all sound reason. We, meaning the brethren and I, all loved him still and prayed continuously for him and Ariel to be delivered from the bondage New York City had become.

In the month of April, my husband was aware that my unsaved sister was coming to Texas to visit my younger sister Liynaa'a, also a born again, blood-bought saint and member of the Church of Wells. My unsaved sister, who I still love, betrayed me, met with him, and offered to help him serve me court papers to take full custody of our son Jeremiah. She embraced his slander against me without even asking my side of the story; he had made a case appealing to carnal sympathy, but not truthfully nor in the light of Scripture. My unsaved sister came with

the intent of serving me the papers, but the Lord did not allow her. When this attempt failed, my husband hired a private investigator to hunt me down. When this also failed, he hired a lawyer on borrowed money. Finally, I was served court papers via email with a multiple-page outline against the Church of Wells and myself. In the court order my husband slandered the church, and me, relentlessly. He stated amongst many things that I was not of a sound mind and that I needed psychiatric evaluation for believing in this “God”. 2 Corinthians 5:13 says, *“For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.”* I committed no crime in obeying the call of Christ and the calling of a Christian which is to follow Christ through his Word and Spirit no matter the cost. I had been ordered to come out from among them and be separate, that Christ might receive me as a daughter and fellow heir with Him (2 Cor. 6:18). This I did, but not until much begging of my husband to follow Christ with me. Further, I was not breaking any laws of the land, seeing we had sought legal advice from lawyers, lest we run in vain. It was solely by the grace of God that I was unwilling to love my life unto death and my family over the God who died and gave me life. Forsaking all was truly a work of the Holy Spirit; I would have fainted easily if I tried in my own strength to take on such a cross. *“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:11).*

VI. More Billows: The Loss of another Child

“Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.”
(Psalm 42:7)

On May 9, 2012 Jeremiah (who was only 3 months old) and I, along with three brethren, came to New York City for the court date. My husband had sought to build a case, much from reports from the private eye he hired, to try to prove I was an unfit mother for Jeremiah, and with a cult that is irresponsible with their children - leaving them with random people to make long trips. I had many emails and text messages from him that I could have brought before the court where he clearly indicated he was seeking to take away Jeremiah only because of spite against me and the Lord I chose to follow. A few brethren and I sought to print these emails and texts, but every time, the Lord utterly confounded our efforts and spoke to the brethren to cease these attempts. One word that was given to me through multiple independent witnesses was Matthew 10:18-19, *“But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”* To His praise, the Lord spoke to me much on the road trip up to New York. I had multiple dreams where I saw Jeremiah on a table not far from me and afar off I could see my husband and his family rejoicing for Jeremiah. I believed the dream to mean that I would lose Jeremiah but that he would still be close to me somehow. Secondly, as we drove to court, there was a huge sign on the road that read, “You may have to lose everything,

to know God is all you ever needed.” I couldn’t deny it; I knew that the Lord had been preparing me the entire time leading up to the date of the court hearing.

When arriving at the courthouse I saw my husband for the first time in months since I had left New York, standing by the court door...and my heart melted. I just saw the anger in his eyes and hatred rising. He was unreasonable to speak to and continuously blamed me for everything that had transpired. He was not the husband that I had married; sin had destroyed his pureness of heart. He was to me as Pontius Pilate was to Christ, telling me that if I agreed to denounce my biblical convictions, which had led me into this situation, he had the power to give and to take away. But the Spirit of God reminded me continuously that He, the Almighty God, has the heart of kings in His hands, and that the sole power to give and take away belongs unto Him (Prov. 21:1). When it was time for the court hearing, we were both called in. There I stood, as my husband and his lawyer slandered the church and me. I was degraded because I did not have a college diploma and discriminated against because I refused to deny Christ. I told the judge my earnest reason for leaving and that my husband had sinned greatly and failed his family in not fulfilling his biblical roles. Then came the verdict; my husband was awarded temporary full custody of our son until the next court date (July 3rd), and I was awarded visitation every Saturday from 10:00am-6:00pm. I wept bitterly. I could have hired a lawyer; I could have brought many things to defend my case, but I was forbidden by the Lord. I was walking by faith, believing all things and hoping all things, and trusting in God. I understand why the unbelieving world would see this as absolute insanity, but I, along with Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the church, agreed it to be the Lord’s will in this instance (Note: We do not always believe it to be improper to use evidence, lawyers, or other means of seeing justice although we do believe that it is God’s prerogative to be inquired of in every particular case -Pastor Ryan). Psalm 20:7, *“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God”*. While I was weeping, after receiving the verdict, a woman randomly came up to me with a word which I believe was from the Lord: she quoted Psalm 46:10, *“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”* I was surrounded by police, being treated as a criminal, and they would not even allow me to nurse my child. He was quickly taken from my arms, no time for goodbyes; there was no compassion given me. All his family beheld with joy upon their faces, and people marveled at the sight. I became a gazingstock. I was not understood by the judges of this world; just as the world through the wisdom of men knew not God, they could not understand the spiritual matters of seeking first the will of God before my own. 1 Corinthians 1:20 says, *“Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”* Also, see 1 Corinthians 1:19, *“For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent”*. I was a fool unto the mighty, a weak child with no eloquence in speech. All I knew was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Yet, being a fool unto many, I’d rather have the wisdom of God and eternal life than the foolishness of this world. I thank my Heavenly Father that I was weak, that the power of God could rest upon me.

VII. Traveling and Prayer for a Husband and a Family

“For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer.” (Psalm 109:4)

“My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you...” (Galatians 4:19)

I returned to Texas, where the brethren received me with much charity, strengthening my weak hands. I was under the (immediate) headship of a faithful under shepherd, Jacob Gardner. He daily took up the burden for my family and me; he watched over my soul with much carefulness and diligence. He and his wife, Hannah Gardner, opened up their home to me and allowed me to live with them. Many prayer meetings were held, and the burden for my family was always carried by us all. I had not met many of the congregants before I came down to Texas, yet they treated me with such love and were always willing to give up their time, money, and all that they had so that I would not be without anything.

I went to New York every Saturday to see Jeremiah for two months. In these meetings I would continue pleading with my husband for his soul and entreating him on his depravity, spiritual idolatry, familial idolatry, the doctrine of counting the cost, and fearfully warned him of his fate in hell (if he continued in rebellion against the will of God). These trips were very difficult on me, being that I was on the road for five days out of the week. These brethren would sacrifice their time and lives to journey with me every weekend and strengthen my soul. This is love and true charity in which there was no shadow of darkness. The men and women of the Church of Wells walked in Christ Jesus, loving their neighbors as themselves, and they freely gave of all things, even their own selves, that I would not be found lacking. I was going through much spiritually and emotionally, having lost it all: my home, husband, kids, and my family of origin. *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).*

In the midst of all these hardships I was dealing with Ariel’s biological father on top of visiting Jeremiah with Francis every Saturday. He agreed to release Ariel into my custody many times, but would continuously harden his heart. Around this time, Ariel’s father cut off all communication, and I was unable to speak to my son. Despite all my circumstances, I continued to pray and cry out to the Lord. The Lord gave me a prophetic word from Jeremiah 31:1-17. Some of the main verses were one, sixteen and seventeen, *“At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus saith the LORD, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest... Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”*

VIII. The Great Turn Around...Setting the Captives Free

“And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.” (Job 42:10)

In the month of June, Jacob Gardner, along with his family and several brethren, came to New York with me. A meeting was held with my husband and brother Jake. In this meeting the Spirit of the Lord fell upon this dear man of God. The scales began to fall off of my husband's eyes. He then realized that all that Jacob was preaching was true. Verily, the Lord was doing wonderful things that day; my husband's heart, at the preaching of the Word in Spirit and power, was turned as if it were in a moment. The next day I spoke by the grace of God to my husband and reminded him that he must leave the city and obey God. Bless the Lord, he agreed to quit his job within the week and come to Texas – finally, after so long a time, following through with the will of God. I flew to Philadelphia a week later and traveled back to Texas with my husband. The court case was dismissed and the Lord had won the well fought day.

The church and I continued to pray for him, and many of the brethren would preach to him, for he was knowingly in great spiritual darkness. While all these things were transpiring for Francis' soul, the Lord gave me faith to speak to Ariel's father. I called and pled with him to let Ariel go. After a few days of his father being unwilling, he agreed, and I traveled to New York City and brought Ariel down with us to Texas. The Lord was answering all of our prayers; it was amazing to behold the utter overturning of my captivity as it were in a moment! Next, after dwelling in Texas for a time, seeking God for repentance and restoration, on July 29, 2012, the Lord heard our unanimous cries for my husband's soul. He was restored and cleansed and thoroughly brought out of spiritual darkness and the snare of the Devil, he was, by God, made a son again and fellow heir to the throne (Heb. 12:7). Through much travail, Christ was again formed in our brother and, under God, I was reunited in mind, body, and soul with my beloved husband! Our joyous cry was, *“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry”* (Luke 15:24). In 2 Timothy 2:25-26, it says of a servant of the Lord toward backsliders, *“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will”* (2 Tim. 2:25-26). David, being backslidden and in a similar situation to Francis, prays, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit”* (Psalm 51:10-12; Psalm 23). Finally, it says in James 5, *“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins”* (Jas 5:19-20). I encourage you all to read my husband's testimony as well, titled *“The Reconciliation of a Former Persecutor Turned Friend.”*

I give glory to the Most High King for having joined me to the Church of Wells - not just in the flesh or geographically, but in the spirit - for flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of

God, which is a spiritual kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50). Never in my life have I met people so earnest and zealous to follow after the Lord. I would have fainted at these trials that the Lord had placed in my life, except I had this body of true Christians lifting me up and encouraging me through the Word. It says in Proverbs, *“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”* (Pro 27:17). My testimony and the deliverance of my family is the fruit of this church; taste and see that the Lord is good, and He is indeed in these, His people. I encourage you all to speak to these beloved pastors, see for yourselves what manner of men they are. All the blessed promises that the Lord had given me would have never come to pass except I was indeed following the true Jesus Christ, under whose authority they stand. *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full”* (1 John 1:1-4). To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.