

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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"JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOR EVER."
"ENDEAVOURING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND
OF PEACE."

"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD."

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EDITORIAL

The prophets of the Old Testament speak to every generation because, while there were particular and contemporary references in their messages, there is very much which is applicable in every age. This is because there are certain factors which remain constant. For one thing, men are the same in every age. They may live under very different conditions but they still do the same basic things—they work, they play, they marry, they raise families, they die. Then again, sin remains the same for lust and covetousness, bitterness and jealousy, theft and murder are not the special marks of any one generation. Above all God remains the same in His wisdom, power and goodness, and above all in His amazing grace and mercy.

Habakkuk faced a national crisis and in his response to the situation he shows how the man of God should react to national needs. The Christian, after all, does not cease to be a citizen. The particular nation to which he belongs is his because of the providence of God. So he accepts his responsibilities not simply as a matter of course but as a matter of divinely entrusted responsibility.

The prophet is burdened as he looks at the extent and depth of national sin. The man of God who loves his country cannot remain unmoved when he sees ungodliness increasing and blatant unrighteousness abounding on every hand. The permissive society is easily taken for granted so that we accept the prevailing immorality as an inevitable feature of our day. In fact we ought to grieve over it and cry to God about it.

God has a reply for the prophet. He will judge this wicked nation and all the more because Judah has been so privileged. The Chaldean invaders are not coming merely because of their own lust for conquest. They are the scourge of judgment used by God. Again and again in history God has employed ruthless nations to judge peoples who have sinned against their privileges. The barbarian invasion of Rome at the beginning of the fifth century is a solemn reminder to us that our national wickedness could call down on our land just such a judgment.

But this brings another problem to Habakkuk. How can God employ such a nation as the Chaldeans in view of their own wickedness? Furthermore, there is still a righteous remnant in Judah—what is to become of them? God's reply is that while He will use the Chaldeans, He will not condone the way in which they act, and their ruthless savagery will in due course bring them also to condemnation. As for the righteous remnant, they are under the watchful eye and the sovereign protection of the Lord. The Lord's purposes will not be defeated for His ultimate goal is that day when 'the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (2 : 14).

The prophet does what the godly have learned often to do in such circumstances. He looks back and recalls God's past dealings. The Exodus, with its amazing record of the deliverance of Israel by the Lord in face of overwhelming odds, is a reminder to faith that God is still able to deliver. The Christian may likewise sing with John Newton—and apply it to all the righteous:

His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.

So Habakkuk comes to the climax of his prophecy as he surveys the worst possible eventuality and yet declares his confidence. 'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation' (3 : 17, 18).

This is not escapism, for the escapist tries to forget his problems. This man, however, faces his problems, and faces the dark situation in the life of his nation; but in addition he turns his mind to the living God and so is able to rejoice. The men who are of service in a day of national calamity are neither those who wring their hands and lament, nor those who try in their own strength to remedy the situation, but those whose

hope is in the Lord and who can by prayer and witness meet men in their hour of need.

What then were the truths which led Habakkuk to rejoice and which can still lift our hearts from despondency or despair? In the first place there is the righteousness of God. The Lord is judge and He will deal with sin. Wicked men may seem to flourish, but in the long run God will bring them all to judgment. His righteousness is also the pledge to the remnant that they are secure. They may have to suffer, but none can pluck them out of His hand.

A further truth which thrills the heart is that the Lord is King. The Chaldeans might invade and devastate the land. The same kind of disaster might happen today with all the consequent chaos and suffering. But the Lord is on the throne, and He will work out His purposes in spite of all the schemes and designs of men.

But the final great truth which warms the heart is that this sovereign and righteous Lord is our redeemer. 'I will joy in the God of my salvation.' If for the prophet the promises of God echoed the great blessings of the Exodus, then we can say that His promises to us are crimson with the blood of the new covenant shed so freely at Calvary.

It is no merely formal ending to the prophecy when we read what seems to have been a musical direction possibly intended for the Temple choir, 'To the chief singer on my stringed instruments'. The prophet is rejoicing in the Lord and so he must sing. The day may be dark, but the song of the people of God will not be silenced.

Through the night of doubt and sorrow

Onward goes the pilgrim band,

Singing songs of expectation,

Marching to the promised land.

H. M. CARSON.

The Suffering Christian

H. M. CARSON

*A sermon preached in Hamilton Road
Baptist Church, Bangor, Co. Down.*

'But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly. Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.' Philippians 2 : 24-30.

'Man,' says the Scripture, 'is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards'; and the longer a man lives, the more he discovers how true that word is. I am not thinking now about troubles which we bring upon ourselves and for which we have only ourselves to blame. I am thinking rather of the troubles which come because of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, not because of any action on our part at all, but troubles that come as it were from without. It is not any one age group which is liable to such trouble. For a young person a major disappointment can be as crushing a blow as some other trial that comes to someone else much later in life. Then again, the presence of trouble cannot be assessed by a person's ordinary demeanour. Very often you will discover that under the surface there are many people carrying hidden burdens and anxieties that they do not naturally show to all and sundry. The more I get to know people, the more I discover how many people there are who have very real troubles and sometimes very deep-seated ones. But the Christian has a particular problem in this matter. It is not simply that he must face the trials and afflictions of life like anybody else—he is not

immune because he is a Christian. Illness comes to him, pain comes to him, sorrow and bereavement come to him just as to anyone else—but he has further problems. Because he is a Christian, because he believes that God is his heavenly Father, he has the problem of understanding how a God who loves him can permit some of the blows which fall upon him to come.

But the Christian has another problem and it is about this that I want to speak this morning. When he turns to the Scriptures, he constantly finds reference to the peace of God and to the joy of the Lord. He finds people speaking in these terms: 'We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us'. 'In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds.' 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice.' So I might continue. The Christian finds these things constantly in the Scriptures and yet at the same time he discovers that in times of trouble he is deeply distressed, and in times of personal loss and bereavement he weeps and knows deep sorrow. So he asks himself—Am I being unspiritual? Should I not always be rejoicing? Should I not always be knowing the peace of God? Is there something wrong with me that at times I feel such distress or at times I feel this sorrow or this burden pressing in upon me? Sometimes his sky becomes darker and the burdens seem to press more heavily because he has this inner nagging uncertainty because of his own reaction. And it is for this reason that I want with you this morning to look at this very human situation that the apostle Paul is describing as he speaks about Epaphroditus' illness and of the Lord's mercy to them. I want to look at this whole matter of our reactions to pain, our reactions to suffering and to bereavement, and I believe we have got to recognise that these reactions are perfectly normal and perfectly natural.

One of the philosophies which competed with Christianity in the early days was the philosophy of the Stoics. The Stoics took the line that fate buffeted you, there came trials and problems and crushing blows, and all you could do in the face of it all was simply to steel yourself. You just had to stand in the midst of all the buffetings of fate and take whatever came and try and maintain your stability and your independence in the face of it all. 'Amidst the buffetings of fate, my head is bloody but unbowed.' This is the typical Stoic attitude. And Christians, if they are not careful, slip into the mistake of

imagining that this is the gospel attitude; that when, as it were, the heavens collapse about you and everything goes wrong and sorrow comes and pain is a reality or there is illness—whatever it may be—that you try to steel yourself, and crush down your feelings and remain unmoved by the situation. But the gospel does not deal with us like that at all. The Stoic philosophy basically fails to treat men and women as human beings. It is a very barren philosophy because you simply cannot repress your feelings. Sometimes indeed—some of you will probably know this from experience, either with yourself or with others—a person who is so stunned by bereavement that they cannot even cry sometimes suffers much more afterwards. But when they are able to let go and weep there is a wonderful relief. But the Stoic philosophers say you should always crush down your feelings, you should remain unmoved. But you cannot crush down feelings; you may repress them for a time, but they have a way of coming back. It is like boys damming a stream. They build very frantically and for a time they check the flow of the stream, but it will burst through at some other point. We may crush down our feelings and try and remain unmoved by the situation, but sooner or later the feelings will break through.

It may affect us in another way. People can try and suppress sorrow for example, but they try so hard that instead of remaining warm normal human beings, they become hard and embittered and cynical. You see, a human philosophy will always lead you in that direction because it is built, not upon the wisdom of God, but of man. The gospel treats us as men and women. It takes into account that we are flesh and blood. Stoicism is unnatural, Christianity is supernatural. These feelings, these reactions to trial and suffering, they are very natural reactions and we need not be surprised that we react in these ways. After all, if we are hurt we feel pain and we do not consider it unspiritual that we feel pain. If we have a splitting headache, there is nothing carnal about that. It is a perfectly normal phenomenon. If we feel intensely hungry we do not consider that it is unspiritual that we badly want something to eat. This is a perfectly normal reaction. If we are trapped in a blazing building, there is nothing unspiritual if we feel afraid and want to get out of it as quickly as possible. In other words, our reactions to pain, to illness, to sorrow, to loss, are perfectly normal. They are what we should expect because we are flesh and blood. Indeed, if we do not react in these ways there is something very strange about us. Being men and women, we react when the blow falls upon us.

Go back to the New Testament. Look at the perfect Man Himself, look at the Lord Jesus Christ. Now He does not remain unmoved by the burdens and the problems that confront Him. Look at Him that day by the tomb of Lazarus. He is deeply moved. He groans in spirit. And when He stands by the tomb of Lazarus, He weeps. When He is getting near the Cross, true He sets His face to go to Jerusalem, there is a majesty about His going, His hour is come and He is ready to die, but the gospel narrative says He began to be 'sore amazed and to be very heavy'. He was deeply troubled. He says to His disciples: 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death'. And when you see Him in Gethsemane, true He is saying, 'Not my will, but Thine be done', but it is not some impassive being who can calmly go forward to all that is involved in the Cross—no, He sweats great drops of blood, there is a dread and an anguish. This is the Man Christ Jesus, and there is a warm, real humanity there. So when we find ourselves distressed or sorrowful or troubled, we need not imagine that there is something unspiritual about this kind of reaction. This is a normal human reaction to the situation as it meets us.

Take this very incident that we are looking at this morning from Philippians chapter 2, and again you see normal human reactions and that from very godly people. Here is Epaphroditus—he has got an intense desire to see the people at Philippi and he is very troubled because he knows that they have heard that he has been so ill and he is distressed because they are so troubled. He wants to be able to see them and to get news to them in order that their distress might be relieved. Or look at the apostle Paul. Now this is the man who wrote 1 Corinthians 15, this is the one who can say with triumph: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'. This is the one who can claim that 'Christ being risen from the dead, has become the firstfruits of them that slept'. For Paul, death is simply the entrance to glory. In this very epistle he has spoken of being 'absent from the body and present with the Lord' as something to be desired. Yet here he speaks in a rather different tone. He had envisaged the very real possibility of Epaphroditus' death. Clearly his friend had been so dangerously ill that they had almost despaired and in this situation Paul had been envisaging sorrow.

In other words, Paul is distinguishing between death as an enemy which has been conquered, and that which accompanies

death, namely the rupture of relationships, the breaking of bonds which knit people together. There is a sorrow and a grief that inevitably accompanies dying. Bereavement is a sad reality for those who have been left behind. While on the one hand Paul says death has been vanquished, Christ is the Victor, and for the believer death is the entrance into glory, yet at the same time he knows that we are flesh and blood, he knows that we are human, he knows how deeply people feel when they lose a loved one. Paul felt exactly the same. He is saying, 'If Epaphroditus had died, well, I would have been deeply troubled, I would have had sorrow upon sorrow'. And there is a wonderful relief in his mind and in his heart as he can say that Epaphroditus has been spared. You see also his concern about the Philippians. He wants them to be relieved in their minds. He knows very well they have been distressed as well, and so he wants to get news to them in order that they might know the peace of God and that they might be able to rejoice. It is all a very human situation, isn't it? A person is dangerously ill, and a friend looking on, anxious, concerned, troubled, seeing the possibility of losing that friend, is distressed in soul. Then the sick friend gets better and there is a wonderful sense of relief.

Now these are men of God, these are men who have been enabled to set their eyes and their hearts upon heavenly things. Death is not the grim enemy and yet at the same time they react in this way. They react as men might be expected to react. And I believe we can learn the lesson for our own situation, that these kinds of reaction are perfectly normal and perfectly natural. We need not add to our troubles when we go through times of sorrow by rebuking ourselves because of the distress which we feel. Anyone who can stand by the open grave where some loved one has been laid to rest and be unmoved, that person is not human at all. There is something radically wrong if they are completely unmoved by such a situation. Of course we are moved, of course we are stirred, of course we weep. There is nothing unspiritual about that. This is a normal reaction. What would be wrong would be if we let the feeling, the natural reaction, so overwhelm us that we become bitter and hard, or we lose sight of God Himself.

Paul is talking here about suffering, and about our reaction to suffering, but he is also speaking as one who is 'in Christ' and can therefore rejoice in the midst of suffering. This is the fundamental difference between the Christian approach to it all and the pagan approach. In one case, you are trying to steel yourself against suffering or you try and escape from it

and get taken up with other things. This is the only advice usually that the world can offer you. If things are desperately wrong, then busy yourself with other things, get your mind filled with other things and try and forget. But of course you cannot forget as easily as that. You cannot busy yourself all the time. There come times when you have to sit down and you have to think, and at that time, as you know, thoughts, memories and past associations crowd in upon you until the whole thing becomes almost unbearable. But the Christian message does not speak like that. It does not say we must try and escape from it all. It says rather that we must realise that this reaction, this grief of spirit, is a very natural reaction. We must learn how to accept this and to triumph in the midst of it all, because a Christian can at the very same time be sorrowful and rejoicing. He can at the very same time be weeping and smiling, at the same time be broken-hearted and yet rejoicing in the Lord. This is the great paradox or apparent contradiction of spiritual experience.

If I may use a very mundane illustration—when a small child has fallen and hurt himself, well, the pain is a big reality as far as he is concerned, and he lets the neighbourhood know by his howls how real the pain is. When his mother picks him up, the pain is still there—and if he is severely hurt it is a very real pain—but at the same time there is a comfort and a security, and the two things are present at exactly the same moment—the pain and the comfort. The two things are real. And for the Christian pain is a reality. He does not try to pretend it is not real and he is not trying to escape from it. The pain is a reality, but in the midst of the pain the reality of the Lord's presence becomes the dominant factor, and it eases the pain and it strengthens him to face the pain.

The key phrase, you see, in this passage, and indeed in the whole of the apostle Paul's writings, is the phrase 'in the Lord'. It keeps coming up in this very passage here, in Philippians chapter 2. It came in verse 19, where he wrote, 'I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly to you'. It comes again in verse 24, when he says, 'I trust in the Lord that I myself shall come shortly'. It comes again in verse 29, 'Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness'. 'In the Lord'—in this phrase is the whole background of all that Paul thinks and does, and surely he is simply saying this—the life of the Christian is always to be lived against the background of this basic fact that he is in the Lord. He belongs to Christ. He has been united to Christ. Christ is the sphere in which he moves. Christ is the atmosphere he breathes. Christ is his whole

world, so that he looks at everything from this standpoint. It is always as one united to Christ that he views life. He tries to understand life by looking at it through Christ's eyes. And in this particular issue that we are considering this morning, the Christian's reaction to illness, to suffering, to bereavement—he looks at it and he attempts to react to it as one who has been knit to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now how does this affect the situation? Well, it affects it in this way. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself teaches us how we are to assess suffering and loss. He Himself teaches us how we are to react to it. First of all, He shows us what our basic security is—that we are in the hands of our Sovereign God. We are not at the mercy of circumstances. When a person has suffered some terrible illness or when a person has been bereaved, for a moment there is almost the feeling of being at the mercy of a blind unreasoning chance—you simply cannot control the situation, it has got beyond you. Then this word comes—you are not at the mercy of chance, or luck, or anything of that sort, you are in the hands of God Almighty. There is a basic stability here. There is an underlying security which enables you to stand in the most testing day. Ask the psychologists—they are not always right, indeed they are very often wrong, but certainly at one point they are very right, and it is this—they will tell you that a child can face a great deal of hardship, a great deal of suffering and a great deal of poverty, if he comes from a stable home. If he has got that basic security at home he can face an extraordinary amount of buffeting, but if there is no stability at home then he cannot face the situation at all. In fact he may not know the meaning of poverty, he may have an abundance of all that he needs, but if there is no stability behind him, he is in an uncertain world.

Well, the Christian is one who has got a stable base. He is in the hands of the sovereign God. The world may dissolve all about him and everything may go completely wrong, and yet he has this underlying assurance: 'I know that all things work together for good to them that love God'. 'For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son; and whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?' 'I am persuaded,' says Paul, 'that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' When a Christian has touched rock bottom, when he feels as if

he cannot go one step further, when his heart seems to be rent asunder, there is this deep undergirding assurance—the Lord is the One who works all things after the counsel of His own will. I am not at the mercy of circumstances, I am in the hands of the sovereign God. 'The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

The Lord reveals a further secret to His people in times when they are suffering very deeply. It is to show us that suffering has its compensations. In times of suffering the whole thing is intensified if we cannot see any purpose, if it seems to be just blind fate breaking us and crushing us. But the Christian looks with the eye of faith and he sees that this is not blind fate; my heavenly Father is in control and my heavenly Father intends to bring blessing to His children through every experience through which they go. He has not let go of us nor has He lost control of the situation. He is still God Almighty and out of the suffering He brings that which both glorifies Him and brings blessing to us. One of the things which supremely emerges from suffering is a closer communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why Paul says: 'My aim, my desire is that I might know Him and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death'. Paul wanted to enter into an intimate fellowship with Christ. But Christ, remember, is the suffering Saviour. His life was no bed of roses, His life was no easy path. He was despised and rejected of men. He was an outcast, He was lonely, He was crucified. If we are to enter into an intimate fellowship with Him, we will often enter into that communion through deep suffering. That is why suffering is not to be looked on as something which comes from a God who does not care. Hebrews 12 says, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives'.

Some of the choicest saints of God have been those who have gone through bitter affliction. One of the classics of Christian literature is, I believe, 'Andrew Bonar's Diary'. Andrew Bonar, who for much of his life was a parish minister in Glasgow, was a man deeply taught of the Spirit of God. In his early life he lost his wife and he never recovered from that blow. As you read through his diary, every year—I think it was in October—there is this recollection of the night when she was taken, and you felt it had left a hurt which not even the passage of time could efface; there was always that deep hurt. Yet in the midst of it there was the peace of God, the wonderful reality of God's presence. And in that diary of Bonar's you feel that here is a man who has drunk very deeply

of the cup of affliction and sorrow. Here is a man who has known what heartbreak is, and in the midst of his heartbreak, and indeed because of his heartbreak, he has discovered the glory of God and the presence of Christ. No wonder he was able to minister to others, because I believe this is one further reason why the Lord lets His servants go through times of suffering and heartbreak, that, as Paul puts it in Corinthians: 'You may be able to comfort others with the comfort wherewith you yourselves are comforted of God'. It is when a man has known some deep suffering himself that he is able to sympathise and to understand. When you are dealing with someone and they are going through a desperate time, if you have never really gone through anything like it, well, you may sympathise, of course you will, you will attempt to help and encourage, but somehow you feel you do not really understand, you can only dimly perceive the anguish that this person is going through. But if the Lord in His providence allows us to go through some such experience ourselves, then we learn sympathy not in terms of reading a book on the subject and producing the theory and trying to apply it, we learn sympathy in the midst of our own heartbreak. The Lord so often disciplines His servants for fruitful service in the crucible of affliction.

The Lord has a further secret to reveal to us and it is surely this. It comes in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding weight of glory'. The Lord is not concerned just with threescore years and ten or a few more years after that. This, after all, is for the Christian only the brief prelude to the glory that lies beyond. This is simply the vestibule; the mansion is beyond. When a man brings his bride to the new house, they do not stop for the rest of their days in the porch. The porch has got to be decorated like the rest of the house, but it is only the preliminary, it is only the way into the house. This life is but the porch; it is just the entrance. Paul says, 'Here, in this life, there is much affliction, many trials, many troubles; but these things are working for us an exceeding weight of glory'. Peter speaks of 'having ministered unto us an abundant entrance into His presence'. So that when we are suffering the Lord is saying, 'I am preparing you for something so rich and so wonderful that it passes man's understanding'.

But the glory of Christ is this: He does not simply reveal these truths to us, He does not simply show us that we are in God's hands, He does not simply show us that there are com-

pensations in the sufferings, that these things perfect us in holiness and draw us nearer to Himself. He does not simply bid us lift our eyes and look at the glory which is yet to be, but He Himself draws near to us, and we see Him, and seeing Him we are stirred and encouraged. He is the suffering Christ. He is the One who wept bitter tears. He is the One who knew great distress of soul and great burdens upon His Spirit. So He is our Saviour. He is the One who is with us. We may not have anyone else in this whole wide world who can really understand. Human nature being what it is, no one else can really go into the very depths of our experience, because there is something about us, by our very constitution, there is an inner citadel that sometimes we cannot open even to our nearest and dearest. But there is One who knows us and He draws more intimately close to us than any human being can draw. And in that moment of drawing near to us, how graciously He sustains and strengthens. Says Paul, 'We are in Christ, drawing our very life from Him, drawing our comfort and consolation from Him, our strength from Him'.

'We must through much tribulation,' says Paul, 'enter the Kingdom', but the tribulation is lit up with the glory of the presence of Christ, for the One who draws near to us is the One who left drops of blood on the pathway as He went to glory. He is the One who wept. He is the One who suffered. He is the One who died. He went through all the darkness of Golgotha. So when we go through the testing times, we have a Saviour who understands. We have One who with His nail-pierced hand lays hold upon us and brings us into the presence, not of some blind unreasoning fate, but into the presence of the King of kings, God Almighty. We discover that the One who sits upon the Throne is the One of whom we can say, 'He is my heavenly Father'. He knows His children, He loves His children, and in the very furnace of affliction He meets with them and sustains them.

So I say this morning to any of you who are going through times of real trouble—it may be there is some burden there, some deep distress, some sorrow, some old wound that never really has been healed and this side of heaven never will be healed—I say to you, do not add to your troubles by feeling you are unspiritual because you are distressed. Do not add to the burden by castigating yourself unnecessarily and saying, 'I should not be grieving, I should not be sorry, I should not be distressed'. Expect to react like that because you are men and women, but do not be content simply with that reaction.

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Doctrinal Definitions

PAUL TUCKER

SINS AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

For over nineteen hundred years the Holy Spirit has been subject to the influences of Christians who fail their Lord. He has witnessed the godlessness and the irreligion of a world that rejects Christ, and in a very real sense the Spirit has been the suffering Spirit of God throughout this entire dispensation. Are there things in your life and mine that make it difficult for Him to rest and be at peace with us? It is one thing for the Spirit of God to be within us, it is another thing for Him to find a humble heart, a contrite, a holy heart wherein to rest. There are many offences that can bring anguish to the Holy Spirit.

I. SOME OFFENCES CAUSED BY UNBELIEVERS.

1. *The Holy Spirit can be resisted, withstood and defied by the unconverted.* See Acts 7 : 51. In what way do unbelievers resist the Holy Ghost? Once the grace of God really begins to operate in a man's life, convicting him of sin, enlightening his understanding and showing him his need, then nothing can finally withstand the accomplishment of that man's regeneration. So I do not think Stephen is here speaking of the operation of the Spirit of God in the mind or the conscience or the will of a man. He is thinking of the external testimony of God's Word (see verses 52, 53). This emphasis upon the prophets and upon the Law suggests that they were resisting the external testimony of God's Word which has been given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is equivalent to resisting the Holy Spirit Himself. The other way in which these men had resisted the Holy Spirit was by persecuting God's messengers.

2. *The Holy Spirit can be insulted.* See Heb. 10 : 29. Weymouth's translation reads, 'And have insulted the Spirit from whom comes grace', the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of grace. His grace has been revealed in the atonement, in the blood of Christ. Here were some people who were in danger of repudiating the once for all atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. They were in danger of trampling under foot the Son of God and treating His precious blood as something unworthy of consideration, as something unholy, and in doing so they were insulting the Spirit from whom grace comes. Any man who treats with contempt the atonement, any man who undermines

the value and the virtue and the sufficiency of the precious blood of Jesus Christ, is giving insult to the Spirit of grace, that is, the Spirit from whom grace comes. (Simon in Acts 8: 18-21). The Holy Ghost can be insulted, and when a man turns his back upon Christ and thinks he can do something by his own self-effort to merit the favour of God, he is insulting the Spirit from whom grace comes.

3. *The Holy Spirit can be angered.* See 1 Sam. 11 : 6. Notice the association between the coming upon Saul of the Spirit of God and the manifestation of anger. Anger is not necessarily a sin. We find in Ephesians, 'Be ye angry and sin not'. There is such a thing as a righteous indignation, a holy wrath. God the Father is angry with the wicked (Psalm 7 : 11), God the Son was angry with those money-changers (John 2 : 13-17; see also Mark 3 : 5), God the Holy Spirit was angry when He came upon Saul and there was this manifestation of a holy wrath.

4. *The Holy Spirit can be blasphemed.* Matt. 12 : 31, 32; Mark 3 : 28-30 and Luke 12 : 10. This is one sin for which the Lord Jesus Christ said, 'There is no forgiveness'. Eternal sin is sin against the Holy Spirit and merits eternal condemnation. What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? The fact that a person has any anxiety about it is a proof that he has not committed this sin, because the people who have committed this sin have no concern at all. In the language of the Apostle Paul, they are 'past feeling'.

(i) *It was a religious sin.* The Pharisees were in danger of committing it, not the common people who heard the Lord Jesus Christ gladly. A key verse is Matt. 12 : 14. The Pharisees had made up their minds to their attitude to the Lord Jesus Christ. They were so opposed to Him that it was decided that they would by all means within their power destroy Him, and they took counsel together to do that. The Pharisees were infuriated at the popularity that the Lord Jesus Christ was receiving (see verse 23), and so they taunted Him. The Pharisees attributed the work of the Spirit of God to the work of Satan. This was the greatest possible insult that they could hurl at the Lord Jesus Christ. It is religious people who sometimes come nearer to this sin than the common people in the world around us, e.g. preachers who tamper with the truth of our Lord's Virgin Birth.

(ii) *It is a persistent sin.* It is not an isolated act but the culmination of a process. This was not the first word of the Pharisees against the Lord Jesus. We find the process mounting right through the Gospel of Matthew, see Matt. 9 : 3; 9 : 34;

11 : 19; 12 : 2, 14, 24. This was a fixed and settled attitude and it was coming now to a final antagonism toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

(iii) *It is a fatal sin.* It is a sin that cannot be forgiven. Why cannot it be forgiven? Is it because God is not bountiful *No*. Is it because the virtue of Christ's blood is not sufficient to save a man who commits this sin? *No*. The answer is very clear. The man who commits this sin makes it impossible for himself to be saved. Salvation is a free gift, but comes along three channels, conviction of sin, repentance unto life, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But if a man does not believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the final revelation of God the Father, and that the Lord Jesus Christ did His works in the power of the Holy Spirit, then that man shuts off every avenue along which God's salvation might travel to reach him. That man stifles conviction, he refuses repentance and he will not believe. It is because this sin by the very nature of it precludes conviction, precludes repentance, precludes faith, and the man who is committing it is shutting himself off from the avenues along which he may be saved, that he cannot be forgiven. It has nothing to do with God's unwillingness, or with our Lord's inability; it has to do with the man himself who shuts every avenue of his being so that God's salvation does not reach him.

II. SOME OFFENCES CAUSED BY BELIEVERS.

1. *We can ignore the Holy Spirit.* See Gal. 3 : 2, 3. These people had been born of the Spirit, they had started walking in the Spirit, but now they had been influenced by other teachers and they were seeking to attain sanctification and full acceptance with God in their own strength. Now, there is a difference between ignoring the Spirit and the ignorance of the Spirit. An unbeliever may be ignorant of the Spirit, but a believer is not ignorant concerning the Holy Spirit. He has had dealings with the Holy Spirit. But a believer can ignore the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8 we see how utterly necessary He is for our sanctification as well as for our salvation.

2. *He can be lied against.* We can tell lies to the Holy Spirit. Remember Acts 5 : 3. It was not a spoken lie; it was an acted lie, it was a lie of behaviour. And note the end of verse 4. Here is another indirect reference to prove the Deity of the Holy Spirit, because to lie to the Holy Ghost is to lie to God. We all like to give the impression that we are more spiritual than we are and we all like to be thought very highly of in our Christian life and in our service. It is so easy to want to give

an impression that is not true, real, living, and personal experience.

3. *A believer can tempt the Holy Spirit.* See Acts 5 : 9. The word 'tempt' here means 'to provoke'. How did Ananias and Sapphira tempt the Spirit? (i) *They tempted His holiness*, because at this point the Church was a holy fellowship, no shadow had fallen upon that early community. Now the lie comes in. In so doing they were tempting the Holy Spirit. (ii) *They tempted His omniscience.* They thought they could get away with it. Did they not know that the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God, that He shall reach to the utmost bounds of knowledge?

4. *In Eph. 4:30 we see He can be grieved.* This word 'grieve' is a Gethsemane word, because the literal meaning of the word is 'to bring sorrow to'. You might anger and infuriate an enemy, but you can grieve a friend. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Friend of God's people, and when we sin against Him, we grieve Him. How do we grieve Him? See verse 29. By unprofitable conversation; by our unChristlike behaviour.

5. *The Holy Spirit can be quenched by the believer.* See 1 Thess. 5 : 19. This word 'quench' means 'to put the fire out'. You cannot quench the Spirit away from you if you are a child of God, but you can quench the fire of the Spirit. See verse 20. When we are unresponsive to the Word of God, when we are not obedient to the revealed Will of God, then we are quenching the Holy Spirit. We should have spiritual discernment (verse 21). Abstain from any suggestion of evil that would bring misunderstanding and misrepresent the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Realise that God in His grace and mercy means to minister to us, means to make these times of sore trial a blessing to us. He is our Father and He has given us a great High Priest who knows and understands and sustains. Yes, there will be the normal human reaction to grief, to pain and to loss, but do not be overwhelmed by the suffering, do not be overwhelmed by the pain and the grief. In the midst of it all, prove that He is an all-sufficient Saviour, and to His Name be the glory.

MARTIN LUTHER

S. M. HOUGHTON

A VISIT TO ROME

Last month an account was given of the way in which, by a divine work, the light of Gospel truth began to dawn upon Luther's soul. The freeness of God's forgiveness of sins astounded him, for the Spirit caused him to realise that it was without money and without price; in other words, without the painful toiling that he had engaged in while under the law, as he strove to merit the favour of God. The Spirit-taught lessons now impressed upon the Reformer never left him, and when the Reformation began in Germany it was simply a pouring out of blessing similar to that which had already been bestowed upon the monk in the monastery at Erfurt. The Reformation, it has been truly said, was first worked out in Luther's own soul. Not that he was as yet clear of many superstitions and misbeliefs. Unlike John Calvin, who passed from darkness to light with remarkable speed, Luther grew in knowledge over a period of years, and it is needful for students of his theology to take careful note of its chronological development.

Luther remained in the monastery for a little more than three years and then his friend Staupitz secured him an appointment as Professor of Theology in the University of Wittenberg. At first he found little pleasure in the work, for it was expected that his lectures would expound man's words and man's wisdom rather than the divine wisdom found in Scripture. But shortly Luther is found delivering evangelical sermons in profusion. Indeed, the old clay-plastered wooden chapel, a mere thirty feet in length and twenty in width, in which the sermons were delivered to 'a handful of monks and professors', has been described as 'the cradle of the German Reformation'. Although these early sermons fell far short of the 'full-orbed Gospel' which Luther later proclaimed, yet they reflected his new-born experience of the grace of God. Much truth he had yet to learn. Meanwhile the Word was fulfilled to him: 'If any man will do His (God's) will he shall know of the doctrine'. If Luther's beginnings were small, his latter end was destined greatly to increase.

While the Reformer was thus occupied at Wittenberg, he was suddenly called aside to undertake a mission to Rome on

behalf of Staupitz. The prospect of such a journey filled him with delight, for to him Rome was a veritable holy of holies, where lived the choicest of saints, and not least the Pope himself, whom Luther regarded as a kind of god upon earth. Accompanied by a brother monk, he set out across the Alps and so came into Italy, expecting to find that the nearer he got to Rome the more holy everything and every place would appear. But to his intense horror and deep sorrow he found, on the contrary, that Italy was a land of darkness rather than light. Many of the churchmen with whom he came into contact revelled in the lap of luxury, and gave to the simple-minded Germans the impression that there was in them more of that carnal-mindedness which is death than of that spiritual-mindedness which is life and peace. Of bodily discomfort, also, the travellers had experience, for the hot Italian sun caused them no small distress. On one occasion they were taken ill, solely in consequence, it is said, of having slept with the casement open, thus admitting the pestilential night air for which certain parts of Italy had an ill fame. Another account, however, ascribes their illness to the fact that they drank some stagnant water from a wayside pool. It is recorded that their cure was effected by the eating of pomegranates.

When the two men arrived within sight of Rome Luther fell upon his knees, raised his hands to heaven, and exclaimed with deep emotion, 'Hail, holy Rome! made holy by the holy martyrs, and by the blood which has been spilt there'. His admiration for the so-called holy city was, however, soon dispelled, but the explanation of this is best given in Luther's own words, written twenty years after his visit. 'I remember,' he says, 'that when I went to Rome I ran about like a madman to all the churches, all the convents, all the places of note of every kind; I implicitly believed every tale about all of them that imposture had invented. I said a dozen masses, and I almost regretted that my father and mother were not dead so that I might have availed myself of the opportunity to draw their souls out of purgatory by a dozen or more masses and other good works of a similar description. 'Tis a proverb at Rome, "Happy the mother whose son says mass for her on the eve of St. John". How glad I should have been to have saved my mother. We did these things then, knowing no better; 'tis the pope's interest to encourage such lies. Now, thank God, we have the Gospels, the Psalms, and the other words of God. To them we can make pilgrimages more useful than any others; in them we can visit and contemplate the true promised land, the true Jerusalem, the true paradise. In them

we walk, not amid the tombs of saints, or over their mortal relics, but in their hearts, their thoughts, their spirit.'

Luther was repeatedly shocked in Rome by the wicked and worldly lives lived by many of the highest officers of the church, by their lust after the rich things of the world, and, most of all, by the lightness with which they often referred to the most sacred Names or subjects. Julius II, the Pope at this time, was scarcely anything more than a scheming statesman, greedy of gain, and willing to obtain his ends by fair means or foul. When our Reformer arrived in Rome, Julius was engaged in a war against the French. From such scenes Luther turned with a sorrowful heart to try to find consolation in the performance of the various works which engaged the attention of Christendom's pilgrims. It was customary, for example, for a pilgrim to climb on his knees, while muttering prayers, the marble staircase which, it was claimed, had belonged to the Judgment Hall of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. Accounts of what happened to Luther vary as between 19th-century and 20th-century historians. The former tend to make much of Luther's experience at this crisis of his career, the latter to play it down. The fact is that such records as exist supply somewhat divergent accounts of the climbing, and it is not easy to weave them together into a consistent narrative. On the one hand there is a letter preserved in the handwriting of Paul Luther, Martin Luther's younger son, in which he states: 'In the year 1544 my late dearest father, in the presence of us all, narrated the whole story of his journey to Rome. He acknowledged with great joy that, in that city, through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he had come to the knowledge of the truth of the everlasting gospel. It happened in this way. As he repeated his prayers on the Lateran staircase, the words of the prophet Habakkuk came suddenly to his mind: "The just shall live by faith". Thereupon he ceased his prayers, returned to Wittenberg, and took this as the chief foundation of all his doctrine'.

On the other hand, in a sermon on Colossians 1 : 9 ff., preached on September 15th, 1545, Luther himself stated: 'As at Rome I wished to liberate my grandfather (Heine Luther) from purgatory, I went up the staircase of Pilate, praying a *pater noster* on each step, for I was convinced that he who prayed thus could redeem his soul. But when I came to the top step, the thought kept coming to me, "Who knows whether this is true?"'

Maybe, if we had fuller details of the event we could see

how the two narratives fit together. It is certainly unwise to dismiss the one of them, according to choice, as a fiction, as does Roland H. Bainton in his popular life of Luther entitled *Here I stand*. His words run, 'At the top, Luther raised himself and exclaimed, not as legend would have it, "The just shall live by faith"—he was not yet that far advanced. What he said was, "Who knows whether it is so?"'

It is clear that the visit to the imperial city was of crucial importance to Luther's development as a reformer. In his anticipation Rome was an earthly Paradise, the scene of all that was fairest and most to be revered in Christian story. In the outcome his reverence was turned into loathing. As T. M. Lindsay said: 'The city which he had greeted as holy was a sink of iniquity; its very priests were openly infidel and scoffed at the services they performed; the papal courtiers were men of the most shameless lives; he was accustomed to repeat the Italian proverb, "If there is a hell, Rome is built over it". It was much for him in after days that he had seen Rome for that month which he had spent in the papal capital.' 'I must see Rome', the apostle Paul had once exclaimed (Acts 19 : 21), and in the Lord's good time he arrived in the pagan capital. Luther's visit, a millenium and a half later, must have caused him to wonder whether in any respect at all Rome's professed Christianity was superior in moral and spiritual value to the ancient paganism.

Yet it must be confessed that the German Reformer did not lack credulity. He seems to have believed that the relics which he saw were genuine. Rome was filled with them. Says E. G. Schwiebert, Professor of History in Wittenberg College, Ohio: 'He was shown the wall behind which the three hundred slain children of Bethlehem lie buried . . . the chain of St. Paul, and the column next to which the great Apostle had once preached . . . He saw the rope used to drag Jesus to His Passion, eleven thorns from Christ's crown of thorns, the sponge used to give Him drink . . . a nail from the cross, the inscription of Pilate, a large and a small piece of the cross, another from the cross of one of the malefactors . . . some milk and some hair of the Virgin Mary . . . a cross made out of the shining sword with which St. Paul had been beheaded, the table on which John read Mass on the Isle of Patmos, two pieces of the five loaves with which Jesus fed the five thousand . . . the stone that had sealed Christ's grave, the rope with which Judas had hanged himself. . . . All that Luther saw, he later related, he believed at the time to be genuine, and did not have the slightest doubt as to its authenticity'. Obviously Luther still had to learn

the difference between blind credulity and Spirit-imparted faith, and from this point of time that knowledge came with increasing rapidity. Later he said, 'I would not have missed seeing Rome for 100,000 florins; I should have always felt an uneasy doubt whether I was not, after all, doing injustice to the Pope. As it is, I am quite satisfied on the point'.

As for Christian doctrine, it is clear that, by this time, Luther had become well established in the great truth of Justification by Faith, and as the apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans was of vital importance to him in this connection, we conclude this 'Visit to Rome' by quoting the opening and closing paragraphs of the Preface to the Epistle which Luther prepared when his translation of the Bible into German was made at a later date. 'This Epistle,' he wrote, 'is the right corner-stone of the New Testament, and the purest gospel, and is in itself so valuable that a Christian should not only know it by heart, word by word, but should have daily intercourse with it as with the daily bread of the soul. For it can never be too much and too well read and considered, and the more it is examined the more precious it becomes, and the more it will be relished. . . . We find in this Epistle most copiously treated whatever a Christian ought to know, namely, what are the Law and the Gospel—sin, punishment, grace, faith, and righteousness, Christ and God, good works, charity, hope and crosses; how we ought to act towards every one, whether he be a religious man or a sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe, and how we ought to act towards ourselves. And all this so admirably laid down with examples from Holy Writ, and so exemplified both by himself and from the Prophets, as to leave nothing to wish for. It would seem as if St. Paul in this Epistle wished to epitomise the whole faith and doctrine of the Gospel of Christ, and thus prepare us an introduction to the whole of the Old Testament. For without doubt he who has this Epistle well by heart has in him the light and the power of the Old Testament. Every Christian should, therefore, make it his own, and observe it constantly in practice. May the grace of God be with him! Amen.'

(To be continued)

Practical Predestination

H. P. WOTTON

To justify its existence, all knowledge must be practical. This applies to secular knowledge, and more importantly to theological knowledge. Jesus said, 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them' (John 13 : 17). Doctrine really believed influences the life of the person who believes it. If it is false, it has an evil influence; if true, a good influence. We need, then, to beware of those who say, 'It doesn't matter what you believe, if you are sincere', for a person may drink poison sincerely believing it to be medicine, but his sincerity will not enable him to avoid the disastrous consequences of his act.

The true Calvinist values the doctrine of predestination not merely because he has been taught to believe it, but because the Holy Spirit has enabled him to see that it belongs to truth, and no Christian can without sin refuse truth when he sees it to be so. Besides, it is truth that makes him free, while every error tends to bring him into spiritual bondage. Here, then, is one practical use of the doctrine of predestination: it is spiritual truth that plays its part in making us, and keeping us, spiritually free.

Isaac Watts said that a believer should first go to the school of repentance and faith before he enters the university of predestination. This is no doubt excellent advice. But if a believer is confronted with this doctrine before he is sure of his repentance and faith, is he to reject it because his lack of assurance makes it distasteful to him? By no means! Rejection of truth is no part of repentance or faith, and so, if he is convinced that predestination is Biblical truth, it is his duty to receive it as such.

But truth does not become ours easily. Those who have been brought up on the doctrines of grace may think otherwise when from an early age these doctrines have been impressed on their minds. But though secular knowledge is learned sufficiently by mind and memory, theological knowledge needs something more if it is to be learned in a truly spiritual sense. John Bunyan did not come to his great knowledge of truth easily. He had to cry to God for it, for he knew that truth must be something more to him than naked knowledge. If it was to have practical meaning it must enter the fibre of his being and become the very life of his soul. He fought for truth as a man fights for his life, for he knew that error had the power to destroy him.

PREDESTINATION AND GOD'S PRESENCE

The doctrine of predestination is of great value because it reveals God in everything. It shows that He has great interest in everything that concerns a believer. To those who would know the will of God it points to everything that comes to pass in their lives, from the most important happenings to those that are trivial in themselves. We cannot lift a finger or think a thought apart from predestination. Nothing comes our way, good or bad, apart from this great truth. The people we meet, the friends we make, and those who oppose us, are all subject to the divine decree of predestination, so that we may ask with the psalmist, 'Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?' (Psalm 139 : 7), and the answer is that it cannot be done. And surely this is a great comfort to him who loves his Lord and values His presence more than life itself.

PREDESTINATION AND SUBMISSION

Predestination is also of great value to the believer from the point of view of Christian submission and contentment. In *Absolute Predestination*, Jerome Zanchius says, 'Christians want nothing but absolute resignation to render them perfectly happy in every possible circumstance, and absolute resignation can only flow from an absolute belief of, and an absolute acquiescence in, God's absolute providence, founded on absolute predestination'.

And of God's providence, another Christian writer says, 'Could we see a miracle from God, how would our thoughts be affected with an holy awe and veneration of His presence! But if we consider everything as God's doing, either by order or permission, we shall then be affected with common things, as they would be who saw a miracle. For as there is nothing to affect you in a miracle, but as it is the action of God, and bespeaks His presence, so when you consider God as acting in all things, and all events, then all things will become venerable to you, like miracles, and fill you with the same awful sentiments of the Divine presence'.

Practical predestination, then, practises the presence of God, and what greater privilege can we have than this?

Finally, the writer would not leave his subject nor his reader without offering a quotation from John Newton, written at the end of one of his letters, entitled 'What the believer can attain to in this life'. It expresses the present writer's feelings more clearly than he can express them himself; and so, 'I hope I *may* say that I *desire* to be thus entirely given up to the Lord; I am

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A New Reformation?

A. M. HARMAN

This address by Professor Harman was given at a meeting of the Belfast Branch of the Evangelical Library and is reprinted from 'The Evangelical Presbyterian'.

When we use the word 'reformation' our minds naturally go back to the great movement in the 16th century which we speak of as the Reformation. But we cannot contemplate a new event in the 20th century precisely like that which swept across Europe four centuries ago. It is impossible for us to turn back the clock and re-create the same sort of situation and movement. We must face up to the situation in which we are living today, not to a situation which exists only in our imagination.

CONSTANT REFORMATION

Reformation should not be a feature of church life which makes its appearance only very infrequently. It should be a constant characteristic of the Church. The Reformers often used the Latin phrase 'ecclesia reformata reformanda est', 'the Church having been reformed is to be further reformed'. There is the need to re-assess our doctrine, our worship, our conduct, in order to bring them into closer conformity to God's Word. This principle was stated clearly by Knox and his associates in the Preface to the Scots' Confession, where they say 'that if any man will note in this confession any article or sentence repugnant to God's Holy Word, that it would please him of his gentleness, and for Christian charities' sake, to admonish us of the same in writing; and we upon our honour and fidelity, by God's grace, do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is from His Holy Scriptures, or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss'. Every aspect of church life must be examined in the light of Scripture teaching and brought into harmony with it.

THE PRESENT NEED

While we cannot return to the situation in the 16th century, we certainly learn much from it. There are, for example, many similarities between the two periods in regard to the need for reformation. Unless God in His mercy intervenes we are heading for a new 'dark age'. In the 16th century the

Reformation brought the knowledge of God's Word to men. Listen to Calvin as he speaks of the work of the Reformers: 'This much, certainly, must be clear alike to just and unjust, that our reformers have done no small service to the Church, in stirring up the world as from the deep darkness of ignorance, to read the Scriptures, in labouring diligently to make them better understood, and in happily throwing light on certain points of doctrine of the highest practical importance'. Are we really seeking to dispel the present ignorance of the Bible and its teaching?

METHODS

What of our methods? If there is to be reformation we must learn from the past and especially from the manner in which the Reformers worked in the 16th century. For example, we need to rediscover the famous Reformation watchwords: by grace alone, Christ alone, the Scripture alone, by faith alone. On the one hand these watchwords remind us that the Reformation was a spiritual movement dealing with heart religion. On the other hand they remind us of the Reformers' stress on clear and definite views of Christian doctrine. The Reformers' doctrinal positions came to clear expression in the formulation of credal statements, such as confessions and catechisms. It is also apparent from their sermons what high regard they had for precise statements on the teaching of God's Word.

How does this compare with evangelical life today? In general there is the dislike of doctrine, and slogans such as 'No creed but Christ' and 'Christianity is a relationship not a creed', are all too common. But this attitude is not the view the New Testament takes, for if we look at the Pastoral Epistles, for example, we see the stress that is placed on adherence to correct doctrine. People today must be taught the message of the Bible, i.e., doctrine and reformation within the Church must be in accord with Biblical truth. The unrest and change we are witnessing in many churches, including the Roman Catholic, are not part of true reformation, because they are not movements of change based solidly on the Bible. We must be aware, therefore, of the need today not only for thorough exposition of the Scriptures but systematic teaching of Christian doctrine. There is much to be said in favour of the practice of those churches, especially Dutch or of Dutch origin, which use the Heidelberg Catechism in their pulpit ministry week by week throughout the year. Believers must know what the Scriptures teach if they themselves are to witness intelligently and withstand attacks made upon them

by those who adhere to one or other of the modern substitutes for the Gospel.

MINISTERIAL TRAINING

Much of the responsibility for the dissemination of doctrinal teaching rests upon ministers, and there must be the recognition of the fact that the quality of pulpit work depends to a large extent on the type of training which is given. For too long much conservative training of students has been modelled on liberal courses, and the trend of study has been governed by the direction of current criticism. The type of Biblical training given in the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods has much to teach us in this respect. While being aware of what are the current trends in theology, we are not to concern ourselves with all the intricacies of liberal study of the Bible. Rather, we are to concentrate on the exposition of Scripture teaching, for it is this which prepares a man for the work of the ministry. The best antidote to unbelief in any form is the clear and positive presentation of the truth. The work of training men for the ministry must be constantly re-assessed to ensure that students are getting the preparation which best fits them for the task of proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

PEOPLE INVOLVED

If there is to be reformation in the church it must involve the average church member. It cannot just be a discussion engaging the attention of ministers, students, etc. Our message must be directed to the average person in plain and direct language. This applies to our preaching, teaching and literature. It is clear that it was so in the days of the great Reformers. It was not to an elite group of the population that their appeal was made, but to the common people.

THE PLACE OF LITERATURE

Looking back to the 16th century it is obvious that literature played an extremely important role in the success of the whole movement. There was not only the production of large works such as commentaries, or theological works such as Calvin's Institutes, but a mass of small tracts and pamphlets. Bainton says that the winning of most of Northern Germany within a decade 'was achieved through a wave of propaganda unequalled hitherto and in its precise form never repeated. The primary tools were the tract and the cartoon. The number of pamphlets issued in Germany in the four years 1521 through 1524 exceeds the quantity for any other four years of German history to the present'.

At the present time there is the danger of relying too heavily on the legacy of good literature from the past, or of over-emphasising that of one particular period, e.g., the Puritan era. We must learn what we can from the literature of past centuries, but above all we must note the methods to face the particular challenge in any one period. While we should be grateful for the amount of solid literature available today, there is the need for much more to explain, defend and propagate the great truths of the Bible. One specific need is that of popularising works to do for Reformed theology what William Barclay has done for liberal theology.

Christian people today should be reading the best books, remembering in so doing that this literature is only an aid to help us in our understanding of Scripture, and should always cause us to turn again to the Word of God with new love for it and understanding of its teaching. Moreover, individual Christians should not be reluctant to invest in their own missionary programmes so far as literature is concerned. A stock of books can easily be kept on hand, ready for distribution when the opportunity arises.

REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

Reformation is inseparably connected with revival. It is God who by His Spirit quickens the zeal of His people; it is He who uses the means of propagating the truth to awaken sinners to newness of life. Though there is no set formula which brings revival and reformation, we must steadfastly adhere to God's Word, proclaim it fearlessly, and pray that God in His grace would come in mighty power, bringing reformation to the professing Christian church, and gathering many into His kingdom. Abraham Kuyper concluded his Stone Lectures with some striking words in this connection: 'The quickening of life comes not from men: it is the prerogative of God, and it is due to His sovereign will alone, whether or not the tide of religious life rise high in one century, and run to a low ebb in the next . . . But you remember the Aeolian harp which men were wont to place outside their casement, that the breeze might wake its music into life. Until the wind blew the harp remained silent, while, again, even though the wind arose, if the harp did not lie in readiness . . . not a single note of ethereal music delighted the ear . . . Still we feel it our God-given duty to keep our harp, its strings tuned aright, ready in the window of God's holy Sion, awaiting the breath of the Spirit'.

CONCLUSION

There are many difficulties facing the church today, but let us remember how great were the obstacles before the Reformers in the 16th century. Towards the end of Calvin's tract, 'The Necessity of Reforming the Church', he is encouraging the Emperor, Charles V, not to turn aside from the work of reformation because he despaired of success before he had even begun. 'How slender soever the hope of success,' says Calvin, 'God bids us be of good courage, and put away every thing like fear, that we may with alacrity begirt ourselves for the work. Thus far, at least, we do Him honour. Confiding in His almighty power, let us not decline to try what the success is which He may be pleased to give.' Are we facing the present situation in that spirit? May God grant us hearts that are set on doing His will, and the strength to go forward in our day and proclaim the whole counsel of God.

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sure I *must* say, that what I have written is far from being my actual experience. Alas! I might be condemned out of my own mouth were the Lord strict to mark what is amiss. But, O the comfort! we are not under the law, but under grace. The gospel is a dispensation for sinners, and we have an Advocate with the Father. *There* is the unshaken ground of hope. A reconciled Father, a prevailing Advocate, a powerful Shepherd, a compassionate Friend, a Saviour who is able and willing to save to the uttermost. He knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust; and has opened for us a new and blood-sprinkled way of access to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need'.

What have we to do with consequences? It is ours to do the right, and leave results with the Lord. To do wrong cannot under any circumstances be right. For the Lord's servants to be false to their conviction is always an evil thing, a root that bears wormwood.—C. H. SPURGEON.

The First Last, and the Last First

C. H. SPURGEON

*A sermon preached at the Metropolitan
Tabernacle on Thursday Evening,
March 12th, 1891.*

'But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first' (Matthew 19 : 30).

'So the last shall be first, and the first last' (Matthew 20 : 16).

We must be saved if we would serve the Lord. We cannot serve God in an unsaved condition. 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' It is vain for them to attempt service while they are still at enmity against God. The Lord wants not enemies to wait upon Him, nor slaves to grace His throne. We must be saved first; and salvation is all of grace. 'By grace are ye saved through faith.' After we are saved, and as the result of salvation, we serve. Saved—we serve. He that is saved becomes a child of God, and then he renders a child-like service in his Father's house. That service is also all of grace. He serves not under the law of the old commandment, 'This do, and thou shalt live'; for he is not under the law, but under grace. Therefore, sin shall not have dominion over him, but grace shall have dominion over him; and he shall seek to serve the Lord and please Him all the days of his life. When we are saved, we must never forget that we are saved that we may serve; made free from sin, that we may become servants to God. David says, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid: Thou hast loosed my bonds'. Because our bonds are loosed, we are under new bonds, bonds of love, which bind us to the service of the Most High.

Now, when we come thus to be servants, we must not forget that we are saved men and women; for if we begin to fancy that, while we serve, we are working to win life by our merits, we shall get upon legal ground; and a child of God on legal ground is going back, he is departing from his true standing before God. Still remember, 'Ye are not under the law, but under grace'. But if you begin to forget your indebtedness to your Saviour, not only for eternal life, but for everything you are, and have, and do, you will be like the Galatians, who

began in the Spirit, but sought to be made perfect by the flesh. You will be like the young man whose question we have just read: 'What lack I yet?' You will be like Peter, who puts in a sort of claim for reward: 'Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?' You will be like the men who had worked in the vineyard from early morning, and who murmured because the penny was given to those who had only worked for a single hour. Christ will not have His servants under bondage to a legal spirit. Wherever He spies it out, He strikes it on the head; for both the service and the reward are all of grace. The service itself is given us of God, and God rewards the service which He Himself has given. We might almost speak of this as an eccentricity of grace. God gives us good works, and then rewards us for the works which He Himself has given. So all is of grace from first to last, and must never be viewed with a legal eye. Into this subject I want on this occasion to conduct you.

I dare say that you have heard sermons from this text, but probably not preached from it in its connection. I like to take the text as it stands, and get from it a bit of exposition for my own heart, which I may pass on to you; for, remember, although the text away from its connection may be true, yet it is not the truth which God there intended to teach us, and it becomes us to look about us to see what comes before the text, and what comes after, in order that we may catch the exact meaning of the Holy Ghost in giving the words.

I. I shall begin by dwelling upon this remark: IN THE SERVICE OF OUR LORD FREE GRACE IS MANIFESTED. It may not strike you as being upon the surface of the text, but it lies on the very surface of the whole connection: in the service of our Lord free grace is manifested. Think that over.

It must be so, in the first place, because, although it is rewarded, *all our service is already due to God*. Under the law we are bound to love the Lord with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength. There can be nothing beyond that. All that we can do we are already bound to do, under the law. Works of supererogation must be impossible, since the law comprehends all holiness, and condemns every form of sin. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, we have done no more than it was our duty to do. Hence, brethren, if there be a service to which we are called, and for which a reward is promised, it must be a service of grace. It cannot be any other. Under the gospel, the same thing is true; all that we can do is already due. 'Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price.' There is

no faculty, there is no capacity, there is no possibility of your nature which is not redeemed, and which does not belong to Christ by virtue of the ransom price which He has paid for it. You will gladly and gratefully own the obligation to do all that lieth in you, for Him who loved you, and bought you with His precious blood.

'Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears for ever flow';

surely they are all due to my Lord already in repentance and gratitude. All the zeal of missionaries, all the patience of martyrs, all the faith of confessors, all the holiness of godly men, is Christ's by right, and therefore there can be no reward for them, seeing that they are His due already. If there be a service for which a reward is given to us, it is a service granted to us of grace, that we may receive grace thereby.

But, next, there is this reflection—*all our service is in itself unacceptable*. When all comes to all, it is still, in and of itself, a thing so mean and poor, so imperfect and defiled, that it could not claim any reward. Job was made to feel this in the day of his humiliation. He said 'If I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life'. If it were possible for us to stand before God in any merit of our own, we feel so certain that we have come short of the glory of God, and that in many things we have offended, that we would tear off our righteousness from us, and throw it away as filthy rags, even the best of it. 'I count all things but loss,' saith Paul, '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.' If then we are so conscious of our failures, and shortcomings, and transgressions, and if we have to cry for mercy even on our holy things, and to confess sin in them, how can we suppose that any reward that may be given can be otherwise than of grace, seeing that the whole service itself must be of grace?

Think again. *The ability to serve God is the gift of God's grace*. I refer not only to mental ability; but to the capacity which men of substance have to help the cause of God by their generous gifts. It is God who gives the power to get wealth, as it is He who gives the brain to think, and the mouth to speak. 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive?' If any here present are serving God with gifts and graces, I am sure that they must own that these were given to them. They did not win them themselves. Or, if some of them be acquirements,

yet the power to acquire was given them of Him from whom cometh every good gift and every perfect gift. Thus the ability to serve God is the gift of grace.

Beloved, *the call to serve God in any special way is also of grace*. If we are called to the ministry, remember how Paul puts it: 'Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ'. If our kings put upon their coins '*Dei gratia*'—kings, by the grace of God—well, well, let them say so; but we can put it on our lives. 'Sunday-school teachers, by the grace of God.' 'Street-preachers, by the grace of God.' 'Students in the College, by the grace of God.' 'Preachers of the gospel, by the grace of God.' It is God who calls us to our several sacred employments. Our ordination, if it be an ordination at all, is from that great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, who went up into a mountain, and called unto Him whom He would, and made them to be His first messengers. Before He left them, He gave them that great commission which is still binding upon all His followers, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature'. It is of grace that we are put into any sphere of service; and what a grace it is to be permitted to do anything for Him! His shoes' latches we are not worthy to unloose; His shoes we are not worthy to bear. Though it be a menial's work, it is a monarch's work to do anything for Christ. Blessed be His name, if He will let me be anywhere in His service, though it were but as a scullion in the kitchen! The kitchen is in the palace, and Christ's kitchen-maids are maids of honour. He that serveth God, reigneth. To serve Him on earth is to be glorified. To serve Him in heaven will be a part of our endless glory. Surely this, then, is by grace.

Still further, *every opportunity of serving God is a gift of grace*. I am sure that when I have been shut out from the pulpit by sickness, I have thought it a great grace from God to be permitted to creep into the pulpit once more. When one's hand has been unable to hold a pen, we count it a grace to be able to write again some loving words that may be blessed to men. I think that it is God's grace that puts in your way people to whom you may speak privately. It is God's grace that brings those children to the Sunday-school to you, that you may teach them. If we were wide awake, we should see, all day long, opportunities of usefulness, and we should be saying, 'Blessed be God who puts me by providence where I can be of some little service to Him, and bring forth some fruit to His praise!' It is all of grace; these providential openings,

and the spirit and the power to avail ourselves of them, come as gifts from God.

Another thing I know: when you have the call to a work, and the opportunity, still *it is a gift of grace to be in a right state of mind to do your Lord's service*. Do you never feel sluggish and dull? Would you not *always* be so if His Spirit did not quicken you? Are you not sometimes frost-bitten, so that your soul seems like a great iceberg? Would the waters ever flow unless the Spirit came with melting power? Do you not thank God, dear brother, that you have had gracious occasions in which the Lord has made you like Naphtali, 'a hind let loose'? When you have given forth goodly words, from whom has come the unction? whence the power? You have spoken: ah, that is a poor thing! But God has spoken through you: ah, that is a grand thing! Is not that wholly the work of grace? Every tear of sympathy that the preacher sheds when he is wooing men to Christ, every heart-throb and all the anguish of his soul when he would fain compel them to come in, the whole bearing and carriage of a grace-taught minister or teacher—all this is of grace, and unto God must be the glory of it. It is not under law that we are working; for law provides no strength, no tone, no savour. It is grace that makes us work; for it gives us the strength with which to work. 'God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for Thou renderest to every man according to his work.' Thou givest him strength proportioned to his need, and the guidance necessary because of the difficulties of his task. Here is grace. Is it not so?

You will be sure to join with me in the next point without a single demur: *success in holy service is wholly of the Lord*. If we were so wicked as to attribute to ourselves the sowing, and to ourselves the watering, apart from grace, yet we dare not attribute to ourselves the increase. 'I have planted,' said Paul; 'Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.' Would a single persuasion of ours prevail with man's hard heart if the Holy Spirit did not convince him of sin, and make him repent? Would the preaching of the gospel in our poor way ever enlighten a single eye if Jesus Christ were not seen in His own light? Could we comfort the broken-hearted, could we proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, if the Spirit of God were not upon us? Why, if we did make the proclamation, would it not fall flat to the ground apart from the work of God, who doeth all things through us and by us? We are labourers together with

Him. We lift our hand, and God lifts His. We speak, and He speaks. We would fain lay hold of men's hearts, and He does lay hold upon them. We would weep them to Christ, and He brings them weeping to Christ, and saves them to eternal life. Blessed be His name! After many years of prophesying in His name, dare any of us say that we have made the dry bones to live? After having long given the invitation, do we say that we have persuaded one to come to the wedding-feast apart from the Lord's divine working? Do we take any of the glory of a saved soul to ourselves? It were treason; it were blasphemy. We dare not commit such a sin. Our work, if it succeeds at all, if it is worth calling good work, is all of grace.

And if, my dear friends, any of you are called to suffer for Christ's sake, *the honour of suffering is a special gift*. If you have been reviled, if you have lost position, if you have suffered those moderate martyrdoms which are possible in a free country like this, then 'Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake'. 'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.' But take no credit to yourself. You are elevated to the peerage of suffering: it is your King who brought you there. You have His gracious permission to pass through great tribulation: that were nothing to you, if you had not washed your robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. You owe your patience, your courage, your steadfastness, all to the Spirit of God. You had long since been carried away by the fear of man, which bringeth a snare; you had long since been a traitor to the truth, and to your Lord, if He had left you. It is your duty to be faithful. When you are faithful, it is not in yourself that you are so. He works all our works in us, and He must have the praise of them. 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.' Work it out to the very full. Be thorough with it. 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.' 'Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.' God will reward you; but your steadfastness, your diligence, your patience, all these are the work of the grace of God, and you know it. If you, indeed, possess them, you ascribe them all to Him.

Now, then, we have established this, I think, beyond all contradiction, among spiritual men—that in the service of the Lord free grace is magnified.

II. So we take another step, and we say, as our second head, HENCE THE LORD HAS HIS OWN WAY OF MEASURING WHAT WE

DO. You see that in the case of these persons who had toiled in the vineyard; their master measured their work after his own fashion. He did not go by the regular pay-way of so much an hour; but, inasmuch as it was all of grace, this great householder made the reward to be after his own measure, a penny for one hour and a penny for twelve hours. He made the last equal to the first. So shall it be: 'The last shall be first, and the first last'. This is because we are dealing here, not with a legal paymaster, but with a God of grace, who measures our service, which itself is all of grace, by His own measurement, and not by ours.

He will reward every worker, but not as we judge. He will do no man any injustice, even in the omnipotence of His grace. He will be able to say to every worker, 'Friend, I do thee no wrong'. He will do no wrong to any one of His servants, whoever they may be; rest sure of that; but still He will reply, 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?' and He will reward His workers in His own royal yet gracious way.

So, then, *He will not reward us according to the time spent, or surface covered.* Some may be Christians for thirty or forty years, and may never be among the first. It is not the length of your service, good as that is, that will be God's gain. There may be some who shall come to Christ and go home to heaven in a single year, and yet shall bring great honour to their Master. It is not the length of time in which you are engaged in the Lord's service. Neither is it the space that is apparently covered. Some seem to do a great deal, skimming over a wide surface; but it is not so that the Master measures: neither by the hour, nor yet by the acre. That might be a legal way of measurement, but His gracious way of measurement is not so.

And *He will not measure out the reward according to our ability*, whether it be mental ability, ability of substance, or ability of opportunity; for some of us might come in for a large share, and others might come in for a very little, if this were the rule. But this is not the way the Master measures. If to one man He gives the gift of speech, to another the great gift of diving deeply into the meaning of His Word, and to another experience, and so on, yet the reward to the persons holding these various gifts will not be in proportion to the gifts they have, but after quite another rule.

The reward will not be according to the judgment of men. A brother has served God in his way, and his brethren think much of him, and appoint him to an office. He is a deacon, or an elder, or, peradventure, he becomes a pastor. It is a high reward to be allowed thus to increase our opportunities of

usefulness; but we shall not at last be rewarded according to the height of office. That is not the standard in this kingdom where Christ rules .

Above all, *no man shall be measured by his own judgment*; else I know some friends who would have a very grand reward. They are free from sin; they are perfect, they say: their Master knows, if they do not, whether that is true or not. Another says, 'I have done this, and I have done that'. But it is not what you say that you have done that will gauge your Master's reward to you. There are some that speak very loudly of what they have accomplished. I do not think that their brethren, for the most part, think the more of them for thinking so much of themselves. I believe that those who have lower opinions of their own capacity and usefulness are much more honoured in the presence of the saints of God. No, our self-judgment, our tall talk, our loud profession, and so forth, will not be the measure with which we shall be rewarded; else those who said, 'We have borne the burden and heat of the day' would have had twopence, at least, if not threepence, or, perhaps, even a shilling, in proportion to those poor creatures whom the Master made equal to them, though they had only come in at the eleventh hour.

Our reward will not be according to the impression made among men. We may have made our mark upon our age, and neighbourhood, and surroundings. Some men's names will go down to posterity; others have no fame at all. It will be found of some men that their lives are written and emblazoned everywhere. Others will live in the little circle of their family, but not beyond that narrow range. But God will not measure so. The godly housewife, with four or five children trained for God in her cottage, may be reckoned of God among the first; and the able speaker, in his pulpit, who has thousands hanging on his lips, may be reckoned of God among the last. God has His own ways of measuring up men's works.

But let me add that *we shall not be rewarded even according to our success.* To some men success is meted out in large measure; that success which really is not their own, but is the fruit of other men's labours. A man preaches the gospel with many tears for years, and sees little fruit. He dies: another man, of earnest spirit, follows him, and gathers in the old man's sheaves. The former man planted; the other man entered into his labours. To whom shall the reward be given? The success is not due to him who seems to have achieved it. You remember the old Romish legend, which contains a great truth. There was a brother who preached very mightily, and

who had won many souls to Christ, and it was revealed to him one night, in a dream, that in heaven he would have no reward for all that he had done. He asked to whom the reward would go; and an angel told him that it would go to an old man who used to sit on the pulpit stairs and pray for him. Well, it may be so, though it is more likely that both would share their Master's praise. We shall not be rewarded, however, simply according to our apparent success.

Neither shall we be put down as one of the last because of non-success. God intends that some men shall never succeed, according to the rule of success that appertains among men; for He sent even His servant Isaiah to go and make the people's hearts hard, and their ears dull of hearing; and He sent Jeremiah to weep over a nation to whom His tears brought no repentance and no reformation. He may send you, like Noah, to preach for one hundred and twenty years, and never get a soul beside your own family into the ark. But if you are faithful, that is well pleasing in His sight. Here lies the good pleasure of God. I do not suppose that it will happen that you are to do all the ploughing and all the sowing, and there should never be an armful of sheaves for you in all your life; though, if it should be thus, and you shall have been at the last found faithful to the commission that your God has given to you, verily, I say unto you, you shall have your reward; but the reward is not measured out according to man's rule of success.

Let me tell you what I think is a rule with God. It is a many-branched kind of rule. Some men stand first because of their strong *desire*. Oh, they would have saved the people if they could; they would have persuaded men to be Christians if they could; they would have laid down their lives to do it. They preached their very hearts out in their desire for their hearers' salvation. Their souls ran over at their lips while they talked with men. God knows their desires, and He takes the will for the deed, and 'so the last shall be first'.

God also measures *proportions*. The brother never had more than one talent, but he did as much with it as some with ten; yet it did not seem to come to much in his eye. He was always mourning because he was so little. He thought that he was like one of those coral insects at the bottom of the sea, just making a little bit of coral which never came above the waves; but it was part of a great whole that would afterwards rise into a fairy island of the sea. Our Lord will measure, not according to what a man hath not, but according to what a man hath.

And here is one who has little to commend him except his *spirit*. He waits upon God. He is very gracious. He trembles at God's word. He speaks with his whole heart very reverently, very tenderly, desiring always to be silent if God would have him silent, and only to speak when God would move him to speak. His delight is to do the Lord's will, and nothing but the Lord's will, and he is quite content to be nothing. Indeed, he cries for that—

'Oh, to be nothing, nothing
Only to lie at His feet!'

Now, God may put that man among the first; whereas the self-contained man, who does work for God sincerely, may, nevertheless, have to go into the back rank, and be among the last.

Here is one, again, who, whatever he does, does it with *thoroughness*. He does not attempt many things, but he does one thing. It is all that he can do, and he throws his whole soul into it, and works at it like some Eastern artist working at a cameo for a prince. All his life is put into that little bit of a thing; and, it may be, that our great King will count him first; while another who did much in a slovenly, slurring style, and was thought to have done a great deal, will have all his work rejected, for it is not up to the Prince's mark, and He will not adorn His palace therewith.

I think, friends, that God will measure our work very much by our *thought of Him* in it. If we did it all *to Him*; if we did it all *for Him*; if He was always in our mind in the doing of it; and we did not think of our friends, nor of our own reputation, God would be more likely to honour us, for He will put those who think much of Him among the first, and others among the last. 'Them that honour me,' saith the Lord, 'I will honour.'

And especially, again, if all that we do is baptised with *love*. Why, see that woman who brought her alabaster box, and broke it, and poured the precious ointment of spikenard upon Christ's head! She is put among the first, and Christ makes honourable mention of her wherever the gospel is preached. Some that did much have to go among the last; for they had not such love as she had.

Some work for God with great *faith*; and the Lord loves to see us working in faith. To do a great deal of work with a great deal of unbelief is to do very little after all; for if a prayer that is unbelieving does not prosper, preaching or teaching that is unbelieving is not likely to do so. Put faith into thy work, and, may be, thou wilt be among the first.

I am sure that God measures much of our work according to the *prayer* we expend over it. Oh, yes, it was a fine sermon! You could tell how the preacher had worked at it; you could see how he had polished up that phrase, and how he had cut that sentence into dice-pieces to make it tell; but you could also see that he had never prayed over it. A sermon that is prayed over is worth ten thousand that are merely prepared, or copied, or that spring out of a man's mind without being wrought by the Holy Spirit in his heart. Oh, to pray down the sermon, and then to pray up the sermon, and pray it all over, resting upon God alone!

God will often look upon our work in *giving*, not according to how much we give, but I think that the Lord's rule is to take notice of *how much we have left*. That woman who gave all her living, gave more than all the rich men gave, because she had nothing left. It was but two mites that make a farthing; but then it was all her living; and so she goes into the front rank. My lord has given a thousand pounds, and we are very much obliged to him. He must go into the back rank for all that; for he has so much left.

And then, it may be, that they will take the first place *who did not get any reward* for what they did. Our Lord tells us that when we are making a feast we should call in the blind, and the halt, and the lame. Why? 'For,' He says, 'they cannot recompense thee.' He speaks of the Pharisees again, and says, 'Verily I say unto you, They have their reward'. You will not be paid twice. If you have done something for Christ—for instance, defended the faith—and you are denounced for it, and traduced for it, very well, you have not had your pay for it. There remaineth the recompense for unrewarded services. It is a grand thing when, by the grace of God, you have something standing in God's book, not of law, but of grace. You helped a poor man, and he was not grateful. Oh, be so thankful that he was not grateful, because, if he had been grateful you would have had your reward, may be! When those you relieve are very kind afterwards, and speak well of you, and do you some good service in return, it is very nice; of course it is. Well, but you are paid. But those who have done good and suffered for it; who, for the best thing that they did have had the worst return; who have rendered kindness, and have only received unkindness as the result; it may be that the Lord will say of them, 'These were last, but they shall be first'; whereas many that stood first in men's esteem, and in the gratitude they received, will have to go last.

III. Now, my time almost fails me, but you must bear with me on my third head; for here is the practical part of free grace in our service. Hence, WE HAVE INSTRUCTION AS TO OUR SPIRIT AS WORKERS. If the work is all of grace, and if God has a way of measuring up that work, which is not at all according to the law, but of His own grace; then there are two things to be observed. First, do not be proud; secondly, do not be discouraged.

Do not be proud, for many that are first shall be last. Suppose, my dear friend, that you really are first, and are doing a great deal for God, will you be proud? Why, *you are only a greater debtor*. You owe all the more to that grace which has enabled you to be of some service in the kingdom of your Lord. Lie low at your Lord's feet, and be very humble.

Next, remember that though you may think that you are first, *you may, even now, be among the last*. Your assessment of your service may not be the divine assessment at all. You may think that you are 'rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing'; and, in God's repute, you may be 'Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked'. Your work may be like very big trusses of hay, and loads of straw, and stacks of stubble; and yet, when God comes to try it, it may be all burned down to a handful of ashes; whereas the friend, of whom you think so little, may only have built a small portion, but he has built it of gold, and silver, and precious stones.

Let us also recollect that, even if it is true that we are among the first, we may, if we get proud of it, *find ourselves among the last*. Oh, how some of God's greatest servants have been shrivelled up when they began to swell out with pride and vanity! God blessed them as long as they were feeble, and weak, and leaned upon His strength; but when they were strong, and relied on themselves, there came a dreadful failure.

There is one thing which is absolutely certain. *If you are among the first, you will reckon yourself to be among the last*. He that is best thinks himself worst. What a description Paul gives of himself in the seventh of Romans; 'Oh,' says one, 'I heard a person say that Paul was not a converted man when he wrote that!' Let me tell you that he had been in the third heaven when he wrote that bit of deep experience. He had so much likeness to his Lord that he excelled every other man then living, except, perhaps, John; and if it had not been for his extraordinary holiness he would never have been able to pen those tremendous groanings wherein he says, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this

death?' The man who thinks that he is holy has never seen the holy God. If he had—if he had ever beheld Him, he would say with Job, 'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'. The superlative perfection of the Lord God, and the absolutely perfect example of our Lord Jesus Christ, are such that if a man has ever had communion with these, he shrinks into nothing in his own esteem. He that is really first is always the man who is willing to be accounted last. Paul, though he is not a whit behind any of the apostles, yet calls himself less than the least of all saints, and describes himself as having been the chief of sinners. Ah, beloved! a low idea of self is one of the labels with which God marks the best of His possessions; therefore, do not be proud.

In the next place, do not be discouraged. If you feel that you are last, *God's measure is not yours*. Though you may think that you are last, He may not think so at all. Though you say, 'I am not worthy to be an apostle', yet He may think you worth putting into the apostleship. God's idea of your worthiness and your own may greatly differ; and His estimate is the true one.

Besides, suppose that you are last, yet '*He giveth more grace*'. Christ has come, not only that we may have life, but that we may have it 'more abundantly'. Do not be content with what you have. 'Covet earnestly the best gifts.' Covet still more the best graces. God is able to do for us 'exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think'. Go in for great things. Hath not the Lord said, 'Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it'? I spoke to a man of God this morning, and I told him how God had graciously enabled me to draw near to Him in prayer, and of the glorious way He had granted my requests. My friend said, 'Yes, and He has made your mouth bigger than it used to be'. Is it not so? The faculty of believing prayer grows by being used. The more you ask, the more you may ask; and the more you have asked, the more you will ask. The capacity to receive is increased by receiving. God grant that it may be so with us if we are last!

Remember, too, that if you really are among the least useful, yet *a right spirit may compensate* for your poverty, and make your little service very precious. If you cannot get a wide sphere, do not want it. A young minister said to an old one, 'Ah, sir! I preach only to about one hundred people. I wish that I could get where I could gather a thousand'. His friend answered, 'Young man, a hundred people are quite enough for you to be accountable for; and if you faithfully

discharge your duty to their souls, you have quite enough to do'. Wish for a larger sphere if you are capable of filling it; but remember that the best preparation for greater usefulness is to be faithful in your present position.

My last word to God's children is this: what does it matter, after all, whether we are first or whether we are last? Do not let us dwell too much upon it, for *we all share the honour given to each*. When we are converted, we become members of Christ's living body; and as we grow in grace, and get the true spirit that permeates that body, we shall say, when any member of it is honoured, 'This is honour for us'. If any brother shall be greatly honoured of God, I feel honoured in his honour. If God shall bless your brother, and make him ten times more useful than you are, then you see that He is blessing you—not only blessing him, but you. If my hand has something in it, my foot does not say, 'Oh, but I have not got it!' No, for if my hand has it, my foot has it; it belongs to the whole of my body. If my mouth alone eats, yet it does not eat for my mouth alone; but it eats for my brain, my hand, my backbone, for every part of me. So, when you get to feel your oneness with Christ, and your oneness with His people, your only thought will be, 'Let God be glorified; let Him be magnified. It does not matter whether I am first or last'. You will stand up and say, 'That brother, who was converted only a week or two ago, got his penny, and I am glad of it'. Here is another, who has done very poor work; but you will thank God that he has got his penny. He is one of the family. It all comes from the same hand, and it will all come home to the same house. We are something like men in a great shop, where there are different people serving. One young man has a counter where ladies come, and he serves them, and he takes a lot of money in the day; another counterman, at the back, sells goods that take a great deal of trouble to dispose of, and upon which there is but a trifling profit. Does the master praise the men of the shop according to the quantity of money each takes? The one who is put in the back place, and sells poor goods, is just as diligent and just as worthy in his master's sight as the others. Suppose that they are all members of one family, when they meet at night one will say, 'I took so much'. Another will say, 'I took ten times as much as that'; but they are all glad, because it all goes into the firm; it is all a part of the same concern. Go then, dear brothers and sisters, and work away for Christ, and do not envy one another, but all

“I Do My Best”

LEITH SAMUEL

I wonder how many of us can honestly echo these words as we think of the work we do each day in the office, the factory, the shop, our school, college, hospital or home. So many people drag their feet these days, getting by with as little effort as possible, always on the look-out for more money for less work. What a difference it would make to our country if every citizen really put his back into his daily work as something vital and well worth doing!

For Christians to find a job in life suited to their gifts and capacity and to do it to the best of their ability brings glory to God as well as work-satisfaction, a sense of daily fulfilment in their own lives. But there are many people who imagine that this idea of *doing your best* applies to the terms on which God will approve of them and their thoughts may run something like this:

‘I’m doing my best. God knows everything. God knows how hard I am trying. God is just. He won’t expect me to do better than my best. After all, nobody can do better than their best. I may not be as religious as some, but I think I am as sincere as they are, and I reckon I stand as good a chance as most of them of getting to any heaven there may be . . .’

If you think like this you may be shocked to read that *the very best we can do is not good enough for God*. No man can be saved by doing his best. Our best efforts are marred by our selfishness and sinfulness. No matter how decent or strong-minded we may be we are quite unable to make ourselves fit for God’s Presence, for He is utterly pure and no impurity can come into His presence. In the sight of God the very finest of men need a Saviour, someone to rescue them, someone to do for them what they cannot do for themselves, someone to make them what they ought to be.

The Bible says, ‘There is no difference, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’. ‘All we like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way.’¹ And while some men impress the rest of us as being streets ahead

¹ Romans 3 : 22, 23; Isaiah 53 : 6; Isaiah 6 : 4, 6.

of us in goodness and merit, they do not impress the Living God as being worthy of everlasting life in His Presence. God has made this quite clear. And God is the Judge. He alone has power to bestow this life. 'Everlasting life is the gift of God' which none of us can earn.² If He withholds eternal life, our approval is no compensation to a man who goes into outer darkness, because he is not good enough for God.

In recent years I have talked with ever so many people who are convinced that so long as they do their best all will be well. They have not realised how clearly the Scriptures state that we are all *'guilty before God'*, and are quite unable to clear ourselves of our guilt in the sight of God. It does not matter what we may think when we look at our life through rosy-coloured spectacles. *What matters is what God thinks.* Do we hope to get to heaven by doing our best? God's Word has sign-posted that way as a NO THROUGH ROAD. What is more, those of us who think we can win God's approval by trying to live a good life have not realised what a mockery this makes of the death of Christ on the first Good Friday. If we can save ourselves, we might well ask, 'What was the point of all that?' *For the blood and agony of Christ on that awful cross was a ghastly waste if we can save ourselves.*

Make no mistake about it, we are utterly powerless to save ourselves. We can neither clear our past, nor change our hearts. Those who have tried to do so know this only too well. Only Christ can cleanse us and transform us. He, and He alone, can blot out the stains of past failure from before the sight of God. He alone can bring true peace to our conscience.³ We cannot know peace with God or have God's love, joy and peace in our hearts until we have received God's forgiveness and the cleansing of our hearts.

Christ died to pay the price of sin, the cost of forgiveness. He lives to bring men and women into this forgiveness. And when He brings us into the wonderful circle of God's forgiveness and peace, He puts a totally new life inside us, imparting both the desire and the ability to live moment by moment a life that is well-pleasing to God.

No man is saved by imitating Jesus, doing his best to live like Him. A man is saved by Christ putting to his credit His perfect obedience and redeeming death, *as if that man had lived Christ's life and had died for his own sins.* A man is saved by Christ imparting His Own Life to him, living His Own Life within him. A man is saved by Christ's constant intercession

² Romans 6 : 23; 1 John 5 : 10-13.

³ Romans 5 : 1-11.

for him. Jesus Christ is alive today and is able to save to the uttermost of extent and time.⁴ There is no besetting sin He cannot save us from.⁵ 'There is no difference, the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. And whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'⁶ No one can rescue us from ourselves like the Lord Jesus and there is no more wonderful Master to serve. There is no moment when He forsakes those for whom He was forsaken when He cried, 'My God, My God, why . . . ?'

I can honestly describe Him as 'my Saviour and my Lord'. Can you? Or do you imagine that because the Father sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world you are all right? Many who go to church quite regularly make this mistake. Most of them have been baptised. Many of them take Communion quite regularly. But 'Churchianity' is not Christianity. Church-going cannot save.

Others, like those quoted at the beginning of this article, think they can do without organised religion. They believe in Jesus. They believe He died for everybody. They believe, therefore, He died for them. Because He died for sinners of all races and generations, they imagine there is nothing for us to do about it. They think we are all automatically covered by Christ's death. So long as we do not disagree with His purpose in coming to rescue sinful men, they reason all must be well.

But this is a very serious mistake. And anyone taking this view is in a position of great peril. This sort of 'Religionless Christianity' is as powerless as 'Churchianity' is to save. In Old Testament days the man who knew he had committed sin could not bring his sin-offering and leave it with the priest to 'get on with it'. He had to lay his hands upon the head of his sacrifice, and in this way identify himself with the animal that was going to suffer death in his place.⁷ He who deserved to die ('the wages of sin is death') must confess his sins over the head of the offering that had done nothing to deserve to die. Then the death of his offering was looked upon as his death. He lived because his substitute died in his place. So today we must take hold, by faith, of the great sin-offering, Christ 'the Lamb of God', and accept Him as our very own Substitute, or His death will never be the ground of our salvation.⁸

⁴ Hebrews 7 : 25.

⁵ Matthew 1 : 21.

⁶ Romans 10 : 12, 13; Leviticus 4.

⁷ Leviticus 4 : 27-35.

⁸ John 1 : 29; 1 John 2 : 1, 2.

It is sadly possible to believe that Christ is the Son of God, and that He died for the sins of men, without enjoying what He died to make available. I must come to Christ personally, confessing my sinfulness and my sins.⁹ I must turn in true repentance from myself and my sins and all my efforts to clear myself. I must turn to Him who suffered the righteous displeasure of a sin-hating God.¹⁰ Then, and only then, can I find peace through forgiveness. And there is no real peace apart from God's forgiveness. Have you found Him and His peace? If your answer to this question is, 'I am not sure', may I urge you to make sure? Get alone with God. One of the best places for most people to get alone with God is in the quietness of a bedroom, kneeling by the bed. God meets people through His Holy Word, the Bible. Open your Bible. Turn to the story of the Cross, e.g. in Matthew, chapters 26 and 27, or John 18 and 19. Ask the living God Who is the Truth, and Who has revealed the truth in this Book, to make Himself real to you. Ask Him to show you yourself as a sinner for whom Christ died. Ask Him to make the Person and love of the Saviour real to you. Why not do this tonight? There is no time like the present. Don't forget that 'the road to By and by leads to the town of Never!'

After you have read and pondered the most wonderful love story of all time—'God so loved the world that He gave (to death) His only begotten Son . . . '—turn to 2 Corinthians, 5, and read from verse 14 to the first two verses of chapter 6. Then turn what you have read into prayer, personal prayer. God always hears such prayer, so you may thank Him that He is listening to you.

All this is very personal, but should it be kept secret? Indeed not! As soon as you have opportunity, whether by speaking or writing a letter, let some Christian friend know what He who did so much for you on the Cross, has done in you, and what you have done with Him. All Christians are required to confess their faith in the Lord Jesus¹¹ and in doing so they generally find much joy. 'O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise.'¹²

'What the world needs is Jesus, Just a glimpse of Him . . . ' may not convey all the truth, but it says something very important, so don't be afraid to go out in a perishing world trusting Christ to show forth in your life His own attractive-

⁹ 1 John 1 : 7-10.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5 : 18-21.

¹¹ Romans 10 : 9-13.

¹² Psalm 51 : 15.

ness. Christianity has been defined as 'the outliving of the inliving Christ'. By His indwelling Holy Spirit Christ takes up His residence in every believer's heart.¹³ There are many living in uncertainty and fear around you, waiting for someone to show them the way out of darkness into God's light, certainty and peace. This world holds no greater joy than to show someone the way to the Living God. *God is not dead!* But we are dead, spiritually, until we find Him through Jesus Christ, who is the only way to Him, and is the Life as well.¹⁴

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be glad to be permitted, in this work of grace, to take any part or any portion for your Lord.

One thing more, and I have done. I have only been talking to God's people all this while, because you that are not saved cannot serve Him. What a miserable position yours is! You are out of the pale of service. God will receive nothing of you till you come to Christ. The only way to bring a sacrifice is to bring it through the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven'; much less shall you be accepted as servants there. I beseech you, by the thought of the grace of which I have been speaking, to rest not until you can say that Christ has saved you, made you a partaker of His grace, and sent you forth into His royal service. The Lord bless you! Amen.

CONTRIBUTORS THIS MONTH

Mr. S. M. Houghton, M.A., Charlbury, Oxford.

Rev. Paul Tucker, Minister: East London Tabernacle.

Mr. Leith Samuel, B.A., Minister: Above-Bar Church, Southampton.

Rev. Prof. A. M. Harman, B.A., B.D., Th.D., Free Church College, Edinburgh.

Mr. H. P. Wotton, Exeter.

¹³ John 14 : 17; Romans 8 : 9; Galatians 2 : 20.

¹⁴ John 14 : 6.