

Living Water — Issue No 15

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“LIFT UP YOUR EYES!”
A FRESH VIEW OF THE THINGS OF GOD.

John 17:1 – 4
Genesis 13:14 – 18
Genesis 22:13
Genesis 24:61 – 67

These scriptures each refer to “lifting up the eyes” and I trust we may be helped today to get a fresh view of the things of God. We may be often perplexed as we look around and see the things in the world or see the failure which has come in amongst christians, which we need to be kept humble about. I believe, though, that the Lord would cause us to lift up our eyes to see what He has in hand and to lay hold of it.

One of the great things in christianity is that we have been brought into relationship with God. We are able to enjoy a link with the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, and we are able to know God as our Father. We are able to speak to God as our Father, with reverence, I trust, and yet thankful that we have been brought into relationship with the God who has so richly blessed us on the righteous basis of the finished work of Christ. One thing that I feel we ought to enjoy more is communion with Divine Persons. I feel, myself, how little I know of it and yet God has brought us into this wonderful place of favour.

The things of this world are passing away. Everything around us is crumbling and that may lead to us feeling cast down. When we take account of the breakdown in Christendom we are saddened. In one sense we are all part of it and cannot get out of it. Yet the Lord has made a way through so that we can each be apart from what is evil and be in relation to what is good. There are only two things - what is good and what is evil and the Lord has brought in the answer to that at the cross. He has established, on a wonderful footing, all that is good. All that is from God is good and it is for us to enjoy. I believe the Lord would help us at the present time because we would all admit that we tend to get occupied with the smallness and with the breakdown and with the public side of things and without looking ahead to see what the Lord has in mind for us to enjoy. Whilst we carry, I trust, the sorrow, yet we are to reach out with regard to the things before. The Lord would say, “Lift up your eyes”. The greatest things that God has for man are available to every believer in Jesus. They are

not material but spiritual. They are things that belong to God, things which remain, and are there for us to enter into at the present time.

I began with John 17 because there the Lord is seen in the full enjoyment of the relationship into which He had come as Man with His God. He is able to lift up His eyes and say "Father". There was nothing with Him to hinder the enjoyment of relationship. Even in the garden of Gethsemane, in that sorrowful time, He could speak to His Father.

We would all understand that there came a time at the cross when it was a matter between God and Himself, when God was to pour out His holy wrath in judgment upon the head of Jesus. Those three hours must have been dreadful to the Lord. We should appreciate Him more for what He has gone through for us. But John's gospel, as we see here in chapter 17, opens up the character of the relationship between the Father and the Son. So the Lord lifts up His eyes and says, "Father". I should like to get into the secret of that relationship according to God. In Christ we see it in all its perfection.

We are told in chapter 11 of John's gospel that the Lord lifted up His eyes at the grave of Lazarus. That is in a different setting. There in the presence of death everybody was sorrowful; even the Lord wept in that situation. But there was nothing to hinder His holy communion and He could look up to heaven and say, "Father". Chapter 17, however, gives us the side of what we should enjoy.

The Lord is unique here, but on the other hand He is opening up the wonderful order of relationship into which we, as christians, have been brought so that we should understand what it is to enjoy the communion that belongs to the place of sonship into which the Lord has brought us. We are brought into that relationship because we have been given the Spirit of His Son in our hearts. We can look up to God and we can cry "Abba Father". We who were once far off have been brought nigh and we can enjoy relationships with Divine Persons. We can know God as our Father. The Lord is unique; He is the only begotten Son but believers are brought into a place of sonship.

Everything is exemplified for us in Christ. John's gospel opens that way and shows us that the Father loves the Son and that the Lord Jesus is the One who is in the bosom of the Father. Jesus in the bosom of the Father has declared

God. It is a blessed relationship. What we are enjoying today comes to us as a result of this wonderful relationship that exists - that of the Father and the Son. Think of the Father loving the Son and putting everything into the hands of that blessed Man. He shines as the great Administrator. What is wrong with the world at the present time? It is the administration. When the Lord comes to reign He will bring about an administration which is honourable and which will bring in peace, joy and happiness.

May we enjoy more the relationship with God into which we have been brought. We can praise God at any time. When you are at work, you can give thanks to the Father, the One who has made us fit to share the portion of the saints in light and has brought us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love.

May the Lord hold our hearts as we see everything in perfection in Himself. He is perfect and the relationship with the Father is perfect. He could look up to heaven at any time and say, "Father", in the full enjoyment of what that relationship held. It was a relationship of love. That is what we have been brought into.

In Abraham we find a man who had answered to the call of God. How pleasing that must have been in the eye of heaven. It should be a concern to us to be pleasing to the Lord and to be moving in the way that has been divinely directed by God's word. Abraham had answered to the call and, just at this juncture, he was separated from Lot. Lot had gone one way and Abraham had gone the other and Abraham was pleasing to God. God will open things up to us if we act in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Lot went in the way of the world. It is easy to talk about Lot and where he failed, but where have we been and what are we doing? There are only two ways - one towards the world and its influences and the other towards the things of God. Lot may not have wanted to enjoy the things of Sodom but he was there at the gate of it and it says that the people of Sodom were wicked and great sinners before Jehovah. In contrast, it says that Jehovah said to Abraham after Lot had separated himself, "Lift up now thine eyes". The matter of separation is always a current matter for the people of God down here. We cannot go on with the world and with the things of God. We all need help because the devil puts everything he can before us. He would say, "get occupied with this

or with that', anything to distract us from the heavenly line. The Lord would say to us tonight, 'lift up your eyes and see what is in view.'

God said to Abraham, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art". You need not move; from just where you are in your soul history with God, have a look. God said to Abraham, "look northward, southward, eastward and westward". What a sight God was showing to Abraham. He says, 'I will give all this to you and to your seed for ever' What a compensation it was for Abraham. Abraham was a rich man. God had provided for him but he had got more than that - he had God's purpose in his heart. God says to him, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth". Then He says to Abraham, "Arise, walk through the land according to the length of it and according to the breadth of it, for I will give it to thee". Have you ever thought of what God is prepared to give you spiritually? Of what He will do if you take the road that His will opens up for you? Abraham was moving in relation to the purpose of God. It is a great thing to get hold of what God has in mind for us, whatever age we may be. The Father is pleased with persons who commit themselves to the Lord Jesus in this way.

We know that Abraham made a few mistakes but his heart was right. He waited for the city which has foundations; he was not bothered about making foundations down here. He had an influence for good among his children and among his grandchildren. As you get older, and you have children and grandchildren, you wonder whether you have been an influence for good, directing them to the things of the Lord. What are we doing with our young people? What do we want for them? God says to Abraham, 'I will give you all this because of the course you are on.'

Abraham gets confirmed. I think that you get confirmed as you move in the right direction. The Lord would confirm His work in you. It says that, "Abraham moved his tents, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre". That was a good situation and there he built an altar. That is the way of safety, to be kept in our link with God. It is a wonderful thing to be able to speak to God, to enjoy the communion with the Father and with the Lord Jesus. It is fine for young people, boys and girls, that are trusting the Lord Jesus, to speak to God as Father. John in his epistle says of the children that they know the Father. The Father is not a long way off. You can speak to the Father; you speak to the

Father about your problems and He will listen. He loves you, and we are each to enjoy this relationship with Him.

I would like to impress upon you tonight the value of having communion with Divine Persons. It is not just for the older ones; it is for us all.

In chapter 22 of Genesis Abraham is tested in the greatest way. I read this verse which says Abraham "lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, behind was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns". It speaks to us of the Lord Jesus, One who was here in relation to the will of God. The devotedness of Jesus here is a lead for us. We never go wrong if we pursue the way in which the Lord moved. He was here in absolute committal to the will of His God and Father. He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. I believe that is what the ram caught in the thicket by his horns would speak to us of. Jesus offered Himself without spot to God; He was holy and apart from sinners and yet He was so near to sinners, the One, dear hearers, who committed Himself to the will of God which involved Him going to the cross. His committal was total. Now that would be encouragement to us.

Abraham was an exercised person and God tested him. You will find that the men of God in both the Old and the New Testament were tested. In our own time, everyone that is true to Christ is tested, yet God would support us as we lay hold of the truth as it is in Jesus. I find this thought of the ram caught in a thicket by its horns very encouraging. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt-offering. It says, "he lifted up his eyes and looked". At a time of extremity he saw a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. May we all have a fresh view of the Lord Jesus in His committal. Though we may have failed in committal in the past may we pursue as having a fresh view of the committal of Christ.

Chapter 24 of Genesis is most instructive in the way we can apply it as a type of Christ and the church. It says, "Rebecca arose, and her maids, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man. And the servant took Rebecca and went away". I wonder if we appreciate the great truth of Christ and the church. One thing I am pretty certain of is that the more separate we are from the world, the more we will enjoy the truth of Christ and the church because it belongs to heaven. It involves Christ in heaven and the church down here, composed of every believer in Jesus having the Spirit; yet not all are in the

enjoyment of it. One of the greatest blessings of christianity is to know and understand a little about what the church is to the heart of Christ.

As we follow this passage through it brings to light, typically, the wonderful service of the Holy Spirit at the present time. One thing that impressed me in this scripture was that Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw the camels were coming. The Spirit is here as power for the believer. I think it is a picture here of the way that the Spirit has served in bringing along the saints in the power that belongs to Him and Him alone. You notice earlier that it says that the servant (who is another type of the Spirit) took ten camels. I suppose that would have in mind the complete service of the Spirit right through the dispensation. You might have expected Isaac to see Rebecca but it says, "behold, camels were coming". One thing we need above all else, at the present time, is to enjoy in a greater measure the presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul speaks about the communion of the Holy Spirit. It is one of the great blessings of christianity. What is linked with the presence of the Spirit down here is the thought of power. There are other suggestions as to His presence too: the opening up of the Scriptures, guiding us into all the truth.

Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw and behold camels were coming. Whether it is individually or collectively, one of the great things we need is power! We may complain about the smallness of things but the power remains the same. The power is undiminished because the presence of the Spirit is here still and we should be thankful for that. I think this scripture shows that, typically, the service of the Spirit goes on right through to the end; the power will be available. The camels were coming; they had not let Rebecca down and the Spirit has not let us down. The Spirit is available. I think that what we lack is the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit. What we spoke of earlier about communion can only be enjoyed because the Spirit is here indwelling us. Christianity is a spiritual matter. There is the practical side of christianity and it is very important, but the enjoyment of what is heavenly, what is beyond death, what is beyond the grave is vital.

Our link with Christ is beyond death. The link that every believer has with the Lord Jesus is with a Man who is beyond death and we find that the Lord gives the Spirit to believers in view of that link being enjoyed and maintained. Well, Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw the camels. Rebecca lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac. What can we say about it, dear brethren? Isaac lifting up his eyes and

Rebecca lifting her eyes. Do you think that we are near that time? Do you think we have a sight of the Bridegroom in view - have we had a sight of the Man who is on the way to meet us? It is like the star arising in your heart - the sight of Christ who is coming for us. The Spirit and the bride say Come. Isaac lifted up his eyes and he sees all the wealth and all the power that the servant had afforded in carrying the whole journey through. What a journey it is. Think of the journey the Spirit has taken for nearly 2000 years now and the power that is suggested in the camels has not diminished. The power is there even today to carry the people of God through. This is a great comfort to our hearts. Rebecca arose with her maidens and rode upon the camels. All is provided. All that is needed on our part is committal in our ways to the Holy Spirit.

He can bring us under the sway and authority of Christ, can guide us, teach us, and cause us to be found walking here pleasing to the One who is soon coming for us. Rebecca sprang off the camel. What about a sight of the One who is coming for us, a sight of the Man in the glory who has given His life for us all? Christ delivered Himself up for the church. What it will be when we see His face! His coming for His bride is very near now. Persons often say everything points to it but I believe that the greatest pointer is in the hearts of the saints. Things around are surely breaking up and, prophetically, I suppose things do point to it, but, I believe, what is greater than that is the sight of Isaac. She lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac. That is what made her move. She sprang off the camel. I believe the Spirit of God is moving the hearts of those that love Christ at the present time with a yearning, a longing, to see His face.

Right at the end of the chapter we are told that Isaac was comforted after the death of his mother. It is to speak to us of the way we can contribute to what is for the heart of Christ even now.

Let us lift up our eyes and see the great things that God has in hand. Everything here is passing away. Only what is based on the foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ, will remain and He is soon coming. There is much to enjoy. I believe the Lord would help us to be engaged with the things that belong to that scene where He is. Then, think of the Lord taking account of what is happening down here. He takes account of the people of God, of believers in Jesus, of assembly movements and He is waiting, waiting for the Father to give the word to call all His own to be with Himself forever.

Sidney Wheatcroft

CHRIST, A HIDING PLACE

“And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the storm; as brooks of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.” (Isaiah 32:2)

Hail, sovereign love, that first began
The scheme to rescue fallen man!
Hail, matchless, free eternal grace
That gave my soul a hiding place!

Against the God who rules the sky
I fought with hand uplifted high,
Despised the mention of His grace,
Too proud to seek a hiding place.

But thus th’eternal counsel ran,
Almighty love, arrest that man!
I felt the arrows of distress,
And found I had no hiding place.

Indignant justice stood in view;
To Sinai’s fiery mount I flew,
But justice cried with frowning face,
‘This mountain is no hiding place’.

Ere long a heavenly voice I heard
And mercy's angel-form appeared.
She led me on, with placid pace
To Jesus as my hiding place.

Should storms of sevenfold thunder roll
And shake the globe from pole to pole,
No flaming bolt could daunt my face,
For Jesus is my hiding place.

On Him Almighty vengeance fell,
That must have sunk a world to hell.
He bore it for the chosen race,
And thus became their hiding place.

A few more rolling suns, at most,
Will land me on fair Canaan's coast,
Where I shall sing the song of grace
And see my glorious hiding place.

Jehoiada Brewer.

PRAYER

Allow me to give you a few practical words as to your prayers. Keep clear of the unprofitable habit of merely 'saying your prayers'. Christendom is full of solemn warnings as to the tendency of our hearts to drop into a routine of religious forms. It is a very great loss to the soul to get into the habit of repeating substantially the same words in prayer every day. It is not real prayer at all. We read, "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). How can you do that if you are using the same form of words day after day and week after week? Today is not like yesterday, and tomorrow will not be like today. If you are really with God you will be sensitive to the fresh needs of every day.

God delights to have our confidence as to every need and care. Then let us cultivate a child's confidence, and a child's simplicity as we come to Him in prayer. Bring the trying circumstances of today, and the expected difficulties and perplexities of tomorrow, to the blessed God who tells you to cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.

Be simple: give up the long preface, do not feel it necessary to quote a dozen scriptures, ask as a needy and confiding child would ask its parent.

If I might venture to say one word about the prayer meeting it would be this: I do not believe any brother should take part unless he has some definite petition to present. I have been in prayer meetings where I have felt that brothers began without knowing a single thing they were going to ask for, and discoursed about every subject that came into their minds. This may be a profitable religious exercise, but it is certainly not "Prayer"....

The more your heart is set for Christ, the more you will be characterised by humility and dependence, which will find their expression in daily prayer.

C. A. Coates

"But ye [are] a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

FROM HINDUISM TO CHRIST

The testimony of Dr. Kishor (Jimmy) Modha was printed in issue number 13 of this magazine. Printed below is the testimony of his brother.

On the day that Jimmy came home and told the family that Jesus Christ was now his Saviour and Lord, and that he was not going to worship the Hindu gods, it was as if a bomb had dropped on the house. We were shocked and felt ashamed of him. I personally was very angry. In fact, the night he told us of his conversion I opened our household temple at 1.00 am and asked one of the Hindu gods to 'take him up' that night because of the shame he would bring on the family. I was incensed at him saying that Jesus Christ was the only way to God, and that the God of the Bible was the only true and living God. I despised the thought of him being a Christian and could not understand how he could profess to know God personally and intimately. I had tried so hard, and for so many years, to know God through prayers, incantations and meditation but I knew I did not know Him.

Jimmy's witness, through his new way of living, forced me to examine my own beliefs and since I wanted to know the truth and prove myself, I prayed even harder to God to reveal Himself to me. At the same time, I battled with Jimmy to bring him back to the Hindu religion but challenging him just made me more aware of my own emptiness. I had no purpose or meaning in life, certainly no joy or hope. I had become very cynical and lonely. Consequently I studied philosophy, thinking that a deeper knowledge of man and the world would satisfy me, but this left me even more empty and despairing. I had explored the last avenue of hope and it was a dead end.

I did not know what else to do and so I just lived from day to day, hoping that something would happen and that life would change but knowing that nothing would happen and that life would not change. Then, one day in February 1988, I had a most powerful spiritual experience. One night at 3.00 am. I had a vision and suddenly 'woke up' to a room filled with a glorious light. The light was coming from above and everything, the ceiling, the walls etc., was transparent in this light, as if made of glass. I saw the light was coming from a Person who was descending on a cloud with powerful angels around Him. He had burning eyes, feet like glowing metal and dazzling robes. His face shone with a brilliant

glory and His body was altogether radiant. I was paralysed with fear on my bed as I beheld this sight because this Person looked so awesome and dreadful. I could not bear to look at Him, and suddenly I saw Jimmy beside me worshipping Him. Then as the cloud descended one of the angels around the cloud blew his trumpet and it was as if the whole world could hear the sound. A second had a scythe in his hand and he swung it crying, 'Now is the earth ready for harvest'. A third angel put his hand to his mouth and with a loud voice shouted, 'Prepare, for the Lord is coming to reap the harvest'. The cloud seemed to come straight through the ceiling and stopped above my head in front of me. Then the glorious Person standing on the cloud looked straight at me with His fiery eyes and I was completely undone. It was as if he could see right through me, into my heart and soul, and that nothing was hidden from Him. He pointed His finger at me and thundered these words, 'What about you Jay? What are you going to do when this happens, because this will happen. And when it happens what will you be doing? Will you be worshipping Me like your brother or will you be terrified like you are now?' Then everything vanished and I sat up in my bed absolutely terrified.

Eventually after calming down and having a wash but still trembling, I knelt by the side of my bed and for the first time without using the name of a Hindu god, prayed for understanding to an 'unknown' God. Two days later, Jimmy, with whom I had stopped speaking because of his Christianity, phoned me at work to discuss a scientific problem and I relayed my experience to him. He was amazed and solemnly directed me to the Scriptures (eg Revelation 1:12-17, 14:14-16 and Matthew 24:30-31) and said that what I had seen had already been spoken of in the Bible, and that it concerned Jesus. This left me completely confused and bewildered. It seemed that everything that I had believed in about God was being challenged and I did not know what to believe now. Therefore I continued to worship the Hindu gods, but began to pray to Jesus as well, just to be on the safe side! My one prayer however was to know the truth.

About six months later I had a serious car accident on the M1 motorway and during the crash I cried out to Hanuman, a Hindu monkey god, to save me, when all of a sudden the Lord Jesus spoke to me and said 'Don't be afraid, I am going to save you'. The car then rolled over, went up a bank, hit a tree and tumbled down the bank finally coming to rest on its side. Then fuel started to leak out of the fractured petrol tank and flowed past me and towards the engine which was still running. As I panicked because of the danger of fire, Jesus

spoke to me again and told me to touch the windscreen, which I did with the barest of force and it fell out. I then walked out of the car through the windscreen completely unhurt. I knew that somehow Jesus had saved my life, but I did not understand why because I was praying to my Hindu gods and was not even thinking of Him at the time. I analysed the whole situation but could not make sense of it. So I let it go by, and tried to put it to the back of my mind as an experience to reflect upon some time later.

I had other things on my mind at the time and two days later I flew to Japan for a two month visit to a laboratory in Sayama. There due to travel fatigue, culture shock, the language barrier, insufficient nourishment and lack of sleep for about ten days I was physically and mentally weakened. I felt totally isolated from those I loved and from God, and during this time an evil 'thing' infested my mind and began to torment me. It would not let me eat or sleep and kept telling me that I was going to die and not see England again. It was taking over more and more of my mind and I seemed helpless against it. I knew that after a while it would take over completely if I did not do something quickly. One night to get peace and release from the 'thing', I contemplated suicide by jumping from the third floor balcony. As I leaned over the balcony the pavement below seemed to open and thousands of souls seemed to be inviting me to jump and so find peace. I did not want to die, I was desperate for release from this 'thing' in my head. I looked up to the heavens, as if to say to my gods 'Where are you when I need you most?' But they had fled and there was nothing. The skies were brass and I was hopeless. Then suddenly it was as if good news did come from heaven. I remembered Jimmy telling me on the day that I broke off relations with him on account of his Christianity, that if ever I was desperate in life, and no one could help me, to cry out to Jesus and He would help me because He loved me and had His hand upon me. As I remembered this, it gave me enough strength and hope to push myself away from the balcony and I fell on the floor crying. I looked at myself in the bathroom mirror and saw in it a man who was completely broken down. I was desperately trying to find peace. There was nothing left but to cry out to Jesus. I thought, may be He will be merciful and hear the plea of a desperate man. After all I had been more pious than most people. So I crawled into my room, knelt by the side of my bed and cried out to the Lord Jesus to help me, not knowing whether He had heard me or not. Not knowing whether, if He had heard me, He would help me, because He was not my god. Moreover, I had hated my brother who was a Christian. Then I fell asleep on my bed weeping, wondering if I would ever get back to

England, alive. However, I woke up next morning to find that the 'thing' in my head was gone and I made a vow to think about these things and Jesus when I got back to England.

Three months later (December 1988) I moved to Leicester and curiosity made me attend a meeting where the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached. Here, under the preaching, I became convicted of sin. That night I was not dealing with the Hindu gods but with Almighty God, or rather that He was dealing with me. I realised that in His eyes I was a rebel. I recognised that He had given me many opportunities to seek Him but I had not. To get away from Him, over the next six months, I ran here and there. I began to be even more pious to win God on to my side, but all my attempts failed. Because of this I got very angry and became even more defiant than before. I began to despise Jesus in a way I had not done in the past. I wanted peace with God but to submit to Jesus was out of the question. So I continued to battle with God. I tried to justify myself by arguing that I had been good and pious from a young age. I had prayed, meditated and chanted millions of mantras. I had many spiritual experiences of Hindu gods and by the age of eighteen was considered by my parents and many religious Hindus to be very gifted. In fact, often Hindu holy men would come to see my father and I would make them envious relating experiences of things I had seen while praying and meditating.

I had sought after God and after the 'truth', for so many years and with so much fervour I must be worthy of God's favour! I argued that Jimmy had denied himself nothing of sensual pleasures, and if he could know God and find peace, why shouldn't I? I had denied myself almost all those things. And even when I did succumb to such things hated myself for it, so I argued that I was more deserving than Jimmy of finding peace and reconciliation with God. But all this self righteousness did nothing to move God closer to me. In fact, He was immovable and the more I tried to plead my cause and atone for my sin, the worse my conviction grew, until after six months I was exhausted. Exhausted from wrestling with God and running away from Him to escape judgment.

All I wanted now was for Him to be my friend. So I found a Bible, because I knew that He was the God of the Bible, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, opened it, and looked for a way. As I read I began to marvel at Jesus and His words. He spoke with such authority and yet His words were so gracious, so wise and so true. He was no hypocrite either—He lived out what He taught. I

began to feel compassion for Him because He was an exceptional Man and was so brutally treated and killed when He had done nothing wrong. His love and mercy towards people endeared Him to me, and before long I was won over by this Man who claimed to be God's Son. I knew that He was not a liar or a madman, and that God was with Him, otherwise He could not have done and said the things He did. I wished He was my God, still not realising that He could be. I lost the desire to worship the Hindu gods, but as far as Jesus was concerned, I still thought that He was the God of the English or the people of the West.

One day in January 1990, in desperation I cried out with all my heart, 'O God, why won't You accept me? What do I have to do to be Yours?' Then He said, 'Jay, I love you dearly, but not even you can come to me except through My Son, Jesus, whom I sacrificed for you'. These words spoke deep within my heart as I meditated on John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me". I began to weep then, and for the first time, I understood about the Lord Jesus being a Saviour for sinners, not just the English or religious white people, but sinners. Sinners, it did not matter what colour or race they were as long as they were sinners. Suddenly I understood what it was all about. Suddenly my eyes were opened and it was as if I was at the foot of the cross, gazing at Him who hung on that central cross. Jesus, the Son of God, the most precious and beautiful gift to have come down from heaven, died for me. Yes, even me. And even whilst dying it was as if He looked down at me from the cross and said 'Father forgive Jay, for he knew not what he was doing'.

My heart melted, and all the anger and defiance and rebellion and misunderstanding were gone. I was so sorry for what I had done and for the wretched man I was. I was broken hearted. Not knowing what to do I just threw myself into Jesus' arms and wept and wept, crying, 'O Lord, forgive me, forgive me.' Then, there was calm. In the stillness of the next few minutes I tried to compose my thoughts together. Suddenly I realised that I had peace with God and that Jesus was alive, that my guilt was removed. My soul soared as I walked out of deadness and blindness of sin and into the wonderful light and life of Christ. I had walked out of Hinduism and into a Person. Out of the burden of religion and into the joy of relationship. A personal intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. I had come to know the living God. And all because of Jesus.

Jayant Modha.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

“Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18)

The subject of the text which heads this page is one which ought to be deeply interesting to every true christian. It naturally raises the questions, ‘Do we grow in grace?’ ‘Do we make progress?’

The question is one that is always useful, but especially so at certain seasons—a Saturday night, the return of a birthday, the end of a year—all these are seasons that ought to set us thinking and make us look within. Time is fast flying. Life is fast ebbing away. The hour is daily drawing nearer when the reality of our christianity will be tested, and it will be seen whether we have built on “the rock” or on “the sand”. Surely it becomes us from time to time to examine ourselves and take account of our souls? Do we get on in spiritual things? Do we grow?

The question is of special importance in the present day. In considering this subject there are three things which I wish to bring forward and establish:

the reality of spiritual growth;
the marks of spiritual growth; and,
the means of growth.

The reality of spiritual growth

The first point I propose to establish is this: there is such a thing as growth in grace.

That any christian should deny this proposition is at first sight a strange thing. But it is fair to remember that man’s understanding is fallen no less than his will. Disagreements about doctrines are often nothing more than disagreements about the meaning of words. Let me therefore clear the way by explaining what I mean. When I speak of growth in grace, I do not for a moment mean that a believer can grow in safety, acceptance with God or security. I do not mean that he can ever be more justified, more pardoned, more forgiven, more at peace with God, than he is the first moment that he believes. I hold firmly that

the justification of a believer is a finished, perfect and complete work; and that the weakest saint, though he may not know and feel it, is as completely justified as the strongest. In the matter of justification before God every believer is complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). Nothing can be added to his justification from the moment he believes, and nothing taken away.

When I speak of growth in grace I only mean increase in the degree, size, strength, vigour and power of the graces which the Holy Spirit plants in a believer's heart. I hold that every one of those graces admits of growth. I hold that repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage and the like may be little or great, strong or weak, vigorous or feeble, and may vary greatly in the same person at different periods. When I speak of a man growing in grace, I mean simply this—that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, his love more extensive, his spiritual-mindedness more marked. He feels more of the power of godliness in his own heart. He manifests more of it in his life. He is going on from strength to strength.

One principal ground, on which I build this doctrine of growth in grace, is the plain language of Scripture. If words in the Bible mean anything, there is such a thing as growth, and believers ought to be exhorted to grow. What says the apostle Paul? "Your faith groweth exceedingly" (2 Thessalonians 1:3) "We beseech you ... that ye increase more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4: 10). "Increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). "Having hope, when your faith is increased" (2 Corinthians 10: 15). "The Lord make you to increase ... in love" (1 Thessalonians 3: 12). "That ye may grow up into Him in all things" (Ephesians 4: 15). "I pray that your love may abound ... more and more" (Philippians 1:9). "We beseech you, as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:1). What says the apostle Peter? 'Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby' (1 Peter 2:2). "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). I want men to look at growth in grace as a thing of infinite importance to the soul. I believe, whatever others may think, that our best interests are concerned in a right view of the question: 'Do we grow?'

Let us know then that growth in grace is the best evidence of spiritual health and prosperity. In a child or a flower or a tree we are all aware that when there is no growth there is something wrong. Healthy life in an animal or vegetable

will always show itself by progress and increase. It is just the same with our souls. If they are progressing and doing well they will grow.

Let us know, furthermore, that growth in grace is one way to be happy in our faith. God has wisely linked together our comfort and our increase in holiness. He has graciously made it our interest to press on and aim high in our christianity. There is a vast difference between the amount of sensible enjoyment which one believer has in his religion compared to another. But you may be sure that ordinarily the man who feels the most "joy and peace in believing", and has the clearest witness of the Spirit in his heart, is the man who grows.

Let us know that growth in grace is one secret of usefulness to others. Our influence on others for good depends greatly on what they see in us. The children of the world measure christianity quite as much by their eyes as by their ears. The christian who is always at a standstill, to all appearance the same man, with the same little faults and weaknesses and besetting sins and petty infirmities, is seldom the christian who does much good. The man who shakes and stirs minds, and sets the world thinking, is the believer who is continually improving and going forward. Men think there is life and reality when they see growth.

Let us know, furthermore, that growth in grace pleases God. It may seem a wonderful thing, no doubt, that anything done by such creatures as we are can give pleasure to the Most High God. But so it is. The Scripture speaks of walking so as to please God. The Lord takes pleasure in all His people, but specially in those that grow.

The marks of spiritual growth

The second point I proposed to establish is this: there are marks by which growth in grace may be known.

Now you want to know how anyone may find out whether he is growing in grace or not? I answer that question, in the first place, by observing that we are very poor judges of our own condition, and that bystanders often know us better than we know ourselves. But I answer further that there are undoubtedly certain great signs of growth in grace, and that wherever you see these marks you see a growing soul.

One mark of growth is increased humility. The man whose soul is growing feels his own sinfulness and unworthiness more every year. He is ready to say with Job, "I am vile," and with Abraham, "I am dust and ashes," and with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies," and with David, "I am a worm," and with Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips," and with Peter, "I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Job 40:4; Genesis 18:27; 32:10; Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 6:5; Luke 5:8). The nearer he draws to God, and the more he sees of God's holiness and perfections, the more thoroughly is he sensible of his own imperfections. The further he journeys in the way to heaven, the more he understands what Paul meant when he says, "I am not already perfect," "I am not meet to be called an apostle," "I am less than the least of all saints," "I am chief of sinners" (Philippians. 3:12; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15). The riper he is for glory, the more, like the ripe corn, he hangs down his head. The brighter and clearer is his light, the more he sees of the shortcomings and infirmities of his own heart. When first converted, he would tell you he saw but little of them compared to what he sees now.

Another mark of growth in grace is increased faith and love towards our Lord Jesus Christ. The man whose soul is growing finds more in Christ to rest upon every year, and rejoices more that he has such a Saviour. No doubt he saw much in Him when first he believed. But as he grows in grace he sees a thousand things in Christ of which at first he never dreamed. His love and power, His heart and His intentions. His offices as Substitute, Intercessor, Priest, Advocate, Physician, Shepherd and Friend, unfold themselves to a growing soul in an unspeakable manner. In short, he discovers a suitableness in Christ to the wants of his soul, of which the half was once not known to him.

Another mark of growth in grace is increased holiness of life and conversation. The man whose soul is growing gets more dominion over sin, the world and the devil every year. He becomes more careful about his temper, his words and his actions. He is more watchful over his conduct in every relation of life. He strives more to be conformed to the image of Christ in all things. He forgets the things that are behind and reaches forth unto those things which are before, making 'Higher!' 'Upward!' 'Forward!' 'Onward!' his continual motto (Philippians 3:13). He thirsts and longs to have a will more entirely in unison with God's will.

Another mark of growth in grace is increased spirituality of taste and mind. The man whose soul is growing takes more interest in spiritual things every year. He does not neglect his duty in the world. He discharges faithfully, diligently and conscientiously every relation of life whether at home or abroad. But the things he loves best are spiritual things. The ways and fashions and amusements and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in his heart. Spiritual companions, spiritual occupations, spiritual conversation appear of ever-increasing value to him. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increasing spirituality of taste.

Another mark of growth in grace is increase of love. The man whose soul is growing is more full of love every year—of love to all men but especially of love towards the brethren. His love will show itself actively in a growing disposition to do kindnesses, to take trouble for others, to be good-natured to everybody, to be generous, sympathizing, thoughtful, tender-hearted and considerate. It will show itself passively in a growing disposition to be meek and patient towards all men, to put up with provocation and not stand upon rights, to bear and forbear much rather than quarrel. A growing soul will try to put the best construction on other people's conduct, and to believe all things and hope all things, even to the end. There is no surer mark of backsliding and falling off in grace than an increasing disposition to find fault, pick holes and see weak points in others. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increasing charity.

One more mark of growth in grace is increased zeal and diligence in trying to do good to souls. The man who is really growing will take greater interest in the salvation of sinners every year. Missions at home and abroad, efforts of every kind to spread the gospel, attempts of any sort to increase religious light and diminish religious darkness, all these things will every year have a greater place in his attention. He will not become 'weary in well-doing' because he does not see every effort succeed. He will not care less for the progress of Christ's cause on earth as he grows older, though he will learn to expect less. He will just work on, whatever the result may be, giving, praying, preaching, speaking, visiting, according to his position, and count his work its own reward. One of the surest marks of spiritual decline is a decreased interest about the souls of others.

Such are the most trustworthy marks of growth in grace. Let us examine them carefully, and consider what we know about them. I can well believe that they will not please some professing christians in the present day. Those high-flying religionists, whose only notion of christianity is that of a state of perpetual joy and ecstasy, who tell you that they have got far beyond the region of conflict and soul-humiliation, such persons no doubt will regard the marks I have laid down as 'legal', 'carnal' and 'gendering to bondage'. I cannot help that. I only wish my statements to be tried in the balance of Scripture. And I firmly believe that what I have said is not only scriptural, but agreeable to the experience of the most eminent saints in every age. Show me a man in whom the six marks I have mentioned can be found. He is the man who can give a satisfactory answer to the question: 'Do we grow?'

The means of growth

The third and last thing I proposed to consider is this: the means that must be used by those who desire to grow in grace. The words of James must never be forgotten: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). This is no doubt as true of growth in grace, as it is of everything else. It is the "gift of God". But still it must always be kept in mind that God is pleased to work by means. God has ordained means as well as ends. He that would grow in grace must use the means of growth.

This is a point, I fear, which is too much overlooked by believers. Many admire growth in grace in others, and wish that they themselves were like them. But they seem to suppose that those who grow are what they are by some special gift or grant from God, and that as this gift is not bestowed on themselves they must be content to sit still. This is a grievous delusion. I wish it to be distinctly understood that growth in grace is bound up with the use of means within the reach of all believers and that, as a general rule, growing souls are what they are because they use these means.

One thing essential to growth in grace is diligence in private: private prayer, private reading of the Scriptures, and private meditation and self-examination. The man who does not take pains about these three things must never expect to grow. Here is the whole reason why many professing christians never seem to

get on. They are careless about their private prayers. They read their Bibles but little. They give themselves no time for self-inquiry and quiet thought about the state of their souls.

It is useless to conceal from ourselves that the age we live in is an age of great activity, and of much bustle and excitement in religion. Thousands are ready enough for public meetings and sermon hearing. Few appear to remember the absolute necessity of making time to 'commune with our own hearts, and be still' (Psalm 4:4). But without this there is seldom any deep spiritual prosperity.

Another thing which is essential to growth in grace, is carefulness in activities that are collective: regular worship, uniting with God's people in prayer and praise, the preaching of the Word, and the taking of the Lord's Supper. I firmly believe that the manner in which these public matters are approached has much to say to the prosperity of a believer's soul. It is easy to use them in a cold and heartless way. The very familiarity of them is apt to make us careless. Here is a matter in which the Spirit is often grieved and saints take great damage.

Another thing essential to growth in grace is watchfulness over our conduct in the little matters of everyday life. Our tempers, our tongues, the discharge of our several relations of life, our employment of time, each and all must be vigilantly attended to if we wish our souls to prosper. Life is made up of days, and days of hours, and the little things of every hour are never so little as to be beneath the care of a christian.

Another thing which is essential to growth in grace is caution about the company we keep and the friendships we form. Nothing perhaps affects man's character more than the company he keeps. We catch the ways and tone of those we live and talk with, and unhappily get harm far more easily than good. Disease is infectious, but health is not. Now if a professing Christian deliberately chooses to be intimate with those who are not friends of God and who cling to the world, his soul is sure to take harm. It is hard enough to serve Christ under any circumstances in such a world as this. But it is doubly hard to do it if we are friends of the thoughtless and ungodly. Mistakes in friendship or marriage engagements are the whole reason why some have entirely ceased to

grow. "Evil communications corrupt good manners", "The friendship of the world is enmity with God". (1 Corinthians 15:33; James 4:4) Let us seek friends that will stir us up about our prayers, our Bible reading, and our employment of time, about our souls, our salvation, and a world to come. Who can tell the good that a friend's word in season may do, or the harm that it may stop? This is one way to grow.

There is one more thing which is absolutely essential to growth in grace, and that is regular and habitual communion with the Lord Jesus. I mean that daily habit of communion between the believer and his Saviour, which can only be carried on by faith, prayer and meditation. It is a habit, I fear, of which many believers know little. A man may be a believer and have his feet on the rock, and yet live far below his privileges.

The names and offices of Christ, as laid down in Scripture, appear to me to show unmistakably that this communion between the saint and his Saviour is not a mere fancy, but a real true thing. Between the Head and His members, between the Physician and His patients, between the Advocate and His clients, between the Shepherd and His sheep, between the Master and His followers, there is evidently implied a habit of familiar conversation, of daily application for things needed, of daily pouring out and unburdening our hearts and minds. Such a habit of dealing with Christ is clearly something more than a vague general trust in the work that Christ did for sinners. It is getting close to Him, and laying hold on Him with confidence, as a loving, personal Friend. This is what I mean by communion.

Now I believe that no man will ever grow in grace who does not know something experimentally of the habit of communion. We must not be content with a general orthodox knowledge that Christ is the Mediator between God and man, and that justification is by faith and not by works, and that we put our trust in Christ. We must go further than this. We must seek to have personal intimacy with the Lord Jesus, and to deal with Him as a man deals with a loving friend. We must realize what it is to turn to Him first in every need, to talk to Him about every difficulty, to consult Him about every step, to spread before Him all our sorrows, to get Him to share in all our joys, to do all as in His sight, and to go through every day leaning on and looking to Him. This is the

way that Paul lived: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." "To me to live is Christ" (Galations 2:20; Philippians 1:21).

I leave the subject of growth in grace here. Let me wind up all with some practical applications.

1. This paper may fall into the hands of some who ought to know something of growth in grace, but at present know nothing at all. They have made little or no progress since they were first converted. They seem to have "settled on their lees" (Zephaniah 1:12). They go on from year to year content with old grace, old experience, old knowledge, old faith, old measure of attainment, old religious expressions, old set phrases. Like the Gibeonites, their bread is always mouldy and their shoes are patched and clouted. They never appear to get on. Are you one of these people? If you are, you are living far below your privileges and responsibilities. It is high time to examine yourself.

If you are a true believer and yet do not grow in grace, there must be a fault, and a serious fault somewhere. It cannot be the will of God that your soul should stand still. "He giveth more grace." He takes "pleasure in the prosperity of His servant". (James 4:6; Psalm 35:27). It cannot be for your own happiness or usefulness that your soul should stand still. Without growth you will never rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4). Without growth you will never do good to others. Surely this want of growth is a serious matter! It should raise in you great searchings of heart. There must be some "secret thing" (Job 15:11) There must be some cause.

Take the advice I give you. Resolve this very day that you will find out the reason of your standstill condition. Begin with an application to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Physician of souls, and ask Him to heal the secret ailment within you, whatever it may be. Begin as if you had never applied to Him before, and ask for grace to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye. But never, never be content, if your soul does not grow. For your peace's sake, for your usefulness' sake, for the honour of your Maker's cause, resolve to find out the reason why.

2. This paper may fall into the hands of some who are really growing in grace, but are not aware of it, and will not allow it. Their very growth is the reason why they do not see their growth! Their continual increase in humility prevents them feeling that they get on. Like Moses, when he came down from the mount from communing with God, their faces shine. And yet, like Moses, they are not aware of it (Exodus 34:29). Such Christians, I grant freely, are not common. But here and there such are to be found. Happy is the neighbourhood where such growing Christians live! To meet them and see them and be in their company, is like meeting and seeing a bit of 'heaven upon earth'.

Now what shall I say to such people? Shall I bid them awake to a consciousness of their own growth and be pleased with it? I will do nothing of the kind. Shall I tell them to plume themselves on their own attainments, and look at their own superiority to others? God forbid! To tell them such things would do them no good. To tell them such things, above all, would be useless waste of time. If there is any one feature about a growing soul which specially marks him, it is his deep sense of his own unworthiness. He never sees anything to be praised in himself. He only feels that he is an unprofitable servant and the chief of sinners. It is the righteous, in the picture of the judgement day, who say, "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed thee?" (Matthew 25:37). Extremes do indeed meet strangely sometimes. The conscience-hardened sinner and the eminent saint are in one respect singularly alike. Neither of them fully realizes his own condition. The one does not see his own sin, nor the other his own grace!

But shall I say nothing to growing Christians? Is there no word of counsel I can address to them? The sum and substance of all that I can say is to be found in two sentences: 'Go forward!' 'Go on!'

We can never have too much humility, too much faith in Christ, too much holiness, too much spirituality of mind, too much charity, too much zeal in doing good to others. Then let us be continually forgetting the things behind, and reaching forth unto the things before (Philippians 3:13). The best of Christians in these matters is infinitely below the perfect pattern of his Lord. Whatever the world may please to say, we may be sure there is no danger of any of us becoming 'too good'.

Let us never measure our faith by that of others, and think we are doing enough if we have gone beyond our neighbours. This is another snare of the devil. Let us mind our own business. "What is that to thee?" said our Master on a certain occasion, "Follow thou Me" (John 21:22). Let us follow on, making Christ's life and character our only pattern and example. Let us follow on, remembering daily that at our best we are miserable sinners. Let us follow on, and never forget that it signifies nothing whether we are better than others or not. At our very best we are far worse than we ought to be. There will always be room for improvement in us. We shall be debtors to Christ's mercy and grace to the very last. Then let us leave off looking at others and comparing ourselves with others. We shall find enough to do if we look at our own hearts.

Last, but not least, if we know anything of growth in grace, and desire to know more, let us not be surprised if we have to go through much trial and affliction in this world. I firmly believe it is the experience of nearly all the most eminent saints. Like their blessed Master they have been men of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and perfected through sufferings (Isaiah 53:3; Hebrews 2:10). It is a striking saying of our Lord, "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit [my Father] purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2). It is a melancholy fact, that constant temporal prosperity, as a general rule, is injurious to a believer's soul. We cannot stand it. Sicknesses and losses and crosses and anxieties and disappointments seem absolutely needful to keep us humble, watchful and spiritual-minded. They are as needful as the pruning-knife to the vine, and the refiner's furnace to the gold. They are not pleasant to flesh and blood. We do not like them, and often do not see their meaning. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11). We shall find that all worked for our good when we reach heaven.

Let these thoughts abide in our minds, if we love growth in grace. When days of darkness come upon us, let us not count it a strange thing. Rather let us remember that lessons are learned on such days, which would never have been learned in sunshine. Let us say to ourselves, 'This also is for my profit, that I may be a partaker of God's holiness. It is sent in love. I am in God's best school. Correction is instruction. This is meant to make me grow.'

J C Ryle