

# *Living Water*

The 'Spirit of a Shepherd' included in this issue starts a new series on the spirit which is to mark christians. The believer in Jesus is to have a different attitude (or spirit) from that which marks men and women of the world. God willing, further articles will follow on the servant spirit and the spirit that is to characterise those who are the sons of God.

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Ed.

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"*Living Water*" is edited by Mark Lemon & published by  
Stone Publishing Trust (Registered Charity 1034689)  
'The Eagles', Headcorn Road, Staplehurst, Kent, TN12 0BU

Correspondents in the UK are welcome to use the Freepost address:-  
Stone Publishing Trust,

FREEPOST TN3448, Staplehurst, TONBRIDGE, Kent, TN12 0BR

Quotations from the Bible given in "*Living Water*" are normally from the Darby translation or from the Authorised (King James) Version.

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Printed by Christian Design & Print,  
34, Prior's Way, Coggeshall, Essex. CO6 1TW. UK

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# THE WAY GOD TOOK WITH PETER, PAUL AND JOHN

## Introduction

This evening I would like to speak of the way God takes with different ones, as shown in the history of Peter, Paul and John. God takes a certain way with us that we who once were afar off might be brought nigh, that we might be secured. There is nothing in me and there is nothing in any one of us, by nature, that would respond to the Lord Jesus or the love of Christ, nothing at all. The sooner we come to that the better. By nature, you and I have no room whatever for the blessed Person of the Lord.

## God's way with Peter

Luke 5:1-11

1 Peter 2:1-10

We read the well known passage in Luke 5, telling of Peter and the haul of fishes. It is a beautiful passage in the simple description it gives of a scene of fishermen and their nets, and the Lord Jesus, telling Peter to "Draw out into the deep water and let down your nets for a haul." Peter replies so simply; he says: "Master, having laboured through the whole night we have taken nothing, but at thy word I will let down the net. And having done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes". I do not want to enlarge on the detail but the result of this was that Peter fell at Jesus' knees, saying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man". That is the start of the journey, may I say, in Peter's history. At the end of his course and writing as an old man in the second epistle when he knew that the time of his departure was drawing near, he wanted those whom he served to know the way God had taken to secure His end in him, a man who had to say at the beginning, "I am a sinful man".

The history of Peter is most interesting. Most of us here, I expect, have loved the history of Peter because it is so like the history of many of us. He failed, yet he loved the Lord. I suppose every one in this hall loves the Lord Jesus, but we fail and Peter failed. He even denied the Lord whom he loved. And the Lord loved Peter. I would like to convey some impression of that.

The love of the Lord Jesus was sufficient to secure Peter despite his failures, despite the testings. Think of the Lord saying at the end of John's gospel, "lovest thou me?" Peter could say, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee". It is very touching to think of the Lord Jesus taking the pains, I say it reverently, to speak to a man like Peter as He would to you and to me, in patient grace going on with us that we might arrive at the end He has in mind for us.

Earlier today we were thinking of the preciousness of Christ. That leads me straight on to the passage we read where Peter says, "To you therefore who believe is the preciousness". He is telling us of his appreciation of Jesus. He did not come to that naturally; he came to it because of the love of Christ and the patient service of the One who loved him and who gave Himself for him.

So you see the beginning of Peter's pathway and you see the end, the conclusion so to speak, in God's ways with him, so that we might arrive at a conviction of the preciousness of Christ.

### God's way with Paul

1 Timothy 1:12-16

2 Timothy 4:5-8

I would briefly allude to Paul. In writing to Timothy, a young man, Paul could say what he had been: "an insolent overbearing man". He was quite a character, obviously, and a man of great ability. He could say, "appointing to ministry him who before was a blasphemer". Well, just for the moment it reminds me that Peter also had been a blasphemer. He denied the Lord with oaths and cursing. I once heard someone ask, "Where did he learn that kind of language?" It must have been in the company he had kept at some time. But here we have got Paul saying that he had been a blasphemer. Yet, he says, "mercy was shown me because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief."

Some of us would not be able to say we did things ignorantly and in unbelief. We would have to say that sometimes we have done things deliberately in wilfulness. Self-will is an awful thing; it came in right at the beginning, the assertion of man's will, the assertion in the garden of Eden of something that was contrary to what God had said to Adam and Eve. We sometimes have very shallow ideas of

what sin really is. But God has rights over us and the assertion of my will in things is in itself a matter of sin. I say it simply, because we have all failed. I am not castigating anybody by saying it, but we have failed.

Paul goes on to say, "the grace of our Lord surpassingly over-abounded with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus". There follows one of the great sayings of scripture. We pick up sayings as we go through life but this is one of the worthwhile sayings that we can all remember: "Faithful is the word" (or as the Authorised Version says, the "saying") "and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners": you and me, Paul, Peter, and John, too.

"... to save sinners, of whom" Paul could say, "I am the first." Oh the wonder of it, that there is a man here who is carrying forward his sense of repentance, not labouring under it, not feeling guilty all the time, because he knew his sins had been borne by the Saviour on the cross; he was not burdened with his sins. But he says, "for this reason mercy was shewn me, that in me, the first, Jesus Christ might display the whole long-suffering, for a delineation" (an exposition so to speak) "of those about to believe on him to life eternal".

Later in the letter to Timothy Paul encourages him to fill up the measure of his ministry. Paul says: "I am already being poured out, and the time of my release is come." Peter also had the clear impression from the Lord Jesus that he had served his time, if I may use that expression, feelingly. Paul says: "the time of my release is come". He could also say at the end of his pathway, "I have combated the good combat, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith".

This is a man who was an insolent and overbearing man at the beginning but in God's ways of faithfulness and patience he could say that he had finished the race and go on to say, "Henceforth the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will render to me in that day; but not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing". "His appearing"—when the Lord will come in His glory! Paul had that in mind when he speaks about concluding his responsible pathway here.

God had worked with Paul. He is working with us, I trust. He is working with each one of us that we might arrive at the end which God has in mind, being conformed to the image of God's Son. Something is to be worked out in you and me that is like Christ. It is fine to have the objective before us, to see the picture of things set before us, but it is a different matter when it comes to the thing being worked out in our own history. We find, like Peter and like Paul, that there is a moral course in the whole journey to take. And God has His way with us in the end.

### God's way with John

1 John 4 : 7-10  
: 17-19

Now we just come to John in conclusion and I had some difficulty in selecting passages related to John. I could only think of John's epistles, where John speaks about the influences, the power that had been exercised over him in the course of his time. You do not get quite the same exposure that you get with Paul and with Peter.

But John says, "love is of God, and every one that loves has been begotten of God", and so on. "Herein as to us has been manifested the love of God, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." I suppose it is an echo of John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal."

John in his gospel gives us the moral history, the road that persons take. "Except a man be born anew he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3,5). He speaks of the reception of the Holy Spirit, the fountain of water springing up in the believer to eternal life. John gives us the route and a lot of directions for our benefit, but there is not much which shows just how John himself came to it.

I thought only of this: "that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God ... " John, the one whom Jesus loved, says this, "but that he loved us, and sent his Son a propitiation for our sins". Then he goes on to speak about God being love and

tells us that "he that abides in love abides in God, and God in him". These are profound things yet we need to get them into our souls.

I would just add in passing, something again that impressed me many years ago: that there is nothing more sensitive than love. That is not sentimentality. A man may love his wife dearly and then something comes in and brings in a bit of friction: I am giving this as an illustration. Something comes in and there is friction and either the one or the other feels the matter intensely. I say again there is nothing so feeling, so sensitive as love. That becomes a test to you and to me as to our love for Christ. His love for us is unquestioned but then what do we allow in our lives which might be inconsistent with the love of the One who has given Himself for us?

John goes on to say, having "boldness in the day of judgment, that even as he is, we also are in this world". If there is ever a scripture that shows that the divine intent is that there should be a representation of Jesus in the believer, it is this scripture. There are many other scriptures which confirm what I am saying, that the intent with God in His ways with you and with me is that there should be something representative, a replica of what was seen in Jesus. It is arrived in a moral way, in a history with God working patiently in our souls. So that, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" etc. "We love because he has first loved us".

Think of the appeal of love in these scriptures, the appeal of love in the way the Lord Jesus has gone, the way He has taken and I might say the appeal of love on the part of God Himself who "has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). The appeal of love deserves an answer from us. Love demands an answer and I believe the Lord would look for it from an occasion like this. May it be so for His name's sake.

*Wilfred Shephard*

*An address at Honiton, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1998*

## RUNNING THE RACE

“Let us therefore ... run with endurance the race that lies before us, looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith”

(Hebrews 12:1-2)

When we look at the christian life we can see that the Lord is working in the hearts of those that believe. When we first come to know Him as our Saviour and our Lord we have not come to the end of the race but rather we are at the beginning. The race is set before us so that we may become more acquainted with the Lord Jesus and with our God. In the race, we come to know how God's work is all for us; we have to find the purposes of God for each one of us and the blessedness of the eternal hope into which we are called.

If we look at it from God's side we start off with the aim already in view, firm and made sure for us. When we believe on the Lord Jesus we are safe and we have eternal life; this is sure. We have His word that none can take us from His hand. But to be preserved here we have to look unto our Lord.

Peter is a good example for us. He often failed and in one instance, the time when he walked on the water, he failed because he looked at the water instead of looking to the Lord. As long as he had his eye fixed on the Lord he was safe. Now we have the race before us but to run that race we must keep our eyes on the One who has gone ahead of us. He is the Leader and the race is before us. There is a kind of parallel when the people of Israel entered the promised land. The land was there before them; they did not buy the land or earn it, for it was given to them by God, but they had to assert their right and to take possession. So, we have to run in this race we read of in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

When we start as young believers we perhaps wonder what the race will be. One of our hymns says, 'Take Thou our hand, Lord Jesus'. It carries on to the effect that we often do not know what is ahead of us but the Lord knows and He will bring us through, so we must continually look to Him. If we do not keep our eye on Him, it is as though we stop running in the race before us. Yet the Lord is available in grace for each one of us therefore it says, "Looking stedfastly on Jesus".



Now, looking means it is possible for us to see the One who is ahead of us. I do not mean with our physical eyes but as taking account of Him in the way that He is revealed to us.

We are to look “steadfastly” which means that we are not going to shake; we are going to pay attention to Him and be continually drawn to Him. He has all power and we can trust in Him but on our side we are responsible to keep looking to Him.

One thing that struck me about the hymn with which we started this meeting was the verse that gives the various attributes of the Lord Jesus: ‘Priest’, ‘Shepherd’, ‘King’, ‘Saviour’, our ‘Way and End’. What a blessed Person. Maybe the believer who wrote the hymn had experienced it in his own soul. Certainly he was looking steadfastly on Jesus and in doing that took account of all those features, and many more, in the Person of our Lord. Let us look on Him and be occupied with Him that we might each pursue the race together.

I was speaking recently to a christian friend in Italy and he was telling me of his own experiences in going to many christian companies and looking for the right gathering. He has had to admit that it is not an easy thing to do; in each case he has started off being quite enthusiastic, and then he has found out that there are things not exactly according to what he was hoping for. I said to him that I was sure that if he looked to the Lord that He would lead him in the way in which he should be. Then he questioned me as to whether I believed that the way I was on was the only right way. I replied that I do not make any assumption of that but try to keep to the Lord’s word and keep my eyes on Him. This is our common exercise. It is certainly a safeguard from any human presumption; let us look steadfastly on Jesus. We can enjoy links together that way as looking on the Lord. If we look back many things have been quite a test but the Lord has been gracious and has given a measure of grace as well as a measure of responsibility to each one in his own setting. Let us appreciate it together.

Now, I just wanted us to look at this feature of the Lord as “the leader” that we get in this passage. The word used in the original is difficult to translate into English. It is leader but it is more than that. It is used for one who begins and sets a matter on and in the Bible it is used only of the Lord. Now I have often

thought of the Lord Jesus as the Leader but it struck me here that He is the Leader of our faith. He has started it; He has originated it but there is something more because of who the Lord is; He is God. The faith we have is only from God and He is the only source of all that we have been given. So we trust in Him, because if we use what we have been given of God we are absolutely sure that we will be kept right to the end. This is a great encouragement.

I was speaking to some older believers recently who are in very isolated circumstances and were discouraged on account of their smallness numerically, yet, when we were sharing the things of the Lord, how bright their hope and how bright their enjoyment of what they have been given. This can only come from the Lord Jesus, from God; it could not come from us nor from any emotional links in a society or group of people. It is something that comes from our God, from the Lord Jesus, the leader of our faith. He has gone on; we know where He has gone. He came to earth, taking the form of a man. He has come into manhood, apart from sin of course, in such a way that He even partook of death but He "is set down at the right hand of the throne of God". This is the way He has gone. He has led in the race and if He has gone to the end of that race in such a blessed way as the only One who could overcome all things, even the power of death and the devil, we can really trust in Him to see us through to the end of the race.

May the faith in the Lord Jesus see each of us through in this race, that we may be kept to the end in our own souls. The Lord Jesus will keep us, but there is also our side; we have a responsibility to keep our eye on Christ. Let us commit ourselves to this race; let us enjoy what we can share together as looking steadfastly on Jesus. We cannot lose our direction if we look on Him; we cannot lose the blessedness of what God wishes to give us. Let this really be our experience together, for His Name's sake.

*Piero Casavecchia*

*Extract from an address in London 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1998*

## THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

The question of christians taking part in political elections is, in view of the vast moral breakdown in the West, being greatly encouraged today. Believers are pressurised into using the political system, through voting, in order to change or repeal laws which sanction horrible acts of immorality rampant in professing christian countries.

Still, the question of whether the believer should vote can only rightly be answered by seeking light from the Bible. Man's thoughts about such issues, no matter how moral, upright, and desirous of good he may be, are of no value unless he has submitted to the mind of God. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5)

First then, we need to see how God views the believer in relation to the systems of this world (political and moral): systems established by man when he went out from the presence of God (Genesis 4:16-17).

We see from John 14:30 that Satan at the present time is the "prince of this world", and in 2 Corinthians 4:4 he is called the "god of this world". That is, he is the "prince of this world" politically and the "god of this world" religiously. That is why the word of God speaks of the world as lying "in the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

The Lord Jesus tells us that we "are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:16). This is further shown in 1 John 4:17: "As he is, so are we in this world". He, crucified and cast out in this world, does not at this time claim His rightful place as "King of kings and Lord of lords". For this reason believers are called to be "strangers and pilgrims" (1 Peter 2:11). Strangers and pilgrims have no rights in the country through which they are passing; they cannot become involved in its politics or government.

Those of us who have come to the USA from other lands have experienced the reality of this very thing—as an immigrant to the United States from Germany I had no political rights in this country.

We learn from Philippians 3:20 that "our commonwealth is in heaven", and in Hebrews 3:1 we are addressed as "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling". Christians have an "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). We learn from Ephesians 1:3 that God our Father has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". In 1 Corinthians 15:48-49 we learn that we shall bear the image of the heavenly One, the last Adam—Christ, with whom we are identified. Thus we too are heavenly ones.

It is plain from these scriptures that we are passing through a world to which we do not belong and to which we have nothing to say as to its politics and government.

In Romans 13:1 we read "that there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God". This means that President Clinton has been given his power and authority from God, not from the people that voted for him. Even such incredibly wicked men as Hitler and Stalin were allowed the exercise of power by God. Though we do not always understand God's ways in allowing such wicked men to rule, we must bow to His sovereign will in all things. We learn from Daniel 4:17 that "God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and he setteth up over it the basest of men".

God gives no instruction in His word about voting for the people that we may think best to govern. If we do vote for the man we feel is best, we have morally become judges of this world, leaving our proper position as strangers and pilgrims. It is sad to see how often christians follow their own thoughts, as though they were wiser than God.

The desire to have a righteous and good government is a good desire, but only the Lord Jesus will be able to introduce such a government when He comes to reign. Then it will be that the "sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (Hebrews 1:8). The reason that even the very best of men cannot straighten out the mess that the world is in is because, currently, it is Satan's world. The time will come when the Lord Jesus will sit on the throne as King of kings (Haggai 2:7). When this wonderful time comes then all will be established righteously through the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For now the believer is to pray rather than to vote. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

The apostle Peter also gives us a most remarkable instruction: "Fear God and honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17). Nero, who was ruling at the time when Peter wrote this, was a very wicked king. Yet Peter instructs believers to honour him. not because of what he was morally, but because of the God-given position which he occupied.

How important that we who are citizens of heaven obey the word of God by praying for and honouring the leaders that He has ordained, rather than using man's political process to attempt to set aside those that we are not happy with.

*H. Brinkmann*

*Reprinted with permission from "The Christian Shepherd"*

## FOR THE POOR

When Hagar found the bottle spent,  
And wept o'er Ishmael; -  
A message from the Lord was sent  
To guide her to a well.

Should not Elijah's cake and cruse,  
Convince us at this day,  
A gracious God will not refuse,  
Provisions for the way?

His saints and servants shall be fed,  
The promise is secure;  
'Bread shall be given them', He has said,  
Their water shall be sure. -

Repasts far richer they shall prove,  
Than all earth's dainties are;  
'Tis sweet to taste a Saviour's love,  
Though in the meanest fare.

To Jesus then your trouble bring,  
Nor murmur at your lot;  
While you are poor, and He is King,  
You shall not be forgot.

William Cowper (1731 - 1800)

## GRACE AND PROVIDENCE

Almighty King! whose wondrous hand  
Supports the weight of sea and land;  
Whose grace is such a boundless store,  
No heart shall break that sighs for more.

Thy providence supplies my food,  
And 'tis Thy blessing makes it good,  
My soul is nourished by thy word,  
Let soul and body praise the Lord.

My streams of outward comfort come  
From Him, who built this earthly frame;  
Whate'er I need His bounty gives,  
By whom my soul for ever lives.

Forgive the song that falls so low  
Beneath the gratitude I owe!  
It means Thy praise, however poor,  
An angel's song can do no more.

William Cowper (1731 - 1800)

## A COLLECTION OF TESTIMONIES FROM YOUNGER BELIEVERS

The quotations given below are all from young believers. They provide an insight into what the Lord does in our own day, and the change that is brought about through believing in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I feel it's very hard in school (when you are a christian) because you want to be popular and you have to a certain extent to sacrifice your popularity, which is a very difficult thing to do.  
Kathy

Before I made my commitment (to the Lord) I really used to look forward to going out for a drink. I drank too much. I think I've been out a couple of times since then ... it's something I've got to pray about, even ask for healing about ... it's a sort of battle.  
Emma

When I became a christian I had all my hair dyed green and orange and that, I says to myself. it's not going to be very nice if people say to me, 'Are you a christian?' and I'm standing there with rips in my clothes, safety pins all over, and my hair dyed, because they will say, 'If that's a christian, I don't want anything to do with that'. So I changed.  
Barry

I only passed my test in March and I am still a bit nervous going into a multi-storey, as you can hold everyone else up. I just sat there in the queue and said, 'Lord, find me a space'; and He did! One on the second floor and I was not holding anybody up.  
Melanie

Everything God does has a time. I realise myself that my timing does not coincide with His but that He does what is best for me. however it may seem at the time.  
Tim

The communion is special. It is the time I feel I can draw closest to Christ.

Being set apart from everybody else is difficult: sometimes you can feel really lonely.  
Penny

Only those who know me really well realise how much a part of my life music is. And I've been challenged very much recently because of how Satan really just got hold of the music business. I mean that really has made a revolution in an area of my life that is really close to me, because I've had to say 'No' to certain records and to certain pieces that I can play on my guitar. And that has been very difficult, especially at the beginning. Tim

I've been with lasses that are not christian—and people say you can change them into being a christian ... but with me it's been the other way round. They have pulled me down. And I am sick of that happening, and I don't want it to happen again. I don't want to mix with darkness. Steve

### EXTRACTS FROM 'STREAMS OF LIVING WATER' THE UPWARD WAY

“Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 3:13-14)

Let the instruction sink deeply into our hearts, that when the Spirit of God is working in souls all envy, strife and jealousy are banished. Love then flows out unhinderedly, and humility is the fruit of love. Edward Dennett

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Nothing but the knowledge of God's love will ever keep the heart of man in contentment, so that one can say, I have nothing to wish for; I have got the greatest thing in the universe; and not only do I know the love of God, but love to God springs up in my heart F. E. Raven



Believing in Jesus is safety; seeing the work done according to the satisfaction of God is deliverance. Walking in conscious association with a glorified Christ is power.

Anon.

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All things become real as we grow old through grace; yet He is always the same, sufficient for the young, sufficient also for the old, and so full of tenderness and grace. May we be kept humble, so as to know Him, and all the resources that are in Him for present difficulties, and even for loneliness, for He has felt it: "Ye shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me". So you can say, 'I and Christ that is with me'. He said to Peter: "take it and give for me and thee"—to think of putting us so together!

J. N. Darby

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I am more and more convinced each day that the check on our prosperity is that the Spirit's work in us is not conscientiously submitted to. Everything has been accomplished for us, every desire of God for us has been fulfilled; but the Spirit's work—God's work now—is to make true to us what is true for us. Many christians are like houses in the course of construction, with a pile of bricks lying near to each building, but the building making very little progress. I use the illustration of the bricks as knowledge of the word. Much is known by each of us which has not been appropriated.

It is comparatively easy and pleasant work to procure the bricks—I mean to read the word and learn the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and yet with this there may be very little of the old house pulled down, and therefore very little of the new one built up. God only can pull down the old one, and God only can build up the new.

I believe that if we were conscientiously walking with the Spirit, we should know the brick—the special truth which He is adding, the one which we next require for His work in us.

J. B. Stoney

## THE BELIEVER'S SPIRIT

### Part I—The Spirit of a Shepherd

In the book of Ezekiel the Lord says to the shepherds of Israel: "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them" (Ezekiel 34:4). In that verse God is judging the false shepherds of Israel, and His judgment, by contrast, indicates the true spirit of a shepherd. It is one of the ways of God with His people to teach us by contrast; for instance, we learn to value light the more when we understand the terror of darkness; we appreciate love more when we have felt the spirit of hatred.

Thus the study of the characteristics of the false shepherds of Israel brings to light God's ideal Shepherd—the Lord Jesus. If we read the verse in Ezekiel conversely, we find that a true shepherd would strengthen, heal, bind up that which is broken, seek that which is lost, bring again that which is driven away and would rule with gentleness and tenderness. The Lord Jesus was the Good Shepherd; He gave His life for the sheep; the character of His spirit was such that He said, 'I am prepared to make the greatest sacrifice that it is possible to make—to lay down My life for the sheep'. That was the shepherd spirit, which was prepared to sacrifice all that He had for the sake of the sheep. As the hymn puts it:

*'His love to the utmost was tried,  
But firmly endured as a rock.'*

As we move about, whether among those who love Christ or among those who do not, it is open to each of us who are His to manifest the shepherd spirit. If we come across a sin-sick soul, then we would desire that such a one might be healed. If we find one who has been driven away, perhaps a child of christian parents who by some means or other has been stumbled or perhaps in self will has chosen a path away from God, we would seek to bring again that which was driven away. If we see one who is lost, who has surrendered to the forces of evil and like a stranded wreck is just waiting for death, we seek that one for Him.

There are many cases like that, men and women who have lived in sin and are reaping in their bodies what they have sown. We would seek that Christ might save such and bless them, and bring them home to God, for "He came to seek and to save that which was lost".

Then, are we prepared, not with "force and cruelty" but with tenderness and grace, to seek to exercise an oversight over those who need control? The shepherd spirit would show the tenderness and grace of Christ to the little ones and the feeble ones.

How these things search us, yet how profitable that we should be searched as to how far we are able to exercise the shepherd spirit towards one another! Think, for instance of the children that we come in contact with. Do they find the spirit of the Good Shepherd in those of us who profess His name? What an opportunity for them to get a right impression of the Good Shepherd, as His spirit is reflected in those who follow Him. All these things are open to us in very great measure. If only we knew Him better, loved Him more, and kept nearer to Him, we would imbibe His spirit.

*F. S. Marsh*

*This is the first of three articles on the spirit which is to mark believers. In the next issue D.V. 'The Spirit of a Servant'*

## FORGIVENESS

“If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared”.

(Psalm 130:3-4)

### Introduction

I want to speak about the forgiveness of sins—a simple and elementary subject but one that should be of concern to everyone. All may not care to consider it. Alas, we know that there are some who never will. The Lord Jesus speaks of such three times in the eighth chapter of John’s gospel.

He says to the unbelieving Jews: “I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and ye shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come”. And again: “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” Solemn words those!

Death is never a light thing, even the death of a believer in the Lord Jesus, where all is marked by a sense of victory and you know that their departure is “to be with Christ, which is far better”. As you stand around even such a death bed there is a hush on everyone’s spirit. But to see a man or woman dying in their sins—who can describe it?

Is there one here tonight, a persistent rejector of Christ? You have got to die. What prospect is before you? You must leave this world. Where are you going? I ask in all solemnity—is it to be with Christ? Impossible if you abide in your sins, for of such He says: “Whither I go, ye cannot come”. For you there is only the dark, outside place, where the rejectors of Christ are cast. But while I speak thus, forgiveness of sins is available to all. The most advanced saint that ever lived (even a Paul or John) entered the pathway of christianity by the door of forgiveness. That door is still open, and all need to enter by it. “For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”.

Now I want to look at forgiveness in four ways:

- the necessity for it;
- the source of it;
- the basis of it; and
- the extent of it.

## What is sin?

Before I speak of the necessity of forgiveness, I would like to ask you, what do you think sin is? I do this because there are many standards and ideas current in regard to sin. What is sin? Scripture answers that question: "The thought of foolishness is sin" (Proverbs 24:9) Did you ever have a foolish thought? It is sin. John tells us: "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17). Who has not committed an unrighteous act? Such an act is sin. John also tells us: "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). What is lawlessness? Pleasing yourself! Did you ever please yourself? Oh, you say, 'many a time'. That is sin.

The first act of sin ever committed in this world, what was it? It was not, as we may estimate it, a very drastic thing. It was a woman pleasing herself. Sin is lawlessness.

## The necessity of forgiveness

Sin can only be measured by the holiness of God, because every sin is against God. David recognised that in Psalm 51. He had committed adultery and murder but, conscience stricken, his thoughts rise to God in regard of his guilt. He does not think of how he had wronged Bathsheba and Uriah. No! He says: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned". Sin can only be measured by the holiness of God. I know that men make standards for sin and talk of venial sins and those that are not venial, but in doing so they expose their folly for they minimise the character of sin and degrade the holiness of God.

You may say, 'If these things be true, you leave no standing for any man'. That is true, and it is exactly what the Psalmist says in the scripture we read: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand". The Psalmist says later (Psalm 90): "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins". Young man, young woman, how about those secret sins? They are not hidden from God. The Bible says "Thou hast set ... our secret sins in the light of thy countenance".

You must face the truth of this sooner or later. Why not face it now? Before I was converted I had committed enough sins to send me to hell a thousand times, and any man honest with himself would admit the same thing.

Is there anyone who would dare to stand up and say that they had never committed one sin? I tremble for you if you do. It only proves you to be one of the biggest

sinner on the face of the earth. The Bible says: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him (God) a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10).

For one sin, Adam lost the Garden of Eden. For one sin, Moses was forbidden to enter into the land of Canaan. If you die with one sin on your soul unpardoned, heaven is closed against you for ever!

The law of Moses proved all to be sinners. There were ten commandments in that law. What was the bent of it? Did it forbid certain overt acts only? No! It did more than that. Had it been a question of overt acts only, Paul could have stood before the law. "Thou shalt not kill". He had not killed. "Thou shalt not commit adultery". He had not done that. "Thou shalt not steal". He had not stolen. He could stand before the first nine commandments and say, 'Not guilty'. But when he came to the tenth commandment he was exposed. What is the tenth? "Thou shalt not lust". That commandment forbade the least movement in regard to what was evil. The sting of the law was in the tail. There it was! "Thou shalt not lust" (or covet).

You might as well tell a healthy person not to breathe as tell a fallen child of Adam not to lust. It searches everyone out. Paul could run his eye down the first nine commandments and say, 'They do not condemn me', but the tenth exposed him.

Years ago in this city, a man said to his little boy, 'Run and wash your face, and I will take you to Lincoln Park to see the bears' By and by the boy came back but his father said, 'Your face is still dirty' but the boy insisted that he had washed it properly. Eventually his father just picked him up and held him in front of a mirror. The boy could see for himself that his face was dirty! The law is like that mirror. "By the law is knowledge of sin". It proves our need of forgiveness.

### **The source of forgiveness.**

What can be more delightful to a man preaching forgiveness than to trace it to its source. Most of the rivers in the world have been traced to their source. In some cases the source may be difficult to be sure of but, thank God, the stream of forgiveness can be traced to its source, right to the heart of the blessed God. Years ago, when I had not been long converted I used to preach in the street with a man who had a most remarkable history. He had been a clergyman but he had given way to drink and had been degraded. I doubt whether he had been a

believer at this time but later he was brought to the Lord and had a most remarkable grip of the truth. The last Sunday night he spent on earth, I remember standing with him on a street corner preaching the gospel. The next day I had an urgent telephone call to go and see him in hospital. When he saw me he said 'I am going to die'. I replied, 'My dear brother, you can't be going to die. I could not spare you.' 'Yes', he said, 'I am going to die, and if they put a tombstone over my grave, see that they inscribe on it these words:

*'A monument of grace,  
A sinner cleansed by blood,  
A stream of love, I trace  
Up to the fountain—God.  
And in that stream, my soul can see  
Eternal thoughts of love for me.'*

He passed away the next day. That dear man had navigated the stream of forgiveness right up to the fountain head. Have you?

How beautifully the Psalmist puts it here: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who should stand?" But he says to the very God in whose presence you have no standing room, "there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared". Is it not wonderful?

The prophet Micah tells us: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity ... He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy ... thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

It is God's prerogative to forgive. I know that by the way He teaches me to act toward my brother. You remember what Peter says in Matthew 18. "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven". Then in the gospel of Luke (chapter 17) the Lord says to the disciples, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him". And at once the apostles say to Him, "Increase our faith". Why did they say that? It is as if they said, 'Let us look into the heart of the blessed God. It is too much for us. We are not equal to it, but let us get nearer to the heart of God, that the grace and forgiveness that streamed from his heart to us might flow from us to our brother.'

## The basis of forgiveness

God must have a righteous basis if He is going to forgive sins. There is a passage in Exodus 34 which puzzled me for years and I am sure that the passage is inexplicable apart from the cross. It says: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." And then what? "And that will by no means clear the guilty". You say, "That is a flat contradiction! The first part is music to my ears. Repeat it!" I will. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful, and gracious, longsuffering". Oh, you say, that is just the kind of God I need. "Abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin". Yes! And then? "And that will by no means clear the guilty". Here is a paradox that can only be explained in the light of the cross of Christ. But in the understanding of this paradox you will have a basis laid in your soul by which you can understand the righteousness of God, the ground on which He is free to forgive the greatest sinner on the face of the earth.

Yes, God delights in mercy, but not in the way that people often speak of mercy. A godless man dies and people say "Oh, he will be in heaven for God is very merciful". What do they mean by that? I will tell you. They think that God regards sin as lightly as they do. That is the common thought as to God being merciful. God is merciful but He can overlook nothing! Every sin you ever committed must be judged, either in you or in Christ.

God must have a righteous basis if He is going to forgive sin and that has been laid in the death of Christ. We read in Romans 3: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (or mercy seat) through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God"

It is the solemn fact that God can "by no means clear the guilty" that makes the cross of Christ what it is! I am certain that we do not dwell sufficiently upon the sufferings of Christ. If we dwelt upon them more, we would hate sin more, and love Christ more. How poverty stricken I feel when I come to say a word on the sufferings of Christ.

Look at Gethsemane. How solemn it is! Satan is allowed of God to do his worst against Christ, in pressing on His holy soul all that was involved in going to the cross. And how deeply Christ felt it all! In absolute human perfection, He shrank



from it. With great drops of sweat falling from His body, He cries, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." Yet in perfect obedience He goes forward. He goes through the conflict of Gethsemane—in spite of all the pressure—in perfect communion with God. There is no cloud on His spirit there.

He even accepted an angel's support. Think of it, I appeal to you! The One who created the universe, there He is in weakness and sorrow, accepting the support of an angel. He would have welcomed the support of the disciples, but they slept! Oh the solemnity of Gethsemane. Let us stand with unshod feet as we contemplate His sorrows, and these only in anticipation of the cross.

Would to God my spirit, would to God your spirit might be touched more deeply with the sufferings of Christ! I repeat it, we would love Him more and hate the sin that brought Him there with an intensity that we have never done before. Well, that is the character of Gethsemane. It is Satan's power—Satan and Christ. But the Lord goes through in perfect communion with God.

When you come to the three hours of darkness at the cross, there is no communion. There was absolute forsaking! There was never such a moment on earth, in heaven, or in hell, and in time of eternity there will never be such another. No sinner, no lost soul in the lake of fire, will ever taste what Christ tasted at Calvary. For a sinner in the lake of fire will suffer in regard of sins in which they had pleasure, and will never fully realise what sin is in God's sight. But at Calvary there was One who hated sin, who shrank from it, feeling in perfect holiness what sin was to God, yet He becomes the sin offering, and the God "That will by no means clear the guilty" must deal with Him as though He was the offender. And, although He had passed through the sorrows of Gethsemane in perfect unbroken communion, in the deep gloom of Calvary's cross there was nothing for Him but judgment. Not a ray of light! Not one drop of comfort in that bitter cup. It was that which caused the deep cry to break forth: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

I see the Saviour there alone, forsaken. No angel to strengthen Him. God hiding His face, and yet (may I use the language) in the solitary dignity of His complete forsaking, great enough to bear the full weight of divine judgment against sin, and at infinite cost to Himself, securing the glory of God. If ever God could

have passed over sin, it would have been then, but He has given proof to the whole universe that He can "by no means clear the guilty".

Do you wonder that God has exalted Christ to the highest height, for through Him He has secured what delights His heart—the fullest right to dispense, in perfect righteousness, the forgiveness of sins.

Some years ago I read a story about the Emperor Nicholas of Russia. One night he was restless and took a walk around by the officers' quarters and was surprised to see a light still burning in the officers' mess. He went in and sitting at a table, all alone, was a young officer; he had led a wild dissipated life and contracted gambling debts that he could never pay, so there was nothing before him but disgrace and dismissal. He had been totalling on a piece of paper his debts. They were very great and he had no hope of meeting them. Wearied with anxiety he had written on the paper, 'Who will meet these debts?' Then he had fallen into a hopeless sleep. The Emperor took in the situation at a glance. He took up the list of debts and underneath the question 'Who will meet these debts?' he wrote, 'Nicholas' and walked out. Those debts were as good as paid for there was the Emperor's signature. But it cost him no sorrow. It did not cost him his son. There was no Gethsemane, no Calvary. But from the heart of the blessed God tonight there flows down by way of Calvary's cross a stream of forgiveness. And at the foot of all your terrible liabilities God can subscribe His own name, as we read in Ephesians: "Be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you".

### **The extent of forgiveness.**

God having raised up Jesus from the dead addresses Himself to every individual as a forgiving God. He has only one thought for every man—forgiveness. That is His thought for you.

There is a parable in Luke 7 of a certain creditor who had two debtors, the one who owed him five hundred pence and the other fifty; when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both. I was never in business for myself and consequently never had the misfortune to fail in business but I have the greatest sympathy for those that do. Some of them have to do with the most exacting and unreasonable creditors. But if I never failed in business, I failed hopelessly in my responsibilities in regard to God, and when God by His Spirit awakened me, and

I saw I was an utter bankrupt, I got the surprise of my life. God could have fastened my liabilities upon me. He could have hailed me to the judge and have the judge deliver me to the officer, and the officer could have cast me into prison, from whence I would not emerge until I had paid the very last penny (See Matthew 5:25-26). But what did He do, that wondrous Creditor? Instead of casting me into prison, He went Himself into the prison house of death for me! He paid the last mite in His precious blood, and He said to me 'I have nothing against you!' "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both" (Luke 7:42). And that is the message that God in Christ speaks to you.

What are you going to do with it? Are you going out of this hall refusing such an offer, despising such a God, such a Christ? May God give you tonight to avail yourself of the grace of such a wondrous Creditor as that.

In the incident in Luke referred to above, you may remember that there was one who appreciated that Creditor. She showed it by what she did; her tears of contrition and kisses of affection showed that her heart appreciated such a Saviour and she went out of that house with those words of His: "Thy sins are forgiven ... Go in peace".

'Ah', you say 'That is just what I need. I wish you would explain to me the plan of salvation.' There is no plan. It is all in a Person. It is all in that blessed Man whom God has raised up. I commend Him to you, God's Christ, the Head of every man, the One whom God has raised from the dead and in whom He announces forgiveness to whosoever will. I commend Him to you tonight. Will you have Him? If you receive Him, you may go from this hall conscious of this: "Thy sins are forgiven ... Go in peace".

Once more in closing let me commend Christ to you. May God bless you.

*Herbert Gill*