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Living Water

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SONSHIP AND PRIESTHOOD

Exodus 4: 21-23

John 20: 17

Sonship and priesthood are, I believe, encapsulated in the verses we have read in Exodus. “Thus saith Jehovah: Israel is my son, my firstborn”, and, “Let my son go, that he may serve me”. You get the thought of sonship in “let my son go” and the thought of priesthood in “that he may serve me”. The purpose of our being redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and delivered from the captivity of Satan and this world is that we should become sons and that we should serve God.

You may ask, ‘What is sonship?’ and ‘What is priesthood?’ I would like to be able to show you from scripture a little of what these precious things are. They are not just words, or doctrines; they are living realities, to be known and enjoyed by each of us. Sonship implies relationship. God says, “Let my son go”. He took up that relationship with Israel. Each one of us has been chosen and taken into sonship by adoption.

In John 20 we see the Lord as the One who, having suffered, died, and risen again, is about to ascend to His Father. His desire was that His Father should be our Father and His God our God. Sonship is implied. It is the relationship that is to be enjoyed and known by us with our God and our Father. The Lord says to Mary, “Go to my brethren”. We are the brethren of Christ, and we are to know His God and His Father as our God and our Father. The disciples had known the Lord and had followed Him. They persevered with Him in His temptations but now they were going to be brought into a relationship with the God and Father of their Lord, the One who is in heaven. We are also brought into that relationship.

Luke 15 gives us another view of this relationship. The younger son got away and went into the far country and dissipated his property, but he came to himself, repented, went back and was going to say to his father, “make me as one of thy hired servants.” That was never the thought of his father, who said “this my son was dead and has come to life ... Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it”. God’s thoughts are ever for us to be in the happy relationship of sonship. God will not have us detained in this world and in the things of this world. He will not have His sons mixed up in the things that they ought not to be mixed up in. The thought of God in sonship is that His sons should be delivered, set free, and brought to Himself.

In the first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians the apostle Paul writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the world’s foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself,” (Ephesians 1:3-5). An alternative rendering of ‘adoption’ is ‘sonship’. That is what God purposed before time, not just to have man in His presence, not only to forgive sins, but to bring us through adoption into the place of sonship. The Lord Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father. He has that distinctive place. We are brought in on the ground of adoption.

We see something of sonship, too, in the epistle to the Galatians chapter 4. Christian believers had fallen into Jewish practices and become mixed up with Jewish rules and regulations and things that really should have had no place with them. How easily we get snared that way—it appeals to the natural order of man. But in Galatians 4 we see how the power of sonship is to be known by us. “But because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). The power to enjoy the relationship and to respond to God is in the Holy Spirit. God has given us sonship and also He has given us the power of sonship. He has given us His Spirit. God has given us everything whereby we may fulfil that precious position into which we are brought.

In chapter 2 of the epistle to the Hebrews, we are shown where we are to be brought as sons. “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). Do we have a sense, in our souls, of being brought to glory? That is our home! That is where we are to be brought.

Then there is another side that should exercise our souls, and that is priesthood. “Let my son go”, said God, “that he may serve me”.

To understand the thought of priesthood I believe we have again to look into the Old Testament. We see there how God selected Aaron and his sons for the office of priests. They were to be priests and they were given special garments to wear. We, too, are given special garments to wear. We are clothed in the worth of Christ and we are clothed with dignity. You will see in Exodus 28 something of the glory of the garments that were made for the priests. It speaks of the way that we go into God. He sees the preciousness of Christ upon us. He does not see us as forgiven sinners; He sees us as sons, accepted through the Person and

work of His beloved Son. That is our acceptance before God.

In the Old Testament order the sacrifices had to be brought to God and the offerer was to be identified with the offering. The blood of the offering was shed and, in the case of the sin offering, the blood was taken into the holy place. “When I see the blood”, said God to the children of Israel back in Egypt, “I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). And it is the same in the tabernacle system. God needed to see the blood. It spoke of the shedding of the precious blood of His Son whereby all those sins committed by Israel and by us could be dealt with righteously by a holy, sin-hating God. The priest had to take the sacrifice and see that it was burnt as an offering to God.

Another of the priestly services was to take incense and burn it before the Lord. It speaks to us of the way that the things that are for God’s pleasure are to be maintained according to His mind. In the tabernacle the oil for the lamps had to be replenished and the lamps kept burning and it was the priests who saw to that. The shewbread had to be renewed and there was a morning and evening offering to God. There was a whole service of God in the tabernacle system that had to be maintained by the priests according to the ordering of God.

Turning to the New Testament the apostle Peter tells us something about priesthood. If we look at 1 Peter 2 we see something of how priesthood works today: “Laying aside therefore all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings... To whom coming, a living stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious, yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:1-5). This brings it into our day and shows that it is a matter of a “spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”. What a wealth of instruction there is as to how things may be continued on a line that is suitable and pleasing to God.

Nadab and Abihu were sons of Aaron who did not do what was suitable and pleasing to God.. They offered strange fire to God and He came out in judgment. Nadab and Abihu were consecrated priests but they offered strange fire. We are to offer what is acceptable and suitable to God. He wants to hear about His beloved Son. He does not want to hear about the first order of man, man according to the flesh. That is gone and dealt with in Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. God wants to hear about Christ and He wants us to be sons like Christ.

How wonderful it is that we have an opportunity to serve God in such a way, here below. The highest privilege and favour that we could have is to be called sons and to be formed into a holy priesthood. “And thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel.” (Psalm 22:3). God is looking for a response from His people. It is to be along the lines that He wants, not along the lines that we want, or desire, or think ought to be. It is to be what is pleasing and suitable to Him.

Hebrews 13 helps us to understand something of this. “Therefore let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach: for we have not here an abiding city, but we seek the coming one. By him”, that is the Lord Jesus, “therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually to God” (Hebrews 13:13-15).

We are living at the very end of the church’s period on earth: the rapture, the coming of the Lord, is very near and praise is to continue to the end. The Lord’s supper is to “announce the death of the Lord, until he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Scripture does not say ‘until the day gets too difficult’. Neither does it say ‘until there are too few to gather together’. It is “until he come”. The remembrance of the Lord and the showing forth of His death are to continue until He comes.

God wants His people to be free from bondage. Whether it is the bondage of legalism that we see in Galatians, or the bondage of the world that we see in Exodus 4, we are to be set free that we may serve Him. We have been saved for God’s praise and worship, now and eternally.

Nothing of the first order of man will do for God but His work is proceeding in our souls and because of the finished work of Christ God’s Spirit dwells in us. At the rapture we will be given new bodies like Christ. “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). What privileges belong to us.

It is upon earth that the song begins. Let us challenge our hearts that there may be more from us for God than there has been before. The Lord Jesus is coming very soon and we will be translated into a scene of glory never to go out. We shall be given bodies of glory and we shall be able to sustain praise in the presence of God in a way that we are unable to do now.

Marcus Chapman

An address at Basildon, 15th April 2000

THE TEN LEPERS

“And it came to pass as he was going up to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village ten leprous men met him, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voice saying, Jesus, Master, have compassion on us. And seeing them he said to them, Go, shew yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass as they were going they were cleansed. And one of them, seeing that he was cured, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and fell on his face at his feet giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were not the ten cleansed? but the nine, where are they? There have not been found to return and give glory to God save this stranger. And he said to him, Rise up and go thy way: thy faith has made thee well.” (Luke 17:11-19)

It must have been a fearful thing to be a leper. In New Testament times, apart from the power of God, leprosy was an incurable disease. It causes the skin to thicken, creates disfigurement and a bad odour. The extremities of the body go numb and may eventually drop off.

Where we read we have a scene where there were ten lepers. It is a scene to which the Lord came and brought in healing. What a wonderful thing! Ten lepers were completely healed. I do not doubt that their flesh became again as the flesh of a little child, just as Naaman's did as recorded in 2 Kings 5. You see I have this conviction about God's word. I believe it absolutely. When the Lord brought in healing it was perfect and complete.

Imagine what it must have been when a person discovered that they had leprosy. Perhaps one day they would have noticed a mark on the back of their hand or somewhere. They might have thought that it would get better but as the days went by, that mark did not disappear but rather spread. Perhaps they would have worn their sleeves extra long and tried to hide the leprosy, but that would only have covered up the problem for a while. Eventually the leper would have been required to go and show themselves to the priest and if leprosy were confirmed then the person would have been told to leave their house and not return or, if they did need to come into the village, then they must ring a bell and cry, 'Unclean, unclean'.

So the leper would have gone out onto the hillside and would have found other lepers. Perhaps they would have all lived in one community without much consideration for creed or background as all having the same dreadful disease. A disease that was only going to end in death.

My friend, there is a disease that is every bit as bad as leprosy. That disease is sin.

As we consider this account in Luke's gospel we can think, perhaps, that one day one of these ten lepers came back into the company and said: 'I have news for you. A man called Jesus is to pass this way. They say that He cleansed a leper down near Capernaum. Perhaps He will cleanse us!' Can you imagine the thoughts of those men? Perhaps some were disbelieving; surely no one was able to cleanse lepers! Well, whatever they thought they decided to cry out to Him. They must have thought about what they were going to say because it says, "they lifted up their voice". When the Lord came along that way they cried out, "Jesus, Master, have compassion on us".

They stood afar off. They would have been very conscious of what they were as lepers. What does the Lord say? "Go, shew yourselves to the priests". You will notice it says, "it came to pass, as they were going, they were cleansed". There is something for us to learn in that. They were obedient to the Lord's word and they were cleansed. I just bring that to bear on each one of us. Have we been obedient to the word of the Lord? That is the only way we shall be cleansed from our sins. Something may be freely offered to you but unless you take it you are no better off. Salvation is offered to you today. Will you take the opportunity that is yours and answer to the call?

In April 1995, there was a prayer breakfast in the city of Oklahoma in the USA. Twelve hundred people attended and, during the course of that gathering, there was an appeal to souls through a message about the brevity of time and the urgency of the moment. Many accepted the invitation to trust in Christ. Shortly afterwards, just after nine o'clock in the morning, a tremendous bomb went off and killed 168 people. It may well have been that some of those who heard the message that morning were killed in the blast. Maybe the word at that prayer breakfast was God's last appeal to some. God is appealing today. It is a wonderful thing that He is appealing still.

There was a young man who was brought up in a Christian household, but he 'kicked over the traces'. One day he met a lady in the street who knew him and knew his background. She said, I have something for you. Taking a gospel tract out of her bag she said, 'I think this is the one for you today'. On the front of the tract was the title 'Your last opportunity'. The young man screwed it up and put it in his pocket. Later that day he had a fatal accident and when his body was recovered the screwed up tract was found in his pocket!

We are in a day when people make light of God's appeal in the gospel. The only way in which you can be rid of the dreadful disease of your sins, is by recognising that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3). He came to this world, came so near to man, that He might deliver us from the consequences of our sins. There were those who mocked Him and disparagingly called Him the

“friend of tax gatherers and sinners”. Yet He delighted in the company of those who had an ear for what He had to say.

He went to the cross. Everything that God could ever want in man was found perfectly in Christ. Yet the Bible tells us that it pleased God “to bruise him;...When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10). That is something almost beyond us to understand, yet it is true. We read of what men did to Christ in putting Him on the cross and that was dreadful. But it was God who laid our sins upon Him.

Have you given thanks to God for giving His Son? Have you given thanks for the finished work of Jesus? What a Saviour Jesus is! The One who went to Calvary and there accomplished the work of redemption. Our opening hymn this morning was:–

*‘O Lord, Thy face was set,
Set steadfastly’.*

Verse two says:–

*‘Yet onward still to go,
On to the cross;
Drink deep that cup of woe,
Of grief and loss.’*

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to be crucified when these lepers called out to Him. There were those who had said to the Lord, ‘Do not go there, the Jews sought to stone Thee’. Yet nothing turned the Lord aside. He went on steadfastly to Calvary and there He bore our sins. As we sometimes sing: ‘In our place condemned He stood’.

One of these ten lepers really appreciated what the Lord had done for him. You can imagine the ten, hobbling off, maybe the stronger ones were supporting the weaker ones. Suddenly they realise, they are fit and complete, and fully well! Perhaps you can understand the nine. Maybe one said he would be the first to see the priest, another that he would go and see his wife on the way. What thoughts they must have had as they left. But one turned round and came back to Jesus “glorifying God with a loud voice, and fell on his face at his feet giving him thanks”. How the Lord would have appreciated it if they had all done the same.

Now, have you turned round? You have trusted Christ’s word, you have been cleansed from your sins but have you turned round and given glory to God? Have you fallen at the feet of Jesus? What an appreciation that leper would have received of the way in which those feet were going. We read: “And Jesus answering said, Were not the ten cleansed? but the nine, where are they? There

have not been found to return and give glory to God save this stranger. And he said to him, Rise up and go thy way: thy faith has made thee well” .

I suppose that the nine went to the priest. Each would have had to take two clean living birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop for their cleansing in accordance with the law (Leviticus:14). One bird had to be killed and its blood sprinkled on the living bird which was then let loose in the open field. What a picture it is, the bird that was slain typifying the death of Christ, while the bird that was set free speaking of His resurrection. What a wonderful result there has been from the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. All the other things that were to be brought speak of Christ, too. The cedar wood reminds us of His strength and stability, the scarlet of His glory and the hyssop of His lowliness.

We read of another leper earlier in Luke’s gospel. He cried out, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou art able to cleanse me” (Luke 5:12). He knew that the Lord was able for it. What did the Lord say? “I will; be thou cleansed”. Think of what was involved in that “I will” on the part of Jesus. The English language has ceased to differentiate between “I shall” and “I will”. “I will” speaks of the willingness of the One to do it. How willing the Lord was to cleanse the leper! How willing He is today to cleanse the sinner. Have you really trusted in Jesus? He went onward to the cross, ‘through toil and grief and loss’ for you and for me.

We sometimes sing, ‘For I am weak and weary, and helpless and defiled’. Yes, if still in our sins we are just like those lepers. The Lord came that He might wash away our sins. I thank God for Jesus and His finished work. I long that all of us might find a place freshly at the feet of the Saviour.

There are others who have found their place there, others who received a wonderful impression of the Person of Jesus. Peter “fell at Jesus’ knees saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord” (Luke 5:8). He realised what he was and he recognised the glory and the greatness of the Person who was there. I love to think of instances recorded in John’s gospel of single individuals with Jesus. The woman in John 4 could later say “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done: is not he the Christ?” (John 4:29). What an impression she had of Jesus. Thomas, as realising eventually who it really was there in resurrection, could exclaim in wonder: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

Well, let us come to Jesus for cleansing, acknowledging what we are as sinners and the need we have of Him as Saviour. Let us fall at His feet too as worshippers, own Him as the One who is indeed Lord and God. May it be so, for His name’s sake.

Joe Taylor

A Preaching at Warley, 28th May 2000.

THIS IS LIFE!

Like most young people I have a great desire to live life to the full. In my search for satisfaction I tried many things. I have gone the round of them all. I tried to persuade myself that this was life. Finally, one Saturday afternoon as I sat in a café, I faced up to the fact that this life just was not worth living. My thoughts grew blacker with each passing moment. What do you do when everything has failed? Who do you turn to? I did not know.

It was then that God stepped in. Into that café He had sent a christian who had taken a job wiping tables and washing dishes so that he might be able to speak to the customers and especially the young people who were seeking the meaning of life. For the first time in my life someone spoke to me about Jesus Christ. I went home that evening with the words ringing in my ears, and hammering at my heart: 'You need Christ'.

A fortnight later I went to a church and listened to the gospel. I had never heard anything so wonderful before. Jesus Christ died for me! The only time I had taken His name on my lips, I acknowledge it with shame, was in blasphemy, and yet He loved me enough to die for me. The thing that amazed me then, and still amazes me now, is that He should love me so much.

So it was that my search for life ended in that little church, for there I found Jesus Christ, who had been searching for me for so long, and in Him I found that life is Life indeed.

If your life is empty and meaningless it is because it is empty of Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, who said: "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Sylvia Smith

A REPORT FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Notwithstanding reports of economic and social progress, this country is still unhappy and uneasy. Murders, armed robbery and other crimes are regular and frequent. Corruption and bribery in various circles still continue. Overshadowing all is the AIDS epidemic, which is steadily increasing, in spite of 'AIDS Awareness' campaigns and other endeavour to halt it, as well as attempts to play down the facts, which are extremely serious. The age group most seriously affected is between teenage and thirty.

This gloomy but realistic picture is the background against which there is a need to carry on with the desperately needed witness of the gospel. This witness is meeting with increased opposition. A recent letter from a local missionary who has spent a lifetime serving the Lord in the Transkei says, 'We are facing more opposition to the gospel today than ever before'.

Much of this opposition comes from increasingly militant Hinduism and Islam which are making steady progress. Both these religions enjoy very effective press publicity whenever their various festivals are held (including, eg, Eid for the Muslims, and Divali [the fire walking ceremony] for Hindus), and their devotees outnumber the christian population of all races.

The most significant factor affecting the African population and its relationship to the gospel is the steady rise and active promotion of African cultural customs, particularly those of religious significance which are incompatible with the gospel. The most powerful and far reaching of these is the presence of ancestor worship. The missionary mentioned above says further in his letter: 'There is a strong movement back to ancestral worship. A group of educated blacks, lawyers, a doctor, and teachers who meet near Lusikiki (a town in the Transkei) encourage this. They claim that even Jesus knew His ancestors, and they use the Bible to show this. They teach that the spirits were worshipped long before the whites came to S.A. and tried to get them away from their form of worship'.

This is a sample of a movement which is throughout the country. A specially disturbing feature is that some leaders of status in some main-line denominations are actively calling for the incorporation of ancestor worship into christianity for Africans. This is part of a general and strongly supported movement for the so-called 'Africanisation' of christianity.

Many African christians are strongly opposed to ancestor worship. They rightly maintain that it is pagan and totally inconsistent with the scriptures. But African believers generally will come under increasing pressure to conform to it — pressure from the promoters of 'African Culture', from some so-called 'christian' sources and from family members and relations.

These are challenges which face all christians, and missionaries in particular, who uphold and promote the gospel of Christ as set forth in the scriptures.

The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. May God enable us to meet the challenge and take advantage of the opportunity.

Raymond Aitchison

Extracted from "International Partnership Perspectives"

This account is given so that readers of "Living Water" may be encouraged to pray for the work of God in South Africa.

REVEALED SECRETS OF GOD'S LOVE

Things that eye saw not,
Things that ear heard not,
Hid in God's heart of love, far from our thought;
His hand hath prepared them,
His word hath declared them:
Praise God who hath spoken; praise God who hath wrought.

Thoughts of deep thinkers,
Dreams of high dreamers,
Wisest and truest deemed, noblest and best:
What could they avail us?
What did they, but fail us?
We groped and we laboured, but fruitless our quest.

Darkness around us,
Death's gulf before us:
Vainly we cried: 'Oh for life! Oh for light!'
Man's wisdom resourceless,
Man's fantasy forceless,
Were wandering fires that died out in black night.

Shamed is men's glory,
Silenced their boasting:
No man could give us what blindly we sought;
Christ only could save us,
And glories He gave us
Transcending our need as transcending our thought.

Where blind hate nailed Him,
Wrought He redemption,
Solved sin's dark problems, set God's good hand free:
And now God's good pleasure
Bestows love's hid treasure
Of good beyond measure; all ours, Lord, in Thee.

Praise we the Father,
Wondering, adoring,
Son of His love, that the counsels divine
Unite us for ever
With Thee in His favour
And love, and love's purpose; ours Thou, and we Thine!

Alexander Carruthers

THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD

O Lord, Thou art our Shepherd;
Thy purchased sheep are we:
Us name by name Thou callest
And gatherest to Thee.
No stranger would we follow;
We love but Thy blest voice.
Thou knowest Thine; Thine know Thee:
Hearing Thee, we rejoice.

Our Saviour and our Shepherd,
Thy care for us we know:
Thy life for us Thou gavest;
No hireling carest so!
Love which to death descended
To bring up thence Thy sheep,
In power divine that raised Thee
That treasured flock shall keep.

Thy hand, which holds us, fashioned
The stars that light the sky;
Thy word of power sustains them,
And guides their way on high.
Each orb by name Thou knowest;
But little though we be,
The least of us is dearer
Than all their host to Thee.

The least saith: 'Thou hast loved me,
And given Thyself for me'.
Each day new proof still bringeth
That loved we are of Thee.
The stars of heaven will perish,
When ends their course above;
But we shall live for ever
In this Thy well-proved love.

Alexander Carruthers

WE WOULD BE LOYAL TO THE LORD

Until Thou come, Lord Jesus,
And Thine from earth set free,
On high, in holy gladness,
Adoring stand round Thee:
Give grace, we pray, to serve Thee
And glorify Thy name,
Where Thou, for our redemption,
Hast died the death of shame.

With glory and with honour
Thee God in Heaven has crowned;
With robe and reed men mocked Thee,
With thorns Thy brow they bound,
Heaven's mightiest, adoring,
Thy blest commands fulfil;
Earth's feeblest dare to scorn Thee
And set at naught Thy will.

The earth, and men, — and angels
Who did before Thee stand
Ere was the world — yea, all things
Are creatures of Thy hand.
Thou, God and Lord, the Bondman
Of love Thyself didst make;
And didst obey, commanded
That road to death to take.

O Man who so obeyest,
To Thee all knees shall bow;
As Lord each tongue shall own Thee:
Thy ransomed own Thee now;
With knee and tongue and spirit
Say 'Jesus, Thou art Lord!'
How worthy, Holy Saviour,
To be obeyed, adored!

Alexander Carruthers

POWER IN RELATION TO THE TESTIMONY OF GOD

“There are three things which have a stately step, and four are comely in going: The lion, mighty among beasts, which turneth not away for any; a horse girt in the loins; or the he-goat; and a king against whom none can rise up”
Proverbs 30:29-31

From these verses in Proverbs I want to show how we arrive at the thought of power, which the idea of a king represents. It is not a question here of an official king, but one who has moral power and that is what God intends to be primarily developed in the church. He looks for the development of moral power in us, and so these four stately things culminate in the one — a king, against whom there is no rising up.

Now the first is a lion and I believe the features of a lion appear as the Holy Spirit is recognised as received in the believer’s soul. Earlier in the passage there were described four things which disquieted the earth — four odious things which are easily compared with conditions with which we have to do at the present time. (See verses 22 & 23)

Then there were four little, or weak things (see verses 24 to 28) which correspond with the position of God’s people at the present time. We do not occupy nor do we seek a place of conspicuousness in this world. “Wise” but “weak” things surely describe the people of God in this day. But then there are the stately things, and these refer to believers in their service in the testimony of God. It is well to accept our littleness and our weakness, but at the same time it is also well to see that the possession of the Spirit of God involves power, and power against which there is no rising up, against which all the power of the world cannot raise up its head.

I want to make that clear, and to make clear, too, how we come into this power, for without it our testimony cannot be effective. So the first feature — the lion — should, I believe, appear in the youngest believer who has the Spirit and who confesses the Lord Jesus. Many are in soul difficulties because they do not confess the Lord. Yet in confessing the Lord you raise your standard, you are not afraid of man, you have come into the light of the Lord Jesus in heaven, and the light of the great fact that the Holy Spirit has been sent down by Him, and that the Holy Spirit is greater than the world power. “Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4) and thus you confess the Lord Jesus, and that is the act of a lion.

You do not underrate what that may involve: it will involve conflict but no one is of any value until he faces the enemy. As you face him and confess the Lord Jesus, you realise that you have got more power than the enemy; he flees from you: he has no power against you as you confess boldly the Lord Jesus Christ. “The righteous are bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28:1), and so is the youngest believer as he apprehends the gospel and confesses the Lord boldly and finds he

has power; he turns not away from any. I speak thus for the young ones because it is the commencement of spiritual power when you begin to realise what you are possessed of, as you openly and courageously confess the Lord Jesus in your home circle and particularly in your business circle.

Then the next thing which has a stately step is the war-horse. He represents aggressiveness. The lion stands his ground, he turns not away from any, but the horse according to Job is aggressive: "He... cannot contain himself at the sound of the trumpet... and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting"; "he mocketh at fear and is not affrighted" (Job 39:24, 25 & 22). He knows the issue and he is present wherever a conflict is on for the truth; he is never in the background; he discerns that the issue is the truth and he comes forward: "He paweth in the valley and rejoiceth in his strength". It is the believer consciously possessed of the Spirit. He knows the power he has and he knows what he has received it for and he is not afraid to use it; so he is present in power for the maintenance of the truth of God. The world may have its issues but for him there is no other issue than the truth. No one who loves Christ will fail to use every bit of power that he has for the maintenance of what belongs to Him.

The next is the he-goat. The goat is a creature that can isolate himself, and does. I have no doubt that he represents the believer here as able to retire into the presence of God. Many of us began well; we made a good confession and came out in the conflict but if we fail to return into the presence of God, if we fail to maintain a secret relation with God by prayer, we lose our power and thus come under the influence of men. Many have suffered thus — living in the christian company merely, living in the success of our service, eating, as it were, our own fat, and as a consequence have lost our power. Whereas the he-goat is a stately thing.

Moses, I suppose, is the best illustration of what is set forth in the he-goat; he was up on the mount with God; Aaron was with the people; Moses came down from the mount from being with God. What an experience was his! He was forty days with God, and he neither ate nor drank; what room there was in him for God! Down in the valley the people were eating, and drinking, and playing, and making the golden calf — all these things go together. Moses neither ate nor drank; he lived by God. "Man shall not live by bread alone", the Lord said, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". And what words were proceeding out of the mouth of God as Moses was with Him there upon the mount! Never had a man heard such words. What things were opened up to him; he lived upon them. As he was with God, his very being, as I may say, was saturated with the thoughts of God. How wonderful! What a man he was as he descended that mount! How he besought the Lord his God for the people! He interceded for them with God before he entered the camp; but when he did enter no one could stand before him. There were possibly two million people there but there was not one who could rise up in the presence of Moses; he is the king, for

the goat culminates in the king — the man of moral power. He ground the calf into powder and strewed it upon the water, and compelled the people to drink of it as from the brook. Such was Moses, such is the king according to God; no one can rise up against him.

James Taylor

Abbreviated extract from an address at Barnet 1925.

FORGIVENESS

Introductory note

In 1945 an undergraduate at Oxford was in trouble. According to his own account he had been converted to Christ out of religious formalism and now he wanted nothing so much as to know and do God's will. Stumblingly he tried to speak of Christ to others and, under God's will, his efforts bore some fruit. He was shy, gawky and not widely cultured, but in the company of christians he was making closer friendships than he had known before. He knew that he knew God and the knowledge brought him joy. But he had a problem. The teaching he was receiving about the inner life just did not seem to work and in his quest for greater godliness he was making no progress; hence his distress.

His perplexity was this: his teachers described the christian life as victorious and power packed with sustained victory over sin; borne along by the Holy Spirit they were kept from falling and were able to do mighty things for God. According to his teachers all that ever kept christians from this happy state was a failure to yield themselves fully to God. The young student tried again and again to do this, scraping the inside of his being to identify unyielded things by which his blessing was perhaps being blocked and finding himself in a state of despair.

What was he to do, for instance, with the vain but recurring wish that physically and temperamentally he could be someone different? Would a really consecrated person feel such wishes? From the glowing way in which the exponents of total consecration talked it seemed not, yet he felt them.

In this troubled and tormented state of soul the undergraduate discovered the writings of J.C.Ryle (1816-1900). As a result he came to see how to deal with himself as he was and to see the thing that he had been seeking as the will-o'-the-wisp that it is. Never can spiritual reading have done anyone so much good so quickly.

The above was the experience of J.I.Packer, but many, including myself, have found the structured, Bible-based teaching of J. C. Ryle to be a lifeline in times of spiritual confusion. The article which follows is on "Forgiveness" and is typical of the way in which Ryle deals with the foundational truths of the gospel.
Ed.

FORGIVENESS

“Your sins are forgiven you” 1 John 2:12

I propose to examine the subject of forgiveness. If we care for our souls let us be sure that we know something by experience of the forgiveness of sins.

Let me show, first of all, our need of forgiveness.

All need forgiveness, because all are sinners. We are all great sinners. “There is none righteous, no, not one”. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10, 23). No child ever needs to be taught to do wrong. No bad companion ever leads us into such wickedness as our own hearts. And “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). We must either be forgiven or lost eternally. We are all guilty sinners in the sight of God. We have broken His holy law. We have not done His will. There is not a commandment in all the ten which does not condemn us. If we have not broken it in deed we have in word; if we have not broken it in word, we have in thought and imagination. All the world is “guilty before God”. And “as it is appointed unto men once to die, so after this comes the judgment”. We must either be forgiven or perish everlastingly (Romans 3:19; Hebrews 11:27).

With all our arts and sciences, with all our machinery and inventions, with all our lawyers and statesmen, we have not altered the nature of people. Men’s hearts are everywhere the same and everywhere wicked. Sin is the family disease of all the children of Adam. Wide as the difference is between the nations of the earth, they have always been found to have one great mark in common — the mark of sin.

I have no doubt such language sounds extravagant to some. But mark well what I am about to say next, and then consider whether I have not used the words of soberness and truth. What then, I ask, is the life of the best christian amongst us all? What is it but a career of shortcomings? Our faith, how feeble! Our love, how cold! Our works, how few! Our zeal, how small! Our patience, how short-breathed! Our humility, how thread-bare! Our self-denial, how dwarfish! Our knowledge, how dim! Our spirituality, how shallow! Our prayers, how formal! Our desires for more grace, how faint! “In many things,” says James, “we offend all” (James 3:2). And what is the best action that is ever done by the very best of christians? What is it after all but an imperfect work, when tried on its own merits? It is always more or less defective. It is either wrong in its motive or incomplete in its performance, — not done from perfect principles, or not executed in a perfect way. Men may see no fault in it but weighed in the balances of God it would be found wanting.

Then what is the God, whose eyes are on all our ways, and before whom we have one day to give account? “Holy, holy, holy,” is the remarkable expression applied to Him by those who are nearest to Him. (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). It sounds as if no one word could express the intensity of His holiness. One of His prophets says, “He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13). We think the angels exalted beings and far above ourselves but we are told in Scripture, “He charged His angels with folly” (Job 4:18). What then is any one of us but a miserable sinner in the sight of such a God as this?

Surely we ought all to cease from proud thoughts about ourselves. We ought to say with Abraham, “I am dust and ashes;” and with Job, “I am vile” and with Isaiah, “We are all as an unclean thing” and with John, “If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (Genesis 18:27; Job 40:4; Isaiah 64:6; 1 John 1:8). Where is the man or woman in the whole catalogue of the Book of Life that will ever be able to say more than this — “I obtained mercy”? What is the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, — what are they all but pardoned sinners?

Sin is a burden, and must be taken off, a defilement that must be cleansed away, a mighty debt that must be paid. Sin is a mountain standing between us and heaven, and must be removed. The first step towards heaven is to see clearly that we deserve hell. The glory and excellence of the gospel is that it meets the sinner as he is. It takes him as it finds him. It goes down to the level to which sin has brought him. It tells of a remedy equal to the disease, — a great forgiveness for great sinners.

Let me point out, in the second place, the way of forgiveness.

Will you turn to sacraments and ordinances? They cannot supply you with forgiveness, however diligently you may use them. They cannot put away transgression. You may go to the Lord’s table every Sunday in your life but unless you look far beyond the sign to the thing signified you will after all die in your sins. Will you trust in your own works and endeavours, your virtues and your good deeds, your prayers and your alms? They will never pay your debt to God. There is no merit or worthiness in them at the very best. The Lord Jesus Christ says expressly “When you have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10).

Will you trust in your own repentance and amendment? You are very sorry for the past. You hope to do better for time to come. You hope God will be merciful. Alas, if you lean on this, you have nothing beneath you but a broken reed! The judge does not pardon the thief because he is sorry for what he did. To-day’s

sorrow will not wipe off the score of yesterday's sins. It is not an ocean of tears that would ever cleanse an uneasy conscience and give it peace.

Where then is forgiveness to be found? There is a way both sure and plain. That way is simply to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. It is to cast your soul, with all its sins, unreservedly on Christ, — to cease completely from any dependence on your own works or doings and to rest on no other work but Christ's work, no other righteousness but Christ's righteousness, as your ground of hope. Take this course and you are a pardoned soul. "To Christ," says Peter, "give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). "Through this Man," says Paul at Antioch, "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things" (Acts 13:38). "In Him," writes Paul to the Colossians, "we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

The Lord Jesus Christ, in great love and compassion, has made a full and complete satisfaction for sin, by suffering death in our place upon the cross. There He offered Himself as a sacrifice for us and allowed the wrath of God, which we deserved, to fall on His own head. For our sins, as our Substitute, He gave Himself, suffered, and died, — the just for the unjust, the innocent for the guilty, — that He might deliver us from the curse of a broken law, and provide a complete pardon for all who are willing to receive it. And by so doing, as Isaiah says, He has borne our sins; as Paul says, He has purged our sins (Isaiah 53:11; Hebrews 1:3).

And now the Lord Jesus Christ is appointed by God the Father to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give remission of sins to all who will have it. The keys of death and hell are put in His hand. He Himself is the door, and by Him all that enter in shall be saved (Acts 5:31; Revelation 1:18; John 10:9). Christ has purchased a full forgiveness. He has done all, paid all, suffered all that was needful to reconcile us to God. He has provided a garment of righteousness to clothe us. He has opened a fountain of living waters to cleanse us. He has removed every barrier between us and God the Father, taken every obstacle out of the way and made a road by which the vilest may return. The sinner has only to believe and be saved, to wash and be clean.

And faith is the only thing required, in order that you and I may be forgiven. That we will come by faith to Jesus as sinners with our sins, trust in Him, rest on Him, confide in Him, commit our souls to Him, and forsaking all other hope, cleave only to Him, this is all and everything that God asks for. Let a man only do this, and he shall be saved. Every man and woman that so trusts is wholly forgiven, and reckoned perfectly righteous.

Faith is the only thing required. Faith, I say, and not conversion. A man may have been walking in the broad way up to the very hour he first hears the gospel. But if in that hearing he is awakened to feel his danger, and wants to be saved, let him come to Christ at once, and wait for nothing. That very coming is the beginning of conversion. Faith, I repeat, and not holiness. A man may feel all full of sin, and unworthy to be saved. But let him not tarry till he is better. Let him come to Christ without delay, just as he is. Afterwards he shall be holy.

I know well that the natural heart dislikes this doctrine. It runs counter to man's notions of religion. It leaves him no room to boast. Man's idea is to come to Christ with a price in his hand, his regularity, his morality, his repentance, his goodness, and so, as it were, to buy his pardon. The Spirit's teaching is quite different: it is, first of all, to believe. Whosoever believeth shall not perish (John 3:16).

Some say such doctrine cannot be right, because it makes the way to heaven too easy. I fear that many such persons, if the truth were spoken, find it too hard. I believe in reality it is easier to give a fortune in building a cathedral like York Minster, or to go to the stake and be burned, than thoroughly to receive "justification by faith without the deeds of the law," and to be blessed as a sinner saved by grace.

This is the glorious doctrine which was the strength of the apostles when they went forth to the Gentiles to preach. They turned the world upside down. They changed the face of the Roman empire. They emptied the heathen temples of their worshippers and made the whole system of idolatry crumble away. And what was the weapon by which they did it all? It was free forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the doctrine which brought light into Europe 300 years ago, at the time of the Reformation, and enabled one solitary monk, Martin Luther, to shake the whole Church of Rome. Through his preaching and writing the scales fell from men's eyes and the chains of their souls were loosed. And what was the lever that gave him his power? It was free forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us never forget that the brightest days of a church are those when "Christ crucified" is most exalted. The dens and caves of the earth, where the early christians met to hear of the love of Jesus, were more full of glory and beauty in God's sight than ever was St. Peter's at Rome. The meanest barn at this day, where the true way of pardon is offered to sinners, is a far more honourable place than the Cathedral of Cologne or Milan.

This is the doctrine which, of all others, is the mightiest engine for pulling down the kingdom of Satan. Preach salvation by the sacraments, exalt the church above Christ and keep back the doctrine of the atonement, and the devil cares

little, — his goods are at peace. But preach Christ, and a free pardon by faith in Him, and then Satan will have great wrath for he knows he has but a short time. I am not ashamed of free pardon through faith in Christ, whatever some may say against the doctrine. I am not ashamed of it for its fruits speak for themselves. It has effected moral changes which laws and punishments have failed to work, which magistrates and policemen have laboured after in vain, which secular knowledge has proved utterly powerless to produce. I can well understand Paul ending his Epistle to the erring Galatians with that solemn burst of feeling, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14).

You should ask yourself whether you have really received the truth which I have been dwelling on, and know it by experience. Jesus, and faith in Him, is the only way to the Father. He that thinks to climb into Paradise by some other road will find himself fearfully mistaken. Other foundation can no man lay for an immortal soul than that of which I have been feebly speaking. He that ventures himself here is safe. He that is off this rock has got no standing ground at all.

You should seriously consider what kind of a ministry you are in the habit of attending. It is not all the same where you go, whatever people may say. There are many places of worship, I fear, where you might look long for Christ crucified, and never find Him. He is buried under outward ceremonies, thrust behind the baptismal font, lost sight of under the shadow of the church. “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him” (John 20:13).

Let me, in the third place, encourage all who wish to be forgiven

Listen to me while I try to exhibit to you the treasures of the gospel. I cannot describe its fulness as I ought. Its riches are indeed unsearchable. (Ephesians 3:8).

Consider, then, for one thing, that the forgiveness set before you is a great and broad forgiveness. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall become white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Yes: though your trespasses be more in number than the hairs of your head, the stars in heaven, the sand on the sea shore, still they can all be pardoned! “His blood cleanseth from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Paul names a long list of abominations which the Corinthians had committed and then says, “Such were some of you: but ye are washed” (I Corinthians 6:11).

It is a complete forgiveness, not a mere letting off. It is a pardon so complete that he who has it is reckoned as righteous as if he had never sinned at all! His iniquities are blotted out. They are removed from him as far as the east from the

west (Psalm 103:12). There remains no condemnation for him. The Father sees him joined to Christ, and is well pleased.

It is a free and unconditional forgiveness. It is not burdened with an “if,” like Solomon’s pardon to Adonijah: “If he will show himself a worthy man” (1 Kings 1:52). Jesus requires but one character and that is that you should feel yourself a sinful bad man. Like David in the cave of Adullam, He receives every one that feels in distress and a debtor, and rejects none (1 Samuel 22:2). Are you a sinner? Do you want a Saviour? Then come to Jesus just as you are, and your soul shall live.

I have read of earthly kings who knew not how to show mercy; of Henry the eighth of England who spared neither man nor woman; of James the fifth of Scotland who would never show favour to a Douglas. The King of kings is not like them. He calls on men to come to Him and be pardoned. “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink” (John 7:37). “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). It ought to be a great comfort to you and me to hear of any pardon at all but to hear Jesus Himself inviting us, the Saviour seeking the sinner before the sinner seeks the Saviour, this is encouragement, this is strong consolation indeed!

Again, it is a willing forgiveness. I have heard of pardons granted in reply to long entreaty and wrung out by much importunity. King Edward the Third of England would not spare the citizens of Calais till they came to him with halters round their necks and his own Queen interceded for them on her knees. But Jesus is “good and ready to forgive” (Psalm 86:5). He “delighteth in mercy” (Micah 7:18). Judgment is “His strange work”. He is not willing that any should perish (Isaiah 28:21, 2 Peter 3:9). He would fain have all men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem. “As I live,” He says, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked... Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; why will ye die?” (Ezekiel 33:11). You and I may well come boldly to the throne of grace. He who sits there is far more willing and ready to give mercy than we are to receive it (Hebrews 4:16).

Besides this, it is a total forgiveness. Thousands and tens of thousands have sought for pardon at the mercy-seat of Christ and not one has ever returned to say that he sought in vain. Sinners of every sort and description have come and none have ever been refused admission. Zacchaeus the extortioner, Magdalen the harlot, Saul the persecutor, Peter the denier of his Lord, the Jews who crucified the Prince of Life, the idolatrous Athenians, the adulterous Corinthians, all have ventured their souls on Christ’s promises of pardon and none have ever found them fail.

Besides this, it is a present forgiveness. All that believe in Jesus are at once justified from all things (Acts 13:39). The very day the younger son returned to his father's house he was clothed with the best robe, had the ring put on his hand and the shoes on his feet (Luke 15). The very day Zacchaeus received Jesus he heard those comfortable words, "This day is salvation come to this house" (Luke 19:9). The very day that David said, "I have sinned against the Lord," he was told by Nathan, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin" (2 Samuel 12:13). The very day you first flee to Christ your sins are all removed. Your pardon is not a thing far away, to be obtained only after many years. It is close to you, within your reach, all ready to be bestowed. Believe, and that very moment it is your own. "He that believeth is not condemned" (John 3:18). It is not said, 'He shall not be', or 'will not be', but "is not". From the time of his believing, condemnation is gone. "He that believeth hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). It is not said, 'He shall have' or 'Will have'; it is "hath". It is his own as surely as if he was in heaven, though not so evidently so to his own eyes.

Last, and best of all, it is an everlasting forgiveness. Once justified, you are justified for ever. Once written in the book of life, your name shall never be blotted out. The sins of God's children are said to be cast into the depths of the sea, to be sought for and not found, to be remembered no more, to be cast behind God's back (Micah 7:19; Jeremiah 50:20; 31:34; Isaiah 38:17). The salvation Jesus offers is an everlasting salvation and a pardon once sealed with His blood shall never be reversed.

Such an one is on a rock. The accuser of the brethren can lay no charge against him. He has a portion that will endure. Such a one is ready for anything: ready for health, ready for disease; ready for tears, ready for joy; ready for poverty, ready for plenty; ready for life, ready for death. He has Christ. "Blessed" indeed "is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1).

Let me, in the last place, supply some marks of having found forgiveness.

Forgiven souls hate sin. Remember how the woman in Simon's house wept over the feet of Jesus. (Luke 7:38). Remember how the Ephesians publicly burned their wicked books (Acts 19:19). Remember how Paul mourned over his youthful transgressions: "I am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9). If you and sin are friends, you have not yet been reconciled to God.

Forgiven souls love Christ. His person, work, name, blood, words, and His ordinances, all are precious to forgiven souls. The ministry which exalts Him most is that which they enjoy most. The books which are most full of Him are

most pleasant to their minds. The people on earth they feel most drawn to are those in whom they see something of Christ.

Forgiven souls are humble. They cannot forget that they owe all they have and hope for to free grace, and this keeps them lowly. They are debtors who could not pay for themselves, wandering sheep who were ready to perish when the Shepherd found them. Forgiveness produces the spirit of Jacob: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant" (Genesis 32:10); and of Hezekiah: — "I shall go softly all my years" (Isaiah 38:15); and of the apostle Paul "I am less than the least of all saints, — chief of sinners" (Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15). When you and I have nothing we can call our own but sin and weakness, there is surely no garment that becomes us so well as humility.

Forgiven souls desire to please Him who has saved them. They want to do His will, to glorify Him. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?" (Psalm 116:12) is a leading principle in a pardoned heart. It was the remembrance of mercy that made Paul in labours so abundant and in doing good so unwearied. It was a sense of pardon that made Zacchaeus say, "The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold" (Luke 19:8). If any one points out to me believers who are in a carnal, slothful state of soul I reply in the words of Peter, "They have forgotten they were purged from their old sins" (2 Peter 1:9). If you show me a man deliberately living an unholy and licentious life, and yet boasting that his sins are forgiven, I answer, 'He is under a ruinous delusion, and is not forgiven at all'.

Forgiven souls are forgiving. They do as they have been done by. They endeavour to "walk in love, as Christ loved them, and gave Himself for them" (Ephesians 5:2). They remember how God for Christ's sake forgave them and endeavour to do the same towards their fellow-creatures. Doubtless in this, as in every thing else, they come short, but this is their desire and their aim. A spiteful quarrelsome christian is a scandal to his profession. It is very hard to believe that such an one has ever sat at the foot of the cross.

Examine yourself before this subject is forgotten. Try yourself by the five marks I have just set before you. If you know anything of them, though it be but a little, I am thankful. If you know nothing of them in your own experience, let me say in all affection, I stand in doubt of you. I tremble for your soul.

Now, let me give a Word of exhortation to all forgiven souls.

You are forgiven. Then know the full extent of your privileges, learn to rejoice in the Lord. You and I are great sinners but then we have a great Saviour. You and I have sinned sins that are past man's knowledge but then we have "the love

of Christ, which passeth knowledge” to rest upon. (Ephesians 3:19). You and I feel our hearts to be a bubbling fountain of evil but then we have another fountain of greater power in Christ’s blood, to which we may daily resort. You and I have mighty enemies to contend with but then the “Captain of our salvation” is mightier still and is ever with us.

Let us strive every year to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ought not to be satisfied with the same kind of hearing, and reading, and praying, which satisfied us in years gone by. We ought to labour every year to love Christ more intensely, to abhor evil more thoroughly, to cleave to what is good more closely, to watch even our least ways more narrowly, to declare very plainly that we seek a country, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and be clothed with Him in every place and company, to see more, to feel more, to know more, to do more, these ought to be our aims and desires every year we begin. Truly there is room for improvement in us all.

Let us try to do good to the souls of others, more than we have done hitherto. Alas, it is poor work indeed to be swallowed up in our own spiritual concerns and taken up with our own spiritual ailments and never to think of others! We forget that there is such a thing as religious selfishness. Oh, it is indeed a true saying, “He that watereth shall be watered himself” (Proverbs 11:25). The idle, do-little, selfish christian has little idea what he is missing.

But above all, let us learn to live the life of faith in Jesus more than we have hitherto. We need ever to have before our minds Christ’s dying for our sins, Christ’s rising again for our justification, Christ interceding for us at God’s right hand, Christ soon coming again to gather us to Himself. Oh, for an ear more ready to hear His voice!

Finally, let us say ‘Stand aside’ to everything in the world that interferes between ourselves and Jesus Christ and let us dread allowing ourselves in the least evil habits, lest insensibly they rise up like a mist and hide Him from our eyes. Let us think lightly of the world’s gifts. Let us sit calmly under its cares. Let us care for nothing if we may only ever abide in Christ.

If our sins are forgiven, our best things are yet to come. Yet a little time and we shall “see face to face, and know as we have been known”; we shall “see the King in His beauty” and “go out no more” (1 Corinthians 13:12; Isaiah 33:17; Revelation 3:12). Blessed then is he whose transgression is forgiven and whose sins are covered (Psalm 32:1).

J. C. Ryle