

95

Living Water

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Editor: Mark Lemon

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What is a Christian?

By A. A. Elliott

A reprint of 3 articles printed in recent issues of this magazine

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Living Water — Issue No. 95

September – October 2009

Recent Ministry

Page

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS—Chapter 5 1

(Highlights of a Bible Reading) Continuing the series based on Bible readings at Bromley, Kent.

Poetry Selection

THE UNSEEN LOVED ONE Hannah K. Burlingham (1842 – 1901) 6

I AM HIS AND HE IS MINE John Quarles (1624 – 1665) 7

Testimony Section

THE TESTIMONY OF THE BIBLE TO GOD AS CREATOR 8

A selection of quotations from the Bible

OVERWHELMED BY THE LOVE AND MERCY OF GOD Caner 10

A voice from the past

THE TREE OF LIFE Max Tucker 15

A word for today

WHAT WE HAVE FROM THE LORD Piero Casavecchia 19

A Bible reading in London, July 2008

EDITORIAL

Included in this issue is the first of a series of testimonies written by former Muslims who have come to trust in Christ. These are some of the most interesting testimonies that I have had the privilege of reproducing in “Living Water”; they also have a message to us as Christians:

- They reveal the terror of Allah which some Muslims labour under and which can lead them to do extraordinary things in order to gain his favour.
- They show the need for patience in Christians involved in any outreach to Muslims. The implications for any Muslim who comes to Christ in terms of being rejected by family and community are frightening and it often takes a long time before Muslims feel able to commit themselves to Jesus Christ. Caner’s testimony, included

in this issue, says it took him any number of years.

- Finally, the joy that is expressed in these testimonies as former Muslims really come into a living relationship with God, knowing Him as Father and conscious of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is a challenge to many who have been Christians for a long time as to whether we have the same valuation of these things.

I found the testimonies profoundly moving.

The first in the series begins on page 10.

Ed.

Recent Ministry

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS—CHAPTER 5

Earlier in the epistle Paul has written about the great truths of Christ and the church. Now as the epistle proceeds he warns the Ephesians about things that would damage their relationship with the Lord and with the Holy Spirit. We find the character of things in the city of Ephesus recorded in the Acts, but against that dark background Paul exhorts the believers there to be "imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, even as the Christ loved us". We have a wonderful example in the Lord's walk here on earth to encourage and help us in the path we are called to. Yet we do need to be aware of the importance of continually judging ourselves in relation to our own path and the influences around us that may affect us.

It is encouraging that this chapter, which provides so stark a warning of the errors of the flesh, starts with the words, "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children and walk in love, even as the Christ loved us, and delivered himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". We are to be affected in our hearts by the fact that the Lord delivered Himself up for us. Many scriptures speak of the Lord being delivered up by others, such as Judas, or Pilate but here we are told that the Lord delivered Himself up. It shows how far He is prepared to go in love and devotion to those that are His.

The "offering and sacrifice to God" (v.2) refer back to the burnt offering in scripture and we are to see Christ in the blessed fulfilment of all that such an offering speaks of. Yet it is remarkable, too, that any sacrifice done in the spirit of Christ and from love for Christ has

something before God of that precious character about it. Paul writes to the Philippians about their giving: “the things sent from you, an odour of sweet savour, an acceptable sacrifice, agreeable to God” (Philippians 4:18).

In verse three of our chapter there is a sad list of things that we need to be kept in self judgment about. These things are not suitable for conversation among believers. The world around us may speak of these things openly, and even with interest, but we need to be protected from that, judging it, because it panders to the flesh that is in us. We are to walk as children of light. These believers in Ephesus were in this idolatrous city but their life and demeanour were to be different from others and from what they had been before conversion. The Acts of the Apostles shows clearly that it was so. There was a testimony that was recognized, as well it might be after the ministry of Paul and others over three years.

**Wake up and “the
Christ shall shine
upon thee”**

It is important to see that as a result of their coming to Christ these believers were “now light in the Lord”. That is the starting point; there was a difference, brought about by the work of God. The exhortation is therefore to walk according to what they were in God’s sight, “proving what is agreeable to the Lord”. These words challenge us all that we might have the mind of the Lord about matters. Believers are not taken out of this world, but are to be lights in the world. These believers in Ephesus, these children of light, were walking in a city that was given over to idolatry and the uncleanness associated with it. Sadly the world around us is much the same today.

It is salutary that the Ephesian believers needed to be reminded that they were once darkness. The earlier part of the epistle had brought them wonderful light and truth from the Lord but sadly experience teaches us that Ephesian light is not always followed by Ephesian walk. Paul writes, “Let no one deceive you with vain words”. We never become so elevated as to be able to leave our moral foundations behind.

So there is an exhortation here to wake up and “the Christ shall shine upon thee”. It is a call to responsibility. Our walk is to be a

**It is easy in the
good times to
give thanks**

purposeful one. It is a question of seeking to do the Lord's will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We read, "See therefore how ye walk carefully, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. For this reason be not foolish, but understanding what is the will of the Lord" (vv.15-17). We return to this thought of the Lord's will and doing what He would have us to do. Then we are immediately reminded of our need for the Holy Spirit. It is a wonderful thing that we have a divine Person here who will support us and help us in doing what is right and give us encouragement. Because the outcome of being filled with the Spirit is speaking to one another in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and chanting with your heart to the Lord; giving thanks at all times for all things" (v.20).

There are some interesting differences here. Hymns are directly addressed to a divine Person, spiritual songs are more descriptive, and psalms relate more to experience with God. When you go to the book of the Psalms, many of them are the result of a person's own experience. When the apostle speaks of psalms here he is not just thinking of what we know as the book of Psalms but what is reflected there by way of experience, so there is room for compositions that reflect soul experience in the present day. Some well-known hymns have been written as a result of very difficult experiences. We can be encouraged ourselves and be a help to one another through singing hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs, but in doing so our hearts are to be directed to the Lord.

We may wonder how we reach the state of heart and soul described here as being enabled to give "thanks at all times for all things" (v. 20). It is easy in the good times to give thanks but in the bad times it is not so easy. It helps us to remember that our times are in His hands (Psalm 31:15). Everything that God orders is for our blessing although we might not see it at the time. Faith lays hold of that and trusts and thanks God.

Paul now turns to the relationship of husband and wife and how it is to take character from that of Christ and the church. Marriage is a very special relationship as purposed in God's ways. In these days so often the relationship of marriage is lightly regarded but for those

who love the Lord Jesus there is a very special significance. Some of what is said here is a very far cry from much that is said about marriage in the world today. Paul exhorts wives to, "Submit yourselves to your own husbands" and he speaks of headship to be exercised by the husband. This is God's ordering and there is blessing in accepting it. The epistle to the Corinthians shows us the order of headship according to God. We read: "the Christ is head of every man, but woman's head is the man and the Christ's head God (1 Corinthians 11:3).

It is a very great challenge for every Christian to work this out but the wonderful thing is that we have a pattern both of subjection and of headship in Christ. As Man here He was subject to the Father in everything and He still waits patiently for the Father's word for Him to call all His own to be with Him for ever. Then we see too a most blessed pattern of headship in Christ. It is shown in respect of the church. He "loved the church and delivered himself up for it" (v. 25). He is the Head and all His actions in relation to the church reflect His love. So headship in marriage is not a husband lording it over his wife but is to be exercised feelingly and with affection. The Lord would teach us these things from the pattern seen in Himself. His headship to the church will be seen in all eternity for the Father has made Him to be head over all things to the church (see Ephesians 1:22).

Then we read here that, "He is Saviour of the body". Those that form His body are precious and important to Him. There are two references to the Lord loving and delivering Himself up in this chapter. The first is for us as individuals, then we find it says that He loved the church and delivered Himself up for it. That is in the past, but that love is still active—He is Saviour of the body. That is His present activity. The Lord is still sanctifying and purifying by the washing of water by the word. The idea of sanctifying is that the church is set apart and the purifying is a process that goes on continually. In verse 29 we get the thought of Christ nourishing and cherishing the church. It is a service that He fulfils because of His wonderful love and any service that we undertake should be of that pattern and character.

The fact that in Christian marriage the relationship between husband and wife is to take character from Christ and the church puts it on

a very high level. Many of us have the advantage of committing ourselves to a Christian marriage from the outset. Those to whom Paul wrote would have included many who were converted out of the pagan world, to whom this would come as quite a revelation. And while the Holy Spirit would have begun working in them before Paul wrote, they would have to apply themselves very much to this new view of marriage. It is not surprising then that he said, "This mystery is great". It is something which the natural mind does not perceive. The apostle re-emphasises that he was speaking as to Christ and as to the church. That is what was primarily in his mind.

It is a very great matter that Christ is our head in heaven and that His body is here. The Holy Spirit has kept that alive down the ages and we can be thankful that we have some light as to this and the greatness of what it is that Christ is truly Head in heaven and truly cares for us and has given the Spirit to the church as the evidence of that care and interest. There are practical consequences that flow out of that, There is to be a reflection of Him and of His mind in His body here. That means that individually we recognise His authority. He is not here now but we should be walking in subjection to Him.

Practically we come first to an understanding of headship as individuals. You see that in Scripture in those that were subject to Him—Mary sitting at the Lord's feet, for instance. We often find that it is a real test to know the Lord's mind but we need to come to it as individuals as submitting ourselves to Christ. While dependence is not quite the same as subjection, having a dependent spirit as well as a subject one helps us to get the mind of the Lord and convey these things rightly in our relationships.

The last part of the chapter, and going into chapter 6 shows us that the great truths of this epistle are to be worked out in the ordinary relationships of life: husband and wife, children and parents and masters and servants. It is instructive that these exhortations follow on from verse 21: "submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ". There is to be a godly and subject spirit in the homes of believers that would greatly facilitate good relationships in the Christian company.

Based on Bible readings in Bromley in September and October 2008.

Poetry Selection

THE UNSEEN LOVED ONE

“Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

1 Peter 1:8

Jesus, Thou precious One, what depths of love

My happy soul is finding out in Thee!

Lead Thou me on, till in my home above,

I shall Thee, chief among ten thousand, see:

Then in unclouded light, I shall adore

And praise Thy holy name for evermore.

Thou art my portion now, most gracious Lord.

The charm of earthly things hath passed away;

Wandering in darkness once, I heard Thy word

Calling from this world's night to heaven's day:

I came to Thee, and sheltered on Thy breast,

The weight of sin was gone, I was at rest.

Oh teach me, blessed Lord, to bear my cross,

And gladly follow Thee, what'er betide:

Well may I count all else but dung and dross,

And with Thy love be more than satisfied;

For Thou hast shed Thy blood to set me free,

And now in heaven dost intercede for me.

On earth the lowest place was ever Thine;

I too would have that mind which was in Thee.

Since Thou hast made the heavenly glory mine,

Grant that Thy glory here my aim may be:

Cause me to know and do Thy blessed will,

To trust in Thee at all times and be still.

Lord, Thou hast left us to prepare the place

Where Thy redeemed ones soon with thee shall dwell;

Now whilst we wait and long to see thy face,
Teach us, by loving much, to serve Thee well.
Attune our hearts below to songs of praise,
Our sweet employ above through endless days.

Lord Jesus, every thought is read by Thee—
Those heart desires that cannot be expressed:
Hasten the day when we like Thee shall be,
And in Thy glorious presence fully blest;
Then evermore will be our joyful part,
To know as known—to see thee as Thou art.

Hannah K. Burlingham (1842 – 1901)

I AM HIS AND HE IS MINE

Long did I toil and knew no earthly rest;
Far did I rove and found no certain home;
At last I sought them in His sheltering breast,
Who opes His arms and bids the weary come:
With Him I found a home, a rest divine;
And since then I am His and He is mine.

Whate'er may change, in Him no change is seen;
A glorious Sun that wanes not, nor declines;
Above the clouds and storms He walks serene,
And on His people's inward darkness shines:
All may depart—I fret not nor repine,
While I my Saviour's am, while He is mine.

While here, alas! I know but half His love,
But half discern Him, and but half adore;
But when I meet Him in the realms above,
I hope to love Him better, praise Him more,
And feel, and tell, amid the choir divine,
How fully I am His and He is mine.

John Quarles (1624 – 1665)

Testimony Section

THE TESTIMONY OF THE BIBLE TO GOD AS CREATOR

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

“And God created Man in his image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27).

“And Jehovah answered Job out of the whirlwind and said... Where wast thou when I founded the earth?” (Job 38:1–4)

“When I see thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou has established...” ((Psalm 8:3)

“Come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker” (Psalm 95:6)

“Blessed is he... whose hope is in Jehovah his God, Who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them” (Psalm 146:5–6)

“And remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come... before the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be shattered at the fountain, or the wheel be broken at the cistern; and the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6-7)

“For thus saith Jehovah who created the heavens, God himself who formed the earth and made it, he who established it, not as waste did he create it: he formed it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18)

“...seek him that made the Pleiades and Orion and turneth the shadow of death into morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon

the face of the earth: Jehovah is his name" (Amos 5:8)

"...but from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female" (Mark 10:6)

"And pray that it may not be in winter time; for those days shall be distress such as there has not been the like since the beginning of creation which God created..." (Mark 13:19)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things received being through him, and without him not one thing received being which has received being" (John 1:1-3)

"...that they may seek God; if indeed they might feel after him and find him, although he is not far from each one of us: for in him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:27-28)

"Who changed the truth of God into falsehood and honoured and served the creature more than him who had created it, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 1:25)

...the Son of his love: in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; who is image of the invisible God; firstborn of all creation; because by him were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible... all things have been created by him and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

"...forbidding to marry, bidding to abstain from meats, which God has created for receiving with thanksgiving... For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, being received with thanksgiving..." (1Timothy 4:3-4).

"God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days has spoken to us in the person of the Son, whom he has established heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2)

“Wherefore also let them who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing to a faithful creator” (1 Peter 4:19)

Thou art worthy, O our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy will they were, and they have been created” (Revelation 4:11).

Note: There are many more verses that could be quoted, and these are just selected extracts.

OVERWHELMED BY THE LOVE AND MERCY OF GOD

What brought me to Christ was the persistence of one solitary high school boy, who refused to take, ‘No’, for an answer. In the western culture, Christians basically hit one shot and done. You tell somebody about Jesus, if they reject you, ‘phppt’, goodbye. You have to understand, in our culture, for a Muslim to come to faith in Jesus Christ and leave Islam means you lose your culture, family, job, home, sometimes your life. The average Muslim takes seven years to come to faith in Jesus. For me it was any number of years. But one boy, from the moment he started talking to me would not leave me alone. It did not matter how many times I said, “No”. He invited me to events, he invited me to services. I said, ‘No, no, no’. I did not want contact with Kafir, with the infidel. Finally, in my senior year in high school I walked into this little church. My eventual coming to Christ was due to one solitary boy, one little, stone-front church, one pastor who had maybe a sixth grade elementary school education. It was always the small, the isolated, and the anonymous. And if you think about it, Christianity marches on the shoulders of anonymous people who have invested their lives in any person watching. If you do a detailed analysis of your life most of the people who radically affected you were people unknown in the world. Their names are not on the spines of books, they are not on the sides of buildings, they are anonymous. And it was an anonymous boy, it was an anonymous church, it was an anonymous pastor and it was a little group of people who loved me to the cross.

And this is important, because everything I had ever learned about Christianity I had learned from my Imam, from my Austaath, from my mosque, my leadership, and every caricature that I held was based on caricatures that other people had held. The meaner I was to Christians or the more sarcastic or caustic I was, the nicer they were to me. I sat by myself, they all come sit around me; I am churlish and they just smile. I was amazed at the ability of the Christian to love me in spite of what I was to them—and this is important because it is unconditional—and when I finally afterwards asked them, ‘Why are you so nice to me?’ they said, ‘That is the way Jesus loved us’: “For God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners...” , while we were still at war with Him, while we still hated Him, “Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). It was the godly for the ungodly. That is a radical concept for somebody like me.

Well. I went into that little church and Kafir took me to the pastor. The pastor said, ‘What do you think about Jesus?’

I said, ‘His name is Isa in Islam, yes, we respect Isa. As a matter of fact, we named the 19th Sura of the Koran after his mother, Sura Maryam’. The pastor told me that you cannot just ‘respect’ Jesus. That is something that I tell Muslims when they say, ‘No, we hold Isa in high reverence, in high respect’, you cannot ‘respect’ Jesus. Jesus declared Himself to be God, Jesus said He was Messiah and more than just the Messiah; He came to give His life for the world. If Jesus said these things, He is not qualified to be a prophet in Islam. Many people down the ages have claimed to be God—they are either deluded or, in the case of Jesus, He actually is who He says He is. You either revere Him as God or reject him as a fraud. You do not have the option of just respecting Him.

I lasted four days in that church. After so many years of struggling, on the fourth day I told the pastor, ‘Jesus is the Son of God, I want to be saved’. I saw at last that (contrary to what the Koran says, that Jesus did not die on the cross but that someone else took His place—Sura 4 v.157), that He really took my place; that the Bible is true. Jesus died on the cross, was buried, rose from the dead, then ascended into heaven and sat down.

Why did He sit down? Is He tired? No. He sat down because His

work is finished, atonement is made! Jesus' death brings me the one thing Islam cannot answer, that is the screaming need for forgiveness and the assurance of that forgiveness. I wanted Jesus to forgive my sins, I accepted His sacrifice for me, I repented of my sin, turned my life over to Him. He is not just a messenger, He is Messiah. He is not just the lover of my soul; He is now the Lord of my life. And in so doing I learned that I live much more righteously when I am not trying to earn His favour. I do so because I am already receiving His favour. I do so because I love Him like a child to his father. I do things because He loves me, not to earn His love.

**He is now the
Lord of my life**

Does that mean that I can go and do what I want, because now I do not have to earn His favour? No, it is the exact opposite. I slowly had to learn that I do what I do, am what I am, read what I read, and say what I say, not to be accepted but because I am accepted. I pray more now than I did when I was a Muslim because I do not have to pray. God tells me that I have access to the throne at any moment. It was said of one evangelist that he was not long without prayer but not long in prayer. I do not have to go on for hours to prove something, I pray when I have a need. I pray that moment, I pray that second. I do not have to do cleansing before I pray. I do not have to put myself in a certain position because He will not hear me unless I do. He hears, He loves. And because God is so intimate the call for me to live a right life is now the love that a child has for his father. I know I have His acceptance and I know I have His love.

One of the things that catches my attention in Christianity is the idea of loving God without fear. This is what leads to worship. This is a foreign concept to us. When I speak of Allah, in every debate, in every discussion, I have never met one Muslim who believes that the Allah of the Koran and Jehovah, the intimate God of the Bible, are the same God. Allah is not father (Koran Sura 1:12). The most important chapter of Koran says that Allah does not beget nor is he begot. Allah does not have children. To use the big terminology that people use, Allah is transcendent, he is judge, he is creator, he is on the throne, he is watching, he is separate.

But Christianity teaches more than that. The Bible presents God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, not just as Judge and Creator but intimate and indwelling. There is no such thing for a Muslim to have a personal, intimate and indwelt relationship with Allah. I found out when I got saved that we come boldly before the throne of grace to obtain mercy in a time of need.

Then, too, the Bible says that Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit indwells you: that I am inhabited by God, in that He comes and lives in my life. This is profound to someone who has never heard this. We did things in Islam out of fear, out of obedience. When you pray as a Muslim you pray because Allah will do what Allah will do but you ask out of obedience. As a Christian I ask because God is my Father. That separates Christianity from any other world religion. We are not religious, we are saved. Christianity offers a relationship with the Creator as Father. No other world system has an intimacy with the Creator as the father and child intimacy. In Christianity and only in Christianity does God offer the sacrifice for men. Around the world people throw virgins in volcanoes, or sacrifice blood on rocks because they are trying to appease the wrath of God. But Jesus on the cross took the wrath of God against sin.

The most difficult thing for a Muslim to understand is the concept of the atonement. Why would Jesus die for me? But the twin difficulty is the issue of grace because that is the answer to the question of 'why?' They ask, 'Why would Jesus die?' Answer: 'Because grace compels Him'.

I define it to Muslims this way: mercy and grace are twins. The Koran says Allah is merciful, the beneficent. But in Islam mercy simply means that he does not kill you when he can. It is a sign of his sovereignty. In Christianity it is different, and in the Bible it is different. Mercy is when I do not receive the punishment that I should get, but grace is when I receive that which I do not deserve. I am brought into a loving, living relationship with God through believing. God blesses me even though I have done nothing to merit it. Christ died for me while I still did not want it. Christ's death is the measure of the love and mercy of God.

I always challenge the Muslim: they say that Allah is love, but

there is not one verse in the Koran where Allah loves those who hate him. The Koran is full of times where it says, Allah loves those who repent, that Allah loves those who forgive, Allah loves those who act right. But show me where Allah loves those who do not want that love. That is the definition of unconditional love. It is Christ dying for us. It is the godly for the ungodly, it is the just for the unjust. The Muslim is right, that God's anger is toward sin; but Jesus dies in our stead and paid the payment, but it was mercy because He did not owe the debt.

**There is not one
verse in the Koran
where Allah loves
those who hate him**

Often I will hear a Muslim say, Well, I have to think of this, I have to get better before I am ready for this. No, that is like taking a bath before a shower! The cleansing that takes place in my life is done to me, just like His death was done for me. If I may use the words, salvation was done for me. It is done for me so now I act differently but I do so because I love Him. I define it this way. I do now what I do because I love Him, I do not do it because I am trying to be a legalist. A person who loves God and tries to walk in holiness does so because he wants to look more like Jesus. A legalist always wants you to look more like them. I tell my Muslims, even those that hate me, that I cannot hate them any more. Jesus taught that the measure of Christianity is our love for those who hate us. The Muslim is not the enemy, he is the one for whom Christ died. It is my job to love them even if they do not love me. It is hard, but it is exactly what Jesus did for us.

The liberation that comes from salvation is the freedom of knowing that I fear God out of reverence, out of love. But I am free from judgment, "There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus". He loves me warts and all. There may be fear when you first get married: you are afraid your wife will see what you look like when you wake up; you fear that she is going to see that you do not always smile when you are supposed to; you fear that she is going to see a glimpse of your anger. Then in time she does see all those things and you are amazed that she does not leave. God

loves me and He already knows what I am like. God loves us. He already knows all of our faults. God loves you and He already knows your doubt, your fear, your angst, your terror and yet He still loves you. That is the heart of God.

For my Christian friends, I pray for their patience

For my Christian friends, I pray for their patience. We have a tendency to give up too quickly. I have been waiting now for 24 years for the salvation of the rest of my family. I cannot stop praying. When I pray for them I wish I could pray, Lord save them and do it against their will but He does not work that way. So what I pray is for God to put people in their path where the person will not only tell them the gospel but be aware of the opportunity to share mercy and grace, the atonement, salvation in such a way that it is understandable. A lot of us hide behind big words. It is the world I live in, as a scholar but I do not like using those words because I would much rather be understandable than to be highly honoured. So I pray that God puts people in their lives that will tell them the gospel so clearly that they understand the relief that comes from trusting in Christ. I live by the cross; that is where Jesus did everything for me.

Caner

A Voice from the Past

THE TREE OF LIFE

References in the Scriptures to the “Tree of Life” are found in only three books: Genesis, Proverbs and the Revelation. We may gather from the first mention of the tree, in Genesis 2:9, that it occupied a central place in the mind of God, as it is stated to have been in the “midst of the garden that he had planted in Eden”.

By comparison, the other tree mentioned—that of the knowledge of good and evil—had only a subsidiary place, although it is to be observed, that when Eve spoke of it to the serpent, in chapter 3, she referred to it as being in the midst of the garden. This suggests that the knowledge of good and evil had assumed undue importance

in her mind, and the eternal blessing represented by the tree of life had been relegated into secondary importance.

This would, in itself, seem to teach us a valuable lesson, for it is possible, to our great spiritual loss, to be over occupied with questions of good and evil to the entire exclusion of matters that are of greater importance and which, if rightly appreciated, would help us rather than hinder us in the solution of moral problems.

Once man had fallen, however, divine mercy made it impossible for him to taste the fruit of the tree of life and thus become an immortal sinner, but as we may see from the end of chapter 3, God's thought was that the way to this tree should be reserved for a future day.

Apart from the references in the book of Proverbs, we do not find any further mention of the matter until we reach the last book of the Bible, where the overcomer in the church at Ephesus is promised that he would be given to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God (see Revelation 2:7). The only other references in this book to the tree are the extremely affecting ones in the last chapter, referring literally to the millennial day. Mention is made there, for instance, of the varied fruits borne by the tree, the very leaves of which would also avail for the healing of the nations (see Revelation 22:2). Those who wash their robes are also said to have the right to partake of this tree (Revelation 22:14).

These references seem clearly to point to the fact that Christ Himself is symbolized by this tree. He is the fruit of life and also the giver of life.

While the Spirit of God would us direct our minds backward to Genesis to grasp the initial thought in all its blessedness, and would also direct our minds forward to Revelation and the future day of glory, He would focus our attention in the book of Proverbs on four distinct references to the subject. These present four special blessings connected with Christ personally, to be known and enjoyed in a contrary scene in the power of the Spirit and convey what Christ can be to us as we tread our way through the labyrinth of this world.

1. “She (wisdom) is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her” (Proverbs 3:18).

What a comfort it should be to every Christian to realize that Christ is available to us as wisdom or resource, and that there is no need to lean on our own understanding! James speaks beautifully on this subject in his epistle, encouraging those who lack wisdom to ask of God, who gives liberally to all men and upbraids not (see James 1:5). Later on in the epistle he defines the wisdom that comes from above as being “pure, then peaceful, gentle, yielding; full of mercy and good fruits, unquestioning, unfeigned”.

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2 also speaks of the hidden wisdom which God has “predetermined before the ages for our glory: which none of the princes of this age knew” (1 Corinthians 2:8).

2. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and the wise winneth souls” (Proverbs 11:30).

Christ is also our righteousness before God, and we are clothed with His worth. Much is said in the Bible as to the fruit or effect of righteousness, such as, “The work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isaiah 32:17). Chastening also is said to yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those exercised by it (see Hebrews 12:11). It is thus easy to appreciate why the fruit of the righteous is likened to a tree of life. To do what is right carries its own reward and leads to no regrets or sorrow. Balaam, who by contrast loved the reward of unrighteousness, pursued an apostate road to death.

3. “Gentleness (or wholesomeness) of tongue is a tree of life; but crookedness therein is a breaking of the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4).

The thought of holiness seems to be in mind here, for this quality expresses itself in a very special way by our manner of speech. Isaiah was made to feel that he was a man of unclean lips in the presence of Jehovah of Hosts (Isaiah 6:5). While righteousness would avoid evil, holiness would hate it with a divine hatred, and

can only be wrought in the believer as the result of the inward work of the Holy Spirit, whose delight it would ever be to conform us to Christ in this respect.

James in his epistle speaks much of the tongue, referring to it as an unruly and untamable member that defiles the whole body (see James 3). If a man can control his tongue he can bridle his whole body. Upon the tongue of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:26 is the law of kindness, and the Lord Jesus exhorted His disciples to see that their speech was always with grace seasoned with salt—not salt seasoned with grace! While we may often feel that holiness is unattainable, it is a comfort to remember that the chastening hand of the Father of spirits has as its object the partaking by the believer in His holiness (see Hebrews 12:9). How attractive this quality is to the renewed mind! While it ever repels evil, it finds its delight in what is pure, sound and wholesome.

4. “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but the desire that cometh to pass is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12).

Finally, we have the reference to the desire that cometh to pass, in contrast to hope deferred. The former applies with special force to Christianity itself, for we are privileged to look back to an accomplished redemption; whereas the latter characterizes the state of Israel before Christ came and particularly at the present moment. Anna, for instance, spoke of Him to all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). Jacob concludes his prophetic utterance in Genesis 49:18 with reference to Dan with the words, “I wait for thy salvation, O Jehovah”, language which befits the suffering remnant of Israel in a future day. To rest in a redemption that has already been accomplished is one of the choicest blessings of Christianity, and to know the One who accomplished it is to know a Person whose love suffices to satisfy our souls completely. We find in Him each longing stilled, and our hearts may well be moved to thankfulness and praise for the love that enables us, even down here, to taste such choice and precious fruits from the Tree of Life.

Max. Tucker.

A Word for Today

WHAT WE HAVE FROM THE LORD

Genesis	12: 1-3
Deuteronomy	8: 1-3
John	4: 10-14
Acts	3: 4-6

What has been on my heart and has impressed me recently is simply what we have from the Lord. I was impressed by the fact that as we go on in our pathway we realise more and more that what the Lord gives us is real and is a blessing for us. The passages read bring before us four aspects of this:

- The call of Abraham with the promise of blessing from God
- The provision made by God to sustain the children of Israel in the wilderness journey
- The Living Water and the One who gives it
- What we have from the Lord that we can pass on.

The call of Abraham with the promise of blessing from God

“And Jehovah said to Abraham, Go out of thy land, and from thy kindred and thy father’s house, to the land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

This is the call of Abraham with a promise of blessing attached to it, and we know that the whole household of faith, of which Abraham was the father, depended on the way in which Abraham answered to this call. Where it is presented in the epistle to the Hebrews it begins, definitely: “by faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out into the place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and went out, not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). Faith has to underlie our links with God and anything we receive from Him. It must have been a great experience for Abraham to have this communication from God. “Go out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house”. If we

were given such a communication, it would require a great measure of faith to obey it. Yet God expects that we obey His command. There is an offer of grace and blessing but the call has to be obeyed in order for the blessing to be enjoyed.

As believers in the Lord Jesus as Saviour our faith is often tested, but if, as Abraham was able to do, we look up to God we can find great comfort. It does not seem there was a moment of doubt in Abraham's mind that God's word needed to be obeyed. Then we have an object of faith in the Lord Jesus Himself. He is the leader and completer of faith (Hebrews 12:2). So, putting our faith and trust in Him we are able to carry on in our pathway. We come to the Lord Jesus as Saviour and as Lord and we can find rest for our spirits as to our eternal salvation, but then there is every day to be lived. The natural man of the world finds it hard to go through the world. Believers have the support of the Lord and the Spirit, but we need daily faith and daily help to continue.

Abraham had really to leave his land, kindred and his father's house. For us it is not quite so literal but relates to the priority we give to things in our lives and whether we put the Lord's interests and things first. Abraham is the great example to us. He is the father of those who have faith therefore we are to walk following his example. It is important that Abraham was not told where he was going. God said, "Go out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to the land that I will show thee" That is the true expression of faith. Abraham was to depend on God all the way through. We are to move with purpose in our Christian path but in dependence on the Lord

In Genesis chapter 13 Abraham is encouraged to lift up his eyes and have a look. He was being drawn towards what God had in mind for him. That is really what we find with the Lord. In looking unto the Lord we find support and help for our pathway. He helps us to keep our priorities right.

It is a remarkable fact that Abraham never actually possessed the land here on earth. Hebrews says that: "he sojourned as a stranger in the land of promise" (Hebrews 11:9). What he actually had to look forward to was in heaven. We read that he sought "a better, that is a heavenly" portion (see Hebrews 11: 16). He had to keep

The path of faith brings God into the whole of my life

looking ahead. It is an example for us of how spiritual things can be enjoyed while on earth. Abraham did not actually possess the land but he dwelt there and he so believed God that he lived there as if the land was

already his own. That is true for us too. The Holy Spirit makes spiritual things real to us.

There is a wonderful result from Abraham's faith: all the families of the earth were going to be blessed through him. It should encourage us to see what great results can arise from the faith of one believer. God had a path in His will for Abraham and the exercise of faith is the means whereby he progresses in it. So we get this blessing if we abide in faith. We begin by believing in Christ, that is the first outcome of faith, but then there is a path of faith and the outcome from that is great.

The path of faith brings God into the whole of my life. There are the practical things, earning one's living, family life and so on, but even in all of that we need to look for some direction from the Lord Himself. I would like to encourage each one here to exercise faith in all moments of happiness and difficulty, joys and troubles of life. Faith often expresses itself in what Scripture calls piety. That means that I bring God into my matters. The mystery of piety is that God has been manifested in the world, which shows that God is gracious enough to take up my needs along with those of all His people. We can be thankful for it and wait for His light and counsel. We should just note that Scripture speaks of "the days of the years of Abraham's life". His life was reckoned in days. That is characteristic of the life of the man of faith—it is day by day.

The provision made by God to sustain the Children of Israel in the wilderness journey

"And thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee and to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or not. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with the manna, which

thou hadst not known, and which thy fathers knew not; that he might make thee to know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by everything that goeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live.” (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

Our second passage shows that we have to live by what comes out of the mouth of God and this is to be day by day. The Lord would have demonstrated this day by day to the disciples through His manner of life and it is affecting that this passage was used by the Lord to counteract the efforts of the devil in his attack (see Luke 4:4,8,12). There was only one Man who lived by every word that came out of God’s mouth—our blessed Lord. It is humbling because Israel’s mixed history is our history. Yet, we see from this scripture that it was the way that God led them. That is how we have to learn God in His faithfulness.

Deuteronomy provides good teaching showing how the people got on in the wilderness pathway and it is intended to focus us on the perfect example of the Lord Jesus, the only Man who could really say that He lived by every word of God in a practical way. The wilderness journey was to humble the people—it is very sobering that this word humbling is repeated. The first thing was, “to humble thee” and then in verse three, “he humbled thee”. What God set about, He achieved. This is one of the painful experiences that we have to learn, that it is only by dependence that we come into any of the things of God at all.

Deuteronomy begins with a reminder that the direct route only needed 11 days but the 40 years was inescapable because of what they were and it is the same for us.

It is notable that the first thing mentioned in verse 1 of the chapter, is to “take heed” to “every commandment which I command thee this day”. I wonder whether sometimes we realise how these commandments can come to us in a practical way in our daily walk. It is not a commandment in the way in which it was pronounced for the people by way of law but it is a divine guide for our pathway, something that will help us in a practical way, even in the details of our life. We have to learn what Israel had to learn in the wilderness, that we are not really able for anything without

God's help. That is not just in spiritual things but in ordinary things as well. The blessing comes from outside of ourselves. It is given to us by the Lord.

The Living Water and the One who gives it

"Jesus answered and said to her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water...whosoever drinks of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst for ever, but the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life." (John 4:10-14)

In John 4 we see something of the height of God's giving. What the Lord presents here is this great gift of the "living water" that we can have in experience in our walk down here.

The Lord really highlighted the need that this woman was in and created a desire in her heart for what He was to offer her. She really did not know that there could be such a source of water but she felt the need. The Lord says, "If thou knewest". Do we know about this source of water? Do we know that there are resources in the Lord that we can draw on day after day?

The woman painfully illustrates the lack of satisfaction in nature. She greatly needed, and readily linked on with this offer of living water. Living water is more than just knowledge. The woman knew the history of the well. She knew about Jacob. But this day she was going to get something different, something that was going to be a new source of life in her. She was to come to know the Lord personally. The Lord not only says, "If thou knewest the gift of God", but adds, "and who it is that says to thee". We need to come to Him in order to receive what the Lord is willing to give us. The wonderful outcome is no more thirst for ever! He brings full satisfaction to our hearts. This is a very encouraging scripture in that way but we are all tested as to how much our satisfaction is truly found in Him and what He gives in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The fountain of water really worked for this woman; it sprang up in her and she became effective in testimony. That is a feature of the Lord's work—there is an immediate effect.

The woman illustrates the further reference the Lord makes in John 7, “He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). That is a test to us, whether the resource I have been given is enough to refresh others as well. We enjoy what the Lord gives us, but how much do we own it in order to pass something on to others? That is the characteristic of the gift of the Lord. When we possess it we can give it to others and we do not lose anything from it.

What we have from the Lord that we can pass on

“Peter said, Silver and gold I have not; but what I have, this I give to thee: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaræan rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6)

This scripture shows us that we receive something from the Lord in order to be able to pass it on. Peter gets the attention of this lame man who was sitting at one of the gates of the temple, but Peter did not want to draw his attention to either John or himself but to attract him to the Lord. Peter was able to give something to him because he possessed the blessing he had himself received from the Lord. Peter says, “What I have I give to thee”, and we might well ask what it was that Peter had got.

One thing that Peter had was the revelation of who the Lord Jesus was, which he had received from the Father (see Matthew 16:17). Then he had other things that came out of his experience with the Lord. Peter was a recovered man—he knew the faithfulness of the Lord. Peter knew too, that he was a channel through whom the Lord could act. He could trust the Lord to act through him. It was a wonderful witness of the power that he had received. It could sound presumptuous to say, “What I have” but he really had something and he knew it and that sureness of what we really have is essential for our Christian pathway

Yet Peter was also very conscious that the power came from the Lord. He says later about this incident, “Why do ye gaze on us as if we had by our own power or piety made this man to walk”. Peter had experienced the immense grace of the Lord and he was able to allow it to flow out in blessing to others.

This passage stresses the need of our being available as vessels

for the Lord. There is much to be done and many need encouragement and help. Scripture shows us that none of us has a right to say that we have nothing because, "to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ" (Ephesians 4:7). It is a question of sharing it, and that is the challenge. We, each one, have received of the Lord.

This chapter is an illustration of the fact that signs and miracles are for a purpose. This man was raised up so as to provide the opportunity for Peter to preach to a people that needed raising up in their souls. And, faithful as the preaching was, it offered a great prospect of blessing, including what we began with, "in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:14, Acts 3:25).

It is marvellous, the way in which God acts. This man was made to walk. Then we can see that after that he was able to become a servant of God and that is really the effect of what we receive from the Lord. If it is communicated it can have such an effect on others.

Peter here took hold of the man by the right hand and raised him up. He did not just say the words to the man. That is important if we are going to pass on something from the Lord. Peter's action showed his interest and consideration for the man. We need wisdom from the Lord that we might be able to act in that way. The change in the man is complete, he is walking and leaping and praising God! It was really the power of the Lord working through His servant

The story continues into the next chapter of the Acts and the man is there with Peter and John at the time of trial and difficulty "beholding the man who had been healed standing with them". He had very rapidly become identified with what Scripture calls, "the testimony of our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:8). What a model he is for us.

Piero Casavecchia

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