

Living Water

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Recent Ministry

THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGING DEMONSTRATION OF SIN AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUDGMENT

“...and having come, he will bring demonstration to the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe on me; of righteousness, because I go away to my Father, and ye behold me no longer; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” John 16:7-9.

In John chapter 16 the Lord speaks of the Spirit as One who would come and who would bring demonstration to the world, “of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”. That is a very authoritative course of action on the part of the Spirit Himself. The Lord speaks of Him very freely here as the Spirit of truth. There is the emphasis on the Spirit of truth, and what He will do as having come and, of course, as having been sent, “He shall glorify me”; “he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you”. This is a mark of intimacy between the Persons of the Godhead leading to those who believe on the Lord Jesus receiving impressions of Himself.

It is worth remembering that the Lord began, in these chapters (14 to 16), to speak of the Holy Spirit as “another Comforter”. The fact that He said “another Comforter” is striking in its own right. There must have been one Comforter already; the Lord had been with them as their shield and support, but He tells us a good deal about the work and service of the Holy Spirit in John 14 onwards. There are some interesting references to the Lord asking the Father “and he will give you another Comforter” (John 14:16). He speaks in chapter 15 of “the Comforter ... whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes forth from with the Father” (John 15:26). These are all balanced statements which guard the sovereignty and authority of the Holy Spirit while taking this wonderful place as having been sent at the Lord's request. Now, when we come to chapter 16 we learn more of what the presence of the Spirit will mean. The

Spirit will come and He will do two things. One is that He will bring those who love the Lord into more of the blessings of Christianity and then, He will also be a testimony actually against the world.

We see that demonstration very powerfully in the Acts of the Apostles. We see in the early chapters how Peter is helped of the Spirit to lay the sin that had been involved in the death of Christ very strongly upon every audience that he had. He laid it strongly upon them, the guilt in regard of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. This demonstration is not to be confined to the past but it belongs to the present time as well. That should arouse questions with us whether this demonstration is coming out in the way of the life of the believer and in what we say and do, and particularly in the gospel testimony. It is no kindness to anyone to evade, as a first issue, the question of sin.

The Lord took up the question of sin, when He was here, straightaway. He did not accuse every one; He had skill, a skill that is seen for instance in His way of dealing with the woman in John chapter 4 who manifestly had a sinful history. He did not begin by pressing it upon her but He very soon brought her round to the issue. Sin is one great question; it stands between the world and God. It stands between me personally and God until I repent and am converted.

Sin is a recurrent issue throughout Scripture. It came in right at the beginning in the history of Adam and Eve. It persists through the Old Testament. Many chapters of the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles go over the sins of the people and of their rulers in detail and when the Lord came, He came into a world of sin and trouble. Thank God, He had the remedy for it. But it was one of the first issues to be faced: "your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2).

John's gospel speaks very strikingly about sin in the chapter regarding the blind man. The Lord said to the Pharisees "If ye were blind ye would not have sin; but now ye say, We see, your

sin remains" (John 9:41). The claim to be able to do what is right and to please God with no reference to the Lord Jesus is fatal. The Spirit has come and He brings demonstration to the world "of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment" ... "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged".

The ruler of this world is Satan himself. Satan is not yet gone from this world. The apostles soon found that Satan was as active as he had ever been. He had a little room and has used and still uses it as far as he can but he was condemned at the cross. That is to say that God's claims were met and Satan was defeated there; he had the might of death, but it does not just say that he was overcome; he is judged. Now, there should be a witness in the believer and in the Lord's people that they know and believe that the ruler of this world is judged. The Lord said: "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). The Lord has done that, and now comes the question whether my life is such as to show that I believe the ruler of this world to be judged and condemned. The world is all around us and there is plenty to show its power and the power of Satan in it and even as a believer I may begin to go along with it and be corrupted by it. I need to remember then that, "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The life of the believer needs to be a condemnation of the world and its system.

There is only too much evidence of the power of Satan in the world. It is not just something we discover for ourselves; the Scripture tells us that it will be so, "Your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). He is still very busy and we have to wait for the Revelation to see him cast out of heaven and then to see him bound and cast into the pit. At the present time believers need the help of the Spirit Himself to stand against the tide of the world. That is part of this "demonstration" that we are speaking of.

We live in a day when the Person of the Lord is under constant

attack. There needs to be a demonstration against that but what form is that demonstration to take? There may be those who feel they are able to tackle these things head on, but we can all take account of what Mr Darby said, 'All kinds of attacks can be made against Christianity and against the Lord', but he said, 'If I know that I am happy in the Lord nothing can be gainsaid, that is

We use this word "testimony" a good deal but what is it that we witness to?

a simple truth: that I have the Lord and He has made me happy, He has made me what I was not before'. The believer can always say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Many must have heard the story about the preacher in public who was challenged to debate with an unbeliever.

He said he would do so if the unbeliever could bring with him 50 people whose lives have been changed by believing what that man was saying. The man shook his head and went away. The question was then, could there be 50 people presented whose lives had been changed by believing the gospel. Oh yes, that and more! This is part of the testimony: has being a Christian made a real and solid difference? I may know it in my heart, but would any one else know it?

We use this word "testimony" a good deal but what is it that we witness to? We witness to the authority of the Lord and His saving power, not only for eternity but saving and keeping and preserving us now. These are things that cannot be gainsaid so long as they are true in me – that is the great test.

Peter in his witness did not overlook, and we must not either, that the Spirit brings demonstration "of righteousness, because I go away to my Father". That, as I understand it, is the Holy Spirit bearing witness to the completed work of Christ in His present glory and it is a witness if the Lord's people are manifestly attached to Him in the place where He now is. That is what Peter testified to in Acts chapter 2, that the Lord, as having gone

to the Father, "has poured out this which ye behold and hear" (Acts 2:33).

Perhaps the Lord is causing us to focus on this matter - the present testimony of the Spirit against the world and the fact that only by showing plainly that we belong to another world can that testimony be maintained. The Spirit, of course, will be His own testimony and He will use whom He will, but if I wish to be in the testimony of our Lord that is the way by which I must come.

One good thing is to demonstrate what the apostles were criticised for in the Acts: they said there was another King, Jesus. If we belong to His kingdom, we come under His authority. So there are things that we must do and things we must not do because we are believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a head-on challenge to the world. Then there is the testimony to the world that we belong to another world. That is a big subject in its own right but John's first epistle, chapter two, tells us something about that.

Then it is important to acknowledge the rights and claims of the Holy Spirit lest we in any way seek to do this in our own power and strength, which we are not able for and lest we should in any way despise the Spirit. We get an example in Paul in Acts 9 where Ananias says to him, "be filled with the Holy Spirit" and then almost immediately it says, "straightway in the synagogues he preached Jesus that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:17, 20). That was the demonstration; Paul had been changed and then Paul gave a strong testimony to the resurrection and ascension of Christ. We see it especially in his preaching in Athens (see Acts 17) and before king Agrippa, for instance.

May we all seek the help of the Holy Spirit that we may be maintained in His power, showing that we have another King and walking apart from the ways of this world..

David Burr

Extracted from a Bible reading at Defford, October 2008.

THE DIVINE STANDARD

God's Standard of Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:32-5:2

Introduction

I want to say a word about divine standards, and how these are to be a guide and influence for Christian life. Men and women adjust their standards to suit the times. As a result, practices become far removed from what might have previously been acceptable. Sadly, this invades Christian circles as well, and, at times, what occurs under the guise of Christianity often is shameful to the name of Christ. How then, with this background, is the believer to find a sure and constant guide and measurement for daily walk here? We must direct ourselves to divine standards. These never change. They are abidingly constant, and are an unflinching yardstick to put against every aspect of the believer's life.

I remember reading an article by Mr Coates in which he was demonstrating the difference between divine and human standards. He likened it to the recruiting sergeant coming to town to enlist young men as members of the Life Guard. In readiness for his arrival, about 20 young men had assembled to await the opportunity to be interviewed by the recruiting sergeant. Whilst waiting they began to measure themselves against one another. One measured himself against his neighbour and found he was half an inch taller. He could say, 'Well, I stand a better chance than you'. Then he measured himself against another and discovered he was an inch taller. 'Well, if I don't pass, you stand a poor chance!' So it went on until this young man found he was the tallest in that company. The recruiting sergeant came along and set up his standard, and full of confidence, the tallest man stepped forward. 'Pass on' said the sergeant, 'you are too small, you do not come up to the standard'. He was the tallest man in that company but, like the shortest man, he fell short of the standard and could not be recruited as a Life Guardsman. That is where the gospel found every one of us: we did not come up to

the standard: we had fallen short. The language of scripture is, "there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22,23). Only one man measured up to that standard - the Lord Jesus Christ, God's standard.

Therefore, when Christians seek a standard by which to measure their walk here, they need not look to any human standards, even the standards given by God of old in the law. Whether it is the matter of forgiveness, or our walk, or our purity and holiness, or our links in love with the people of God, all aspects must be measured against God's standard, which is Christ.

God's standard of forgiveness

Let us look at forgiveness. "So as God also in Christ has forgiven you". What a story is told in these few words! The grandeur of divine forgiveness, which has reached us as sinners! Remember, Paul is writing this to persons of whom he had said: "that ye were at that time without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world". In this verse he highlights what had reached them – "as God in Christ has forgiven you". Oh, how long ago is it since you tasted the sweetness of divine forgiveness? In chapter 1 he says, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace". The riches of divine grace have reached out to us, giving us a taste of what has come directly from the heart of God, when there was no merit with us. That is what Paul is referring to here, the wonder of divine forgiveness. The story of Calvary, the story of the heart of God, and the cost to God, all lie in these few words. That is the measurement for any of us, as we seek to extend forgiveness to one another.

One of the longest prayers in scripture was by Solomon, at the dedication of the temple. If you look at that prayer, there is one word that keeps coming up, "Forgive! Forgive!" The time was probably the top note of Solomon's reign, but he looks forward in prayer, knowing that there would be failure and sin in the future, and he appeals to God to remember and forgive. The fullness of

that forgiveness awaited the incoming of Christ and His wondrous work. That forgiveness has come to us, but how quickly we can forget its sweetness!

Do you think that the woman in Luke 7 to whom He said, "Thy sins are forgiven", would ever forget those words? Never! It should be thus with each one of us. As forgiven by God, such should be our joy, that it should be easy to extend forgiveness to one another. You may remember that Peter came to the Lord with such a question. "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?" He was very generous, was he not? Jesus says to him, "I say not to thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21, 22). How ready are we to express the spirit of forgiveness towards one another?

The devil has caused havoc over the years in the breakdown of personal relationships and the brotherly covenant (Amos 1:9). If we had studied this wellspring, "so as God in Christ has forgiven you", how different it might have been. It was seen perfectly in Christ. When He was crucified, we find Him praying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"(Luke 23:34). Have you ever studied the previous 24 hours that led up to that prayer? Think of the agony and the anguish. Overnight in the house of the high priest, maligned and buffeted by the soldiers, in Pilate's judgement hall, then before Herod, then back to Pilate to be condemned and scourged, out past the weeping daughters of Jerusalem, and nailed to the cross; then was uttered that lovely prayer of forgiveness.

Oh, let us be imbued with the spirit of the Man of Luke's gospel, the dependant Man! That prayer of forgiveness has been answered! Peter stands up in the Acts, and publishes the glad tidings of forgiveness. 3000 souls were brought to the knowledge of Christ that day. How different from the time of the giving of the law! Grace was now reigning and the riches of God's grace were reaching out in forgiveness.

I want to read a recent excerpt from a calendar, concerning a widow. This is what she said about her husband who was martyred for his Lord in Turkey in 2007, less than two years ago. 'I believe

How well have we ministered the spirit of forgiveness to one another?

that Jesus went to the cross to forgive our sins and on the cross He forgave those who were taking His life saying, " Father forgive them, for they know not what they do". So I am going to forgive the people who took the life of my husband, because they truly did not

know what they were doing'. We have never been placed in such tragic circumstances. We have been placed amongst God's people through His grace. How well have we ministered the spirit of forgiveness to one another? Let us have another look at the time when God freely in Christ forgave us at such great cost, on the basis of Christ's work, His death, and His shed blood at Calvary.

Ephesians gives us the top note of Paul's teaching. He has laid out the height of the Christian's calling, and then he says, ' It is time to work it out with one another'. He exhorts them to walk worthily of the calling wherewith they had been called, "with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love". As he nears the close of this chapter, he just touches the matter of forgiveness. That is what reached us in the gospel when our hearts were opened to the word, and the joy of forgiveness flooded our lives. What a day that was! Let us not lose that joy, but let us extend that spirit of forgiveness to one another as well.

Alex Mowat

Extracted from an address at Hampton, February 2009.

In the next issue – "The Divine Standard for the believer's walk"

Poetry Selection

NIGHT MUSINGS

I love the starlit night, when all is still;
I love to climb the height of some lone hill;
Thence upward gaze
And watch the rays
Of the bright orbs that heaven's vast concave fill.

I hear their mighty voice in my soul's ear,
It bids my heart rejoice that God is here;
 Who spoke – twas done –
 Moon, stars and sun
To praise His glorious name in heaven appear.
The same almighty power that holds them all,
Preserves my feet each hour, from snare and fall;
 A worm of dust,
 In Him I trust,
And Him my God and Father humbly call.
I love the starlit night, it tells of Him
Born as my soul's sure light at Bethlehem;
 With longing eyes,
 I watch to rise,
"The Morning Star", when I shall be with Him
 J. G. Deck (1807 – 1884)

THE LORD OUR GOD

Effulgence of God's glory bright art Thou;
 Upholder of creation by Thy word.
Thou art the Son, whose love and triumph now
 We celebrate, and worship Thee as God.
All things received their being through Thy might;
 Thy glory shines transcendent over all;
Our hearts are full, we worship and delight
 In Thine own love which doth our hearts enthrall.
Thy worthiness exceeds our loftiest song,
 Supreme in light, in glory, love and power,
All majesty and praise to Thee belong;
 We honour Thee, we worship and adore.
 Josiah Harper

MY SUBSTITUTE

Thou Life of my life, blessed Saviour,
Thy death was the death that was mine,
For me were Thy cross and Thine anguish,
Thy love and Thy sorrow divine.
Thou hast suffered the cross and the judgment,
That I might for ever go free –
A thousand, a thousand thanksgivings
I bring, my Lord Jesus, to Thee.

For me Thou hast borne the reproaches,
The mockery, hate and disdain,
The blows and the spitting of sinners,
The scourging, the shame, and the pain;
To save me from bondage and judgment,
Thou willing, has suffered for me –
A thousand, a thousand thanksgivings
I bring, my Lord Jesus, to Thee.

O Lord, from my heart I do thank Thee
For all Thou hast borne in my room –
Thine agony there as forsaken,
Alone in the darkness and gloom –
That I in the glory of heaven
For ever and ever might be -
A thousand, a thousand thanksgivings
I bring, my Lord Jesus, to Thee.

E. C. Homberg (1605 – 1681)
Translated by Mrs Frances Bevan

Testimony Section

FROM THE TERROR OF ALLAH TO THE FEAR OF THE LORD

I was born in the southern part of Iran, in a city called Abadan in a Muslim family. My grandfather was a Muslim leader and he had 19 children and out of 19 children he had 84 grandchildren. And obviously he had to choose one to carry the spiritual heart of the life and teachings for the next generation. There had been occasions in my life when I had some very narrow escapes from danger and my grandfather took that as a sign that the spiritual leaders of Islam were protecting me. So he gave me very close attention and he taught me all the things I knew about Islam.

I joined Hezbollah and was in that army for about three years. I was studying the Koran extensively then. My grandfather actually sowed this seed in my heart that I should share Islam with the poor, misled Christians that have gone astray, and be a spiritual leader to our family outside Iran.

I travelled to Malaysia where I was caught with 30 illegal passports and put in prison. I started teaching Islam in the jail and telling everybody what they must do, what their duty is toward Allah. I prayed five times a day, which is more than usual, but I wanted to spend more time with Allah and at the end of the evening I would pray extra prayers. I would read the Koran cover to cover once every 10 days.

I had gained the spirit powers out of Islam. I was able to pray for people, especially when someone hurt them or someone did something bad to them. People would come to me and ask me to say a prayer and immediately the person that had hurt someone else would get sick or have an accident. I was also able to close my eyes and tell you what a person was doing in another room. I wanted to gain more power so I would spend more time meditating on the Koran. I was doing this one night, meditating on the verses – there are words in the Koran that are repeated continually but they have no meanings, they are the secrets of

Koran. When I was meditating on these a spirit entered the room and it was much more powerful than I could handle. I was filled with fear and tried using all the tools Islam had given me: 'In the name of Allah I command you to leave', 'Satan I rebuke you',

**that question,
'Why would Jesus
help a Muslim?'
would not go away**

and similar things. I used all those and nothing was helping. I was totally desperate and I felt that the life was being choked out of me and I was dying in my cell. I cried out to the heavens and I said, 'God, enforce jihadi, help me'. Immediately I heard a voice very clearly saying, 'Bring in the name of Jesus'. At that moment I felt I was drowning. If you are drowning and someone throws you a rope, you do not question the colour of the rope; you just grab hold of it! That is what I did. I said 'Jesus, if You are true, show me'. To this day I have no idea why I used those words rather than saying, 'Jesus, help me', but that is the way it came out, and before I had finished the sentence, everything was back to normal.

Now, that was not my conversion, it was the beginning of my confusion. Why, I asked, would Jesus help a Muslim? I had been committed to Islam, I had done everything in my power to be a good Muslim. I had already tried to go and commit myself in the way of Allah and be a martyr for him, walking on the mines. The government of Iran used to issue people who were willing to sacrifice themselves in that way with a special Koran that had the stamp of the government on it. I had participated in executions by hanging. I had done everything that I thought I must do against the infidels and anything and everything I must do to share Allah with others. I fully believed in Allah and in Mohammed, the last prophet, and that Islam was the perfect religion. So I just tried to forget about my frightening experience, but that question, 'Why would Jesus help a Muslim?' would not go away. For two weeks I set myself to pray and fast and to ask Allah to show me the path. Maybe Allah had a specific way for me that he wanted me to follow. So I prayed and fasted and from the bottom of my

heart, with all my strength, I asked Allah what it was that he wanted me to do.

For two weeks I sat in one place and prayed and fasted. I would fall asleep in that place and I would wake up and just pray, asking Allah again and again the same question. After two weeks I had no answer and I felt very let down. Here I was, I had lived in fear of Allah all my life and had tried to do everything to please him and here he was confusing me. I had prayed for two weeks and nothing had happened. So I decided to ignore Allah and do my own thing. Now in Islam the greatest sin you can commit, and for which there is no forgiveness, is doubting Allah, or his teachings, or his prophet – and I had done that.

Now, just as I made that decision, I felt that the power of God filled my cell. In Islam they teach you that Allah never visits human beings, but here I was, conscious of God's presence. I was terrified. I was confronted at once with God's holiness – He must kill me, wipe me off the earth because I am so full of sin. I sat in the corner of the cell and held my head in my arms and cried out, 'Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me'. And the very instant those words were spoken I physically felt forgiven. I could not understand it. Muslims repeat, 'In the name of God who is merciful and gracious', but we do not know if we are forgiven until the day of judgement. That is why there is not one single verse in the Koran which says that Mohammed is in heaven. He must wait, like all people, for the day of Qiyamah, the day of resurrection and all shall be judged on that day. Yet here I was and I felt forgiven. Then I knew that it was not Allah whose presence I felt but Jesus Christ, the living God. I fell on my face to the ground and I started weeping at the presence of God.

Eighteen years have gone by, but I still cannot forget His love, His mercy. I cannot forget what He did for me that day. I felt forgiven. For many years I had tried to please Allah, but nothing I had done was any good. I felt so deceived because they told me, 'This is Allah, he is god' but he was not God. They said, 'This is the law, kill in the way of Allah', but now I knew that the true God is loving and forgiving, and I knew that I was forgiven.

We have a saying in Farsi that something is 'as easy as drinking water' and compared with what I had known, that was how God's forgiveness seemed to me.

That is how I became a Christian.

I prayed and God sent me a Bible. In the jail, somebody from some other section just walked up to me and gave me a book and says, This is what you asked for. This was so wonderful; I had prayed that night and the very next day I got the answer! He is Almighty God.

I can assure you that the mighty God touched me and changed my life and totally forgave everything I had done and He made me sure that I can be in heaven with Him. That is who Jesus Christ is. May glory be to Him, today and for evermore. Amen.

Afshin

A Voice from the Past

FERVENCY IN PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION

The Holy Scriptures provide us with many examples of persons who were marked by real earnestness in prayer, accompanied by great intensity of feeling, both on behalf of themselves and of others. Supremely outstanding in this respect, as in all else, is the Lord Jesus Himself, the blessed Son of God, who, when on earth, was always so deeply concerned, both for God's glory and man's truest welfare. What deep and holy feelings, what intense supplications, were His, all through the course of His pathway here below! His sufferings in Gethsemane call for our holy contemplation, as also do those days in which, after having been actively engaged in exacting service, He went out into the mountain to pray, remaining all night in prayer to His Father; Luke 6:12. How very intense must have been those prayers and supplications, to be sustained the whole night through!

The apostle Paul was also a man of deep and intense feelings, and a man of prayer. "Behold, he prayeth", was said of him at the very beginning of his Christian course, while later, he spoke of himself as "combating in prayer". Epaphras also, to whom Paul referred in Colossians 4:12, had similar features: "always combating earnestly

for you in prayers, to the end that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God".

In Old Testament times we have also many such examples. Abraham cried to God with great earnestness for Sodom. What feelings entered into the matter, and what persistency! With Jacob the exercise was a personal one, for it is said that he "wrestled with God." How deep were the desires of his soul as he considered the great reality of divine blessing—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!" Again, Moses prayed: "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin, and they have made themselves a god of gold. And now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—but if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book that thou hast written".

Elijah is used by James (chapter 5, verse 17) as an example of one who prayed with fervency. The Scripture says of him that "he prayed with prayer" — a remarkable expression which conveys the idea of intense feeling. Then when we consider David, what depth of feeling is shown in the utterances to which he gave expression, as recorded in the Psalms, and also in his tears!

Jabez is another who was characterized by an earnest desire to secure divine blessing. "Oh", he says, "that thou wouldest richly bless me!" The interjection here is significant, for it evidences his intense desire and it might well find a greater place in our own supplications, prayers and intercessions, as we speak to God! It is used also by Isaiah as he reviews Israel's history, with all their departure, and God's governmental dealings with His people, involving severe judgments: "Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down!" Such language would challenge us as to the depth of our own feelings in these great matters.

Similar earnestness and depth of feeling marked the utterance of the publican in the parable spoken by the Lord: "O God, be merciful to me, the sinner". The Pharisee, on the contrary, was wanting in those features, being characterized by self-complacency.

May it be our own concern, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, to be characterized by a greater intensity and depth of soul, cherishing every divine interest, and seeking the welfare of all God's people and of men generally.

W. B. Harris.

THE SECRET OF SUCCESSFUL SERVICE

Each believer has been sent by the Lord into this world on some mission. He said at the beginning (a sure time to turn to for guidance), "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you". Before you can enter on your mission, you must be assured of Christ's work for you; you must, like the disciples in the passage quoted, first have, in a known way, received of His life, having practically entered into the meaning of the passage, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." If you are not in life and peace you cannot enter on your mission. The mission (so to speak) to yourself has not yet been assured, and this must be accomplished in you, before you are fit or qualified to serve another.

The history of a bird is the history of a believer: first in the nest, served by parents; then, when fledged, learning to do for others what has been done for oneself. First served, and then, in the power and enjoyment of it, serving. There can be no question that it is the duty and calling of each to serve in some way; but it may not be so easy to find out your specific and proper duty or mission, and this is often the excuse for doing nothing, or something worse than nothing. I do not believe it would be found to be so difficult if you were really fit in heart to enter on service. I believe you would find out your mission if you simply occupied yourself with whatever came to your hand *for the Lord*. It might begin by carrying food to a sick child, or reading to an old saint. There is a serving of one's time; that is, you will not be entrusted with very great works until you have proved your competency in small ones.

It is impossible but that a star must shine, and it is equally so, that if your eye were single, your whole body would be full of light. The cause of idleness, or ignorance of one's mission, is either that one is not fit for it, or not free and humble in heart enough to begin at the little works appointed for one to do. It is a universal principle that, "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much".

J. B. Stoney.

A word for Today

FAITH

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16)

I propose to consider the way in which we obtain the benefit of God's love and Christ's salvation. It is written that "whosoever believeth shall not perish". God has given His Son "to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:14). Yet we learn from Scripture that some persons in the world never find salvation. Only some obtain eternal benefit from Christ. Who then, and what are they?

Christ and His benefits are available only to those who believe. To believe, in the language of the New Testament, is simply to trust. Those who will not believe in Him have no part in Him. Without believing there is no salvation. It is vain to suppose that any will be saved, merely because Christ became incarnate, or because Christ is in heaven, or because they are baptised, or because they have taken the Lord's supper. Without faith all these things together will not save the soul. We must have personal faith in Christ, personal dealings with Christ, personal transactions with Christ, or we are lost for evermore.

It is utterly false and unscriptural to say that Christ is in every man. Christ is for every one, but He is not in every one. He dwells only in those hearts which have faith. He that believeth not in the Son of God is yet in his sins. "He that believed not", says our Lord Jesus Christ in words of fearful distinctness, "shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16, John 3:36). But Christ and all His benefits are the property of any one that believes. Every one that believes on the Son of God, and trusts his soul to Him, is at once pardoned, forgiven, justified, counted righteous, and freed from all liability to condemnation. Their sins, however many, are at once cleansed away by Christ's precious blood. Their soul, however guilty, is at once clothed with Christ's perfect righteousness. It matters not what they may have been in time past. Their sins may have been of the worst kind but do they believe on the Son of God? This is the one question. He that believes is justified from all things in the sight of God. It matters not that he can bring to Christ nothing to recommend him, no good works, no long-proved amendments, no unmistakable repentance and change of life. But does

he this day believe in Jesus Christ? This is the one question. If he does he is at once accepted. He is accounted righteous for Christ's sake. But what is this believing, which is of such matchless importance? What is the nature of this faith which gives a person such amazing privileges? I ask attention to the answer. Here is a rock on which many make shipwreck. There is nothing really mysterious and hard to understand about saving belief. But the whole difficulty arises from man's pride and self righteousness. It is the very simplicity of justifying faith at which people stumble. They cannot understand it because they will not stoop. Believing on Christ is no mere intellectual assent, or belief of the head. That is no more than the belief of devils. We may believe that there was a divine Person called Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again yet never believe so as to be saved. Doubtless there must be some knowledge before we can believe but knowledge alone is not saving faith.

Nor is believing on Christ mere feeling something about Christ. This is often no more than temporary excitement which soon passes away. We may be pricked in conscience, and feel drawings toward the gospel, like Herod and Felix. We may even tremble and weep, and yet all this time our hearts and wills may remain utterly unchanged, and secretly chained down to the world. Doubtless there is no saving faith where there is no feeling. But feeling alone is not faith.

True belief in Christ is the unreserved trust of a heart convinced of sin, in Christ, as an all-sufficient Saviour. It is the combined act of the head, conscience, heart, and will. It is often weak and feeble at first, yet, like life in the new-born infant, the belief may be real, genuine, saving, and true. The moment that the conscience is convinced of sin and the head sees Christ to be the only One who can save and the heart and will lay hold on the hand that Christ holds out, that moment there is saving faith. In that moment a person believes.

True belief in Christ is so immensely important that the Holy Spirit has graciously used many figures in the Bible in describing it. The Lord God knows our slowness to comprehend spiritual things. He has therefore multiplied forms of expression, in order to set faith fully before us:

- Believing is the soul's coming to Christ. The Lord Jesus says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Christ is that Almighty Friend, Advocate, and Physician, to whom all sinners, needing help, are commanded

to apply. The believer comes to Him by faith, and is relieved.

- Believing is the soul's receiving Christ. Paul says, "Ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord" (Colossians 2:6). Christ offers to come into man's heart with pardon, mercy and grace, and to dwell there as its Peace-maker and King.
- Believing is the soul's building on Christ. Christ is that sure cornerstone, that strong foundation, which alone can bear the weight of a soul. The believer places his hopes for eternity on Him, and is safe. The earth may be shaken and dissolved, but he is built upon a rock, and will never be confounded.
- Believing is the soul's putting on Christ. Paul says, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).
- Believing is the soul's laying hold on Christ. Paul says, "we have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:18). Christ is that true city of refuge, to which the man fleeing from the avenger of blood runs, and in which he is safe. Christ is that altar which provided a sanctuary to him who laid hold on its horns. Christ is that almighty hand of mercy, which God holds out from heaven to lost and drowning sinners. The believer lays hold of this hand by faith, and is delivered from the pit of hell.
- Believing is the soul's drinking Christ. Christ is that fountain of living water which God has opened for the use of all thirsty and sin-defiled sinners, proclaiming, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). The believer drinks of this living water, and his thirst is quenched.
- Believing is the soul's committal of itself to Christ. Paul says, "He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). Christ is the appointed keeper and guardian of souls. It is His office to preserve from sin, death, hell, and the devil anything committed to His charge. The believer places his soul in the hands of the Almighty treasure-keeper, and is assured against loss to all eternity. He trusts himself to Him and is safe.
- Believing is the soul's looking to Christ. The invitation of the Gospel is, "Look unto me, and be ye saved" (Isaiah 45:22). Christ is that brazen serpent which God has set up for the healing of all sin-bitten souls who desire to be cured. The believer looks to Him by faith, and has life and spiritual strength.

One common remark applies to all the expressions which I have just gone through. They all give us the simplest idea of faith. Not one of them implies the notion of anything mysterious, great, or meritorious in the act of belief. All represent it as something within reach of the weakest and feeblest sinner, and within the comprehension of the most ignorant and unlearned.

Hold fast the grand truth that saving faith is nothing but simple trust in Christ, that faith alone justifies, and that the one thing needful in order to obtain an interest in Christ is to believe. —No doubt repentance, holiness, and charity are excellent things. They will always accompany true faith. But in the matter of justification, they have nothing to do. In that matter the one thing needful is to believe. —No doubt belief is not the only grace to be found in the heart of a true Christian. But only belief gives him an interest in Christ. Prize that doctrine as the peculiar treasure of Christianity. Once let it go, or add anything to it, and there is an end of inward peace.

Prize the doctrine for its suitableness to the wants of fallen man. It places salvation within reach of the lowest and vilest sinner, if he has but heart and will to receive it. It asks him not for works, righteousness, merit, goodness, worthiness. It requires nothing of him. It strips him of all excuses. It deprives him of all pretext for despair. His sins may have been as scarlet. But will he believe?

Prize the doctrine for its glorious simplicity. It brings eternal life near to the poor, and ignorant, and unlearned. It does not ask a man for a long confession of doctrinal orthodoxy. It does not require a store of head-knowledge, and an acquaintance with articles and creeds. Does the man, with all his ignorance, come to Christ as a sinner, and commit himself entirely to Him for salvation? Will he believe?

Above all, prize the doctrine for the glorious breadth and fulness of its terms. It does not say "the elect" who believe, or "the rich" who believe, or "the moral" people who believe, or "the churchman" who believes, or "the dissenter" who believes—these, and these only shall be saved. Oh, no! it uses a word of far wider signification —It says, "Whosoever believeth, shall not perish". Whosoever, —whatever his past life, conduct, or character, —whatever his name, rank, people, or country —whatever his denomination, and whatever place of worship he may have attended, whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish. This is the Gospel. I marvel not that Paul wrote: "If we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we

have preached, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

Now let us consider the marks by which true belief in Christ may be discerned and known. True faith may always be known by certain marks which are laid down unmistakably in Scripture.

He that believes in Christ seeks purity in heart and life.

Let me endeavour to set down some of those marks in order:

- First he that believeth in Christ has inward peace and hope. It is written "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ". "We which have believed do enter into rest" (Romans 5:1, Hebrews 4:3). The believer's conscience is no longer burdened with the load of unpardoned transgressions. He is reconciled to God. He can look forward to eternity without fear. The sting of death is taken away. He has a hope laid up in heaven. He may not be fully sensible of all these privileges. His sense and view of them may vary greatly at different times, and be often obscured by doubts and fears. Like a child who is yet under age, though heir to a great fortune, he may not be fully aware of the value of his possessions. But with all his doubts and fears, he has a real, solid, true hope, which will bear examination, and at his best moments he will be able to say, 'I have "a hope which makes me not ashamed"' (Romans 5:5).
- He that believes in Christ has a new heart. It is written, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away: behold all things are become new"—"To as many as received Christ, He gave power to become sons of God, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"—"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17, John 1:12, 13, 1 John 5:1). A believer is changed, renewed, and transformed after the image of his Lord and Saviour.
- He that believes in Christ seeks purity in heart and life. It is written that God "purifies the heart by faith," and, "Whoso hath this hope in him, purifieth himself" (Acts 15:9, 1 John 3:3). A believer loves what God loves, and hates what God hates. His heart's desire is to walk in the way of God's commandments, and to abstain from all manner of evil. His wish is to follow after the things which are just, and pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report, and to cleanse

himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. He may fall far short of his aim in many things. Yet he fights on, and resolutely refuses to serve sin. Where there is no holiness, we may be sure there is no saving faith.

- He that believes on Christ works godly works. It is written, that "faith worketh by love" (Galations 5:6). True belief will never make a man idle. It will stir him to do acts of love, kindness, and charity, according as he sees opportunity. It will constrain him to walk in the steps of his Master, who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). In one way or another, it will make him work. The works that he does may attract no notice from the world. They may seem trifling and insignificant to many persons. But they are not forgotten by Him who notices a cup of cold water given for His sake.
- He that believes on Christ overcomes the world. It is written, that "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). A true believer is not ruled by the world's standard of right or wrong, of truth or error. He is independent of the world's opinion. He cares little for the world's praise. He is not moved by the world's blame. He does not seek for the world's pleasures. He is not ambitious of the world's rewards. He looks at things unseen. He sees an invisible Saviour, a coming judgment, a crown of glory that fadeth not away. The sight of these objects makes him think comparatively little of this world. Where the world reigns in the heart, there is no faith. A man that is habitually conformed to the world, has no title to the name of a believer!
- He that believes on Christ, has an inward testimony of his belief. It is written, that "he that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself" (1 John 5:10). The witness of the Spirit is unquestionably a difficult subject. But I cannot shrink from declaring my own firm persuasion that a true believer always has inward feelings peculiar to himself—feelings which are inseparably connected with his faith, and flow from it—feelings of which unbelievers know nothing at all. He "has the Spirit of adoption", by which he knows God as Father, and looks up to Him without fear (Romans 8:15). He has the testimony of his conscience, sprinkled with Christ's blood, that weak as he is, he rests on Christ. He has hopes, joys, fears, sorrows, consolations, expectations, of which he knew nothing before he believed. He has evidences which the

world cannot understand, but which are better to him than all the books of evidence in existence. A person who knows nothing of an inward, spiritual, experimental Christianity, is not yet a believer!

- Last, he that believes on Christ has a special regard to the person of Christ Himself. It is written, "Unto you that believe Christ is precious" (1 Peter 2:7). That text deserves especial notice. It does not say Christianity, or the gospel, or salvation is precious, but Christ Himself

A believer's religion does not consist in mere intellectual assent to a certain set of propositions and doctrines. It is not a mere cold belief of a certain set of truths and facts concerning Christ. It consists in communion and fellowship with an actual living Person, even Jesus the Son of God. It is a life of faith in Jesus, confidence in Jesus, leaning on Jesus, drawing out of the fulness of Jesus, speaking to Jesus, working for Jesus, loving Jesus, and looking for Jesus to come again. Paul said, "The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" — "To me to live is Christ" (Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:21). Where there is true faith, Christ will always be known and realized, as an actual living personal Friend. He that knows nothing of Christ as his own Priest, Physician, and Redeemer, knows nothing yet of believing!

I place these marks of believing before you. I do not say, that all believers have them equally. I do not say that no one will be saved who cannot discover all these marks in himself. I concede, freely, that many believers are so weak in faith, that they go doubting all their days, and make others doubt about them too. I simply say that these are the marks to which a man should first direct his attention, if he would know whether he believes. Where the marks, of which I have just been speaking, are utterly wanting I dare not tell a man that he is a true believer. He may be called a Christian, and attend on Christian ordinances. He may have been baptized with Christian baptism, and be a member of a Christian congregation. But if he knows nothing of peace with God, conversion of heart, newness of life, and victory over the world, I dare not pronounce him a believer.

And now in conclusion I ask you, in my Master's name, whether you believe? It matters nothing what others are doing. The question concerns you. The folly of other men is no excuse for yours. The loss of heaven will not be less bitter, because you lose it in company. Think of your own soul. I invite you this day to believe on Christ to the

saving of your soul. I will not let you put me off by the common objection, "We cannot believe,- we must wait till God gives us faith". I grant most fully that saving faith, like true repentance, is the gift of God. I grant that we have no natural power of our own to believe on Christ, receive Christ, come to Christ, lay hold on Christ, and commit our souls to Christ. But I see faith and repentance laid down clearly in Scripture as duties which God requires at any man's hands. He "enjoins all men to repent". "This is His commandment, that we should believe" (Acts 17:30, 1 John 3:23). And I see it laid down with no less clearness, that unbelief and impenitence are sins for which man will be held accountable, and that he who does not believe and repent destroys his own soul (Mark 16:16, Luke 13:3).

Trust Christ, look to Christ, cry to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you never yet believed, about your soul.

I finish with a word of exhortation to all believers. I address you as fellow-pilgrims and companions in tribulation. I exhort you to be diligent in your private communion with God, diligent in your daily watchfulness over time, temper, and tongue—diligent in your private Bible-reading, —diligent in your own private prayers. It is vain to expect spiritual prosperity, when we are careless about these things. Let those who will, call it over-precise and legal to be particular about them. I only reply that there never was an eminent saint who neglected them.

Seek to become more acquainted with Jesus Christ. Study your blessed Saviour more and more, and strive to know more of the length and breadth and height of His love. Study Him in all His offices, as Priest, Physician, Redeemer, Advocate, Friend, Teacher, and the Shepherd of His believing people. Study Him as One who not only died for you, but is also living for you at the right hand of God, as One who not only shed His blood for you, but daily intercedes for you at the right hand of God—as One who is soon coming again for you, and will stand once more on this earth. The miner, who is fully persuaded that the rope which draws him up from the pit will not break, is drawn up without anxiety and alarm. The believer, who is thoroughly acquainted with the fulness of Jesus Christ, is the believer who travels from grace to glory with the greatest comfort and peace.

J .C. Ryle (1816 – 1900)