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Living Water

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Recent Ministry

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM” LUKE 23:34

These words of the Lord Jesus from the cross echo through the ages to the present day. Those who crucified Jesus hated Him but He says, “Father, forgive them”. The Lord prayed specifically for those men who crucified Him, “Father, forgive them”. If such people could be forgiven it shows that forgiveness is available to all. We preach a forgiving God, One who is prepared to forgive anything you have done. It is wonderful news. There are millions and millions throughout the world tonight who have been forgiven because they have trusted in Jesus.

Now, how is God able to act like that? How can God be holy and righteous and yet forgive the sinner? Well, it is all because of what Jesus did in going to the cross. When Jesus was crucified He not only suffered very dreadfully at the hands of men but He suffered even more terribly at the hands of God. There were three hours of darkness, from the sixth to the ninth hour, when the Lord Jesus was made sin and bore the wrath of God. He who “knew not sin, was made sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). God cannot have sin in His presence and Jesus, by His sacrifice, put it out of God’s sight for ever. Then, too, He bore the sins of everyone who trusts in Him. As the Bible says: “He bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24).

For three hours it was absolutely pitch black. You could not see a thing. God did not allow anyone to see the horrendous sufferings that Jesus went through in meeting the question of sin. We can read in the gospels of the sufferings He went through at the hands of man but we have no account of what it was for Him to suffer at the hands of God.

At the end of those three hours He cried in the anguish of His holy soul: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Why was He forsaken? Because He was made sin! It is very solemn and serious. Then He said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. And having said this, he expired” – He died (see Luke 23:46). Later a soldier came and pierced His side and out

came blood and water - blood for our cleansing. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission (see Hebrews 9:22).

Jesus died and was buried but on the third day He came out of death – raised by the glory of the Father. So today we preach

that Jesus is a living, glorious Man. There were hundreds of witnesses who saw Jesus alive after the resurrection and millions of persons have been affected by it. Jesus is out of death, a real, living Man! Because of His sacrifice on the cross, because He bore God’s judgment, because He became dead and lives again, there is forgiveness available for you whatever sins may have come into your life.

When Jesus was crucified two robbers were crucified at the same time and Jesus was in the middle. One of the robbers admitted that he was a sinner and said, “we receive the just recompense of what we have done; but this man (Jesus) has done nothing amiss” (v.41). Then he looked to Jesus in faith and said, ‘Remember me, Lord when You come in Your kingdom’. Jesus’ reply was instant: ‘I tell you, without a doubt, today you will be with Me in Paradise’.

What an answer! Instead of going into death and coming under the judgment of God, that repentant robber went to paradise with Jesus. Why? Because he acknowledged that he was a sinner and

knew he needed a Saviour. He was like the man we are told about in Luke chapter 18 who prayed, “God be merciful to me the sinner” (Luke 18:13). You have only to say to God that you are a sinner and really feel it and mean it; then ask Jesus to save you and you will be forgiven. He can forgive you, whatever you may have done,

because on the cross Jesus bore the sins of all who call upon Him. God is ready to receive any one who approaches Him through Jesus. It is wonderful.

There were hundreds of witnesses who saw Jesus alive after the resurrection

Jesus bore the sins of all who call upon Him

The Lord Jesus said of those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them". There was forgiveness available to them and you too can be forgiven! What wonderful news that is. Jesus has done the work for you. He is risen. He is in heaven. He is waiting to be your Saviour. He is waiting for you to come to Him yourself. Invite Him into your heart and life, for the only way to be saved is to have a personal link with the Lord Jesus Christ.

What are we saved from? Well, first of all, from ourselves, from our sins, and from the judgment of God. God is a righteous God. He cannot have sin in His presence. That is why Jesus came. He came to save sinners. He came to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life.

If you do not believe in Jesus and so leave God out of your life, then you will not come into the life that God has in mind for you. He does not want you to come under His judgment, so He has provided a Saviour in the Person of His only Son. Tonight, God is as it were throwing you a lifeline. You had better catch hold of it. Do not let it go.

God is throwing that lifeline to all of us. We are all sinners, "all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Maybe you have gone along in life deceiving yourself, thinking that you are not a sinner and that you do not need a Saviour. We are sinners. God has told us so in the Bible and we know from our own experience and from what we do that we are sinners. We do bad things, we do naughty things. We all do. Grown-ups and children are just the same, for all are sinners. But God throws the lifeline. The Lord says, "Father, forgive them". Those words show the heart of the Lord Jesus and how much He desires that you and I and all of us should be forgiven.

What does it mean to be forgiven? It means that your sins, all the wrong things you have done or thought, are taken away. God says of those that trust in Jesus, "Their sins and their lawlessnesses I will never remember any more" (Hebrews 8:12). What grace!

To be forgiven means that the sting of death has been taken away. When a Christian dies they go to be with Jesus in paradise, just like the repentant robber I was speaking about earlier. We know, too, that not every Christian will die. The Lord is in heaven

and soon He will come again to call all those who love and have trusted in Him to be with Him forever. The sting of death has gone because the Saviour went into death, has broken its power and come out victorious, a living, glorious Man. He has broken the power of death for ever.

Then, when you believe God gives you the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come here to dwell in the hearts of those who have trusted in Christ, so that we might know that we belong to Jesus, know that we are forgiven and know that God really loves us.

The Holy Spirit helps us, too, as we go through life. You see, life for a Christian can be just as problematical as life for persons who are not Christians. But as a Christian you have Someone to turn to. You have the Lord Jesus to turn to and you have the Holy Spirit to ask for His help and guidance.

When you receive the Holy Spirit, you are baptised by the Holy Spirit into one body. That means you are part of the body of the Lord Jesus. You are part of the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). How thrilling that is. You are part of those who are waiting for the Lord to come. He will soon take us all from earth to heaven.

If you come to Christ then you are "in Christ". You are a son. You have the right to be in God's presence. You are part of God's family. What a wonderful thing that is. You may have family down here but God has His own family and He will introduce you into that family. It is just amazing that we who are sinners and do our own will and are naughty can be brought into such blessing. God wants to forgive us and when He forgives us He gives and gives and gives. He gives the Holy Spirit. He gives eternal life. He gives us hope for the future. He gives us a place in His family. All through eternity we shall be those who receive from God. He will sustain us and bless us and keep us for all eternity.

The heart of God is made known in the gospel that you might know what it is to be saved from your sins and have eternal life and know the blessing of being here in God's favour.

It is a great blessing to be here as a Christian. I am really thrilled to be here as a Christian. It is a wonderful thing to be here to praise God and to tell others, as I am telling you, about the way of

salvation. What a thrill to go and tell those I know, my mates, my friends, everybody, that there is a way of forgiveness. A way to heaven! Heaven's gates are open wide. Who opened them? Jesus. You can come now. Say you are sorry to God. Put your faith and trust in Jesus. Ask Him to save you. If you feel you are a sinner, call out to Jesus in your need and He will save you.

May you receive that blessing tonight, for His name's sake.

Bernard Deacon

A preaching of the gospel at Basildon, 10th October, 2010.

Poetry Selection

WITH THE LOWLY IS WISDOM

*Oh, make me, Jesus, Saviour,
More apt in pleasing Thee;
Guard Thou my whole behaviour,
That walking in Thy favour,
Thy will my way may be.
Thou see'st, Lord, how slowly,
E'en of Thyself I learn;
Oh, Saviour, meek and lowly,
When shall I know Thee wholly
And cease aside to turn?
Oh, give me grace to ponder
Thy perfect, patient ways!
It wearies me to wander –
Direct my footsteps yonder,
Where all is love and praise.*

Hannah K. Burlingham (1842 – 1901)

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee:
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not.
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.*

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

Thomas Chisholm (1866 – 1960)

Testimony Section

A DYING MAN'S DECLARATION

As a young man at St Andrews University, James Guthrie came under the teaching of Samuel Rutherford. This changed his whole outlook and, as he expressed it, he was 'recovered out of the snare of prelacy, ceremonies and the service book'. In 1650 he became minister of the Holy Rood Church in Stirling, Scotland.

In 1657 Guthrie travelled to London to confront Oliver Cromwell over the rights of King Charles 1. Although he supported the king, he would not accept the right of any earthly king to make rules in Christian matters. Because of this, on the accession of Charles II he was arrested and executed on 1st June, 1661. June 2011 marks the 350th anniversary of his death.

The note below is extracted from his testimony written after he was sentenced to death and given to his young son.

I bless God that I die not as a 'fool': not that I have anything wherein to glory in myself. I acknowledge that I am a sinner; yea one of the greatest and vilest...and one of the most unworthy that have preached the gospel. My corruptions have been strong and many, and have made me a sinner in all things, yea even in following my duty; and therefore righteousness of my own I have none; all is vile. But I do believe that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, whereof I am chief; through faith and His righteousness and blood I have obtained mercy; and through Him and Him alone have I hope of the blessed conquest and victory over sin and Satan, and hell and death, and that I shall attain unto the resurrection of the just, and be made partaker of eternal life. I know in whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day. I have preached salvation through His name; and as I have preached so do I believe, and do commend the riches of His free grace, and faith in His name, unto you all, as the only way whereby ye can be saved.

And I bless the Lord that as I do not die as a fool, so also that I die not for 'evil-doing'. Not a few of you may perhaps judge that I suffer as a thief, or as a murderer, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters. It was the lot of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and hath been that of many of His precious servants and people, to suffer in the sight of the world as evil-doers. My soul is not afraid but desires to rejoice in being brought into conformity with my blessed Head, and so blessed a company as those who have given up their lives. I do desire and pray that I may be to none of you today, upon this account, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. Blessed be he that shall not be offended at Jesus Christ, and His poor servants and members, because of their being condemned as evil-doers by the world.

...the matters for which I am condemned are matters belonging to my calling and function as a minister of the gospel — such as the reproving of sin, the pressing and holding fast the truth of God... and preserving and carrying on the work of religion and reformation, and denying to acknowledge the civil magistrate as

the proper competent judge in matters of faith – that in all these things, which – God so ordering by His gracious providence – are the grounds of my indictment and death, I have a good conscience, as having walked therein according to the light and ruling of God’s word as did become a minister of the gospel.

James Guthrie (1st June 1661)

From “Living Water” No 5

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

I would like to share my story with others and point out that I am definitely not a good person, but I am a changed one, and it is because I now have a Friend who takes care of me; His name is the Lord Jesus.

I was born and brought up in a slum area of North London; my parents were Irish Catholics and we had to obey the Roman church in most things, that is, not eating meat on Fridays and attending Mass every Sunday. Apart from that, anything goes. I never really got to hear about my Saviour and His unconditional love for me.

My mother died when I was eight years old and my father did his best to look after me and keep his job at the same time. It was hard for him and I would not go to school. I spent most of my youth causing trouble and began to drink a lot which later led me into borstals and prisons for violence.

I was angry and had no hope in my life. I found myself without education, covered in tattoos and penniless. It was easy to turn to more crime—it seemed the only answer. I now had a girlfriend that I later married and gave her a horrible life. I really loved her but I never knew how to show it.

A friend of mine gave me a job looking after his gaming machine business while he skipped the country for tax reasons. I ended up owning the business because he was out of the way. My life improved and we bought a nice place to live in; I had cars,

plenty of money, and I started to get involved in drugs; they gave me the escape that I needed at the time.

My wife left me because I was never about to talk to or help her. I was shocked because I thought that everything seemed to be going so well. We got back together a few months later and I promised to change but I got worse. My father had an accident after I persuaded him to come out with me on one of my drinking sprees and he died three days later in hospital. I was with him and my heart was really broken. My sister had become a Christian five years earlier and tried to tell me about God. I used to swear at this God and at her. It did not make sense to me at all.

Things went well for a while and we got a new home but after a couple of years our marriage started to fall apart again. One day I went home to find the flat half empty. Kim had gone and said that there was no way that she would ever return. I got so depressed that I visited a doctor and was given antidepressants. One day, under their influence, I walked into a tree and nearly lost my eye on a branch, so they went into the bin. I tried everything and ended up at the Westminster Chapel. I heard the gospel for the first time in my life and went again the next week.

Someone said, 'People can change; a bad man can become good, and a good man can also become bad'. Jesus said, "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17).

My sister had taken a lot of time trying to help me and now her prayers were being answered. I lost my business and then my flat; everything that I valued had gone now but the great change was that I had asked God to forgive me and had accepted Jesus as my Saviour. I asked Him to give me my wife back and against all the odds within three months we were together again. This was a thing that only God could have done and I thank Him so much.

I was baptised and found a Christian fellowship in Maidenhead which I left although they were good to me and helped me as a new Christian. Then I was without a church for a few months but now I am at a Gospel Hall in Slough and have been there for over eighteen months. I fit in and they encourage me. I have not found it easy sometimes and have been a problem to some people, which I regret. I make a lot of mistakes; at the end of the day I am still me and I need a lot of grace to get through. I have seen prayers answered and things happen that only God and I know about. My wife and I are getting on well; I think she can trust me for once.

I am going on alright because God is looking after me. If you do not know Him now, then please think on what He said: “and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Sean Staunton

This article was selected for reprinting from “Living Water” No 5 by Tim Knappett

In the next issue, God willing, there will be a reprint from “Living Water” No 6 selected by Joel Asare Kyeremateng (Ghana).

If there is something in an early issue of “Living Water” that you would like to see reprinted please let me know. I would be glad of suggestions from readers. Ed.

A Voice from the Past

THE PERFECTIONS OF CHRIST

Growing acquaintance with Christ makes Him more and more precious to our souls. If Christ were anything less than unsearchable, He could not satisfy us – could neither fill the heart, nor give peace to the conscience.

The strength of love is shown in great things; the tenderness of love in little things. Christ showed the strength of His love on the cross by dying and bearing the curse for us; the tenderness of

His love when He said, "Behold thy mother", "Children, have ye any meat?" and "Woman, why weepest thou?"

Christ was the only one who could, without a struggle, be content to be, "a worm, and no man" (Psalm 22:6).

How few the words of Jesus when all the earth, in its representatives – Herod, Pilate, priests and elders – rose up against Him! He never uttered more or less than was needed for God's glory. That perfect guidance of the tongue arose from the perfect subjection of His will to God.

In the members of Christ, even in those in whom much excellence of character is found, too often we find, alas, the 'flies of death' in the apothecary's ointment (Ecclesiastes 10:1); but in the Lord Jesus all excellencies are blended in full perfection and harmony. He is the "altogether lovely" (Song of Songs 5:16).

If we considered more that we "have an Advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1), we should not go far from the paths of the Lord and the presence of God. The Advocate speaks to the love as well as the holiness of the Father. It was the Advocate who said, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). He knows all our circumstances, and the power of temptation and trial. Let it be the first business of the conscience to think of this "Advocate with the Father", then what child of God will be slow to make confession whenever it is due.

Robert C. Chapman (1803 – 1902)

Extracts from "Choice Thoughts"

(This is expected to be the beginning of a new series)

THE LORD IS AT HAND

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" Matthew 28:20.

There is an added beauty and meaning in these words when we translate the Greek into literal English: 'I am with you all the days'. How fresh and vital and inspiring they are! Though familiar

as household words, they refresh us like the breath of a spring morning laden with the smell of the sea.

We shrink back from the mysteries of life, and dread its pain, less for ourselves than for those who are so closely twined into our life. We need wisdom, strength, guidance, a Saviour's intercession – but it is all here, if only we can appreciate the wonderful fact of the perpetual presence of Christ.

There are conditions if we are to enjoy it:

- *Obedience* "If a man keep my words...I will manifest myself unto him" The path of your life is marked out by the providence of God, either in the levels of ordinary existence, or in some special mission or calling. As you tread it, you become aware of a glorious Presence walking in the way with you.
- *Purity* The pure in heart see God. A quiet heart is a most blessed thing. I do not say a quiet life, that may be impossible, but a heart free from care, from feverish passion, from the intrusion of unworthy ambition, pride and vanity. The habit of meditation on God's word helps to induce the quiet heart and devout spirit which realise the Lord's presence. The Bible is like the garden in which the Lord God walked in the cool of the day; read it much and prayerfully, and you will meet Him in its glades.
- *Recollection* There will be times when the sense of His presence will be happily conscious to your soul. At other times it is important to say, 'Thou art with me Lord! I am not conscious of Thy presence. My heart is desolate, but Thou art beside me!' Faith in the promise and not feeling is the realising faculty. Without it, you would not have perceived His presence even if you had been beside the apostle John on Patmos; with it we may find Him as near in London today as in Palestine, long years ago.

Meditation: Lord Jesus, Thou art with us all the days. Give us eyes to see Thee and ears to hear Thy voice, that Thou mayest become more real than the dearest and closest of our friends.

F. B .Meyer (1847 – 1929)

A word for Today

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Romans 10:12-13 & 12:1-6

Revelation 3:14, 20-22 2

Timothy 1:14, 2:1, 19-22 & 4:50

I would like to speak about individual responsibility. I want to speak firstly of the obligation of every man, woman and child of responsible age to heed God's call in the gospel, to repent and put their faith in Christ and then to speak about the responsibility of individual believers to lay their bodies upon the altar and to undertake Christian service. I next want to speak about a believer's individual responsibility in a local company, and finally, of our responsibility to the Lord Jesus when things go badly wrong within the Christian profession.

* * * * *

Individual responsibility is taught in the Bible from beginning to end. Often in our society people blame their upbringing or their environment or other things when they commit evil. In the Bible God teaches each of us to be responsible for our conduct. When God challenged Adam after our first parents had sinned he blamed his wife. When God then spoke to Eve, Eve blamed the devil. Both of them tried to avoid personal responsibility. When God later challenged Cain after he had murdered Abel, he said, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' He did not accept responsibility for his evil action. Alas, sin invaded the world: all humanity—men, women and children—have failed in responsibility. But right at the start of the reign of sin God provided the answer. He said that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. God also provided coats of skin to cover man and his wife. God looked on to the incoming of Jesus, the One who would annul Satan and through His death would deliver souls from the power of Satan. All are responsible to recognize they are sinners and avail themselves of God's wonderful offer of salvation in Jesus.

So in the epistle to the Romans where we get the teaching of the gospel, Paul says, "the same Lord of all is rich towards all that

call upon him". Despite the billions of people who live in this world Jesus has the answer for every man, woman and child who has failed in responsibility; He alone has the answer. He is rich towards all. He can provide forgiveness of sins. He can provide peace with God. He can provide the gift of the Holy Spirit. What rich provision of God!

Are there any here still in their sins, who yet do not know the Saviour for themselves? It says here "every one whosoever, who shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved". Every one! Provision is there for everyone to call on the name of the Lord to be saved from wrath, to be saved from hell, to know that God has cast our sins behind His back because of the finished work of Jesus. How wonderful to know that our sins are gone and gone forever!

That is just the beginning of our blessing. It is also a joyful matter to experience the strength that comes from Christ as we believers go through this world with all the pitfalls and difficulties that there are in it. You and I can call on the name of the Lord any time of the day or night. Nehemiah had several very short prayers. He asked God to strengthen him several times and God did strengthen him! When he was afraid before the emperor he prayed (see Nehemiah 2:2-4). He proved that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

You boys and girls at school, you can call on the name of the Lord any time, in the playground, at your studies, at night, when you are going through difficulties. Those of us who are older also must continually call on the name of the Lord. Whatever the difficulties, at home, bringing up families, at work, in ill health, call on the name of the Lord and prove the blessing that comes from Him. He is a Wonderful Saviour!

O JESUS, Friend unfailing,

How dear art Thou to me!

I now want to speak about our responsibility as believers. I have observed that when people come to faith in Christ, they

immediately wish to please Him, to commit their lives to Him. I think that is a normal response of anyone who is genuinely affected by the saving grace of Christ and that is what Paul enjoins in Romans chapter 12. He says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice". He emphasises the believer's individual commitment to Christ.

The first service that he enjoins is to present our bodies a living sacrifice. In Old Testament times, Israelites brought animals to be offered to God. These sacrifices pointed on to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. We

**Jesus, when here,
lived for the
pleasure of God.**

are not enjoined to offer an animal sacrifice. We are exhorted to offer ourselves, each one of us individually, to present our bodies a living sacrifice. My body does not now belong to me, it belongs to Christ. Paul says elsewhere, "Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Paul says, "present your body a living sacrifice" and that it is to be holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service. When I realise how much Jesus has done for me I should then commit my life wholly to Him and prove "what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God".

Paul then warns us of matters that will hinder us from holding our bodies for the will of God. He says, "be not conformed to this world". The world is constantly trying to drag us down to its level. Jesus, when here, lived for the pleasure of God. The world does not live for the pleasure of God. The world lives for its own pleasure, for its own glory, for its own aggrandisement, for the glory of man, for satisfying the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. Those are the principles upon which this present evil world is built. But the Christian as coming under the sway of Christ should not be conformed to this world. Every one of us, old and young, have to beware of this tendency. The world is all around us; we are surrounded by evil things and we meet people who are not followers of Jesus. Our constant

tendency is to be dragged down to the level of this world. If that happens God and Christ and the precious things that centre in Jesus then cease to be the prominent focus of our lives.

So we are enjoined not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Earlier today we were referring to the importance of prayer, of reading the Bible, and the importance of cultivating a personal link with Jesus. That is to be on a continuing basis by feeding our minds on Him and on what He has done. The Bible says of the spouse in the Song of Songs, 'Who is this, she that cometh up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke'. Pillars of smoke would suggest a sustained line of sacrifice. In the tabernacle system there were daily sacrifices. We Christians need to be maintained day by day in presenting our bodies a living sacrifice.

I sometimes ask myself, 'Is my commitment to the Lord Jesus as much as it was 10 years ago? 20 years ago? 30 years ago? 40 years ago?' Each of us knows when we first committed ourselves to Jesus but this commitment must be maintained. We cannot help the ageing process, being in ill health or becoming frail and weak and being unable to do things we could do before, but there is no reason why our commitment to Jesus should not be maintained. Younger people should see older Christians committed to God's will and seeking to stand for the things of God.

Paul also gives another warning to each believer. "I say, through the grace which has been given to me, to everyone that is among you, not to have high thoughts above what he should think; but to think so as to be wise". We are all in danger of having inflated ideas about ourselves, of our own importance and of our own status, even among fellow Christians. I believe our links with others are hindered if we cultivate inflated opinions about ourselves.

What an example we have in the lowliness of Jesus! Paul writes in the epistle to the Philippians about the mind that was in Christ Jesus—the mind to go down. He refers to His stoop into manhood, the way He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death and that the death of the cross—and he says, Let this mind be in

you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Paul then refers to one body because we are not intended just to be isolated Christians. One of the great truths entrusted to the apostle Paul was that the church, the assembly, is one body in Christ. So he says, "as in one body" that is, the human body, "we have many members, but all the members have not the same office; thus we, being many, are one body in Christ, and each one members one of the other". So, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I, form part of the one body in Christ. Two practical aspects that hinder the working out of "one body in Christ" are stated here. One is conformity to the world, because the one body in Christ is distinct from the world. Jesus said, "ye are not of the world... as I am not of the world" (John 15:19, 17:14). The other danger is being inflated with high thoughts of ourselves. We need lowliness of mind to be able to fit in with one another and work out things together in the one body in Christ.

Now that does not mean that everyone has the same office because Paul then goes on in the chapter to say, "But having different gifts". We are all different. I was reminded about such differences recently when I was listening to some brothers engaged in open air preaching. Some people are good at that and some people are not. We have not all been given the same gifts from God. Having put our body on the altar as a living sacrifice, each of us should then find out our unique service. Every believer has a measure of grace from Christ on high. We are not robots: we are not created from a production line. Everybody is different. We should learn to merge with others but also find out what each of us is given that is special and seek God's help to fulfil it.

I now want to speak about the individual overcomer in Revelation. John wrote the book of Revelation when he was in Patmos, banished there because he was a believer true to Christ. He was there, "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus". His body was on the altar, his body was presented as a living sacrifice. While in Patmos John received an amazing vision from God and

he is told to write three things:

- what he had seen,
- the things that are, and
- the things that are about to be after these things.

It is very important for us to differentiate these three aspects.

First of all John saw Jesus in a way that he had never had done before. Now, the apostle John knew Jesus very, very well. No disciple had known Jesus better than the apostle John when He was on earth. John lay in His bosom and leant on His breast. Even the apostle Peter, at one stage requested John to ask Jesus about a difficulty because John was so near Jesus. John says in his gospel, "we have contemplated his glory" (John 1:14), yet when Jesus appears in Revelation in chapter 1 John was frightened. Why was that? Well, Jesus was seen clothed in judicial clothes, as a judge, He is not administering kindness and grace but about to judge. Later John would see Jesus come forth to reign as King of Kings with the armies of heaven following Him.

Secondly he sees the Lord Jesus walking amidst the seven golden lamps, among these seven churches all located in present-day Turkey. John saw Jesus personally, walking amidst the seven churches. I am sure it is a picture of the history of the church from the days of the apostle to the rapture of the church. These are the "things that are".

Thirdly John was told to write the things that were to be "after these things". At that stage John is caught up into heaven. He then has a vision of the church when it is taken to be with Christ in heaven and when many judicial activities then take place on the earth.

But in chapters 2 and 3 John sees Jesus walking among each of the seven assemblies (or churches) and records His messages for each of them. In five of the seven assemblies Jesus tells them to repent because there were features in them that were not according to His mind. That was so even in John's day! But in all seven of them there is a message to the overcomer. Irrespective of which company of Christians you are in, even if

I feel more comfortable speaking about Laodicea than I do about any of the others

you think it is the best on earth, you still need to be an overcomer. Every single one of us must be an overcomer. Because it is right that believers should merge with each other and work out

things together as enjoined in the Bible, our personal responsibility to the Lord is not negated. Each of us here has a personal responsibility towards the Lord. The call "he that overcomes" applied to Ephesus and to all the other seven churches. Although Jesus did not criticise Smyrna and Philadelphia yet there is still the message to both of them, "he that overcomes", along with the injunction to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. However I specially want to speak about Laodicea. To be honest, I feel more comfortable speaking about Laodicea than I do about any of the others because I best understand that assembly.

Jesus commences by presenting Himself in a unique way, a beautiful presentation that should awaken the desire of everyone who heard it to be true to the Lord. To Laodicea Jesus says, "These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God". Let us think about Jesus as the faithful and true witness. No one fulfilled His responsibilities better than Jesus. He did it perfectly. Whatever situation He was in, whether with His parents as a boy of 12, whether He was tempted by the devil in different ways, whether engaged in His service of healing, preaching and teaching, He was the faithful witness. What a wonderful example for us!

But this church in Laodicea was rich; they had grown rich and they were in need of nothing. They did not need Jesus! Terrible thing, is it not? It is sorrowful that professing Christians can go on with certain routines, or many outward activities, and yet Christ is kept out. They did not realise what a terrible state they were in. How easy it is for that to happen. We can have meetings, read the Scriptures, talk about the Scriptures and Christ be kept out. They thought they were alright, they did not think they

needed anything else, they were grown rich, everything was apparently going well but Christ was outside. Have you ever felt that? I remember being where I felt Christ was outside. John was not referring to the Jewish synagogue or heathen temple, but to the assembly of God which would comprise all the believers that were in Laodicea - and Christ was outside!

What does Jesus do? Does He give up on them? No, He does not give up. In His grace He is knocking at the door! Think about Jesus, He is knocking at the door, knocking at the door of this church, Laodicea. Jesus has His own way of seeking to get in and make His presence felt. Each individual in this assembly was responsible to open the door to Jesus. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking; if any one hear my voice and open the door". Any one! Notice that, a message to each individual. "If any one hear my voice and open the door".

Think of what blessing that individual believer receives from the Lord. "I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me." Is that not beautiful? That is what Jesus wants to do to each of us here. He wants us to enjoy His company and He enjoy our company. That is normal Christianity. We were speaking earlier today about abiding in Christ. He says, "abide in me and I in you". If we are abiding in Christ and He in us we will know what it is to sup with Him, to enjoy His company, to know His precious things.

So here is a word to the individual. Even in this company in Laodicea He says, "if any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him". "Unto him" - notice that- it is the individual that gets the blessing of Jesus coming in and supping with him. Jesus says, 'I will sup with him'; He will enter in to our circumstances, each one of us individually as we open the door to Him and sup with Him.

You sup with Jesus. He sups with you. I think the order given in this verse is important. He says, I will come in unto him and sup with him. So that He comes into your individual situation. He knows all your circumstances. He knows my circumstances. He wants to come in. He wants each one of us to know what it is

for Him to enter sympathetically into our circumstances. He would bring in His own help and support exactly where we are.

Then He wants us to sup with Him. He wants us to enjoy privilege with Him and have a foretaste of heaven. He wants us to enter in to the precious things of God that centre in Him. Think of that promise to the overcomer in the church in Laodicea.

Jesus does not give up on anyone here tonight. How many people there are within the Christian profession! How many places there may be that have very little, if any, room for Jesus. But how precious to let Him in, to sup with Him—He understands your situation, He would help you and guide you and support you and lift you up so that you might know what it is to sup with Him.

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I want now to speak a little about the second epistle to Timothy because this letter provides individual guidance when things go badly wrong. Paul wrote this final letter to Timothy, a person who had accompanied him on several of his journeys and had probably been converted through Paul's ministry in his first journey from Antioch.

Timothy had received considerable instruction from Paul. Paul loved him and trusted him. He had served with Paul as 'a child with a father in the work of the glad tidings'. Paul knew the state among believers was not good. He says in chapter 1 of his letter to Timothy, "all who are in Asia... have turned away from me". That was very sad because many of the believers in Asia had been converted through Paul's preaching. In chapter 2 he also speaks of "men who as to the truth have gone astray", saying things that were overthrowing the faith of others. In chapter 3 he describes those who have a "form of piety but deny the power of it", an imitation of Christian practice but not genuineness of faith. In chapter 4 he says there would be a time when persons will turn away their ear from the truth.

We live in these times. People have now not only turned away from Paul personally but today Paul's ministry is largely discredited by many who take Christian ground Not everyone discredits Paul's

ministry but many have turned away from it. Now, to turn away from Paul's ministry is very serious. Paul was entrusted with precious things. He was entrusted with the truth of the glad tidings for the nations, the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God.

Paul was entrusted with the truth of the mystery, the truth that Christ is our Head in heaven and that He has His body here. He taught the distinctive heavenly calling of the church, being not of the world as Christ is not of the world. He was entrusted with the truth of the rapture of the church. He was also entrusted with the truth of divine order and the relative functions of man and woman in the local assembly. We can see therefore that it is a very serious thing to turn away from Paul. I believe turning away from Paul is iniquity. We should learn to name things as Scripture names them.

The exhortations of Paul to Timothy should be heeded by every one of us. Paul says, "Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted." Chapter 2 specifically calls on "every one" who names the name of the Lord. Some commentaries on second Timothy say such statements apply to those who are ministers or in positions of leadership, and it certainly does apply to all who undertake Christian ministry, but the second epistle to Timothy emphasises the individual responsibility of each believer in the Lord Jesus Christ when it says "every one". That is you, me and every other believer.

Paul says to Timothy, 'Look, you have been entrusted with the most precious things in the universe which you have received through my ministry. Look after them!' If others surrender divine things that are taught in the Bible, do not you give them up. Do not let me give it up. Let me stand by what is contained in the Scriptures.

Later on he says in chapter 3, "abide in those things which thou hast learned... knowing of whom thou hast learned them". Timothy had learned those things from the apostle Paul and he is told to abide in them. This applies to each of us now. Hold on to them, do not let them go.

**God has not
changed since the
day of Pentecost**

We cannot carry out these injunctions in our own strength but God has given to each believer the gift of the Spirit. He says in chapter 1, God "has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise

discretion". Hold on to what God has given us. Let us each hold on to what God has given us and that is taught in the Holy Scriptures.

He also says, "be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus". I think that is a lovely expression. I think of an enormous reservoir which will never run out. Where I live the authorities have imposed a hose-pipe ban because the reservoirs are low. I tell you, nothing will ever run out in the reservoir that is in Christ Jesus. Everything is safe and secure up there. What you and I have to do is be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He gives us the needed supply to enable us to keep going.

Later in chapter 2, after referring to bad doctrine that was being taught, Paul then tells us that "the firm foundation of God stands". God has not changed since the day of Pentecost, since the days of the apostles. God's standards are the same. God's truths are the same. The Holy Spirit is the same. Christ in glory is the same. The firm foundation of God stands and the Lord knows those that are His.

Now, the two expressions about the seal here come from Numbers chapter 16 when there had been a great rebellion against God in the time of Moses. What were they then going to do? God says, Tomorrow I will make known who belongs to Me. But then what they had to do was to depart from the tents of wicked men (see Numbers 16:5, 26). That is where these expressions come from, "The Lord knows those that are his"; and, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity". That is my responsibility. That is your responsibility.

This is not withdrawing over a triviality. Paul names persons who were undermining the whole basis of Christianity. Such subversive activities are going on today, undermining the whole

basis of Christianity. What is a believer to do? The Scripture is plain: he is to withdraw from iniquity. Then he says, "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work". Again, the individual is stressed, "one ... shall be a vessel to honour", sanctified, set apart for holy purposes, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work.

Then Paul says, "Flee youthful lusts". Run away from them. You do it. I should do it. So we separate from iniquity, flee youthful lusts and you the find others with whom to work out divine things.

When I was twelve I asked to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread and a brother came to see me and he read this scripture to me. I have never forgotten it. He was quite right to read this scripture. He read this scripture to help me to understand firstly that there are many people who belong to Christ and secondly there is a right way for the individual Christian to follow where he can find the presence of the Lord and to link on rightly in practical fellowship with others.

There are many things being said today about with whom to have fellowship. We should also remember that we can have fellowship in people's sins. Have you ever thought of that?

I will give you a few pertinent scriptures to think about:

- "Do not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather also reprove them" – (Ephesians 5:11).
- What fellowship is there with light and darkness? (See 2 Corinthians 6:14)
- "Lay hands quickly on no man, nor partake in others' sins" (1 Timothy 5:22).
- "Come out of her, my people, that ye have not fellowship in her sins, and that ye do not receive of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

I just commend these scriptures for your consideration. Before you start thinking about having fellowship with anyone make

sure, and let me make sure, that I am not going to having fellowship in others' sins. The Bible teaches that association with evil is defiling. Do not forget that.

So, there is thus the obligation on believers, on each one individually to withdraw from iniquity, an obligation to flee youthful lusts, an obligation to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. These are four moral qualities of Christianity, a wonderful blend of qualities that each of us should pursue with others.

Paul then speaks of other things that should mark an individual believer. "A bondman of the Lord ought not to contend, but be gentle towards all; apt to teach; forbearing; in meekness setting right those who oppose". Reaching out to others—even those who oppose—must not stop. Paul is not teaching isolationism. At the end of this letter Paul also enjoins Timothy to do the work of an evangelist.

So, individual responsibility is important throughout our lives. First of all, there is an obligation on every sinner to get right with God while it is still the day of grace. Then, having begun a life of faith in Christ, each one of us should place our body on the altar, to be here to serve God on a sacrificial basis.

Second Timothy uses the expression, "serviceable to the Master". I think that means serviceable to the Master for praise and worship, serviceable to the Master in care for the Lord's people and serviceable to the Master in reaching out towards others.

Let us seek to be overcomers, as Jesus was an overcomer, while we wait for Him to come again, to come into His rights. May the Lord help us to think about these things and bless us all, for His name's sake.

Ken Hollands,

An address at Basildon, 2nd October 2010