

FAITH LIFE

The messages delivered on the theme,
"The Just shall Live by Faith,"
in a Revival Camp in 1985

by

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**“THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY
FAITH!”**

SPEAKING of faith, our thoughts race back to the sixteenth century when Martin Luther thundered, “*The just shall live by faith*” and shattered the unscriptural structure of the medieval Church. In his crusade to eliminate religious abuses, he came vehemently upon sham doctrines, vain traditions and corrupt religious practices. In this eleventh hour when pure and simple faith is traded for an umpteen number of practices which have nothing to do with faith, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? (Lk 18:8). Is it too much for us to expect a comeback of “*The just shall live by faith*” at the turn of the century? God is calling us to join the army of bold reformers who will stamp their feet and proclaim, “Here we stand!” Welcome. Read on!

It is wonderful to notice that this glorious truth first glowed in the time of Habakkuk. The word Habakkuk means “one who embraces.” Funny though, it has a far-reaching sense. It depicts the depth of the Divine love on degraded humanity. There are times when we feel crushed and bent by the cares and pains of this temporal life. At such times the Eternal Being’s mighty hands are extended towards us from the Throne of Grace. The compassionate God becomes our only source of consolation. He cannot forget us, for He is more than a mother. Nor can He forsake us, for we are drawn in His palm. Despite our failures and frailties, we are taken to His bosom to be comforted there!

“The just shall live by faith” (Hab 2:4).

The situation in which these particular words in Habakkuk were written deserves our serious attention.

The people of Judah were the chosen people of God. But they had gone a whoring from their God. They failed to walk in accordance with God’s Law and Commandments. They gave themselves up to iniquities. They transgressed against His Covenant and trespassed against His Law. They forgot the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed the strange gods of other nations and burned incense to them.

Amidst such a debased generation lived the prophet of God, Habakkuk. A prophet is one who lives close to God. He is chosen to be God's mouthpiece, and talks for Him. Whenever God's own people are sidetracked from the path of glory, it is the prophet's office to warn them against their degradation.

Habakkuk could not bear to see the illegal and disloyal activities of the people of Judah. As a true prophet of God, he raised his trumpet and voiced God's judgment over them. At the same time he is seen lamenting the fallen state of the chosen remnant of Judah: "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? even cry out to You, Violence! and You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds" (Hab 1:2-4).

The treachery of Judah had kindled God's wrath. He was about to pour forth His fury on them. He planned to provoke the Chaldeans of Babylon against the people of Judah: "For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which

marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs" (Hab 1:6). In order to punish and purge His people, God chose to use the comparatively more wicked Chaldeans.

But Habakkuk could not approve of the godly being trampled upon by the ungodly. It is as though he pleaded, "My God! My Holy One! It's true that the people are turned back from Your ways and have sinned against You. But, will You forsake Your own folk? Should You punish them with persecutions from the pagans?"

His cry of grief was given expression in the words that follow: "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do you look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he?" (Hab 1:13).

The prophet's passionate pleadings were heard in the Heavens and the God of compassion had to respond: "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:4).

God meant to say, "The Chaldeans are proud and rebellious. Though I use them to avenge Judah's treachery, none of the Chaldeans shall escape My wrath. But the

just shall live by his faith.” Whom do you think the word “the just” refers to? The people of Judah, indeed! Why said God so? They had not obeyed the voice of their Lord; nor walked in His Law, nor in His statutes, nor in His testimonies! But God knew that the history of the people of Judah was centred on their fundamental faith. Abraham, their forefather, is called the father of those who believe. Faith can be traced out in the entire course of the Jewish life. And that was why God said, “The just shall live by *his* faith.” “His” faith signifies the faith of Israel, the faith of Judah.

The prophecy packed in these words are so important that the Lord answered Habakkuk and said: “Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it” (Hab 2:2). These words were to be written on tablets of stone, in block letters! Why should it be written so? “For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab 2:3).

“An appointed time” is the time of the New Testament. In this verse God seemed to tell His prophet, “Do not think I am unjust in My dealings with Judah. Wait for My time. Watch closely at what I would do. Time shall reveal it. The Messiah will appear on this earth to fulfill this prophecy about FAITH.”

Faith is the foundation of Christian life. The importance attached to this truth about faith is made obvious by its emphatic recurrence in three of the New Testament Epistles. There are three key verses, which enlighten the message this truth imparts.

(i) *Romans 1:17*, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written (in Hab 2:4), The just shall live by faith.”

(ii) *Galatians 3:11*, “But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith.”

(iii) *Hebrews 10:38*, “Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

The Epistle to Romans talks about the *commencement* of the Christian life. The Letter to the Galatians deals with the problems we face in the *course* of the Christian life, and that to the Hebrews pictures the successful *completion* of the Christian race. The **commencement**, the **continuation** and the **consummation** of faith life!

Let us meditate these three stages of Faith Life, under the light of the Word and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the

contemporary spiritual commotion, Christians are tossed to and fro with every wind of strange and diverse doctrines. And we need to be educated about living the faith life in order to survive the sleights of Satan. I write with a sincere prayer that this life-changing truth may dawn on you with its full significance. Let your unbelief be destroyed and forts of faith be built!

Part 1

COMMENCEMENT OF FAITH LIFE

MANY are the Christians who stagger throughout their life and still more are there who stop abruptly in the middle. Numberless are stumbled down. Why is this tragedy? I say, and I repeat: Something is fundamentally wrong, and fatally too! We cannot expect a Christian life to be successful if the foundation is not sustainable. And that is why the commencement of faith life is of living importance.

In this section we shall study five basic lessons pertaining to the beginning of faith life.

Part 1 Chapter 1

FAITH THE PREREQUISITE

FOR a life to be approved by God, faith is the basic requirement. There is nothing that can be a substitute for faith. Traditions cannot be an alternative. Religious practices cannot replace it. Many of us live a rigidly disciplined religious life. We revere God. We pray oftentimes. We are regular Church-goers. We even tithe! We are well-spoken of by our fellow Christians for our pious living. In short, we are doing our best to live the Christian life, and the world certifies that we are 'Good Christians.' But, "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). It is not impossible to be engaged in all Christian activities and yet be out of favour with God. Without faith there is no way. Here are seven classic examples from the Scriptures.

1. Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve were originally a holy pair. Shortly after their creation they had to quit the place where God Himself had put them. But why? Why were they banished from Eden? Why was God so particular about such a trivial thing as eating a mere fruit? It seems to be too awful a consequence for so small a sin. But if we look deeply into the matter, we may discern their grave error which led to that grievous end.

God created and placed them in an exceedingly beautiful garden, the Eden. It was a place of hills, plains and lovely lakes. The blue heavens and the green earth were in perfect harmony. On the graceful shrubs stood colourful flowers, dressed in purple and pink, to greet the first man and woman at every turn of their eye. The lion and the lamb played peacefully around them. The two full-grown babies enjoyed the company of the angelic beings who were their frequent visitors. Above all, they welcomed the coming of their Creator who walked in the garden, in the cool of the day. They lived in perpetual dependence on God and enjoyed perfect bliss. But they could continue in that happy estate only on a condition. The condition that their Creator laid down was this: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen 2:18). The tree of knowledge had

been made a test of their faith and obedience. It was then that the unwanted intruder came on the scene and asked Eve, “Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen 3:1). He questioned the very Word of God. Alas! Eve began to distrust God’s love and doubt His wisdom. She DISBELIEVED the words of God for whom it was impossible to lie (Heb 6:8) and believed the lie of the liar (Jn 8:44). And the outcome? They became outcasts from the garden of Eden. The first sin of our first parents is failure to believe God’s Word. Yes, unbelief is the sin of sins.

2. Moses and Aaron

Have you ever once stopped to think why Moses the prophet and Aaron the priest were denied admission into the Promised Land? When Moses was born, by faith he was kept hidden and was safe. When he came of age, by faith he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. And again, by faith he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. God spoke to him face to face as a man speaks to his friend. “There has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses” (Dt 34:10). God testified that Moses was a faithful servant in all His house (Heb 3:2). Aaron was no less than Moses. God once said to Moses, “Aaron, your brother, shall be your

prophet.” He was called and anointed to be a high priest. These two men were given a great commission to lead Israelites into the land of milk and honey. Through them God smote the Egyptians with plagues and redeemed the Israelites from bondage. But at one stage, the same God denied them what once He promised! What was God’s reason? “You trespassed against Me” (Dt 32:51). Trespassed! In what way? God told them: “Because you did not BELIEVE Me” (Num 20:12). God had told them to speak to the rock. To them it seemed a folly to speak to a rock. So Moses struck that rock with the rod. They disbelieved God’s words and incurred His displeasure. Disbelieving is trespassing.

3. Israelites

Israelities were God’s elect. Even when they had not known their Lord, He called them and named them. He delighted in being called “The God of Israel,” “The Holy One of Israel,” “The Redeemer of Israel” and so on. He carried them on His shoulders as a father. But did they enter that promised land? Why couldn’t they possess their possessions? On their way, in the wilderness, Israelites became idolaters, committed fornication, tested God and murmured against Him. But the main reason the Bible gives for their failure is this: “They could not enter in because of UNBELIEF” (Heb 3:19). Unbelief was the deadliest of all their sins.

Next, let's look at a few positive examples.

4. Paul and Silas

Faithful proclamation of the risen Christ as the Lord and the Saviour took Paul and Silas to the innermost of dungeons. The two peculiar prisoners were prepared for everything. They met the persecution with a spirit of praise and prayer. Whether or not their hymns moved their fellow-prisoners' hearts, we are not sure. But their praise did move the Roman prison! Following a great earthquake, the foundations of the prison were shaken, all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosened. All these brought the Phillippian Jailor on to his knees. He fell down trembling before Paul and Silas and cried, "Sirs, What must I do to be saved?" What do you think was the reply? Paul did not attempt to deliver a sermon on Seven Steps to Salvation. Nor did he make him recite a long prayer of confession! He could answer the thirsty soul in one sentence, and I should say, it was the only possible answer that God Himself could have given the jailor: "BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Hundreds of thousands of people today ask the same question that the Jailor asked. "What must I do to be saved?" This is the throbbing of their hearts. They visit places of pilgrimage, one after another, hoping to

get their sins washed off by holy baths. Many perform charitable works to make up for the dark deeds of their past life. By neither way could they get rid of their guilty conscience and so they know no peace of mind. There is only one way! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!"

5. John 6:28,29

During His earthly ministry Jesus went about healing the sick and setting free the demon-possessed. The disciples had the opportunity to accompany Him wherever He went and to be the eye-witnesses of all that He said and did. The blind received sight, the lame and crippled rose up and walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard and the dead were raised up. The hungry multitudes were fed with just a few loaves and fish. The disciples wanted such miracles to be wrought by their hands. They approached Him asking, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" They might have expected Him to set up a ministry and teach them the means and methods of performing miracles. To their disappointment, He replied, "This is the work of God, that you BELIEVE in Him whom He sent." Simple words but profound truth! It may imply nothing important to the present day Bible scholars who frantically seek to dig out deeper truths. In our desire to go 'deeper' we have failed to move 'higher.'

Believing the Son of God is the work of God.
Can words be clearer?

5. John 16:8,9

Speaking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “When He has come, He will convict the world of sin.” Note, it is “sin” and not “sins.” This sin of sins is referred to in the very next verse: “Of sin, because they do NOT BELIEVE in Me.”

1 John 5:16 talks about the sin unto death and the sin not unto death. “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.” The “sin leading to death” is nothing but unbelief. Let me explain. If you pray for a brother or a sister who has sinned in any other way, God will hear your prayers and the person will be forgiven. But if you pray to God to pardon a man his unbelief and his unwillingness to accept Jesus as Saviour, God can never grant it. Adultery, fornication, murders and idolatry are all devastating sins, but these are not what take us to hell. There will be in hell those who never committed adultery or murder, but all will be **unbelievers**. It is terribly true that even those who know nothing of these heinous sins will be there, just because of their unbelief.

7. John 3:18

“He who BELIEVES in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Anyone who takes shelter under the shed blood of Christ escapes the eternal damnation. He will not perish but will have everlasting life. But the one who does not believe in Jesus will be condemned. Nay, he is “already” condemned! The unbeliever need not wait for the Dooms Day. He is already doomed. His unbelief has made him a son of hell. Believe or perish!

All by faith!

Faith is supreme in everything that concerns God and man. Every step that draws a human soul nearer to God and every growth is founded on faith.

(a) Author of faith

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:1,2).

(b) Family of faith

“Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

(c) Spirit of faith

“Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believed and therefore I spoke, we also believe and therefore speak” (2 Cor 4:13)

(d) Word of faith

“The word of faith which we preach” (Rom 10:8)

(e) Prayer of faith

“The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up” (Js 5:15)

(f) Children of faith

“To Timothy, my true son in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2)

(g) Fight of faith

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called” (1 Tim 6:12)

Thus,

Our Leader	—	Author of faith
Our Church	—	Family of faith
Our Life	—	Spirit of faith
Our Message	—	Word of faith
Our Prayer	—	Prayer of faith
Our Fruits	—	Children of faith
Our Warfare	—	Fight of faith

Part 1 Chapter 2

WHY FAILURES?

IT may be clear to you by now that God accepts us on the only condition of faith in Him. The very simplicity (simplicity should not be taken for triviality) of this truth has made it seem too complicated for many of us to comprehend the divine plan of Redemption. Instead of putting all our faith and trust in God and finding rest in His promises, we strive and struggle, but all in vain. And we encounter failures right where we are supposed to be progressive.

The history of the Israelites serves us with a good illustration here. The reasons for their failure explain our failures. Theirs was not a triumphant life for two reasons. First, they did not realise the futility of self effort. Secondly, they did not realize the temporariness of the Law.

1. The Futility of Self-effort

The Law was, in simple words, the Holy God's righteous and virtuous demands placed on man. When the Israelites heard what their Lord had commanded them, they all answered in one accord, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex 24:3). Though it seems very good on their part to have said so, they made their first flounder there. They could not comprehend the claims of the Law on them. They did not understand that the requirements of the Law were of a supreme standard and were beyond their reach. They knew not the cost of obedience. With a spring of enthusiasm they promised, "We-will-do!"

Many among us have put great confidence in our undaunted and indomitable will-power. We decidedly move forward but often we are detained. Christian life becomes tedious and we say in disgust, "Oh, it is very difficult." The Christian life is not just difficult but it is totally impossible if it is to be lived by determination. Will-power is the vain religion of the world and Jesus never once advocated this. It is neither by will nor by power that we can run this race of faith (Rom 9:16). There must come a time in our lives when we realise our total depravity, so we stop promising God and learn to take His promises by faith.

The Israelites were self-confident. Instead, they should have thrown themselves at God's feet and confessed their inadequacy. What God would have said if they had done like that is not told in the Bible. But we know fully well that they could not do what they said they could. And their children could not do, their grandchildren could not, not even their late descendants. Nor is it possible for any man born on this earth.

"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbour as yourself, you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the Law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, Do not commit adultery also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law" (Js 2:8-11).

Whosoever he might be, whatever possible explanations he might give, if he is a keeper of the whole Law and yet failed in one point of the Law, he was guilty of all the sins and was considered the transgressor of the Law. Think that you have to jump over a 10 meters long pit. Even if you jump 9.5 meters you will be fallen into the pit. That was Law. That was God's viewpoint!

We may keep a distinction as small sins and greater sins. Some of us look upon our 'pet sins' with a little bit of allowance. But God cannot allow even the smallest sin to go unpunished. "Yoke" was the name given by the apostles of the New Testament to the Law of the Old Testament. "Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). The yoke had been unbearable. It had bruised the Israelites' necks. None of them succeeded in making himself acceptable to God by means of the Law. It took a long time for God to bring home to their own experience the insufficiency of self-effort.

When Jesus ministered in this world, He invited the Jews, the keepers of the Law, to the new and the living way. "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11:29). He told them to put off their old bruising yoke and put on His yoke which was soft, soothing and gentle. The yoke of the Law enslaved, whereas the yoke of Christ delivers us from every burden of sin and guilt. Real freedom is in being yoked with Jesus. "What the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son" (Rom 8:3).

2. The Temporariness of the Law

"The Law made nothing perfect" (Heb 7:19). We can say that the Law was not given to make man righteous but to convict him of his unrighteousness and convince him of his need of a Saviour. Nowhere in the New Testament are the men of faith told to keep the Law.

"The Law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never...make those who approach perfect" (Heb 10:1). Shadow is good. But when the light comes it has to give way. The Law was only a shadow of the better things to come. When Christ Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, rose to shine in strength the shadow had to give way. The Law is only "a SHADOW of things to come, but the SUBSTANCE is of CHRIST" (Col 2:17). The Israelities had the shadow, but we have the substance. It is unwise to cling to the shadow when the real substance has been revealed.

Colossians 2:14-16 give us a picture of how the shadow was dispelled. "Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross... triumphing over them in it. Therefore let no one judge you."

The Law was the handwriting that was AGAINST us and was CONTRARY to us. The Law made our sin manifest. It was standing on our way and it made hard the possibility of union with God. But Jesus Christ nailed it to the cross and opened the WAY for us, revealed the TRUTH and gave us the LIFE. This new and the living way He opened through the veil, that is, His flesh, His own body (Heb 10:20). So now, none of us is to be judged by the Law. Hallelujah!

“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal 3:23-25). The Law was a strict guard and a stern tutor. It was not all sufficient in itself and so it has led us to “a better hope” (Heb 7:19). It had been given to us temporarily till the prophecy about Faith Life came to pass.

The following passages make it obvious that we are justified by faith and not by the Law.

“The **righteousness of God apart from the Law** is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through **faith** in Jesus Christ to all” (Rom 3:21,22).

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have

attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by **faith**, but as it were by the works of the **law**” (Rom 9:30-32).

“By what law? Of works? No, but by the **law of faith**. Therefore we conclude that a **man is justified by faith apart from** the deeds of the Law” (Rom 3:27,28).

“But that **no one is justified by the Law** in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith! Yet the Law is not of faith” (Gal 3:11).

Cursed is everyone who is a keeper of the Law but stumbles in one point. But Christ became a curse to save us from the curse of the Law. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). There is neither curse nor condemnation for those who believe in Christ Jesus. “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom 8:33-35).

It is neither our self-effort nor our self-righteousness that justifies us. We are justified by our faith on the finished work of Christ on Calvary. We may say a hundred times: *“The-just-shall-live-by-faith!”*

Part 1 Chapter 3

SIMPLE FAITH

THE trouble with the Christianity of today is its complexity. With a dogmatic insistence on externalities, the Church is misleading the Christian multitudes to a mere religious orthodoxy instead of guiding them to the spiritual realm of reality. The Church is diseased with diverse doctrines. Externalism is esteemed as essentiality. Ritualism is reigning in places which are not worthy of the name 'Church.' A set of codified ceremonies is the celebrated creed of certain congregations. It is not Christianity but Churchianity that exists. It is most tragic that Salvation by Faith is neither taught nor believed. But, "What if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?" (Rom 3:3). Truth is forever what it is and God always acts like Himself. There can be no shadow of variance either in God

or His Word. Justification by Faith is God's design and its invariability remains indomitable by the man-made dogmas. The lives of three sinner women can be the greatest examples of the simplest form of faith.

1. Rahab

"By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb 11:31).

These words were recorded nearly 2000 years after the woman had lived. But still the epithet 'harlot' lingers with the lady's name and even now she is known only as the harlot Rahab. It shows how black her sin must have been! But "by faith" she did not perish with the unbelievers. This Gentile woman's faith was so wonderful! The two spies from the Lord's army gave her a line of scarlet cord as a true token of their faithfulness. She trusted in their words, "and she bound the scarlet cord in the window" (Josh 2:21). Simply a cord! It shows her simple faith! And that saved her when the city of Jericho was burned to ashes. She survived the destruction and lived with God's people in Israel. She gave birth to Boaz whose great grandson was King David, the generation in which Jesus appeared hundreds of years later.

God honoured her faith and her name is found registered in the list of the patriarchs of faith. Were there not any better women living in her times? But this woman's simple faith has got her a place in this Book of Life. The Red Cord typifies the Red Cross. She blended herself with Calvary's love even thousands of years ago.

2. The Samaritan Woman

This woman who was a harlot by profession discovered that Jesus was Messiah! A simple conversation with the Saviour led to her great conversion. A conversion of heart and life. She perceived that the person she had been talking to was a prophet (Jn 4:19). That gave her too great a joy and she could not hold herself back. A moment later she was found proclaiming Him in the streets of Sychar, a City of Samaria. The woman saw the Christ in the man she met near the well and she invited others to "come and see" Him. She found the fountain of living waters and from her heart began to flow forth rivers of living water.

A professional harlot! She met her Messiah in the Son of Man and He completed His purpose in her life (Jn 4:34). Many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the words of that woman (v 39). But what did the Samaritans say to her? "We believe,

not because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (v 42). The people did not want to acknowledge that the sinner woman was the channel for their spiritual blessing! Such a bad testimony she had had that she was despised eventhough she was approved by Christ!

Dear Reader, Is your condition that? Is it your conviction that you are unworthy of ever being saved? Are your past sins so hideous that a guilty feeling haunts you even after contrition and confession? Does your conscience continue to condemn you? Take off your eyes from looking at yourself. Lift your eyes and look up to the Lamb of God who was stricken and smitten on your behalf. Your faith saves you!

3. Sinner Woman in a City

There was no need in her times to refer to her name as such. She was very popular as "The sinner of the city!" Just imagine! What an immoral life she must have lived! Obviously, she had been a harlot. She first met Jesus when He was dining in a Pharisee's house. The Pharisee saw Him as a godly man, but she saw Him as God's Son. The burden of her sin prevented her from coming in front of Him. She "stood behind Him weeping" (Lk 7:37,38). How penitent

and how remorseful she was! Fear gripped her heart that she might not be accepted by the holy Son of God. She washed His feet with tears of repentance, kissed them with gratitude and anointed them with fragrant oil. It was not oil but her life itself that she poured out at His feet. In the Pharisee's thinking she was not worthy even to touch the feet of Jesus. Except for Jesus, she was an unwanted person in that place. The woman uttered not a word. But what her tear drops spoke was intelligible to Him and He answered her, saying, "Your sins are forgiven." The Pharisee would not let her go forgiven. But Jesus assured her of her salvation, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Lk 7:50).

My friend, the crowd around you may fail to recognise you as one in God's family. There may be fingers that still point to your past but forgiven sins. Do you cry in quietness, There is none who understands me? I tell you, dear one, God does know your heart. Pour out your broken heart as the woman did with her alabaster flask. He accepts you, for you are precious in His sight. It cost Him His blood to get you to His side! Jesus could understand the sinful woman's sorrows. He said to the Pharisee, "She loved Me much (much more than you did)" (Lk 7:47).

Reading about these women's lives we now understand what Jesus meant when He said, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the Kingdom of God before you...You did not believe... But tax collectors and harlots **believed**" (Mt 21:31,32). Jesus never failed to felicitate faith wherever it was found. The Pharisees stuck to the Law of Moses. They were proud and puffed up with their self-righteousness which was but filthy rags before God. But Gentiles and sinners enter Heaven by embracing the law of faith. They did not attempt to do what they could not. They simply confessed their helplessness, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Lk 18:13). On the contrary, the simplicity of the Gospel is a great stumbling block to the religious philosophers and wise men. Why? "Because they did not seek it by **faith**, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone" (Rom 9:32).

Mr. Religion glorifies his 'creeds' and crowns it with the name 'Grace.' To some denominational leaders Christianity means Christ *plus* numerous externalities, God's Grace plus man's works. Hence Christ has become a stumbling stone to them. Man's tendency is to do something in order to *earn* his own salvation. But nothing can be done to merit God's grace. God offers salvation free on faith. Thus He excludes any boast-

ing, and claims all glory to Himself. By grace we are saved through faith. "That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor 1:29). Man is saved by Christ's atoning blood, altogether apart from any works of merit. "Being justified **freely** by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Rom 3:24).

Mr. Good Works may list out his most religious acts and profess that he is fully qualified to enter the Kingdom of God. He is sure to be disappointed on Christ's Day. The following Scripture passage speaks about the blessedness of the man who is saved by his **faith** (and obviously not by his good works). "God imputes righteousness apart from works. To him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin" (Rom 4:5-8).

In the Old Testament we read about a man who had a great difficulty to exercise the simple unquestioning faith in order to possess the blessing of God's promise. It was Naaman, the Commander of the army of the King of Syria. That mighty man of valour was a leper. He was told about the prophet of God in Israel. He went to Israel expecting

the Lord's servant to "wave his hands over his body and heal the leprosy." But God's plan was different. The prophet instructed the army Commander to wash in Jordan seven times. At this Naaman became furious and left the place in rage. His servants spoke to him, "If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done?" (2 Ki 5:9-14). At last, Naaman humbled himself and "he went down." Formerly he wanted God to stoop down to his wish and way and bless him with His miraculous healing. But that was impossible. When he yielded to perform a simple act of faith, by way of obeying God's word, he was healed and "he was clean."

We are made 'clean' by Christ's blood, through faith. There is no sin too dark, no crime too black to be washed by His blood. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from *all* sin" (1 Jn 1:7).

Part 1 Chapter 4

ADULTERATED GOSPEL

WE preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23).
To preach Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the Saviour is pure Gospel. If we add to this or subtract from this it becomes adulterated. Cross plus or minus nothing!

The faulty exposition of the New Testament truth is the chilly breeze that blows across the Church today. The spirit of modern orthodoxy is utterly in contrast with the spirit of the Word of God. People are found preaching many formulae for which they cannot furnish chapter or verse in the Bible. Salvation is not to be found in any formula, but in the Saviour.

Here are some examples of the Adulterated Gospel.

a) Baptism, etc.

Baptism is the answer of a good conscience towards God (1 Pet 3:21). Trusting in Jesus, you make an agreement with God through baptism. That ‘Baptism—a must’ is the clear teaching of the Bible. But we ought to be careful lest we make a mistake here. Faith precedes and baptism follows. If it is vice versa, that is adulterated Gospel. We see in the Bible as well as in the lives of many today that God baptizes some with the Holy Spirit even before they are baptized in water. And if we say that baptism saves men, or a person is not saved until he is baptized, it would mean that God baptizes ‘unsaved’ people also with the Holy Spirit!

Tithing, fasting, praying, etc., are all necessary. Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees. But these things do not save you. Nobody can say that he is saved just because his prayers are often answered. Jesus granted even the prayers of demons (Mt 8:31). If you believe that your tithing and fasting can save you, you are deceiving yourself. Beware of self-deception! Salvation is only in the Cross.

We meet a Pharisee in the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. He thanked God for he was not like others and he delighted in that he was far better. He

exalted himself. "I fast twice a week; I give tithes" (Lk 18:12). But he had to take his pride in his hands and go back just as he came! But the Publican with the simple prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," went home justified. And we know about another Pharisee who counted everything but loss for Christ. That was the apostle Paul! "I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,...and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil 3:8). That your most religious activities are counted for your salvation is, again, an adulterated gospel.

I cannot but make a reference to Dr. Billy Graham here. For more than forty years he has been preaching the pure uncorrupted gospel. His ministry has had tremendous results. The scattered sheep are being gathered to their Good Shepherd. One among them is the Director of Back to the Bible ministry, Warren W. Wiersbe, whom God is using in a mighty way to bless millions. The fruits of pure gospel are always great!

b) Confession of sins

"Have you confessed and forsaken all your sins?" This is the question often asked to the new converts. To speak the truth, there is none on this earth who, at the time of conversion, confessed every single sin he had

committed. If that is the rule, nobody can say that he or she is saved, because it is impossible to recall to your memory the whole of your past life! We search ourselves and confess only those sins that we remember.

Once I asked a brother if he was saved. A preacher standing beside him instantly replied, "He is still on the way to Calvary." He meant to say that the brother had not yet finished the confession of his past sins! I do not know where in the Bible such a thing is written. This, again, is adulterated gospel. These preachers keep sinners on the road to the Cross too long! Many are the examples in the Bible to prove that people are saved instantly. Men and women were saved instantly when they confessed that they were sinners (and not, as a rule, all their sins).

(i) The Tax-collector (Lk 18:13,14)

This man had been a cheat and disliked by all. But when he entered the presence of God he humbled himself. The penitent sinner stood afar off and dared not to raise his eyes up. We see him beating his breast and lamenting his sinful state. He begged God to be merciful to him. The Bible testifies that he went home "justified." He came to God, confessed his sinfulness and got saved "instantly."

(ii) Zacchaeus (Lk 19:5-9)

He was a chief tax-collector and a very rich man. But he was also “a man, who was a sinner.” He sought to see who Jesus was. He could not see Him in the crowd, for he was of a short stature. But his longing to see the Saviour took him to the top of a Sycamore tree. When Jesus came to the place He looked up and saw him—not his face but his heart. “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” And Zacchaeus “received Him joyfully.” When others saw it they all grumbled, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.” But the sinner said, “Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.” Jesus knew that those were the words from a broken heart and so He replied, “Today salvation has come to this house!” The moral giants were murmuring outside but Zacchaeus, the saved, was rejoicing with his Redeemer inside.

(iii) The Criminal on the Cross (Lk 23:40-43)

He hung crucified on the cross. All that he could do was to turn his eyes towards Jesus and see the King of kings crowned with thorns. First, he accepted that such cruel death on the cross was a due reward of his own wicked deeds. He knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong but was most unjustly

punished. There sprang in his heart a living assertion that Jesus was the Son of God. Secondly, he prayed, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.” Christ replied at once, “Assuredly, I say to you, Today you will be with Me in Paradise.” A sinner a moment before is saved now!

(iv) The Ethiopian Official (Acts 8:35-38)

He had been to Jerusalem to worship and when he was returning he was lost in reading Isaiah the Prophet but he did not know whom it was all about. The Spirit of God directed Philip to this man and he preached Jesus to him. This man of great authority understood the limitless authority and the Lordship of Jesus. His confession of faith followed: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Then they came to a place where there was plenty of water and the new believer wanted to be baptized. Philip did not advise him to fast and pray for some days so that he could be made fit for baptism! But he said, “If you **believe** with all your heart, you may.” He at once took the man down into the water and baptized him. He believed with all his heart and he was saved instantly.

(v) Lydia (Acts 16:13-15)

A woman from the city of Thyatira. A seller of purple. A worshipper of God. She heard Paul and others preaching in the

riverside outside the city of Philippi. “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.” Her heart swelled with the joy of salvation. She and her household were baptized that day itself. Instant salvation!

(vi) The Jailor (Acts 16:31-33)

We know what happened when Paul and Silas praised God in the prison cell. The Philippian jailor found that Paul’s God was indeed a living one. He atonce wanted to be saved. Paul spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all those who were in the house. They all believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and he “rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” **“Immediately**, he and all his family were baptized.”

These instances of instant salvation are seen in the gospel of Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles. It is interesting that Luke recorded them, for he was a doctor, a practical man!

c) Removal of jewels

“Remove your jewels before baptism!” This is another adulterated gospel! The Bible teaches us, “Believe... and be baptized” and NOT “Remove...and be baptized!” Making such a condition for baptism is absolutely unscriptural. God has no patience with such preachers and this is why He baptizes many

with His Spirit even before the preacher agrees to baptize them in water! I am not speaking for or against removing jewels here. But I am against making it a pre-requisite for baptism and I oppose putting any such thing in the place of faith. “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14).

Part 1 Chapter 5

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

EXCEPT Christianity, every other religion offers a balance of works and reward. But Christianity is salvation by faith alone. Trusting in Christ's saving and keeping power, you cease from your own works and efforts.

But, a misunderstanding of all that has been written in the previous pages may tempt you to pull yourself back in your easy-chair and breathe an air of freedom from every responsibility. God forbid that I should suggest any such 'easy believism.' God's grace in our salvation does not exempt us from our responsibility towards God and man.

It is true that we are not saved **by** our good works (Eph 2:9), but it is equally true that we are saved **for** good works (Eph 2:10).

In writing so, have I left the position of grace and reverted to salvation by works? Certainly not. If an initial act of faith alone will do, what is our explanation for the following Scripture passage?

“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead...Do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Js 2:17,20,26.).

What does “works” here mean? Are these works the so-called good and religious deeds done with an intention to merit God's favour and with an expectation of reward from God? A thousand times, No! Works here mean the corresponding actions of obedience. Faith and obedience go hand in hand in the Scriptures.

Paul says it is faith that saves and not works. James argues that faith without works is dead (Eph 2:9; Js 2:17). Does it mean that there is contradiction in the Word of God? It is a seeming contradiction and not an actual one! Examples given by James himself in his Epistle make clear the implications of the word “works.”

a) Abraham

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? (Js 2:21).

Here, Abraham is said to have been justified by works! Let us examine the truth about this statement. Turning to Genesis 15:5,6 we read, "Then He brought Abraham outside and said, Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. And He said to him, So shall your descendants be. And Abraham believed in the Lord and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

Abraham was circumcised in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, Isaac was born in the twentyfirst chapter and he went to sacrifice his son in the twentysecond chapter. But he was counted as righteous even in the fifteenth chapter! That is, before he was circumcised. Why? Because he believed and "did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom 4:20). Before circumcision (without works) he was justified by faith. This is what Paul means by "works." But after being justified, Abraham's faith was revealed in the corresponding actions. When he took his son to mount Moriah to do as he was told, his faith was confirmed by his works. This is the "works" referred to by James.

b) Rahab

"Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the

messengers and sent them out another way?" (Js 2:25).

Let us turn back to the second chapter of the book of Joshua where we read about the two spies taking shelter in Rahab's house. She brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof (Josh 2:6). Did she believe in the Lord Jehovah only after meeting those messengers? Listen to what she says: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us... For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea...the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Josh 2:9,10,11). She had heard about the Lord Jehovah even before she met the spies and her words to them show how great her faith was in the Lord Jehovah. This faith she made manifest in her works when she accepted the men from the Lord's army and helped them to get out of their enemies' hands.

What the Apostle James actually means by "works" can be well understood by referring to the context (Js 2:13-17). He says that, if we see a brother or sister who is a destitute, naked and without food, and tell them to go in peace without giving them the things which are needed for the body, there is no sense in saying that we have faith in

God. One has to show his faith by his works (v18). Only by our lovingkindness, compassion and merciful acts we can show our faith in God to the people around us, to our friends and neighbours. Our deeds must confirm our faith. Our lifestyle must be worthy of being called the life of faith. This is the living faith that works, which will otherwise be a dead one. Good works cannot be a substitute for faith, but faith leads to good works. "Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works" (Tit 3:8).

Almost in all of Paul's epistles, faith in God and love towards man are presented side by side. See Gal 5:6; Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Tim 1:14; Phile 5.

By faith we are reconciled to God. By love we have to be reconciled with men. Our right fellowship with God through faith must invariably result in a right interpersonal relationship with men. Get right with God; Get right with man. This is true Christianity!

Faith goes with good conscience too:

1 Tim 1:19 : Faith and good conscience
1 Tim 3:9 : Faith and pure conscience

Good conscience is inevitable and one cannot maintain it if his or her personal relation-

ship with the others is defective. Many who rejected the good conscience have made a shipwreck of their lives! (1 Tim 1:19).

Finally, you may be a backslider. Come back in faith. Resume your position in the race of faith. Two of Jesus's disciples backslided. One was Judas who was holding an important office, usually given to people who are trustworthy, that of a treasurer. The other was the most prominent leader, Peter.

Judas did a shameful deed by betraying his Master to the Chief Priests, who, Judas knew, were plotting against His life. He sold his Saviour just for thirty pieces of silver. Later when he saw that Jesus had been condemned he was remorseful and confessed, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But, Alas! He confessed to the wrong person—the priest and the elders (Mt 27:3,4). So his sins remained unforgiven and led to his miserable death and eternal destruction. Had he gone to Jesus, He could have received His "friend" (Mt 26:50), and embraced him with pardoning love. But Judas did not have the faith to turn back to Christ.

Peter was the worst of the two. He denied Jesus thrice and cursed Him too (all in spite of previous warning)! But Jesus had prayed that "his faith should not fail" (Lk 22:31,32). The Father granted the Son's

prayer. When Peter's eyes met his Lord's eyes he became penitent and cried bitterly. Unlike Judas, Peter turned to Christ. He, then, became a great blessing to others!

Dear friend, do not suspend yourself in a state of self-condemnation. That was exactly what Judas did with himself. You may have gone to the deadline of backsliding. But Jesus keeps praying that your faith would not come to nought. God awaits your coming back. It is not too late yet. Get back to Christ. Make yourself available to God. You shall surely be made a blessing to others. Yes, that is what Christ did with Peter's life! (Lk 22:32).

The just shall live by faith!

Part 2

CONTINUATION OF FAITH LIFE

WE commenced our Christian life by faith and we continue it in faith. The Christian life is, from the beginning to end, by faith.

If we are to quote one example of faith from the Old Testament, it is Abraham. "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised" (Rom 4:11,12).

Abraham is said to be "the father of those who believe!" This is the greatest title of

honour that God can give to any man. The unique statement about Abraham's faith is: "*He believed God, it was accounted to him for righteousness.*" This statement occurs four times in the Bible and the convenient order is as follows.

a) Romans 4:3,10

"What does the Scripture say? *Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.* How was then it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised."

Before he was circumcised, he was justified by faith. This is comparable to our experience of **salvation**.

b) James 2:21-23

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, *Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.* And he was called the friend of God."

Abraham offered Isaac by faith. This signifies the path of **sanctification** by full surrender.

c) Galatians 3:6,8

"*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.* And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nation by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, In you all the nations shall be blessed."

"In you all the nations shall be blessed!" The Jehovah God gave His first **commission** of the gospel to Abraham. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations," was the commission given to us by Jesus Christ two thousand years ago. But many thousands of years earlier a commission same as this was given to Abraham. Abraham was the pioneer of God's missionary Plan!

d) Genesis 15:4,6

"And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir. *And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*"

Eliezer was born in Abraham's house. Abraham was childless. He thought that Eliezer of Damascus alone could be his heir. But God said, "The one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Though

his body was already dead, being hundred years old, he believed what God said. In believing God's words, he believed the impossible. He was fully convinced that what God promised He could perform. From a man, who was as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, innumerable as the sand of the seashore! God gave life to Abraham's body which was as good as dead. This signifies the power of God which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and which He will work in our bodies to raise us from the dead! Here, the statement about Abraham's faith is symbolical of **resurrection**.

Thus this particular statement denotes various steps of growth in the Christian life.

Romans : Salvation
James : Sanctification
Galatians : Commission
Genesis : Resurrection

We thus see faith covering and affecting all the areas of our Christian life, from Rebirth to Resurrection.

We are admonished, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col 2:6). How did you receive Christ? By faith. How are you to walk in Christ? By faith. Yes, the Christian life is "A to Z" of faith!

Part 2 Chapter 1

VICTORY OVER SIN

THE definition of sin is to be found in 1 John 2:16. "All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but of the world." These three are the root cause of all the sinful deeds in the world. Adam and Eve were tempted on these three points.

"The fruit was good for food"
—*the lust of the flesh*;
"The fruit was pleasant to the eyes"
—*the lust of the eyes*;
"You will be like God"
—*the pride of life*.

The first man yielded to be deceived and failed miserably. The Second Man was also tempted in the same way but He overcame.

"Command this stone to become bread"—
the lust of the flesh.

“Taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world”—*the lust of the eyes*.

“Then he set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, Throw yourself down from here. He shall give His angels charge over You”—*the pride of life*.

It should bring us strong consolation to know that the Lord Jesus was Himself tempted with every single temptation that comes to us. “He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). We were defeated in Adam, but we triumph in Christ. Victorious life is not an experience that we seek to attain. Christ is our victory. There is no experience apart from Christ. Christ is the Captain of our Salvation. Is it possible that the Captain has triumphed and his soldiers be defeated? The Captain’s victory is the soldiers’ victory!

What should we do to be victorious like Christ? The answer is this: “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our **faith**” (1 Jn 5:4). What is this faith? It is believing “that Jesus is the Son of God” (v5). To win over the sins of the world, first we are to be believers of the Son of God. We, who are in Christ, are the sons and daughters of God. Jesus Christ, who was the only begotten

Son of God, has now become the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Rom 8:29). If Jesus, our elder Brother, has overcome, we too can overcome like Him. We, who are born of water and of the Spirit into God’s family, are sure to win!

The apostle Paul states the same truth in different words: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). “the life...in the flesh...by faith.” When we were reborn, our flesh did not cease to be. It will be transformed into a spiritual body only when Jesus appears again. Now we live in the flesh and blood but we live triumphantly “by faith in the Son of God.” Adhering to a set of do’s and don’ts is not living the victorious Christian life—it is the way of the religions of the world! Judging themselves by such standards, many think they are perfect. These are “filthy rags” before God (Isa 64:6).

Our Father in Heaven calls us to be perfect even as He Himself is. He has provided this perfection in His Son. Jesus died on the cross not only to atone for our sins. He died that we might die on the cross with Him. He died as our Substitute. He also died as our Representative. It is made clear

in Romans 6:1-11 that the death of Jesus is representative and inclusive. We have to identify ourselves in His death. Anyone who longs to walk as his Saviour walked on this earth must learn this truth of Identification with Christ.

When Christ was crucified two thousand years ago, we were also crucified with Him. This is the first step of identifying with Christ. We died with Him. "Do you not know that as many of us, as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His **death**?" (Rom 6:3). We were also buried with Him. "We were **buried** with Him through baptism into death" (Rom 6:4). Thus the death of the Lord Jesus is inclusive. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is alike inclusive. "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His **resurrection**" (Rom 6:5). Jesus died for our forgiveness. He resurrected for our victory. Christ's life has been implanted in us so we can live a new life (v 4). Christian life is Christ living in and through us. In Paul's words, "No longer I, but Christ" (Gal 2:20). We died and resurrected with Christ. What next? "God made us alive together with Christ and raised us up together, and made us **sit** together in the **heavenly places** in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:5,6). We were raised up with Him and our life is hidden with Christ who is sitting at the right

hand of God (Col 3:3). What did Jesus do after resurrection? He presented His torn, stricken and smitten body as an eternal sacrifice to His Father. Likewise we have to present the members of our body to God. "**Present** yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom 6:13).

Real triumphant Christian life begins here. Without any reservation and without controversy, we must give ourselves to Him to do anything and everything that pleases Him. This transfer of ownership gives us the true sense of belonging to Another.

Not only this, you have to believe that you are made perfect in Christ. The Word of God says, "In Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and you are **complete** in Him" (Col 2:9,10).

The secret of victory is thus to be found in the two key words "*In Christ.*" Died together with Christ, buried together with Christ, raised up together with Christ, seated together with Christ and made perfect in Christ. This is Full Gospel!

These are accomplished facts. Now, remember, one of Devil's main objectives is always to make us doubt these facts. His attack is always on our assurance. If he can get us to doubt God's Word, he can easily

overthrow our faith life. Are we to believe Satan's lie or God's truth? We must believe God at His Word, no matter how convincing Satan's arguments appear. In Ephesians 6:13-17 we study about the whole armour of God that we must have, to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. We are admonished to take the shield of faith "above all!" Faith is also the breastplate: "Putting on the breastplate of faith and love" (1 Thess 5:8).

Satan has successfully deceived many either by keeping them blind and ignorant of this truth about victorious life or by constantly breathing into their ears that victory over sin is just impossible. Stand on the ground of faith and proclaim your victory over every sin! There is a novel teaching that you must confess "all" your sins to certain ministers called "apostles," and only then you can be victorious. Their argument is that we sin again and again because no one knows about it! This doctrine is totally unscriptural and this is one of the attempts of the evil one to distract Christians from the simple teaching of the New Testament Epistles. Beware!

The just shall live by faith!

Part 2 Chapter 2

COMMUNION WITH GOD

COMMUNION with God is man's greatest privilege and God's greatest pleasure. To have personal communion with God, it is therefore absolutely necessary that we make use of every means of grace. God has made sufficient provision to build up fellowship with man. The two basic means He has granted us to commune with Him are the 'Word' and 'Prayer.' These are like the two rails or the two wings of a bird. Faith is interwoven into both.

a) The Word of God

The greatest faith is faith in God's Word. The list of the patriarchs of faith (Hebrews 11) begins with neither Abel, nor Enoch, nor Abraham. "We" come first in the list! "By faith WE understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things

which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (v3). Yes! Our faith in the Word of God is the greatest of all faith. In the first page of the Holy Bible the words "God **said**" are seen recorded several times (Gen 1:3, 6,9,11,14,20,24,26,28,29).

The very purpose of the Bible is to give us faith for eternal life. "These are **written** that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn 20:31). When we hear the Word of God faith is generated in our hearts. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). God is the Author of our faith. But this initial faith communicated by the Word must be exercised while reading the Word further. Only thus faith can grow and it cannot be otherwise. Some carry on with this initial faith happily for a while until unfortunately they meet a modernist preacher who by his so-called higher criticism get them to doubt the divine authority of the written Word. Giving rein to the critical faculties, their faith begins to crumble and they begin to stumble.

Faith in the Word of God is basic to spiritual growth. It is by the Word of God that our faith is fed and strengthened. "The word of God effectively works in you who **believe**" (1 Thess 2:13). Only when we believe

the Word, it works in us. "Teach me good judgment and knowledge. For I **believe** Your commandments" (Psa 119:66). David wanted God to teach him His Word. But first he had a heart to believe the Word. Herein lies a great practical truth: Trust in the Word to be taught of the Word. The Israelites failed at this point of mixing faith with God's Word: "Indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the Word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with **faith** in those who heard it. For we who have **believed** do enter that rest as He has said: So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest, although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb 4:2,3). The "rest" here is the blissfulness and tranquility that we experience because of the blessed faith that we have in the finished work of redemption on the Cross. Only when we hear the Word of God with faith we can possess the spiritual blessing the Word carries with it.

What is our responsibility while reading the Word? Let us consider the Parable of the Sower as recorded in Mark 4. The seed that fell by the wayside was devoured by the birds of the air. Our Christian lives are fruitless because we fail to remember and meditate on the Word constantly. As soon as we get the Word we forget it! Bible reading should not become a matter of daily routine. We

should meditate on God's Word until through it we receive His message for us. The negligence and ignorance of the Scriptures make many an easy prey for the devil's deceptions. Some seeds fell on stony ground "where it did not have much earth." This indicates temporary faith which can endure only for a time. Lack of brokenness and patience is the cause. We can no more do without His Word than our physical bodies can do without food. If God is to rectify our deficiency with His sufficiency, He can do so only through His Word, and for that He needs our cooperation of faith.

b) Prayer

Prayer is the breath of the soul. In the Christian life there can be no substitute for prayer as there is no substitute for oxygen for our earthly existence. To pray is to draw near to God. The very access to God is by faith. The following Scripture makes it evident: "Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have **boldness** and access with confidence through **faith** in Him" (Eph 3:12). "Having **boldness** to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full **assurance of faith**" (Heb 10:19-22).

Both these texts talk about "boldness" which our faith gives us. We are to approach God in full assurance of faith. The moment we get on our knees to pray or gather in Christ's Name, we are in God's presence. God has promised us in unfailing words: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). To doubt God's presence is to doubt God's integrity. When we gather in Christ's Name we need not be inviting Him. He says He is *already* there! We only have to acknowledge His Presence. Just think of trying to push yourself into a room which you are in! Do not try hard to pray Him down to earth. Praise Him in faith for He is present! Do not look for any feeling. Feelings vary according to the state of mind and have not much to do with God's presence. Whether or not we experience an exhilaration emotionally, it is hundred percent true that God is amidst us in prayer. The knowledge of this truth will save us from some deceitful doctrines present today.

Next, believe with all your heart that God does hear what you say. Here are some important Bible texts concerning faith and prayer. Jesus said, "Have faith in God... I say unto you, whatever things you ask when you pray, *believe* that you receive them, and you will have them" (Mk 11:22,24). Apostle John wrote, "This is the confidence that we have

in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 Jn 5:14,15). God can-not but respond to a prayer of faith. But doubt and unbelief lock the gates of Heaven lest our prayer should enter there. Apostle James admonishes, “Let him ask in *faith*, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (Js 1:6,7). Prayer without faith is merely waste of time!

We earlier saw we must read God’s Word by faith, and as we read more and more, faith will grow. Similarly we must pray with faith, and as we pray more and more, faith will grow. So also praise increases our faith. “You, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy **faith, praying** in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20). “Rooted and built up in Him and established in the **faith**, as you have been taught, abounding in it with **thanksgiving**” (Col 2:7).

A word of warning! In our desire to emphasise the necessity of prayer we should not disparage the importance of the Word of God. More of prayer and less of Bible meditation will leave you unwise. Prayer makes you pious. Bible makes you wise.

Devotion and discretion should be in perfect balance. Devotion without discretion and discretion without devotion worths nothing. We are to be guileless like doves but wise like serpents! (Mt 10:16).

Paul appreciated young Timothy, “From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you **wise** for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Yes, wisdom can be obtained only from the Holy Scriptures. Faith and wisdom go together and are not contradictory as many of us suppose. Several false doctrines have their birth after someone’s forty days of fasting and prayer! What could be the reason? Prayer without sufficient intake of the Word causes such troubles. Look at what Jesus said at the close of His fasting: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word of God” (Lk 4:4). During those forty days He lived on the Word from God’s mouth. That was how He could defeat Satan. Satan’s most subtle traps are set for us even when we are in prayer. The knowledge of the Word of God alone can save us from going astray. When we pray we talk to God. When we meditate on His Word He speaks to us. We human beings are capable of talking lot of insensible things within a short time. But if God is to go on speaking even a whole day, He speaks only wisdom. So we read in Eccl 5:2, “Do not be rash with

your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let **your** words be few.” Let us speak but few words and let God speak more! If you pray for one hour, study the Word for atleast one hour and fifteen minutes! This is safe.

Part 2 Chapter 3

THE FELLOWSHIP OF SAINTS

WHEN we are born again, we are born into a spiritual family: the household of faith. Next to God Himself we need each other most. As long as we stay on this earth we will never outgrow this need of the fellowship of saints.

When the Church was born over two thousand years ago, “All who believed were together” (Acts 2:44). As the true and legitimate offsprings of the early Church, the twentieth century believers must practise and maintain the same kind of fellowship. “With one accord!” (Acts 2:1). This was the secret of the faith of the early saints of God. If this can become true of all the believers of all the Churches today, we can turn the unbelieving world upside down. The Apostles did it! (Acts 17:6). Let’s do it again!!

The Bible exhorts us not to forsake assembling for it helps faith, love and good works. "Let us draw near with a true heart in full **assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the **confession of our hope** without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the **assembling of ourselves together**, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:22-25).

Individual faith builds up corporate faith. In like manner, corporate faith strengthens individual faith. When we assemble as a family of faith, every believer's faith is made strong. We go to the Church with a faith so feeble but after worshipping the Lord together we return with a heart full of faith, and praises cannot but often escape our lips on our way back home. Getting together helps! When a Church grows in faith it grows in size too! "So the Churches were strengthened in the faith, *and* increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5). What a wonderful text is this! Strengthened in faith and increased in number! A qualitative as well as quantitative growth! In the Western as well as in the Eastern countries "Church Growth" is currently a popular subject. Many are the

ministries dedicated to this mission of Church Growth. But the increase in number alone is not Church Growth. If a Church grows in faith, invariably it grows in size too! The converse may not be true!

The fellowship of saints is important for another reason, that is, it helps especially those who are weak in faith. Listen to Paul's exhortation: "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Rom 14:1-4). The weak in faith is to be received kindly and supported. God gives no man the right to expose and exploit others' weaknesses. When God receives a man it is none of our business to despise him or to judge him. Some denominations impose various conditions on the new converts to be admitted in. God accepts every repentant sinner who comes to Him through His Son. No one has any right to enjoin any manmade requirements. It is grievous that leaders as well as members of various Churches refuse to pray together and to work together. These barriers

break down the fellowship of saints and breed enmity and hatred among the children of God. A fellowship of love can be wrought by the work of the Cross alone.

Unity does not mean that all have to be alike. Unity is not uniformity. God does not expect uniformity among His people. That is rather improbable. Take a look around the world and see God's creation. No two things are alike! Our God is a God of diversity! Uniformity is man's way. Unity in diversity is God's way. When a man organises a Church he seeks to make all the members of that Church act alike. He exerts a subconscious pressure of unspoken measure on each of the members, to conform to the accepted norm in external matters. People too have a tendency to join together with others who are exactly like them. They are inclined to walk in agreement with the general pattern of the assembly they belong to. But the truth remains that God magnifies Himself in the Church only through a glorious diversity.

Hear what Paul has to say: "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does

not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:5-8).

In the Church people are different from us in many ways. We do not have to work on them in order to change them and make them mere conformists. It is necessary that we learn to accept them as they are. Here is a challenge for each one of us: "Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves" (Rom 14:22). You may have a "superior" kind of faith, but you are told to keep it with you. Do not be noisy about your faith, but help the weak. Do not advertise your faith and cause the weak to stumble. "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification" (Rom 15:1,2).

In the Church God has placed dissimilar people together so there can be a corporate expression of the glory of Christ that would be impossible through any single individual all by himself. There should be perfect coordination in the Body of Christ. In the final day, Jesus is going to present to the

Father not a large number of saved souls, but ONE BODY. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore but rather pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another.

Mutual faith imparts gifts: To the believers in Rome, Paul wrote, “In my prayer making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the **mutual faith** both of you and me” (Rom 1:10-12). Imparting of gifts means the sharing of mutual faith. Spiritual gifts are bestowed by God for the enrichment of our faith and not for anyone’s enjoyment. They are tools to work with and not toys to play with, nor trophies to show off. Gifts should be used for the glorification of God and for the edification of the Church.

Assembling helps the operation of gifts in a proper way. There is an important lesson regarding the operation of gifts. **Understand your limits!** God has given each one a different measure of faith. Paul admonished, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt

to each one a **measure of faith**” (Rom 12:3). This is one of the rarely preached truths. One should not think of himself more highly than he ought to think. Some pastors encourage the people to prophesy(!) anything and everything that passes through their minds. “If you speak by faith, it will come to pass”—they say!! When it does not come to pass people are perplexed. Again how many times have we seen healing evangelists calling lame men on to the dais and then sending them back unhealed, that too before the eyes of idolators! Peter and John healed a lame man who was sitting at the gate of the temple (Acts 3:1-8). It led to the glorification of God’s wonderful Name. God’s healing power has not run short. Multitudes of people are being miraculously healed by God’s touch even today. But what about calling the blind and the crippled to the dais, creating scenes with shouts of praises and clickings of cameras, but sending them back as bad as they came? Should all these things be done in the name of the Lord? Such things become a mockery rather than a glory to the Lord of hosts. All because the people of God fail to understand the “measure” of faith allotted to them and work within those limits.

Dear friend, know your measure of faith. Work within your limits. Give no room for presumption.

A particular minister, well-known as a great man of God, died a natural death some years ago. He had been exalted to such great heights that people expected him to be resurrected on the third day! His followers prayed fervently and awaited a miracle. They did not bury him. Should I tell you what happened? On the third day, the dead body did not rise again but it did naturally began to stink! That was nothing but ridiculing the Lord of lords. It brought not glory but only reproach to His Holy Name. Beware of such things. It will scratch your backs! It will make you fall headlong!

If you are given the gift of prophecy, use it in proportion to your faith. Do not attempt to act like Elijah calling down fire! “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them; if prophecy, let us prophecy **in proportion to our faith**” (Rom 12:6). Also, when one prophesies, others should examine closely the things said. God will never say through His prophets anything that is contrary to His written Word. Gordon Lindsay (1906-1973), a respected Charismatic leader, warns that it is not good to begin with “Thus saith the Lord.” It is rather dangerous. When you feel a burden in your heart to say something, it is always safe to share it with the elders and they should see if it is in accordance with the Word of God. Above all,

the One Spirit, who is in all of us, must confirm it. This is the true test of a genuine prophecy.

Finally, while considering the importance of the fellowship of saints in the life of faith, it is inevitable to refer to the faith of the leaders. “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the Word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb 13:7). The word “outcome” here means the fruit of their lives. We have to learn and follow the faith of those leaders who, like the fruit-giving-trees, bear much fruit for the Lord and thereby glorify Him in their lives. “By their fruits you will know them” (Mt 7:20). But it is most injurious to one’s spiritual life to keep any one particular leader as a model for everything. It will lead to heroworship and I am not suggesting that. By no means! Hebrews 13:7 talks about “leaders” and not one particular leader. The single pastor system is an Old Testament concept and is never found anywhere in the New Testament. In the New Testament, leadership is always plural, at least two.

Each leader has a great responsibility to set himself as an example to the people. As a leader Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy in the first Epistle to “fight a good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12). In the second Epistle he

testifies, “I have fought the good fight...I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7). Oh, great is the need for such leaders! Leaders must learn to be examples to the believers in faith (1 Tim 4:12). When leaders walk an exemplary life, young believers will not be “carried about with various and strange doctrines” (Heb 13:7-9).

Part 2 Chapter 4

BODILY NEEDS

JESUS rebuked His disciples for their “little faith” four times in Matthew’s Gospel, and all the four instances refer to the needs of the body.

“If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of **little faith?**” (Mt 6:30). Here Jesus rebuked their *worry*.

“He said to them, Why are you **fearful**, O you of **little faith**. Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. And there was a great calm” (Mt 8:26). Here He rebuked their *fear*.

“And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, O you of **little faith**, why did you doubt?” (Mt 14:31). Here Jesus rebuked Peter’s *doubt*.

“But Jesus perceived it, He said to them, O you of **little faith**, why do you reason among yourselves?” (Mt 16:8). Here the rebuke was for the *human reasoning* of the disciples.

Thus, unbelief causes worry, fear, doubt and questioning in us. Faith dispels them. We can study what our attitude towards the bodily needs should be, under two headings.

a) **Health**

What should you do when you become sick? When you get sick, resort to prayer at once. “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (Js 5:14,15). Elders means shepherds or pastors. We should not ignore any of them saying they are not “gifted.” God can use anyone whom He has anointed for His service. When we invite them to minister to the sick, their own faith also will increase. Some believe only olive oil should be used and there is a big business! Somewhere in Africa, they even used kerosine oil! Oil is only symbolic of God’s healing power, and so it is not scriptural

to bless the oil and sell it. We must pray over the sick person and not the oil.

As you pray, believe in the power of God’s Word. “He sent His word and healed them” (Psa 107:20). God’s word breaks the sting of disease and sickness. Jesus marvelled at the centurian’s great faith on His Word. Look at the Biblical narrative: “The centurion answered and said, Lord, only speak a *word*, and my servant will be healed. When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to those who followed, Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (Mt 8:8,10).

Perhaps your faith is feeble. Be frank with God about your weak faith. Do not use a language of faith which is not real and try to flatter Him. God does not need your encouragement! Confess your ‘little faith’ to God. The father of the sick boy who did so was not rebuked but was blessed with the blessing he sought for. He prayed, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” (Mk 9:24). And Jesus did deliver his son from an unclean spirit that had possessed him. It is here I am not able to agree with certain faith preachers who advise people to make a “positive” confession in order to get healed. But the Bible says, “Let your Yes be Yes and your No be No. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Mt 5:37).

If you have pain you tell God you have pain. When you still have high temperature you say that you do have it. But if you say that you are alright, you are lying. To tell the truth is “true” confession, and to hide the truth is “false” confession. Don’t live with a delusion. Confess your true state to God and request His help. He perfectly understands us. He will heal you for His own Name’s sake!

Read through the passages in the Bible where the sick and diseased were healed miraculously. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Remind yourself of God’s promises of healing and put your trust in them. God will honour His Word. Abraham and Sarah did not waver at the promise of God, but were strong in faith and so received strength in their bodies which were, the Bible describes, “as good as dead bodies” (Rom 4:19-21). Such miracles recorded in the Bible renew and vitalise our faith when we read them one by one.

Divine healing is scriptural. But that does not mean taking medicine is unscriptural. Jesus never once condemned medicine. Certain denominations consider medical treatment as terrible trespassing. There was a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years. She spent all she had, all her livelihood, on medicines. She tried many

physicians but she could not be cured by any. When she touched in faith the garment of the Son of God she was instantly healed. Did Jesus rebuke her for consulting the physicians? Did He warn her against taking medicine thereafter? Never. He spoke to her in kindness: “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace” (Lk 8:48). What is medicine after all? “God said, See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth” (Gen 1:29). Several medicines are from the extracts of herbs. Medicine does not contradict faith. Oral Roberts, who has been mightily used by God in miraculous healing ministry, has set up a magnificent hospital in Tulsa (USA) with the name, City of Faith! They give medical care with prayer. The Christian mission hospitals throughout the world have been doing the same for centuries!

Do I mean that medicine is a must? No. The One who promised “I am the Lord who heals you” (Ex 15:26) is able to heal you without medicine. If you have faith to be healed without medicine, good. But, let not those who take medicine be condemned by you. Neither Jesus nor the Apostles preached against medicine. God is not going to condemn any believing saint simply because he takes medicine. You need not make a decision that you will never take medicine

in your life. Jesus never once exhorted people to make such a decision. You cannot quote one such example from the Bible. Many who have taken such decisions have condemned themselves at a future date when due to some reason they had to resort to medical aid. Even when you take medicine it is God who heals you. "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Mt 8:17).

Our mortal bodies are corruptible. We eagerly await the redemption of our body (Rom 8:23). When the last trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised and this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality. That will be our final victory over diseases and all kinds of physical deformities. Till that day dawns, may God bless every healing ministry and all the medical efforts taken to relieve men and women of their sicknesses and suffering. Pain and agony is everywhere in the world. But in the world to come there will be no disease, no sorrow, no pain, no crying. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death" (Rev 21:4).

b) Wealth

Normally we can expect God to meet our basic daily needs. Jesus challenged, "If God

so clothes the grass of the field,...will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?... Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:30,33). He has taught us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt 6:11). David witnessed, "There is no want to those who fear him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing" (Psa 34:9,10).

But sometimes God puts us in trying situations. He allows hunger and poverty and humbles us. In 1 Corinthians 4:11 we read about the experience of God's servants. "Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless." About the Macedonian Christians we read, "In a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality" (2 Cor 8:2). No doubt, they were saints. They were well-spoken of by other men. Does not this show that even faithful followers of Christ Jesus may have to live in great trial of affliction and deep poverty at times? Paul wrote, "Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you... For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanks-

givings to God" (2 Cor 9:1,12). What does this mean? Saints of God *can be* in material inadequacy. They may undergo hard times of deficiency. It is no evidence of their low faith. Paul describes his frequent journeys in the following words: "In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor 11:27). This victorious soldier of Christ was in "hunger and thirst" and in "cold and nakedness." So, do not think it strange concerning the lack and want among the true men of God.

In the recent years, India has imported from the West the "Prosperity Doctrine." According to this philosophy of prosperity, believers should have no suffering, no sorrows, no worries of any kind and no loss of anything! Christianity is that which pours out fortune on them from her horn of plenty and all believers must be spiritually prepared to take them by faith! Well, Christians have heard about the Cross and that was the one on which Jesus was nailed two thousand years ago. But now it has nothing to do with their lives. The "life of faith" costs them nothing. They love the Lord as much as some young people fawn on their rich old grandfather in order to get a share from his prosperity. They know nothing of Paul's Christianity which costed him everything, nor about the

patriarchs of faith (Hebrews 11) who counted this world as rubbish and trash. Many accept Christ Jesus for what they can get out of Him. But the Bible speaks of true saints who always walked in the path of complete surrender and ready sacrifice.

"By faith, Abel offered"

"By faith, Abraham went out"

"By faith, Abraham offered up Isaac"

"They confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"

"By faith, Moses forsook Egypt"

"Thro' faith ... they wandered about..."

being destitute, afflicted, tormented..."

These great men of faith readily parted with what they possessed at the dictation of God and were strangers and destitutes in this world and walked on this earth as if they had already gone to Heaven!

Believe not the prosperity message which is full of rosy promises. Most of the prosperity preachers, whether they preach or pray, will finally come to a financial appeal. Their schemes will be similar to the method adopted centuries ago by the Pope to raise money to build a Cathedral. The Pope sold "forgiveness," and these preachers sell their "prayers." They promise "special" prayers for "special" offering! Who is there then

to pray for the poor widows who offer just two mites? Jesus applauded the poor lady's offering. Nearly 40% of Indians do not have a square meal a day. Let's pour our lives for them and identify with them. Let's stop the Cross-less doctrines at any cost.

The early Church faced a similar problem. Men who came to the assembly with gold rings and in costly dress were paid much attention and were made to sit in prominent seats. But poor people in filthy clothes came and went unnoticed. They should stand aside or be seated on the floor near the footstool. James challenged the believers thus: "Listen, my beloved brothers: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (Js 2:5). Poor in wealth, but rich in faith! Hallelujah! If we show partiality we commit sin. "Do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality" (Js 2:1). Jesus was not going around with the rich. During His life He was with the poor; but at His death with the rich! The material simplicity of the lives of Jesus and His apostles prove the fallacy of this prosperity message which is spreading like cancer among God's people.

Covetousness is the enemy of faith. Let not covetousness corrupt your heart and rob you of your faith. The godly man is a

perfectly content man, whether his possessions be much or little, because he lives by faith. Paul warns us not to have our hope set on the riches nor be desirous of becoming richer, for to do so will only pierce us with many sorrows. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness (and) fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:10,11,12).

(The Author's 20 hours of solid teaching given in the Sound Doctrine Seminar of 1997, English to Tamil, is available from the Publisher as a pack of 10 DVDs or 3 MP3 CDs. It will teach you how to interpret the Bible and escape floods of false doctrine.)

Part 2 Chapter 5

SHARING OF FAITH

JESUS stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who **believes** in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:37,38).

Jesus is the source of living water and we are the channels to the thirsty souls. God wants every believer to be a communicator of faith. A believer who shares his faith with others does it to his own spiritual welfare and growth also, for it is said, “He who waters will also be watered himself” (Prov 11:25).

Let us consider a few examples to see what tremendous results the sharing of faith could bring in our life and ministry.

1. Barnabas

Barnabas, “the man full of faith,” knew what it meant to be a communicator of faith

to others and eventually he could beget many children of faith into God’s household (Acts 11:24). Do you know the real reason for spiritual barrenness? Without this sharing of faith any believer will stand like a fruitless tree, though planted in God’s garden. “The Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Have you ever wondered why this is not so with your (local) Church? Your failure to be a constant communicator of faith accounts for it.

2. Paul

No doubt Paul had been a brilliant student. But he never trusted in his literacy and excellency of speech. He trusted in the power of the Word of God. This was the truth behind his successful ministry (1 Cor 2:1-5). Smartness and eloquence can help you to become a first class salesman but not necessarily a man of God! A flow of words from the pulpit is no proof of divine wisdom. Persuasive words of worldly wisdom is of no avail. It’s enough if you communicate your faith in simple words. Paul and Barnabas were found sharing their faith in the streets and in the marketplaces, and only thus they could win the Gentiles for Christ. “They (Paul & Barnabas) reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27).

3. The Four Friends

“They brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you. And he arose and departed to his house” (Mt 9:2,7). The four men who carried the paralytic shared their faith with him. They demonstrated it in action. Jesus saw “their” faith. He healed the paralytic and honoured their faith.

4. Lois and Eunice

“When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Tim 1:5). This contains a word of encouragement for ladies! Women think that they have no great part in the great work of building God’s Kingdom. Many of them give the excuse that they cannot go out and preach as men do. Their eyes are blind to the fantastic possibilities right in their own homes! Timothy’s mother Eunice was quite different. She imparted her sincere faith to her son and enabled him to breathe the pure air of faith in a world of unbelief. The above verse talks about Timothy’s grandmother and mother and not about his grandfather and father! It makes explicit the importance of women’s role in imparting faith to their children.

We read about the “upright and perfect” man called Job in complete fortytwo chapters. But his wife’s name has been carefully avoided! “Remember Lot’s wife,” tells our Bible. But her name is not given. There is no wonder that Timothy’s mother “Eunice” and his grandmother “Lois” were found worth mentioning. God is honoured when faith is imparted and in turn God honours the imparter.

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith!” (Rom 1:17).

Part 3

CONSUMMATION OF FAITH LIFE

Yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by **faith**; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him” (Heb 10:37,38).

The greatest incentive to our faith is the Second Coming of Christ. That will be a day of felicitation for the faithful saints. We began our study of the Faith Life with Habakkuk 2:4. The previous verse reads like this: “Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” The author of Hebrews says “He who is coming will come and will not tarry” (Heb 10:37). The prophecy in Habakkuk and the expectation in Hebrews have a beautiful coincidence in their implication of the Return of our Lord. We all long to hear that “Well Done!” from our Master. It is well said

by the wise man, “The end of a thing is better than its beginning” (Eccl 7:8). Yes, the end or the con-summation of our faith life is of greater importance than the beginning of it.

The purpose of the long list of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 is given in 12:1. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” In a race there are participants as well as spectators. We are the participants today. “The cloud of witnesses”—they are the spectators of our performance. They have finished their course successfully and are anxiously looking at us. The faith race can be compared to a relay race. When one person finishes his run he hands over the baton to the one who is to run next. All the fore-runners of faith have done their part superbly well and have trusted us with the finishing part! Shall we make it? The Church of Christ is living the last days of its history on earth. Oh that we realise our great responsibility!

The participant is trained intensively in the three phases of the race called: the start, the run and the finish. After the start there should be a steady increase in the speed. Towards the end it will be really tough, for

he has to do his best to win the race. Effortless breathing now becomes a hard toil. But the thought of turning back is out of his mind. He fixes his gaze on the finishing line, and when he feels exhausted every thought about the glorious reward gives him extra energy to accelerate. The phase of the finish is really challenging to athletes.

The consummation of the life of faith is no less difficult. We require the spiritual stamina to become triumphant winners of the faith race. As we mount higher up in the Christian life we encounter greater and greater difficulties on the way. Sufferings, doubts and darkness, persecutions and oppositions become part of our everyday life. In the following pages we shall learn how to handle them and be a victor.

Part 3 Chapter 1

SUFFERINGS

SUFFERING is seldom presented to the believers as a fact of Christian life and so when it does come and knock at their doors they are taken by surprise and they stumble over to their own undoing. Admittedly there is a great deal of suffering among God's children. In the hour of soul's deepest anguish even the strongest faith has wavered at times. Elijah sank down on the desert sand and asked that he might die!

Sufferings: Part of Christian life

“Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you!” (1 Pet 4:12). Is not our Saviour's following statement clear enough? “In the world you **will** have tribulation” (Jn 16:33). Paul puts it this way: “We **must** through many

tribulations enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Tribulations are but the pathway to our Heavenly Abode. Peter writes: “...Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the **faith**, knowing that the same **sufferings** are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Pet 5:7-9).

That suffering is the experience of every true Christian in the world must bring us spiritual encouragement and help us stand fast in faith. The Cross led Christ to glory and it is so with those who seek to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. There is no such thing as a saint without scars.

Physical Afflictions

Jesus took on Himself our infirmities and bore our pains on the Cross. But it does not mean a complete eradication of physical affliction from a believer's life altogether. I can quote from the Bible and from the lives of some great saints as well to prove that even the loftiest saint is no exception from physical pains. True, some are miraculously restored from sickness. Many, however, are not. Some suffer even unto death. Amy Carmichael (1861-1951), that saintly woman,

spent years in sick bed. Passing through the valley of the shadow of death, she could compose songs and messages which today bring great consolation to suffering saints all over the world. The heroes of faith received God's sufficient grace amidst severe afflictions and glorified Him bringing honour to his Holy Name! Even today many are the children of God who pray for the removal of the thorn from their bodies, once, twice, and thrice; but are quietened by the reply: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). This does not mean we must welcome sickness. No! When we fall sick we must pray and get others to pray for us. Normally we can expect to be healed. But the fact remains, due to reasons unknown, God does not always perform miracles.

What gave Paul the strength to overcome his physical affliction? He knew that “if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith and not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6-8). Oh the Blessed Hope that our body will one day perish, along with it the afflictions and

pains, and that we will be given a glorified body! Let not your temporary physical tortures deprive you of your spiritual joy.

Suffering Wrongfully

Adversity is not always a sign of Divine anger. Such religious notions will only add to your mental distress. Sometimes doing the right brings you into unforeseen difficulty. You may have sown the seeds of love and good but will reap nothing but disappointment, hatred and suffering. Who does not know what it is to be misunderstood, misinter-preted, accused falsely and punished wrongfully! David, the man after God's own heart, had such similar experiences: "All who hate me whisper together against me; against me they devise my hurt. Even my own familiar friend whom I trusted, ...has lifted up his heel against me" (Psa 41:7,9). We trust in people who pretend to be faithful but when we are made to see their true identities we moan just as David did.

Do not become vengeful when you suffer wrongfully. Are we not called to unjust suffering? (1 Pet 2:19). We can endure physical tortures but cannot bear the shame when our reputation is damaged. Let's remember we are the followers of the One who suffered wrongfully in the hands of sinners. We make mistakes in trying to clear

and vindicate ourselves. Defend not your cause but let it go. Why can't we trust God with our reputation and let Him take care of it if we can trust Him with our eternal life? Of course, we can afford to stop defending and keep quiet, till the last Day, when the brick and the beam will take their turn to speak for us; when God will bring out our righteousness as the light and our judgment as the noonday; and when death and resurrection will prove to the whole world who is who. "When you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called" (1 Pet 2:20).

Trust not in man!

The Bible warns us against trusting in any person other than God. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (Psa 118:8). Because, "every man is a liar" (Rom 3:4). May be your latest experience is to learn what it means to be betrayed by false friends. Turn to the Man of Sorrows for comfort. It was His own experience too!

You cannot trust even in the members of your own family. Not that all are traitors. But human love has its own limits. The husbands know they have to fight their own battles, single and alone, where their wives' assistance will be of no avail. The wives will

tell you stories how they have to work out the answers for some of their great problems, all by themselves. Whether husband or wife, each to the other is only next to God. "Do not trust in a friend, do not put your confidence in a companion; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom. For the son dishonours father, daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me" (Mic 7:5-7).

Men fail us. Even the best proves to be false. At the turn of events they change their colours and their promises fade away. Turn from the failure and forgetfulness of man to the constancy and faithfulness of God. He says, "You will not be forgotten by Me" (Isa 44:21).

Trust not in yourself!

"Friends are unreliable. Men are liars. My family cannot be trusted. Am I to stand on my own legs, then?"

No, dear friend. Trust not in yourself. It is no less than total foolishness to trust in one's own self. Here I tell you the secret of God: He will take from your heart anything you love most; He will have everything you

trust in be removed from you; and finally He brings you to the point where He purges you of your self-trust too. Lend your ears to Apostle Paul's account of his experience: "Our trouble which came to us in Asia; that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that **we should not trust in ourselves but in God** who raises the dead" (2 Cor 1:8,9).

Believe not in your facilities. Disappointment is sure to sweep your face if you put your confidence in your strength and talents, in your possessions and positions. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God... For I will not trust in my bow nor shall my sword save me. But You have saved us from our enemies" (Psa 20:7; 44:7). David, the great King, trusted neither in his strength nor in the strength of his army but in His Lord. God alone is trustworthy for "He abides faithful always" (2 Tim 2:13).

Trust in God!

We are too busy at times to listen to God that He is forced to send us some difficulties in order to get our attention to Him. It is well worth to undergo some bitter experiences, to learn the new spiritual lesson

that He does not want us to be ignorant of. If God has singled you out to be a special object of His grace you may expect Him to honour you with stricter discipline and greater suffering than many are called upon to endure. Peter, whom God allowed to be “sifted as wheat” by Satan, explains it thus: “You are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:5-7).

Faith needs to be tried by fiery trials. A faith that is not tested cannot be trusted. We pass through flooded rivers and burning furnaces. Neither the waters overflow us nor are we scorched by the fire, for the God of circumstances is in control (Isa 43:2). Though for a moment we are forsaken, with great mercies He gathers us to His bosom (Isa 54:7).

Sometimes we feel that God does not hear our cries of grief and the call for help. At such times we should simply trust Him and patiently wait for him. Apostle James exhorted, “My brothers, count it all joy when

you fall into various trials; knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (Js 1:2-4). Suffering is inevitable in the perfecting work of our faith. So let it not make us bitter and cynical but increase our faith in God. Think of the perseverance and patience of Job and take him as an example. He testified, “Though He may slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

The fear of death should be out of a believer’s vocabulary. Our time is in God’s hands and not in Satan’s. We shall not die before God’s appointed time. Selwyn Hughes, of *Every Day with Jesus*, once said, “Dear believer, You will not die before God’s time, for any reason come what may. Nothing can put an end to you until God decides that it is time for you to be at home with Him.” The ship in which Paul once sailed was caught up in a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon. Disaster and loss dismayed everyone and all gave up hope. But Paul trusted in the Lord to whom he belonged and declared: “I believe God, that it will be just as it was told me” (Acts 27:25). He was the one who passed through perils of waters, perils of shipwrecks, perils of robbers, perils of Gentiles, perils in the city and perils in the wilderness. But he was sure that nothing could kill him before God’s time.

Beloved, faint not at your “light affliction which is but for a moment” (2 Cor 4:17). Let not suffering weaken your resolution, neutralise your conviction, tame your fervent spirit and quench your first love. Take courage from the Scripture: “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12). Do not flinch from suffering. Bear it patiently. Be assured that it is God’s way of infusing iron into your spiritual make-up, for He needs steel saints and not chocolate soldiers. Faith rejoices, for it sees afar the “triumph of Christ” and is willing to endure any hardship to share in it. The Captain of our Salvation was made perfect through suffering (Heb 5:9), and it cannot be otherwise with us.

Part 3 Chapter 2

DOUBTS AND DARKNESS

YOUR life of faith had a buoyant beginning. But presently disappointment, sorrow, disaster and dismay overcloud the sky and blot out the sunny prospect. These will be times of inexplicable depression due to doubts and darkness upon the soul. Luther, Edward Irving, Savonarola and scores of such mighty men passed through darkness so thick that it almost put out the torch of their heroic faith. But they made the best use of such times and learnt great lessons that all the Bible schools in the world could not have taught them. There are only a few Christians willing to go into this dark night of the soul and that is why there are so few who enter into the light. If God has set out to make you an unusual Christian, He is likely to lead you through dark passages.

Discipline of Darkness

“Who among you fears the Lord, who obeys the voice of His servant, who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him **trust** in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God” (Isa 50:10).

Darkness creeps into the lives of even the obedient children of God. Is your life woven with dark shadows of sorrow? Are the best years of your life slipping away in silent tears? Do not sit down in solitude to deplore and moan your unhappy lot. Let not the experiences which have befallen you in earth's darker cells drain on your spiritual resources. When your urgent prayers bring no response, when His mercies seem to be withdrawn and His face hidden, when the waves toss you up and down and things go from bad to worse, you throw your face into your empty palms and cry, “God, don't you want me anymore?” Not so, dear. God your Father has turned down the lights of your life because He wants to show you how great His mercies are. The night is the time to see the stars! There never yet has been a night which was not sure to end in the dawning light of a glorious morning. Lay hold on God's promises and rest your weary head on them.

Walking by Faith

About spiritual depression, Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones writes, “To overcome the spiritual depression the truth that *the just shall live by faith* must be well understood. Every other effort made and help sought to scheme out your deliverance will only prove to be a failure and can never give you permanent relief.”

The prolonged period of darkness may make your faith life dry and tasteless and to some degree you may become a burden to yourself. To maintain faith at such times is a real struggle. No wonder Paul called it a “fight.” “*Fight* the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12). These are times when the prayers of the pastor bring you no change, nor the elders counselling any relief. The “joy unspeakable” ceases to be your experience and you find none of the inward sweetness you had enjoyed before. It is at this time you will know better the definition of faith! “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Now you will learn how to walk by faith and not by sight, and it is this that God has intended to teach you.

There is no light but faith gives evidence!
There is no support but faith gives substance!

At moments of discouragement, when you are exposed and most vulnerable Satan is on the attack. He haunts you with his doubts: "Does God really exist?" Questions become your frequent visitors: "What have I gained by my integrity?" Do not leave any loophole for Satan. "Resist him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet 5:9).

Remember God's Fatherhood!

Some of our characters need to be taken to the dark dungeon where Joseph was once put so we can be emptied of our spiritual pride and other undesirable qualities. David relates: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word...It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Psa 119:67,71).

Who of us does not know people with Christian background who have wandered far from the Lord and have been brought back to Him through sorrows, afflictions, humiliations and heartaches? The Son of God, "learned obedience by the things He suffered" (Heb 5:8). And if you are God's child you are sure to be taught obedience the same way. Remember His Fatherhood when you suffer. He chastens you for He so loves you that He cannot allow you go astray. "My Son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves

He chastens, and scourges every **son** whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom a **father** does not chasten?" (Heb 12:5-7). When God punishes us, He loves us as much as ever because there is not a shadow of change in His affection for us.

Purposeful delay

God's delay in answering our prayers is always purposeful. Where faith is, there is no impatience. Patience is the mark of great faith. Delay develops perseverance and patience in us. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick He stayed two more days in the place where He was. He delayed because He looked for a better opportunity to vitalise His disciples' faith. Had He gone at once to Lazarus when he was sick it would have been only a matter of divine healing. But when He went four days after Lazarus' burial He could demonstrate the power of resurrection. "Jesus said to them plainly, ...I am glad for your sakes, that I was not there, that you may **believe**" (Jn 11:14,15). Delay is not denial, but God's means of developing our faith. Do not be feverish and in a hurry. "Whoever believes will not act hastily" (Isa 28:16).

Impatience stems from unbelief, and faith is not afraid to wait. "Wait on the Lord; Be

of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!” (Psa 27:14). There is no other way out. “I would have lost heart, unless I had *believed*” (Psa 27:13). “Blessed is she who *believed*” (Lk 1:45). The delayed blessings will really be great!

Be not perplexed!

Sometimes the ministers of God to whom you go for counselling may add their share of confusions to your perplexities. They may tell you that it is all because of your transgressions that you have incurred God’s curse on your head! Some may even tactfully manipulate you and direct you to do this or that in order to earn God’s favour once again. Be watchful. Do not allow yourself to be made a puppet. No man is the master of your faith. Paul tells the believers: “Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand” (2 Cor 1:24).

Preachers are given the authority for edification and not for breaking the bruised reed and quenching the smoking flax. Some such people quote: “Believe the prophets and you shall prosper!” But you turn the pages and read the entire verse: “Believe in the Lord your God and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper”

(2 Chron 20:20). If you believe in the preachers only, you may temporarily prosper, but will never be established. God first, and then the preachers.

Satan often makes use of your past failures to discourage you and disilluminate your path. Let not your past falls make you feel frustrated. Only when we stumble we learn to walk better. Look up to your Redeemer! He will remove the stains from your life and the sting from your memory. Turn a deaf ear to Satan and answer him in these words: “Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me; He will bring me forth to the light, and I will see His righteousness” (Mic 7:8,9). Forgetting things which are behind, reach forward to those things which are ahead! (Phil 3:13).

Be not surprised when dark passages come in your way. God allows it, because unbroken sunshine would madden our brains. We must be sometimes deprived of *feelings* so we may acquire the art of walking by *faith*. Wait for the Lord for He is working out everything for your supreme good. Yes, the time is coming when you will bless the Lord for your times of sorrow and mis-

fortune, because then you will understand that many of your disappointments were God's own appointments, and that He sent failures in some sensitive areas only to save you from missing the best that He has in store for you.

It is very sweet, as life passes by, to be able to look back on dark and mysterious events and to trace the hand of God where we once saw only the malice and hypocrisy of man. And no doubt you will be able to speak gratefully of all the dark passages of your life.

Part 3 Chapter 3

PERSECUTIONS AND OPPOSITIONS

FAITHFULLY to proclaim Jesus as the Saviour and Lord is bound to evoke antagonism and enmity in a country like India. You are sure to face two kinds of people:

1. Opposers of the Gospel
2. Twisters of the Gospel

1. Opposers of the Gospel

We began the third part, *The Consummation of Faith Life*, with Hebrews 10:37,38. These words were written at a time of great tribulation for the believers in Christ: "You endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on

me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in Heaven” (Heb 10:32-34).

In the work of God oppositions are not something unusual. Do not shake and shudder when oppositions and persecutions show their faces. Paul encouraged the believers of the Church at Philippi thus: “Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, *and not in any way terrified by your adversaries*, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to **believe** in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake” (Phil 1:27-29).

It has been granted to us the privilege to suffer for Christ’s gospel. Is there anyone who suffered so much for his faith in and love for the Lord Jesus as did the Apostle Paul? He was a man who hazarded his very life for the name of the Lord Jesus. He passed through trials and tortures. Nevertheless amidst these all he bore testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He was a man who knew the worth of his high calling and the immense responsibility

involved in it. “To which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed” (2 Tim 1:11,12). As a faithful servant of God he was most unreasonably persecuted by the wicked men. He needed the prayer support of other believers to be saved from the opposers of the gospel: “Pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified,...and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith” (2 Thess 3:1,2).

When you are oppressed by the opposers of Christian faith nothing should you do except to pray. Avenge not yourself, for revenge is God’s. When you suffer for the sake of your Saviour, you are carrying His cross. There is only forgiveness in Christ’s cross and not revenge. Pray for the opposers that they too may be saved. Do not draw your sword to settle matters as Peter did!

Oppositions and persecutions are part of God’s ministry. Meet these with a spirit of submission and praise! “We are hardpressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 Cor 4:8-10).

Take heart from the real life-experience of the apostles of the early Church. They were threatened, imprisoned, beaten, stoned and scattered but they were always triumphant. The history of the Church proves that only in the midst of terrible oppositions, the gospel of Christ spread with great speed. The more they were harassed, the more powerful and fervent they became. Yes, indeed, persecutions serve God's purpose by adding fuel to the burning fire. In several communist countries, preaching Christ means inviting death. Christians are slain there. But Christianity cannot be destroyed, for Christ lives and lives forever.

Persecutions feed faith! In the midst of persecutions, Paul wrote, "Since we have the same spirit of **faith**, according to what is written, I **believed** and therefore I spoke, we also **believe** and therefore speak!" (2 Cor 4:13). The undaunted spirit of faith can never afford to keep quiet even amidst oppositions. It will obey Jesus' command and keep on preaching the gospel, than to obey the persecutors who will not let it be done. No matter how great the opposition, no matter how difficult the time or how fierce the persecution, the good soldier of Christ Jesus can stand in the strength of the Holy Spirit and remain a victor on the battlefield.

2. Twisters of the Gospel

"Now the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will depart from the **faith**, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim 4:1). There is a definite prediction that in the last days people will depart from the pure faith of the gospel. Departure from faith can be seen in our Christian circles today but with different names.

a) *Legalism*

The principle of legalism advocates the adherence to the Law, even while living under the Spirit of grace. The Galatians were misled to believe such doctrines and so were flogged by the apostle Paul (Gal 4:19). Law and grace cannot go together. What does the Bible say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman" (Gal 4:30). Ishmael and Isaac cannot dwell in one place. The bondwoman and her son are not to be given even a portion in the backyard. They are to be turned out and cast away completely.

What a glorious privilege to be under grace! The followers of the Law have fallen from grace. The Bible gives us a clearcut

picture of the distinction between Law and Grace. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the Law; you have fallen from Grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by **faith**” (Gal 5:1,4,5). No man puts a new garment upon the old garment. New wine poured into old wineskin will burst the wineskin and ruin it and the wine will be spilled. New wine must be put in the new wineskin (Lk 5:36,37). May God help us to discern this truth lest our faith be polluted by these poisonous winds.

There is yet another last day doctrine which the Bible warns us against. “Forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim 4:3). This is the doctrine of the supposedly ‘holier’ people. God saw it good to give Eve as a wife to Adam (Adam never asked for one!). But these holiest people consider married men and women as second-class citizens of Heaven! Regarding food the New Testament teaching is: “Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim 4:4,5).

b) Rationalism, Liberalism, etc.

“Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it, some have strayed concerning the faith” (1 Tim 6:20).

The “profane and vain babblings” are taught in the name of “knowledge” in several theological colleges. The liberals do not believe in the divine inspiration of the Word of God. They are too wise to believe the creation of the world by God and are so broadminded and unprejudiced that they accept the theories of evolution. They question the possibility of a virgin ever bearing a child, and a man staying alive in the belly of a great fish! These theological liberals have stuffed their minds with learning, philosophy and science that they are on the borders of madness. When they come to occupy our pulpits let’s resist them and protest. Are we not Protestants?

There is another group in Tirunelveli district (Tamilnadu, India) which preaches undying, endless life on this earth. John 11:26, “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die!”—is the peg on which the leader hangs his arguments. Unfortunately for him, his wife died recently! But that did not change him. He stood by himself and

blamed his dead wife for her unbelief. He indeed has a congregation too! People who have grown affectionate to this world and are least willing to leave their possessions here are his followers. Of course it is not very difficult in India to get a crowd of followers for any cause!—let it be even a dog fight!

Again the false teachings of William Branham have had a devastating effect on the Church. He met with an accident and died a terrible death. But his followers carry on the deceptive ministry even now. They hail William Branham as their Lord and insert his name into the Bible verses replacing the name of Jesus. To give but one example, they proclaim: “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord William Branham!” Be on the watch that such deceptions do not enter your house or your Church, because books with such messages are issued freely to every house entitled “*End Time Messages*,” “*The Spoken Word*,” “*The Voice of the Seventh Angel*,” and so on. “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist...do not receive him into your house nor greet him” (2 Jn 7,10).

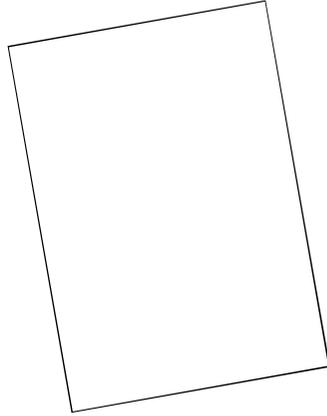
These are the agents of the antichrist who are sent to deceive even the ‘chosen’ people of God. Much more is there to tell you about the twisters of the Gospel of Christ. The

twisters indeed attract big crowds to themselves, and have a lot of followers too. You need not be surprised at that. Who has attracted bigger crowds and got more admirers than film stars! Man’s applause does not mean God’s approval. The Word of God foretold this even before centuries: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). I plead the pastors to guard their sheep against these wolves.

Apostle Jude wrote, “Beloved,...I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Faith is “once for all” delivered into your hands. It means that the written Word of God alone is sufficient and there is no necessity to look for any kind of new revelation. Because, there lies the danger of being deceived by the prophets of the antichrist. All that a sinner needs to be cleansed, purged, made perfect and fit for the Kingdom of God is revealed in the Bible. New Revelations ended with the Book of Revelation. Amen!

“When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” asked Jesus (Lk 18:8). Let’s answer Him, “Yes Lord, we are living by faith and you will see faith in us!”

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