

# If you are retaining ...

GOD'S MESSAGE OF GRACE is preached; it announces that the death of Christ was for sins, and that He was entombed and roused. This is accepted by some who hear, and in it they stand; through it they are saved also, if they are retaining the evangel.

The above is an outline which is easy to apprehend, yet it is most pertinent in its applications. A far greater number of persons have heard the evangel than have accepted it, and the latter number is also greater than those who have retained the message proclaimed by God through the apostle to the Nations.

This presents a problem which has confused, and the confusion found confirmation in the poverty of the methods of scripture study. Failure to give close attention to contexts, together with incorrect partitioning of God's Word have had baneful effects. Because of instances which appear to be a turning away from the evangel, credit is given to the misunderstood experience rather than to the plain declarations of the scriptures, and hence the precious verities of the Roman epistle have been put aside in favour of the idea that salvation may be lost.

On the contrary, the scriptures show the retaining of the evangel to find its consummation in salvation, and the interval is a growth in the realization of God; this retaining of the evangel is evidence of the reality which lies behind the acceptance, which signifies our profession of believing God's evangel.

## SALVATION IS OF GOD

We can be definitely assured that any understanding which grants that salvation may rest upon human caprice or fickleness is quite wrong. Salvation is of God; it is accomplished by Him from its commencement to its consummation. He is our Saviour, and we are the recipients. God does not lose any of His chosen. He does not declare a person to be righteous and then reverse His decision.

The evangel is a declaration of God's activities in Christ Jesus. It tells how God's own personal righteousness is exercised on our behalf, and how that righteousness becomes ours. This is the basis upon which God pronounces us not guilty, and hence we stand justified before Him.

Justification is not the forgiving, but the actual declaring that our past is righteous because God has established for it a righteous basis, and at the same time He is able to constitute us just for the future. This is the significance of the death of Christ, and of our being in Him, and He being in us. Thus nothing can separate the believer from the love of God. God is the Justifier!

This, then, is the evangel of which the apostle declared he was not ashamed; IT IS God's power for salvation; IN IT God's righteousness is revealed. It takes us into a realm which is exclusive to the Deity; that high virtue of forgiveness is deficient when compared with God's power to declare the irreverent justified. The evidence for our justification is God's own righteousness, and this makes the evangel to be veritably God's power for it demonstrates Him as God.

## THE PROCLAMATION OF THE EVANGEL

The evangel is announced to the nations of the world; specifically it is to call God's chosen ones. Though the evangel is launched into a world with a disqualified mind, yet God uses and requires our mental powers in His evangelizing. The scriptures are His word, and they provide the necessary information whereby the knowledge of God enters our apprehension. From this, under the operation of His spirit, we grow in the realization of God in Christ Jesus.

Through the proclamation God saves those who are believing. The evangel can be attractive to many in whom the scriptures never become creative. Time showed those gathered within the various ecclesias, by the labours of Paul and his associates, to be both honorable and dishonorable. Some denied certain facts of the evangel; others taught differently to the apostle Paul; others desired the wisdom of the world.

Beneath the proclaiming of the evangel, and the professed acceptance, lies the necessity to retain it. This ability rests upon the spirit of God and Christ. Thereby God discriminates His children and sons; they follow His leading. To retain the evangel is then a particularly crucial matter, at least this is so when we come to compare experience with the Scriptures.

#### THE LANGUAGE OF SCRIPTURE.

Attention to the scriptures will give its blessing, and yet therein we note phrases and statements which would seem to query the certainty which is evident in say the Roman epistle. The Galatian epistle, which is a defense of the teaching recorded in the Roman epistle, particularly as regards chapter 1 to 4, speaks thus; You fall out of grace, also of the Galatians being bewitched and hindered. Colossians warns; Beware that no one should be despoiling you through philosophy and empty seduction. To Timothy the apostle speaks of those who swerve from the truth and subvert the faith of some; also of others who upset those who are hearing. The whole province of Asia abandoned Paul.

These are details which be difficult to appreciate in the light of the distinct teaching given in the evangel. Their awkwardness inclines to the desire that the scriptures had not such references, for they seem to touch that superlative quality of the grace of God, and the saint who is well taught is justifiably zealous that the certainty of salvation should not be taken away. But we may be sure that our fears in that direction arise because we have not fully understood God's word; we are lacking in our penetration; there is something we have failed to learn. Do not the scriptures speak of apostasy? How then is this possible? We must note that the evangel presents to the world God's wisdom, yet it is within human apprehension. Consequently there is reaction, and this is most varied, but amidst it all, God is calling out those whom He foreknew.

#### GOD'S SOLID FOUNDATION.

To venture to discriminate as to who are God's saints is, in certain circumstances, a folly. The apostle Paul treats the question with great discretion. If others have confidence that they are Christ's, then he maintains the same of himself. But we must note he terms this "looking on the surface". Yet again, amidst apostasy, he is emphatic saying; I have contented the ideal contest; I have kept the faith. Here he is implying the possibility of even such as himself failing to retain because the spirit of God is not in him.

The position seems to be that in the absolute sense it belongs to the glory of God to know who are His saints. This does not detract from our own personal assurance that we are His, for His spirit joins its witness to our spirit that we are children of God.

Should we wish to make any distinction, then we are to do so only on the basis of - all who are invoking the Lord out of a clean heart. This is as far as we are allowed. We fellowship with all such, and seek to present ourselves qualified before God, acknowledging and believing His word correctly partitioned. This affords to Him the glory which is proper.

#### FAITH — UNFEIGNED OR SHAM?

The passive faculty to believe is common to the mind of humans, but its activity in different persons may be characterised as unfeigned or sham. Abnormal and wicked men have not faith. In ordinary matters, no less than in scriptural, the difference in effect is tremendous. To the straightforward person deception behind the sham faith is abhorrent. That these terms can fit the profession of faith in the evangel is a problem which may give serious concern, as well as intense disappointment and sorrow. It is certainly a strange fact that there can be such a position, especially so seeing that the apostle Paul has no doubt that the evangel is God's power for salvation. He writes without shame, and sets out details which establish it as God's power. So much is this so that the details are summed up thus; Nothing is condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, and, if it is possible, this is made still more absolute by the affirmation that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

In the face of such statements we may be sure it is with the unfeigned faith in the death of Christ that the blessings and glory of the evangel are associated.

## SIMULATION.

The profession of faith may be a sham, an imitation. Though in its first analysis, faith is an ability of the human mind, yet it has value in relation to God and the evangel, for He takes hold of such capacity and by His spirit leads us; then faith becomes the fruit of the spirit.

The natural side can be seen in the case of Timothy. Unfeigned faith made its home in his grandmother Lois, and in his mother Eunice. Paul was persuaded the same of Timothy, and he urges Timothy from the example of his forbears.

Paul did not proclaim human wisdom. This in order that the faith of the Corinthians should not be in men's wisdom but in God's power. Thus in either case it is the same faculty.

Let us note how the scriptures speak regarding faith. Abraham was not infirm in faith, Rom. 4, 19; some were feeble in faith, Rom. 14, 1; similarly we read of the measure of faith, Rom. 12, 3; of faith being grown, 2 Cor. 10, 15; again, it is a fruit of the spirit, evident in fidelity, Gal. 5, 22; faith arises out of tidings, Rom. 10, 17; we note also that faith may be specialised, thus; in accord with God's chosen, Tit. 1, 1; some repudiate first faith, 1 Tim. 5, 12; faith is for naught if Christ is not roused, 1 Cor. 15, 14; it is vain and we are still in our sins, if Christ is not roused, 1 Cor. 15, 17. All these show it as a human ability, used or not by God. It bears a definite comparison to God's use of David's mouth to speak God's words.

Failures of faith are of human origin, and not of God's power to save, for that is the real significance underlying the notion that salvation may be lost. Yet we may be most seriously exercised to appreciate whether there is reality in our profession of faith. The sons of God are led by God's spirit and His spirit cannot lead us to walk according to the wavering will of the flesh.

## YOU FALL OUT OF GRACE.

The statement in Gal. 5, 4; must not be denied. The Galatians who identified themselves with the false teachers had fallen out of grace. We ought not to take the sentence apart from its context, and so lend ourselves liable to use it to query what is most definite as regards the certainty of salvation.

Those who are foreknown of God can never lose their salvation. This is clearly stated in this epistle; they are children of the promise, and as a consequence they will obtain salvation.

To "fall out of grace" (in this context) signifies the turning from righteousness by faith to righteousness by law. The sentence is equivalent to the first portion of the verse - you were exempted from Christ. In replying to the problem, the apostle deals with it from several angles. Perhaps the most salient are those in 2, 21 and 5, 4. That in 2, 21 covers the position as regards the death of Christ, if righteousness be through law; in that case Christ died gratuitously. This exhibits the poverty of the position of Paul and those of faith, if the rival "evangel" be correct, Paul is without righteousness!

The case of the other evangel is stated in 5, 4; You were exempted from Christ, any who are being justified by law. You fall out of grace; we await righteousness by faith. The adherents to the false teaching are without the benefits of grace. This is the plain position based upon the simplest aspect of the case. The apostle is not telling them directly that they are not saved, but he has referred to them as foolish, and as being bewitched. They started well, Christ crucified, but now they have accepted the error that they need to be completed in flesh!

It is not really within the considerations of the epistle as to whether salvation can be lost, but it queried as to whether they have suffered for Christ. This brings forward the real point; have they merely been imitations of those who have faith in Christ crucified!!

As a matter of fact the question of losing salvation can scarcely be argued for the evangel proclaimed by the apostle has stated positively that we are saved because of God's foreknowledge and choice. God is effecting the salvation, and sin can but bring increased grace. This is definite and emphatic in Paul's evangel; the chosen cannot lose salvation, otherwise grace is no more grace. Grace would be shown to be a phantasy if it could be frustrated and God's choice prevented from coming to its consummation.

Now the acceptance of even such heresy as that which bewitched the Galatians does not take away the salvation bestowed by God, but persistency in the error, after the admonition by this epistle, would be strong indication that the evangel of God's grace had no root in such persons. Even so, it would not be in point to deduce that God had not chosen such to salvation, but only that His choice was not as yet made manifest.

Such admonition as is given in this epistle ought logically to cause serious reaction, for the position is distinctly stated that righteousness must be found absolutely in Christ. It is a righteousness which needs no augmenting, and, in fact, will not tolerate any considerations outside Christ crucified. In Him we are complete.

The Galatians were being taught by Judaizers to seek, by their own activities, to augment the benefits of Christ. Such a thought indubitably suggests that the necessity for the death of Christ was misunderstood, and, moreover, that the professed acceptance of the evangel may not be true. This really is the alternative which the apostle points to, and later he adds the fact that they had become partisan. Thus the full case seems to reach the idea that they had not simply fallen out of grace, but rather that they had not been in grace. Behind the discussion lies the implication that salvation may not have been in possession, for there is no resemblance to the theological notion of losing salvation. All the cases which are usually considered by theology to be a matter of "falling away" are, in actuality, cases where grace has not become subjective. The evangel has been heard, and assent to it has been given, but the spirit of life has never been received. To be in Christ denies the possibility of condemnation.

If a professed believer ceases to retain and obey the evangel, then there is proof that the faith is a sham; it is a case of simulation; there has only been the appearance of a saint, not the reality. When God gives the grace which saves, He does so because in no other way is salvation possible.

There is very little in the Galatian epistle concerning Christ being also the Lord. Perhaps the only direct reference to this is 5, 10. The persuasion to which the Galatians had given heed was not of Him who is calling. A believer should realize that his Saviour is also the Lord of his life. Without such an understanding there must be serious reservation as to the reality behind the profession.

In maintaining the truth and significance of the statement in 5, 4, we fully establish that evangel proclaimed by Paul. He defends his evangel and claims its inherent value to be the gift of righteousness by faith in Christ. All who receive this righteousness can never lose it. This evangel shows God as the One who saves, and of this the law was impotent.

#### APOSTASY.

This is a grave possibility amongst the saints, and the Apostle Paul laboured to safeguard the genuine child of God from being sorrowed by participation in it. The major part of the persons in such movements are those whose faith is a sham, and whose minds have not been renewed by the evangel. The activity of apostasy can only be viewed on the surface or outwardly, and this the apostle does, but we learn that deception lies beneath the withdrawal from the faith; unbelief reacts to deception.

The second epistle to Timothy especially moves in the atmosphere of departure from the faith; it had been an undercurrent in the first epistle, and develops definitely to call forth the second writing to Timothy. The attitude which is taken up is to look at the whole as a great house, and this controls the manner in which matters are spoken. All are placed under the necessity of showing their own sincerity and faithfulness in purging themselves from the dishonorable. Even Paul takes that position for himself; he urges Timothy to do so. Onesiphorous is singled out and mercy is requested for him from the Lord, for all around are those who abandon Paul. The actions of Onesiphorous are of the highest and betoken the grace of God in his heart, yet such is the extent of the apostasy that special reference is made to him.

Demas loved the current eon. He had been associated in greetings to the saints. Apparently he had turned back from the ministry and probably became involved in the business of a livelihood, for Demas had been a fellow worker of Paul. Such a turning away becomes serious in view of the fact that it has agreement, outwardly at least, with the tendency of the eon.

Apostasy is a straying from the faith, a swerving from the truth, a substituting of philosophy for God's word. Depraved minded persons are given to apostasy for they are disqualified for the faith, and do not regulate

their teachings by a correctly partitioned word.

Our understanding of apostasy may be helped by perceiving that it is a revival of irreverence, yet it seeks to be disguised to represent devoutness. Apostasy does not afford to God His deity, being a continuance of the condition against which the evangel is revealed. If we reflect we shall recall that the evangel was launched into a world, disqualified in mind, and irreverent in attitude. The evangel, received, retained and unfeignedly believed, dispels irreverence, and created the real and proper reverence, indicated by the Greek term translated by the Concordant Version by the word devoutness. Devoutness has serious regard for all that concerns God and His truth; its character is such that it affords to God all the glories of His revelation, and does not venerate the creature, but gives to God His fullest deity.

The apostasy seeks to emulate devoutness, but it is only an imitation, being devoid of power. It is deception purporting to be real reverence, whereas in reality it is irreverence and lacks any reliance on the living God. It will head up into the man of lawlessness.

This is in direct contrast to the evangel which makes irreverent persons to become truly reverent, wholly reliant on God as their Saviour. With the development of apostasy our reverence needs to be thoroughly distinct from the false reverence of the apostate. The saint may be spared being engulfed in the apostasy, or any tendency thereto, by guarding and guiding attention to the sound words of the commission given to the apostle Paul. Timothy is the specific example.

#### SUBVERTING THE FAITH.

The office of teaching may be assumed by those not graced by God, as well as those chosen. Each class may effect ill. The warnings given by the scriptures should be gravely and sanely regarded in order that the saint may be useful to his Owner. Those who swerve from the truth and faith, and by their teachings subvert the faith either of the unfeigned or the sham saint are not doing the Lord's service. Moreover they may belong to the class who are disqualified for the faith since their mind is depraved, the depraved mind withstands the truth. Paul had to contend and warn against such, and they are not confined to that time only, but appear to have been ever present from Moses onward.

It is important to note that the genuine child of grace, though he may become involved in the apostasy, yet his salvation is immune and immutable. His folly and error may pierce him with sorrow; his service may suffer loss; yet his righteousness in Christ Jesus remains, and so must his salvation.

#### CONDUCT.

Conduct may shipwreck faith. This occurs when conscience is thrust away and the warfare consequently is not ideal. This is the extreme position reaching even to blasphemy. The apostle delivered such to Satan to be disciplined.

The simple aspect of conduct comes from reckoning ourselves to be dead unto sin; this will ensure immunity from such a position as that of Hymeneus and Alexander. And as genuine children of God we shall be allowing our Saviour to be also the Lord of our life.

#### SERVICE.

Our service should be characterized by power, love and sanity; a close adherence to sound words is the course with value. In entering upon any service for God we ought to assure ourselves that we are in accord with His revealed word. There is neither room nor necessity for anything else. Nevertheless, whatever imperfection there may be in our labours, we may be sure that our salvation stands inviolate. Still it ought ever to be our endeavour to be qualified workmen correctly partitioning the word of truth for that is the only sane desire.

#### THE CIRCUMCISION WRITINGS.

These are addressed to those who already have a connection with God's ways; many, indeed, had heard the Lord Jesus Himself. He called Israel to repentance on the basis of the nearness of the Kingdom, for He claimed to be the King and presented His credentials in this regard. Those who companied with Him during His ministry confirmed His announcement, pointing to the Lord Jesus as the prophet like unto Moses. God

corroborated this confirmation. The Hebrew epistle affirms that the Lord Jesus is the Priest, but not of the Aaronic order. The people are counseled to endure and so receive the blessings flowing from the ministry of their King and Prophet and Priest.

Peter in his epistles engages in a ministry figured as the shepherd feeding the sheep and lambs. By this he prepares the flock for the Kingdom.

John's epistles dispense the love of God's Son, whom God gave to display His love to Israel and to the world. This One is a propitiation for all. He emphasizes that Christ has come in flesh and insists that he will again so come. John by His ministry remains "till He come."

From the rudimentary beginning by the Lord Jesus all these ministries seek to lead forward to the maturity of the Kingdom; those who fall aside, it is impossible to renew again to repentance which is the initial step as regards the Kingdom. It ought to be clear to us that repentance and justification have nothing which enables them to be identified as being equivalents, and hence the results from each are quite different.

#### THE NATIONS.

It has been a perplexing matter to understand how Nations, as such, can be said to stand in faith and at the same time be threatened with the fate of being hewn out of the Olive Tree. We have learned that individuals can give what seems to be a response to God's evangel, and the evidence of the reality of the professed faith lies in the evangel being retained. This exactly features the case of the Nations. They respond to the position afforded by God's conciliation of the nations; this is an entry into God's kindness. Will they persist in God's kindness, even as the individual retains God's evangel? Should a nation become so highly biased as to vaunt over Israel, then they are failing to persist in the kindness God has displayed to them, and they are ready to be hewn out of the Olive Tree; their outlook as a Nation no longer recognizes that God has called them to the privileges of reconciliation both to Himself and to Israel. Such a Nation disbelieves and ignores that God has grafted it into the Olive Tree to enjoy the root and fatness thereof which figures the illumination coming from God's word given to Israel. They are refusing the light which makes God manifest, and are displaying their innate stubbornness to God and His ways; they have come to rely upon their own glory rather than the living God.

#### CONCLUSION.

As God's saints we should adhere to the declarations of His word, and thus shall we avoid withstanding the truth. By clinging closely to His word we shall limit the possibility of our apostasy. A pattern of sound words will also lead us increasingly away from the influence of the apostasy of prior times.

Of Salvation, may we never for a moment go contrary to the specific declaration of the evangel that the justified cannot be condemned. Let us retain the evangel and so give an affirmative to the "if"; then shall we not be sham saints.

Now I am making known to you, brethren, the evangel which I bring to you, which also you accepted, in which also you stand through which also you are saved, if you are retaining what I said in bringing the evangel to you, outside and except you believe feignedly. (1 Corinthians 15, 1-2 C.V.)

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