

ON READING THE BIBLE

PART ONE

(**Webmaster's note:** The original page numbers of Stuart Allen's book have been inserted to assist in cross referencing from the indexes.)

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There is no doubt whatsoever that the Bible is the great text book of the Christian profession which no one who names the Name of Christ can neglect if he wishes to be a Christian worthy of the name. But its scope is so vast and the subjects treated are so great and varied that the question arises "Where does one commence reading it?" Should the reader start with Genesis in the Old Testament, or Matthew in the New Testament, or perhaps the first of the epistles, namely Romans? This is a real problem which we trust this book will help to solve.

First of all we should reflect on the fact that the Bible is unique. It makes claims that no other book does and these are so challenging that we cannot ignore them if we are honestly seeking for truth. The Apostle Paul refers to the Old Testament as "the holy Scriptures" (2 Tim.3:15). Of the millions of books which have been written, how many claim to be holy? This word is so far removed from human experience that it is never used in ordinary conversation. The Bible is holy because it comes from God and belongs to God Who is holy. It is therefore called the "holy Scriptures" and "the Word of God" and although written by human instrumentality it is, as Paul states, "given by inspiration of God" or "God-breathed" (literally), (2Tim.3:16), and speaks with all the authority of God.

This may seem to be overstating the case to some, but we can make a check by noting the attitude of Christ on this question. It must be said straight away that on no occasion did He belittle the Scriptures or suggest they were anything but what they claimed to be, that is God's Word. He said:

"...Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot (the smallest Hebrew letter of the alphabet) **or one tittle** (the tiny strokes that distinguish certain Hebrew letters from one another) **shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled"** (Matt.5: 18).

"...the Scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

"Sanctify them (His disciples) **through Thy Truth: Thy Word is Truth"** (John 17:17).

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"For had ye believed Moses ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings (the first five books of the O.T.) **how shall ye believe My words?"** (John 5:46,47).

"Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Matt.22:29).

When He faced Satan in the wilderness, in isolation and fasting for 40 days, He met His temptations not with His divine power, but with the truth and the authority of holy Scripture, which He quoted three times and vanquished the tempter (Matt.4:4,7,10).

His constant appeal was to the Scriptures as the basis of His teaching (see the following important verses of Matthew 4:4,7,10; 11:10; 19:4; 21:13,42; 22:29; 26:31,56). He asserted that the Word did not merely contain the truth, but IS the Truth (John 17:17), and so closely is He associated with the written Word that He Himself is called the Word of God (John 1:1; Rev.19:11-13) and He said:

"I am the Truth" (not I have it) (John 14:6).

Some tell us that when Christ was on earth He was limited by the ideas and prejudices of His day and thus they try and explain away this clear testimony. But in resurrection when any such limitations (?) were over, He adopted exactly the same attitude to the written Word. He said to the eleven apostles:

"All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me (i.e. the whole of the O.T.). Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures"
(Luke 24:44,45).

And to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus He said:

"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses (the Pentateuch) and all the Prophets, (the rest of the O.T.) He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:26,27).

Never did the Lord Jesus suggest at any time that the Scriptures were untrustworthy or anything other than they

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claim to be, i.e. the very Word of God, which must be Truth. (The reader will find this important subject treated more fully in the author's *God's Word Written* published by *The Berean Publishing Trust*.)

Now we have a proposition to make and it is this, that no one can call himself a true Christian or believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who adopts any attitude to any subject other than His. It would be mockery for anyone to say "I am a true follower of Christ and a Christian in the fullest sense, but I do not believe or accept His teaching on this point or that".

There can be no doubt of the attitude of the Lord Jesus to the written Word. It was one of complete reverence and acceptance. He regarded the Scriptures as divinely authoritative and if we desire to be completely loyal to Him, His attitude must be ours and we wish to make it clear at the outset that this is the attitude of this book.

Having settled this, we come back to our first problem, where to start in our reading of the Bible? We feel the best way is to be guided by man's need. God's Word speaks in plain language and calls a spade a spade. It asserts that all man's problems whether personal, national, or world-wide can be traced back to sin and imperfection. When God created man He had at least two courses open to Him:

(I) He could bring man into being and compel him by His

divine power to always think, speak and do the things that are right. In this way a perfect universe could be maintained without problems. Some think things ought to be like this. There would then be no calamities in nature, no personal sickness, pain, death, frustration or the multitude of pressing problems that go to make up life. But do they realize at what cost this would be obtained? Such a man would be a mere puppet, having no choice or desire, God pulling the strings as it were all the time. Such a being would be of no satisfaction to Him. It would appear that one thing God desires above all is the response of real love from the creature He has made and puppets cannot love or respond to love.

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(2) The other way would be to create man as a moral being with the power of choice and the ability to love unselfishly, but this would open up the possibility of choosing wrong rather than right. God knew fully the risks He took and the tragedy that would follow if man disobeyed. Yet He chose the latter course and this is what actually happened. The first man made his choice and unbelief and disobedience followed. He became a sinner and passed the "virus" on to all his posterity so that since this time man is born into the world a ruined creature. He is a ruined creature by reason of what he is apart from what he does, for the virus of sin is already in him from his birth (Psa.51:5).

"By one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom.5:12).

The Dilemma of Sin and Death.

Death is a hideous thing and is represented in the Bible as an enemy to the last (I Cor.15:26) both to God and man. Men may try to glamourize it, but the Word of God never does. Death cannot originate from something good. It can only spring from something evil and the universality of death proves the universality of sin. We have to face this fact honestly that man, whether he likes to admit it or not, is a sinner. He is constantly falling short of perfection in thought, word and deed whether he knows it or not:

"As it is written, there is *none righteous, no, not one*".

"For *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Rom.3:10,23),

and as a sinner he has put a yawning chasm between himself and a thrice holy God, which he can never bridge by his own efforts. There is no exception to this. Sin is a great leveller. High or low, rich or poor, intellectual or non-intellectual, clever or foolish, there is no difference in this respect and there is no exception to it. "There is none righteous, no not one". People may take offence at this, specially those who are trying hard to live a good life. But facts are stubborn things and it is better to face them than to run away and pretend they do not exist.

Sin does four things:

- (1) It brings spiritual and physical *death* (cp.Gen.2:16,17).
- (2) It brings into *bondage*.
- (3) It brings God's *condemnation*.
- (4) It contaminates and *makes unclean*.

The Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in his letter to the Ephesians, wrote:

"And you hath He quickened (made alive), who were *dead in trespasses and sins*; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we *all* had our conversation (manner of life) in times past in the lusts (desires) of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph.2:1-3).

From this passage we can see, looking back to their pre-Christian days, that these Ephesian believers were *dead* spiritually as the result of their sins. They were in *bondage*, because whatever their thoughts and desires were, all were controlled by Satan, "the prince of the power of the air". This great enemy of God and man energizes all mankind in their natural fallen condition, the Apostle asserts. When writing to the Corinthian church he states:

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world (Satan) hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is the Image of God, should shine unto them" (2Cor.4:3,4).

And John writes:

"...the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19 R.V.).

One of the tragedies that sin brought in was the opportunity for Satan the deceiver to get control of men's minds. So much so, that three times the Lord Jesus called him the "prince (ruler) of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). We should cast out of our thoughts the medieval conception of Satan as a monster who constantly urges mankind to commit the blackest of crimes. These come from man's evil heart as Christ clearly taught (Matt. 15:18-20). The Bible shows that Satan is a primarily *religious* being who desires

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above all to usurp God's place and receive the worship of creation, hence the third subtle temptation of Christ in the wilderness (Matt.4:8,9).

Sin then brings spiritual death to the whole human race and the first thing a dead person needs is life. This gives us an important clue as to where we should commence in our reading of the Word of God. It should be with the Gospel of John, for this is the great theme of the fourth Gospel:

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that *ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have LIFE through His name*" (John 20: 30,31).

Let us stop for a moment and consider this word "life" as the Apostle John uses it. Does he mean this present natural life which will end in death, or does he mean spiritual life which will be eternal, without an end? We can easily discover which it is by his usage. This word zoe, life, occurs 36 times in the Gospel, alternating "life" with "eternal life". We give all the references:

Life (1:4)
Eternal life (3:15,16,36)
Life (3:36)
Eternal life (4:14,36; 5:24)
Life (5:24,26,29)
Eternal life (5:39)
Life (5:40)
Eternal life (6:27)
Life (6:33,35)
Eternal life (6:40,47)
Life (6:48,51,53)
Eternal life (6:54)
Life (6:63)
Eternal life (6:68)
Life (8:12; 10:10)
Eternal life (10:28)
Life (11:25; 12:25 twice)
Eternal life (12:25,50)
Life (14:6)
Eternal life (17:2,3)
Life (20:31)

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It will be seen that life which is eternal is one of the great key thoughts of this Gospel. In only one verse does the Apostle use it of the present physical life (12:25) and then it is in contrast with eternal life and its inferiority is shown. These 36 occurrences should be checked by the reader and each context carefully considered. Some may feel that this will entail a lot of time and patience, but in the quest for truth our sincerity is shown by the amount of effort we are prepared to make for its discovery. Diamonds are not scattered on the earth's surface. Digging and toil are necessary to acquire them, and those who market diamonds evidently think this is more than worth while!

What we shall discover from these verses and their contexts is that this unending spiritual life of joy and complete satisfaction is not inherent in human nature (as we have seen, mankind has lost this life because of sin). If its source is not in man, the Gospel of John makes

it abundantly clear where it is found, and that is IN CHRIST. He alone is the possessor of it inherently, but, wonder of wonders, He is ready to give it to all who put their entire trust and faith in Him and His work for them.

The Origin of Eternal Life.

"In Him (Christ) was LIFE" (John 1:4).

"I am the Bread of LIFE" (6:35).

"I am the Resurrection and the LIFE" (11:25).

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the LIFE" (14:6).

The way to obtain it.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (3:36).

"...He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

To these references we may add two more from John's first epistle:

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is IN HIS SON" (1 John 5:11).

"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12).

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This confirms what we have already seen, that spiritual death and condemnation because of sin can be exchanged permanently for endless life and freedom from condemnation and guilt by committing one's self in absolute trust to the Lord Jesus. "I am come" He said, "that they might have life, and that they might have it *more abundantly*" (John 10:10). To some who would not receive and trust in Him He said "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life" (John 5:40), and to such He later added "Ye have no life in you" (John 6:53), although they were very much alive physically. "To eat His flesh and drink His blood" in this context is simply a figurative way of receiving Christ by faith and "assimilating" Him, just as we describe learning a fact as inwardly "digesting" it.

For sheer simplicity 1 John 5:12 cannot be beaten. There is no word that has more than four letters and a child can easily understand the verse. To "have Christ" (the only source of this life) is to possess life unending for one's self by faith in Him. Not to "have Christ" *is never to attain to it*, and there is no middle position. Let no one think that the Lord Jesus forces Himself or this life on anyone or that somehow, at some time or other, they will drift into it apart from their belief and choice. Those who choose not to come to Him to receive this life or in other words reject Him, automatically cut themselves off from eternal bliss. It is, without exaggeration, a choice of eternal life or death, *and there can not be an issue more serious or solemn for each one of us.*

Needless to say, the reader of the Gospel of John will find other wondrous truth in it, all of which is resident in Christ, but owing to its basic stress on the need for eternal life and all the abundant blessings that go with it, we advise the one who wishes to approach God's Word seriously to start here. Before we press on we quote from

the Apostle Paul, showing that his testimony is the same as John's:

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of *life which is in Christ Jesus*"

(2Tim.1:1 R.S.V.).

"...our Saviour, Christ Jesus, Who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher" (2Tim.1:10 R.S.V.).

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"For the wages of sin is *death*; but the free gift of God is *eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom.6:23 R.S.V.).

The Dilemma of Sin and Bondage

The second consequence of sin which we listed on Page 5 is that it brings all of us *into bondage*, for whether we recognize it or not, in God's sight we are all sinners. Sin makes slaves of us all and it makes no difference whether we are big sinners or little sinners. One sin makes a sinner just as one lie makes a liar. We are slaves to sin because none has the power or ability to free himself from this terrible bondage. In other words we cannot change ourselves permanently into perfect beings who never sin in thought, word or deed.

Anticipating what we hope to show later on, God is slowly working back to a perfect creation such as He had when He first created. Nothing less than this will fulfil His will, and His standards of righteousness and perfection cannot be lowered, *otherwise this goal will never be attained*. To admit *one* imperfect being into His eternal kingdom would be to start the rot and the tragedy of sin and death all over again.

God is finally going to create new heavens and earth as Peter in his second epistle tells us:

"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, *wherein dwelleth righteousness*"

(2Pet.3:13),

and the divine statement concerning the heavenly Jerusalem will then be true of all the new creation:

"And there shall in *no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie*: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"

(Rev.21:27).

Thus the new heavens and earth will be peopled only with perfect beings, but how can perfect beings be made out of sinners? *This is what the gospel, God's good news is all about*. What man as a sinner cannot accomplish for himself, *Christ has come to accomplish for him*. To go wrong here is to go wrong everywhere. Millions have never learned this. They try hard to live what is called the "good life" thinking that this is a good enough standard for God and His future creation. Or if it is not, then they indulge in wishful thinking and hope that somehow God will make up the deficiencies.

This conception of salvation by human effort lies at the base of all the world religions except the true Christian faith. However much they differ in details, they are all united in this, that man must *do* something for his salvation, whereas the truth of the gospel revealed in the Bible, is that *it has already been done perfectly and completely by Christ on the cross* and all that is now needed for the individual to participate in its eternal blessings is personal faith, trust, or reliance upon Him and His work on his behalf.

This may seem too good and too simple to be true. Some may think there is a snag in it somewhere. *But there is not*, and if anyone should object and say that, in this case, the kind of life we lead does not matter, the N.T. answer is just as clear. Salvation is not *by* good works, but it is *unto good works*. In other words, good living should follow as a *result* of salvation. Good works are never its *procuring cause*. Salvation by faith in Christ is the *root* and good works are the *fruit* of such salvation:

"For *by grace* you have been saved *through faith*; and *this is not your own doing*, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"
(Eph.2:8-10 R.S.V.).

The work of Christ on the cross for us meets every need of the sinner. The sinner is spiritually dead and needs life, and this is provided as a free gift by faith in the One Who alone has it - the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner is in *bondage* and therefore needs *freedom*, and this too is provided by the same Saviour. This has been made clear in "picture" language in the book of Exodus, chapters I-IS which can next be read. God's people Israel are here in cruel bondage in Egypt. The tyranny of Pharaoh is so complete that they could do nothing about it. Protestations or strikes would have been utterly useless! for the more they resisted the more rigorous the bondage became (Exod.5:4-12). There was only one thing left to them, *to cry to God to deliver them* and this they did (Exod. 2:23-25).

God heard their cry, and using Moses as His instrument, He intervened with His mighty hand and outstretched arm (Exod.6:1-8) and delivered them. He not only rescued them

from Egypt, the land of cruel bondage, but took them safely through the Red Sea on to the Promised Land and at the same time destroyed their oppressors, Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exod.14:26-31). Their deliverance was signified by the offering of the Passover lamb (Exod.12:3,7,12-14) a picture of the *real* Lamb, the Lamb of God Who beareth away the sin of the world (John1 :29). The Israelitish slaves were *really free*, not through any efforts of their own, but through God's mighty redemptive power alone.

Now the N.T. book which treats of this freedom from sin and trying to keep the moral law as a way out of sin's bondage, is the *epistle to the Galatians*, and this should now be carefully read.

A word is necessary here about the moral law. It was essential for man to learn what *God's* standard of right and wrong really is. Otherwise man with his imperfections would make his own failing standards and fall far short of God's requirements. The moral law is in 2 parts: (1) Man's attitude to and regard towards God. (2) Man's attitude to and regard towards his neighbour (Exod.20:1-17), and both are summed up in the word "love" (Rom.13:8-10).

The first thing we have to face is that God's law is so high in conception that no human being as a sinner can attain to it. It may then be asked, what was the use of making it known to men? The answer is simple - it showed up sin in its true colours. The best way to show up black is to put it in front of a brilliant white background. The Apostle Paul said: "If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet' " (Rom.7:7 R.S.V.). "It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order *that sin might be shown to be sin*, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure" (Rom.7:13 R.S.V.).

We must get quite clear in our minds that God's standard touches not just our exterior *acts*; it touches our *minds*, with their thoughts and their intentions. Many through will power can control their actions, but no one can control his thoughts to the extent that no wrong idea can ever enter the mind. God's conception of perfection is such a condition *inside* as

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well as *outside*. Furthermore this perfection in thought and action must be carried out from *the cradle to the grave without one slip*. As we have before remarked, *one lie makes a liar*. A person does not have to lie a dozen times before he can justly be called a liar.

Sin is transgression of God's law and brings with it a curse:

"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, cursed be everyone who does not *abide* by all things written in the book of the law, and *do* them"

(Gal.3:10 R.S.V.).

We should note that keeping the law of God spasmodically will not do; it must be continuous, without a break, and putting into practice this law is not accomplished by just admiring its purity; it has to be rigorously carried out into acts.

It surely is obvious that no human being has ever done this since Adam's fall. One sinner, by his efforts, may be relatively better than another sinner, but this is all that can be said about human attainment to real holiness. Man may struggle to reach perfection, but the task is hopeless and unattainable by his own will-power or

strength. In other words he is a slave to sin; he is in absolute bondage, and the more he contemplates the rigorous standard of righteousness revealed in the moral law of God, the more this shows up his shortcomings.

The epistle to the Galatians with that to the Romans makes it quite clear that man cannot extricate himself from this dilemma. Because of man's inability to keep the law of God, it is as well to understand what it *can* and *cannot* do:

- (1) It gives the knowledge of sin (Rom.3:20; 7:7).
- (2) It stirs up sin in the human mind (Rom.7:5).
(We all know that when we are *ordered* to do a thing, we immediately feel like refusing to do it, to be disobedient).
- (3) It cannot give *righteousness* (the standard God lays down for a future *inheritance* in His kingdom or for *eternal* life Gal.2:21; 3:18,21).

There was of course nothing wrong with God's law - it was "holy, just and good" (Rom.7:12,14,16), but, as chapter eight says, "it was weak on account of the flesh" (Rom.8:3) i.e. weak because of man's sinful nature being unable to rise to its high standards.

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Man as a sinner then is virtually a slave, whether he knows it or not. The epistle to the Galatians shows how he can have the chains that bind him snapped and how he can become *really free*. It is not, as we have seen, by his own efforts, but by the *redemptive work of Christ* Who alone has kept the law perfectly without one flaw. All the law can do is to bring us to Christ (as our only hope of deliverance, Gal.3:23-26), and at last, putting our complete trust in Him and what He has accomplished for us by bearing the penalty of our sins on the cross, we find ourselves gloriously *free*; and let us remember that the Lord Jesus said: "If the Son makes you free, *you will be free indeed*" (John 8:36 R.S.V.). This freedom is no sham; it is the real thing and the only freedom that is complete and worth-while.

Men love to talk about liberty. They think that their political ideas and aspirations can lead them to this goal. But while they talk about it one can see the chains and hear their clanking! In the Galatian churches there were Jewish opponents of the gospel who were trying to fasten the law as a means of salvation and deliverance upon the members there. This the Apostle Paul resisted absolutely and showed in this epistle the falsity and hollowness of their claims. His conclusion is:

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of bondage" (Gal.5:1 R.S.V.).

At the same time of realizing the wonder and joy of such a freedom, we do well not to forget that this divine liberty, worked out for us at such great cost to God, does not mean we are *free to do just what we like*; but rather we are free to do *what He likes*; in other words to carry out what is His will for each one of us, for only in doing this can we

experience the "peace of God that passes all understanding" (Phil.4:6,7; John 14:27) and the abiding joy of Christ which the world can not give or take away (John 15:11).

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The Dilemma of Sin and Condemnation

We have seen that sin brings *death and bondage*. Another thing that it does is to bring all men into *condemnation* before a holy God. If mankind is arraigned before God as Judge of all the earth, then there is only one verdict which can be pronounced and that is, *guilty*:

"There is *none righteous*, no not one ... Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and *all the world may become guilty before God*" (Rom.3:10,19).

What does a guilty person need if he is to escape from the penalty of law-breaking? He needs something that no human court can provide - someone who can take away his guilt and give him in its place complete innocence so that he can be acquitted. In other words he needs absolute *righteousness* and this is the key thought of the *epistle to the Romans*. This is the next portion of Scripture we would advise the reader to read and study carefully.

In English we can use the word "righteous". or "just", the latter word coming from the Latin. In the original Greek we have a family of words clustering around the root DIK, and while the A.V. uses both "righteous" and "just" for variety, it is better to keep to one English word throughout, namely righteous, righteousness, and to make righteous, and then we get something of the insistence of the original words of the Holy Spirit. We must not make distinctions in doctrine from the English words 'just', 'justify', 'righteous' and 'righteousness'. This would only lead to false conclusions.

We have seen that the goal of God is to bring in finally a perfected creation which is absolutely righteous and spotless (2Pet.3:13) and therefore completely free from sin and death with its multitudinous problems and misery.

God's righteous standard has been crystallized in the moral law, and we have seen that this standard enters searchingly into every thought, word and deed done by man and is so high that no one can attain to it in performance.

Here then is the dilemma. God cannot lower His standard for His future perfect kingdom, otherwise its wonder and beauty will never be attained. Yet man cannot produce this perfection.

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How can such a tremendous problem be resolved? God has done this by *providing this righteousness through Christ's work on the cross in dealing with sin and thereby giving such righteousness as a free gift which can be personally received by faith or trust in the Saviour and His redemptive work*. This is the theme of the epistle to

the Romans:

"But now the righteousness of God without (apart from) the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ *unto all and upon all them that believe*"

(Rom.3: 21,22)

and this wonderful righteousness which is part of the very character of God, forms therefore the basis of the gospel, the "good news of God" to men who cannot attain to it by their own efforts.

"For I am not ashamed of the *gospel of Christ*: for it is the power (miracle) of God unto salvation *to every one that believeth*; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith* (as its source) *to faith* (as its goal); as it is written '*the just* (righteous) *shall live by faith*' " (Rom.1: 16,17).

Note, there is only *one condition* for its personal possession, *namely faith or complete trust in Christ*. There is no reserve - it is "unto all" (3:22), but it is only "*upon all them that believe*", those who receive it for themselves in this way. Unbelief, and pride behind it are the *only* barriers to its reception. God's righteousness is not just something added to make up what sinners lack, as it were. It is for the bad, the helpless and the hopeless and it meets their every need and covers them, like a garment, from head to foot and obliterates their sin and shortcoming.

This is beautifully expressed in Isaiah 61:10:

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He *hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness..*"

Centuries later the Apostle Paul expressed it in this way:

"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, *not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith ...* " (Phil.3 :8,9).

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The way this all-needed righteousness is expanded in the epistle to the Romans may be expressed as follows:

	<i>Romans</i>
God's righteousness <i>revealed</i> in the gospel	1:17
God's righteousness <i>required</i> and found wanting in human attainment	1:18-3:20
God's righteousness <i>provided</i> through faith in Christ	3:21-31
<i>A concrete illustration of this</i> - Abraham. How God reckons righteousness to a sinner	chapters 4&5

God's righteousness and the <i>freedom it brings to serve God</i>	chapters 6-8
<i>Israel's attitude to this righteousness and their failure through not receiving it</i>	chapters 9-11
<i>God's righteousness in practice in the daily life</i>	chapters 12-16

A personal grasp and reception of this vital truth concerning righteousness is absolutely essential before one can go any further in the understanding of divine things. Get quite clear that God's provision of His righteousness is a free gift from Him and received personally by nothing more than faith in Christ Jesus. God bestows it on the believer in Christ by virtue of which he stands accepted and assured in Christ for ever. If such a person were to stand in the dock with God as the Judge, the verdict would be NOT GUILTY, or completely innocent of wrong-doing, in other words in no sense is he under *condemnation* of God as a law-breaker.

This all sounds too good to be true - in fact it is so stupendous that the majority pass it by and think it is impossible. In other words, as we have stated before - unbelief acts effectively as a barrier to the personal experience and joy of it all. Let us also understand that, just as a man as a sinner cannot manufacture this righteousness by his own efforts or merit, so the believer in Christ cannot lose this righteousness of God by his own failure. Justification or righteousness does not depend upon works or merit *after* salvation any more than *before* it. It is still *God's gift* by faith, not by human works, and what God gives as a free gift He never takes away.

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"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance (change of mind on His part)" (Rom.11:29). *God's righteousness is not received by faith and then maintained by human merit or works.* Many professing Christians have not got this clearly in their minds. We repeat: righteousness (or justification) is by faith alone, *apart* from the law and its deeds (Rom.3:21,28). This epistle states that it is impossible for anyone to be made righteous by their own deeds or any merit on their part:

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall *no flesh be justified* (made righteous) *in His* (God's) *sight ...*" (Rom.3:20).

"Therefore, being justified (made righteous) *by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom.5: 1).

As we have seen, it is this attitude of mind to human merit or attainment that severs the N.T. conception of salvation by grace apart from works from the pagan idea of having *to do something* to obtain it. The words of Max Muller are apt here:

"I have found the one key-note of all these so-called sacred books, whether it be the *Veda* of the Brahmins, the *Puranas* of Siva and Vishnu, the *Koran* of the Mohammedans, the *ZendAvesta* of the Parsees, the *Tripitoka* of the Buddhists - the one refrain through all - salvation by works. They all say that salvation must be purchased, must be bought with a price; and the sole price must be our own

works and deservings".

(quoted by Moody, *The Childhood of the Church*, p.68).

And it can be added that this idea is prevalent in *religion all around us*. This strikes at the very root of God's salvation on our behalf. In contrast we have in chapter four of Romans a concrete example of salvation by faith alone in the person of Abraham. Abraham was reckoned righteous by God, not through any acts of his own or any personal qualities he may have had. He was accounted righteous solely *by his faith* in what God had said and promised, and so it is today.

A person who has come to a saving knowledge of Christ may lapse into sin. He may become a careless and unfaithful servant of the Lord. But in no sense can he cancel God's free gift of righteousness bestowed through Christ. He may "walk after the flesh", that is, according to the dictates of his sinful old nature and so be designated in the N.T. as "*carnal*", in which case he will be accountable to the Lord when his service

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and witness is assessed by the Lord in the next life, and be in danger of losing his reward and forfeiting the Lord's approval. But he cannot lose *the righteousness imputed* by God and the free gift of salvation that goes with it, and *so is never described in the N.T. as unrighteous or unjust*.

And while we are on this point it will be as well to mention the apparent contradiction to this in Romans 8:1 in that in the A.V. the state of "no condemnation" is linked with works. One should read the R.V. or any of the later versions which omit the last clause "who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit" on the basis of the best Greek texts. This phrase properly occurs in verse four.

Summing up then, we can with complete assurance state that the creation of a perfect heaven and earth yet to be (2Pet.3) where righteousness rules, can be the sure hope of men and women when they come to acknowledge Christ as Saviour, and have bestowed on them by God *His own righteousness* in the place of their sin and failure, that sin having been reckoned to Christ and the penalty borne by Him. God then has not overlooked or winked at sin and death. *He has borne them Himself in the Person of the Lord Jesus* and then given His own perfect standard to the believer at a cost we can never realize or assess. Consequently "He can be just" and at the same time be "the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" (Rom.3:23-26).

We may talk of the "simple gospel", but let us remember that its simplicity resides only in *the way it is received*, namely by faith or complete trust in the Saviour. It was anything but simple for God, for it meant *giving His all* in the person of His beloved Son and then carrying the sin of the world on His shoulder and treating Him (Christ) *as though He was the sinner*. What love! What abounding

love is here! and at what tremendous cost!

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

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation*; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

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The Dilemma of Sin and Uncleanness.

The fourth thing that sin does is to render the sinner *unclean* in the sight of a holy God. And if such an one is ever to have direct dealings with the God of holiness then this uncleanness must be removed and holiness put in its place. Here again the sinner cannot accomplish this for himself. Once again we are brought back to the great Foundation, Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the answer to this dilemma.

In the N.T. the word holiness is often translated as "sanctification". Hebrews 12:14 reads: "Follow peace with all men, and *holiness* (or sanctification), *without which no man shall see the Lord*". So holiness is a "must", for no sinner can ever even see God in the Person of the risen Saviour, let alone dwell with Him throughout eternity. The basic meaning of the word translated "holiness" or "sanctification" is *separation*, this separation being primarily the Lord's action in separating His children unto Himself for His work and witness. This separation is *positive* and does not merely mean what the believer is *separated from*. With so many Christians sanctification is negative and this consists of a list of things they do *not* do. Far more important is what we *are* and *what we do*, that is, what our positive acts are. For the Scriptural answer to the problem of uncleanness, the reader should turn to the first chapter of John's first epistle, where we read:

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the *blood of Jesus Christ His Son clean seth us from all sin*. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just (righteous) to forgive us our sins, and to *cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1John 1:6-9).

There is only one way a sinner can be made clean and holy before God and that is through the atoning work on the cross of the great Sanctifier Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. His shed blood, in other words His perfect life laid down on our behalf, is the basis of such cleansing. Through this work, cleansing resulting in sanctification or holiness can be the continual experience of the believer in the Lord Jesus.

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"But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God *is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification* (holiness),

and redemption" (1 Cor.1:30).

Concerning the redeemed who form the Body of Christ, Ephesians 5:25-27 states:

"...Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might *sanctify (make holy) and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish* ".

Titus 3:5 reads:

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the *washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*",

and the Apostle Paul, reminding the Corinthians of their pre-conversion days and the sins in which they indulged, writes:

"...Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; *but ye are washed, ye are sanctified (made holy), but ye are justified (made righteous) in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Cor.6:10-11).

Symbolically the need for cleansing is clearly set forth by the great condescension of the Lord Jesus in washing the disciples' feet (John 13). He said to Peter:

"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me" (verse 8).

The Lord distinguishes between bathing all over, the complete cleansing that results from salvation, and the need for the daily cleansing of the feet, in other words the daily walk of the believer in contact with an unclean world. Hence the need for daily cleansing in this respect which is constantly being accomplished for him by the risen Saviour on the basis of His shed blood, His life offered on the cross.

Let us now recapitulate. The atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross is the complete answer to the terrible dilemma brought about by sin. The eternal and inestimable benefits from this work are for all who rely upon it by complete trust. This brings to them:

(1) *Unending spiritual life* in the place of death as the result of sin.

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This is not the old life patched up and reformed, it is a new life, a new beginning, a new creation. "If anyone is *in Christ*, he is a *new creation*: the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2Cor.5:17 R.S.V.). This life is linked with peace, joy and satisfaction that *does not lessen or fade away with experience, rather the reverse*. The present life at last has a real meaning and a real purpose and the believer looks forward to a certain hope that goes beyond physical death, a hope that is too great and wonderful to express adequately in human language. And, as we

have seen, this life, the real life, lasts for eternity.

- (2) The atoning work of Christ releases from the *bondage* that sin brings. Here at last is perfect freedom, deliverance from the strain, stress and frustration that exist in ourselves and all around us consequent upon man's failure and his domination by Satan, the enemy of God and the ruler of this world. This freedom can at last be expressed in the satisfaction that comes from following the will of God in practice day by day just wherever we are placed and learning the ever increasing joy of serving Him "Whose service is perfect freedom".
- (3) The atoning work of the Lord Jesus delivers the believer for ever from *condemnation* from God because of our sin and shortcoming. With the righteousness of God given to him, the believer is guiltless in the sight of the great Judge of all the earth. And because Christ has borne the penalty for the believer's sins, these are blotted out as it were and God can say, not only of His earthly people Israel, but concerning *all* His great redeemed family "their sins and iniquities I will remember no more" (Heb.10:17).
- (4) Christ's work on the cross cleanses from the *defilement* of sin. It washes the believer clean from all such contamination, and now, in Christ, he can be called a 'saint', a holy one, and one day will be presented to the Lord in glory, "holy, unblameable and unproveable in His sight" (Col.1:21,22) and can now, even in this life, be a "vessel fit for the Master's use" (2Tim.2:20,21).

Let us think a little further about this new life of service for the Lord Jesus. It is certainly true to say that everyone

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who has personally experienced salvation by trusting and relying upon Christ alone is *saved to serve*. He has been saved to do something for the Saviour, and while we have seen that *before* salvation, no amount of service or doing or personal goodness can bring this about, yet *after* salvation this is just what the Lord expects! One has advanced in Scriptural knowledge quite a distance when one has the Scriptural conception of the place of "good works" in our lives. Ephesians 2:8-10 expresses this clearly:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it (i.e. the gift of salvation by faith) is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained (or prepared for us) that we should walk in them".

"Good works" or good living can never *earn* salvation. As before pointed out, millions err here, never learning this lesson, and hope that somehow they will be able to produce of themselves something good enough for God. But, as we have seen, salvation, redemption, atonement and all the kindred thoughts that cluster around this great

subject combine to make the only effective remedy and *are entirely of God*. When Christ said in His last words on the cross "it is finished", the phrase means it is perfected or completed, that is, the foundation and the work of man's redemption and salvation from sin, and nothing needs to be added or can be added to a perfect, complete and finished work! All that needy man can do is to receive it by faith for himself or equally he can reject it, but if he does this he automatically cuts himself off from eternal life, forgiveness and blessing.

If he receives it for himself in this way, then limitless possibilities lie ahead for him. He can now be an instrument in God's hands to carry out His work for Him, in other words *he can become a servant for God* and produce the good works *as a consequence* of his salvation. Now just as there are no useless members of the human body, each part working together for the good and health of the body as a whole, so there should be no useless members in the Body spiritual. There is *variety* of function in the human body and one member does not fight against another or try and usurp the function of another.

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So it should be in the Body spiritual. It is not for the saved member of the Body of Christ to decide what he shall do for the Lord or merely to do what appeals to him. His service is decided solely by the Lord Himself. He is the Head of the Body and as Head and Lord He controls and directs each member. It is not for the writer or anyone else to direct anyone to this or that form of Christian service. What each of us must do is to respond to the Lord as the Apostle Paul did directly he was saved on the road to Damascus. His first words to the Lord Jesus were, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:5,6) and such a prayer, sincerely offered and with the mind ready to respond to whatever God's will may be, is never unanswered although sometimes we may have to wait for the Lord to reveal it to us. Nor need we be afraid and fear lest God should make too many demands upon us which we cannot fulfil, for "God's biddings are God's enablings".

As we think further about this (and the N.T. makes this evident), service for God can be of two kinds or qualities, good or bad. The parable of the talents clearly sets forth this difference. There were the good and *faithful* servants who pleased the Lord and received His commendation "well done" and also His reward. On the other hand there was the lazy servant who did nothing and received the Lord's stern reproof and lost any possibility of reward, and we should remember all Christian service partakes of these two qualities, and as God's redeemed children are not puppets, but have the power of choice, these qualities must exist and account must therefore be taken by the Lord of all work and witness that has been done in His Name.

The N.T. also makes it quite clear that when the day of reckoning for service comes in the next life, the Lord rewards those who have been

faithful and denies that reward to those whom He deems have been unfaithful. Some say we should not do anything with reward or gain in view. Rather should we serve the Lord out of love and gratitude to Him. Perfectly true - but God will never be in any man's debt and it would be contrary to righteousness if the believer who wasted his Christian life and the believer who has consistently given his "all" for Christ, should have exactly the same position in glory.

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As the great text of 2 Timothy 2:15 makes clear, the believer can either be "ashamed" or "approved unto God" as regards his service.

We are exhorted to have constantly in view God's approval - "Be zealous to show yourself *approved to God*" (2Tim. 2:15) and the Apostle Paul aimed to be "well pleasing (acceptable) unto Him" (2 Cor.5:9). The opposite is His disapproval - in fact the N.T. reveals that Christ will be ashamed of some of His followers and they will be ashamed in His presence (Mark 8:38; 2Tim.2:15). The passage that needs to be pondered carefully for the question of service and reward is I Corinthians 3: 10-15. The reader should consult this and he will see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only Foundation for the believer to 'build upon'. This building which every saved person erects upon that Foundation during his life-time whether he realizes it or not can be of two kinds - good and bad, a building erected with shoddy materials and one of good quality. This illustration we can see all around us every day in our towns and villages.

The fire of God's holiness will test all Christian service. The good quality service stands this searching test, but the bad is consumed by the fire of God's holiness and the context clearly states this will mean *loss of reward* but the person concerned will *still be saved* yet so as by fire for, as we have already seen, his salvation does not depend upon *his works*, but upon the sacrifice of Christ (1Cor.3:11-15). But let us not make the mistake of thinking that the fulness of God's grace and our perfect standing in Christ takes away our responsibility as *servants* of His. There are two parallel lines in N.T. teaching then which we must never confuse, that is, salvation by God's grace independently of human works, and divine prize or reward in connection with good works and faithful service to the Lord. The former is a gift and can never be lost. The latter depends upon our practical response day by day and *can* be lost. Therefore Colossians 2:18 states: "Let no man beguile you of *your reward*" and Revelation 3:11, "... Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take *thy crown*". Note it does not read "that no man take *thy life*". This is impossible, for that life is "hid with Christ in God" (Col.3:3) and who can touch the believer's

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life in such a gloriously safe position? "Crowns" are a figure of *reigning* which is something additional to future *living with* Christ and these two lines of doctrine are set forth in 2 Timothy 2:11-15. Living with the Lord in resurrection is the culmination of our salvation by

grace. *Being on the throne with Him* and sharing His reign is something much higher and it is this that can be lost by unfaithfulness. He will "deny" the unfaithful this inestimable privilege and they will be ashamed before Him.

Getting these two lines of truth clearly in our minds will prevent us from going to two extremes:

- (1) Taking the attitude that, if we are saved by grace apart from our works or merit - it does not matter what sort of lives we lead after salvation. We can "get away with" anything.
- (2) On the other hand, denying the certainty of salvation and its hope and thinking by our failures we can be "saved today and lost tomorrow". Those who take this latter view are confusing "prizes", "crowns" or "rewards" that can be lost, with salvation by faith in Christ which is a free gift of God and is therefore sure and certain and cannot be forfeited.

In these balancing truths we see the matchless wisdom of God Who has, by them, rendered null and void the above extremes. As we think of the privilege of serving Him (and there can be no greater privilege), there is another aspect of truth we must consider and that is the teaching in Scripture concerning the two natures in the believer.

The Two Natures in the Child of God.

We must not assume that because the believer's sins are forgiven and cancelled (Christ having borne them), the believer has now no problem in his daily life regarding sin and failure. In other words he learns by experience and from the teaching of God's Word that he is not yet holy *in himself* although he has a *perfect standing in Christ*. He finds at times that his experience is similar to that of the Apostle Paul which is graphically described in the seventh chapter of Romans: "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil

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which I would not, that I do". "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me".

Every real believer in Christ knows something of this experimentally and it can be a shattering discovery, for it is possible to expect that, once one is gloriously saved, the sin problem will not exist any more, *but it does*. What does one do then to remedy this? Struggle on and somehow by willpower try to master and eradicate sin within us? Many Christians attempt to do just this and get hopelessly depressed because they find they are fighting a losing battle.

Once more the answer to the problem is found in God's Word. Every believer has *two natures*; one is sinful and he inherits this from fallen Adam, and the other sinless, because it is implanted by the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of holiness.

The Apostle Peter in his second epistle writes:

"According as His (God's) divine power *hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature...*" (1:3,4).

One of these "exceeding great and precious promises" is the gift by God of a *portion of His own holy nature* which by the Holy Spirit's power He causes to reside permanently in the believer. The Apostle Paul often calls this "spirit" (with a small 's'), being the gift of God the Holy Spirit. So then every saved person has two lodgers as it were, two "indwellers", "sin that *dwelleth in me*" (Rom.7:20) and the Spirit of God that *indwells* (Rom.8:9) and these two most obviously are contrary one to another (Gal.5:16-18), hence the internal conflict which every Christian experiences at times.

Now it is true to say that no consistent Christian service and witness can be given in the daily life, if we are constantly "see-sawing" up and down in experience, sometimes the old nature in control and sometimes the new. With Paul this conflicting experience became so acute that he cries out "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Having asked the question, he is enabled to supply the answer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.7:24,25).

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So yet again we are brought back to the fulness of what the Lord Jesus has accomplished for us and His almighty power, and the next thing we should learn and believe is this, that in God's plan and by His working, the believer has been *identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection*. This is the wonderful instruction given in Romans 6:1-14. It means that God sees us in Christ closely identified with Him, so that when He was crucified, we were crucified; when He was buried, we were buried; when He rose again, we rose in Him. Consequently Romans 6:6 teaches us that our old sinful nature was crucified with Christ and so can be 'put out of action'. This means if we count upon this in faith, the old nature, which is the root of all our troubles cannot operate and enslave us. Note that the A.V. translation "destroyed" is too strong. This sinful root in us is *not destroyed* and removed until death or until our hope is realized.

F.F.Bruce's paraphrase is helpful here:

"Understand this: our old inherited self was crucified with Him, so that the material with which sin had to operate might be *put out of action*. Consequently, we are no longer in bondage to sin; once a man has died, he is quit of the claims of sin upon him" (Rom.6:6).

Here then is the basis of the believer's holiness in his walk day by day, and the divine answer to the problem of besetting sin. It is not to be found primarily in the believer's strength or his resolution, *but*

again in what God has done for him in Christ. This he is commanded to *reckon for himself* (Rom.6:11) and only when this is done will freedom from the domination of sin be realized. This is sanctification in practice and experience and is possible when we rely upon (reckon) the *likeness* of Christ's death and resurrection made ours by God (see verse five). Needless to say, our being *raised with Christ* is not dealing with our *physical* resurrection any more than our crucifixion with Him was a physical crucifixion. But it does mean we can serve in "newness of life", on resurrection ground here and now, and the power of His resurrection can mightily operate through us.

How wonderful it is to realize that, just as we are not left to save ourselves by our own efforts, so we are not left to live the Christian life in our own strength.

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The limitless power of the Lord's resurrection waits to be appropriated by faith. In his first recorded prayer in Ephesians, Paul prays that the believers at Ephesus may know:

"...what (is) the exceeding greatness of His power to *usward who believe*, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come .." (Eph.1:19-21 R.V.).

Not only this, but Romans eight assures us that both the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus are *continually* interceding for us (8:26,27,34) and both of them are indwelling us (John14:17; Eph.3:16,17). If such a God be for us (on our side), who can be against us? (Rom.8:31). With such limitless might and love in our favour, why should we shrink from anything the Lord wills us to undergo or accomplish for Him?

No wonder the Apostle Paul could say:

"I have strength for anything through Him Who gives me power" (Phil.4:13 N.E.B.),

and this can be our continual and joyful experience too, so that as believers in Christ Jesus we can live the abundant and fruitful life He promised, and so shine for Him in a world that is getting darker and darker and more dangerous as it goes further and further away from Him Who is the only source of true life, light, wisdom and love.