

THE FAITH BUILDER

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

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From The Editor

The challenges we have today in our churches is in the area which I will call “market research”. This sounds like the adopting of a business principle into our Christian involvement, but the basic principle remains the same whether it be in a secular business wanting to sell their product, and a church wanting to attract members. In these modern times, both have a “product” to sell. It was quite different in the days where everyone went to church on Sunday as a matter of course. It was the cultural thing to do, and some went to church because they were passionate for Christ; others because it was the “done thing”, although they may have been merely “nominal” Christians; that is, Christians by name only and not much else.

In recent times, because of Sunday trading and sports, there has been a marked decrease in attendance in churches, mainly the traditional ones which had a larger number of “nominal” Christians. These ones, being not fully committed to Christ, and attended church only for cultural or social reasons, found other Sunday activities more attractive to them. This has brought a marked decline in the traditional denominations, and the Presbyterian Church is no exception.

It is significant, however, that the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have always experienced an increase in numbers rather than a decline. My opinion about this is that very few attendees are “nominal” in their Christian observance, and that these churches have an effective mission into their communities.

There is also another factor in this equation, and this is where my view on market research comes into play. The question we have to ask ourselves as churches (as well as any new business wanting to sell a product), is that do people need the product that were are offering them? Our course, we will always say. “Yes”, because we believe that all people need to have Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. That is without dispute.

The next question we need to ask is whether people actually want our product. Well, that is quite another issue, because we know that the majority of people out there don’t want what we have to offer. This is because the god of this world has blinded them so they cannot see or understand the gospel of Christ. All they see is a group of

ardent religious folks trying to convert them to a religion they don't feel they need, nor want.

The third question we have to ask is, "What competition is out there with other groups offering the same product?" In any city, there are a number of churches conducting mission into their community, offering salvation through Jesus Christ. For a person wanting to know more about Christ, he or she is spoiled for choice in many cities. It may be different in a small town where there is only one church representing their denomination; and so a lively Charismatic church with a strong message, loving and welcoming people, and a bright and interesting service, and having no competition in the town, can attract many more who desire that type of Christian involvement and worship. But in a large city where there are many similar churches, it is more difficult for an individual church to attract followers.

The days have gone where a church can attract followers just by being there. A church now has to offer something that the ordinary person "on the street" feels that they need and want; and that individual church can offer their "product" in a way that shows that it can better service the needs and wants of the person in a better way than the other similar churches in the community. In reality, this is much easier said than done.

There are many seriously committed Christians who will not accept secular business principles in their churches because they say that this is the church compromising with the world. They believe that the Holy Spirit will not use worldly methods to bring followers into the church. I think they forget the story about the man stranded on the roof of his house during a flood. He asked the Lord to rescue him. Before long a man in a row boat came along and offered a lift. The man on the roof said, "No thanks. I am waiting for the Lord to rescue me." Then along came a rescue helicopter, but the man refused, saying, "The Lord will rescue me." At length, the house was washed away along with him. He drowned. When he got to heaven he asked the Lord why He did not rescue him. The Lord replied, "Well, I sent along a guy in a rowboat and a rescue helicopter, but you refused them, and now here you are." This is a lesson for us, that as we are asking the Lord to increase our church numbers, we remember to use all the resources available to us, because it may be that the Lord is providing those resources, even though they are used by secular business owners to market their products.

Of course, to attract people to our church, and keep them there, we have to have something for them once they get in the door. We have to decide what type of church we want to be, and what type of person we want to attract. If we want to attract young people, we need to have our services and programmes allied to young

people. There is no point trying to attract young people to a church that has one Sunday service made up of three hymns and a sermon. They would come in the door, be totally bored, and walk right out again. If we want to attract mature and elderly folk who are just looking for a “middle of the road” comfortable church with a welcoming “family” group of members and good pastoral care, it is no point having a noisy, lit up service with a rock band providing the music. So, we need to decide on the type of church we want to be, and then find out the type of people in our community who would enjoy what we have to offer.

If we want to attract young people with a strong sense of mission, we need to provide discipleship and Bible training programmes. Some churches have linked with Bible colleges and discipleship training schools for that purpose, so that when a young person joins the church, they can develop themselves in the ministry of their choice. If a young person wants to have a music ministry, there must be resources in the church to train them in music, learn their chosen musical instrument, and give them opportunity to practice and develop their skill in the church services. If we cannot provide these things, don't bother trying to attract this type of young person, because they just won't be interested. Some churches have linked with sporting clubs to provide outlets for those who are sports-minded. Other churches have incorporated Scouting and Guiding groups. The Methodist Church has Boy's Brigade; the Anglican Church has its Church Army. Still other churches have holiday programmes for children, and children's playgroups. All those are set up to provide ministry opportunities for members.

In the same way, if we want to attract mature and retired folks, we need to provide programmes and opportunities to use their skills, whether it is practical or theological. There also needs to be a strong social support programme to provide fellowship opportunities, such as a mature singles group for widowed people, providing outings and social events.

For those who believe that all they have to do is to have prayer meetings to ask God to bring new members into the church (and there is absolutely nothing wrong with prayer meetings for that purpose), but do nothing else, they are doomed to failure and frustration if they listen to any suggestion from God about resources they can use to achieve the purpose. When God speaks, action must follow. It is like Moses when he was crying out to God as the Egyptians were approaching. God asked him, “Why are you on your face crying out to Me? Get up and do what I tell you.” Moses did that, and a mighty miracle resulted. For those who are doing nothing but crying out to God for new people to come into the church, He would say, “Get up off your knees and use the resources that you have available to you.”

Some churches have planning meetings and try to organise grandiose activities to draw people in, but many of these fail because they have started too big. Starting small is a better approach. Organising a ladies coffee morning and inviting members of the local community along and just establishing friendship is one small way of attracting people into the church. Another is having a community barbecue and inviting the community along. Making it free of charge would be an excellent way of attracting people who would otherwise not come. It would certainly attract low-income and university students who would never turn down a free feed. If this happened on a regular basis, say once a month (and our church can admirably afford it), it would give people the impression that our church is a caring, generous and welcoming church. That would go a long way in attracting new people to our services.

A kindergarten teacher was walking around observing her classroom of children while they were drawing pictures. As she got to one girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, "I'm drawing God."

The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like."

Without looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."



(See Matthew 10:29-31)

11-16-2005

**WE ONLY HAVE TO NUMBER THE HEAD HAIRS,
RIGHT?**

Late Notices

Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles, and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

- The church will host an evening of fine dining, superb entertainment, and gracious hostility.
- Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday. Please use the back door.

TRUE PEACE MAY BE INTERRUPTED

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you troubled within me?" —Psalm 42:11.

It is possible that the saints and people of God, may be much discouraged, and cast down: though there be an inward peace and quietness of soul, which they are ordinarily endued with, yet possibly this peace may be interrupted, and themselves much discouraged and cast down.

Here are two words in the text speak as much; cast-down, disquieted. And three times in this Psalm, the Psalmist says, his soul was cast down within him, yet this David was a man of great peace and comfort ordinarily.

And as with David, so it was, is, and will be with other saints. This is so ordinary a case, that the Holy Spirit has provided a standing psalm, or prayer, on purpose for such as are in this condition: Psalm 102, the title, "A prayer, or psalm, of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the Lord." In Psalm 119:25, he says, "My belly cleaves to the dust;" and that is low indeed. And verse 28, "My soul melts for heaviness: "I am not only sad and heavy, but my soul melts for heaviness. Song of Solomon 5, the Spouse says, "Her heart was gone "or, "My soul failed within me." And if we look into Psalm cxliii., we find, at the 4th verse, that the Psalmist says, "My spirit is overwhelmed, and my heart within me is desolate.

What do all these expressions, high, great and many, speak, but this truth that is now before us^o?

For the more full clearing and opening of it, I shall labour to show—

First, How far it is possible for a good person to be discouraged, or cast down.

Secondly, How it does come to pass that he is so discouraged.

Thirdly, How those discouragements can stand with his grace and goodness.

Fourthly, How they may be healed and cured.

And first. If you ask, How far the discouragements of saints may reach? For, will some say, I know it is possible that the most gracious, holy person, may be much discouraged, but not with such discouragements as my are.

1. I answer. What are yours? Are you so far uneasy, discouraged, cast down, as to refuse the word, promise, or consolation that is brought to you?

So far may the discouragements of the saints extend: Psalm 77, verse 3, "I remembered God, and was troubled." He doesn't say, I remembered my sin, and was troubled, but God; yes, I wasn't only troubled, but "I did complain, and my spirit was overwhelmed within me." But when the promise came, and mercy came, and comfort came, did he refuse that too? Yes: verse 2, "My soul refuses to be comforted."

2. Are you so far discouraged, troubled, cast down, that your very body feels the pain of your discouragements? That you do not only refuse the promise, and all comfort for your soul, but even for your body? Then look into Psalm 102, and see if your case may not be paralleled, verse 4, "My heart is smitten and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread: verse 5, "By reason of the voice of my groaning, my bones cleave to my skin:" verse 6, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness, and I am like an owl of the desert:" verse 9, "I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping:" verse 10, "Because of your indignation and your wrath; for you have lifted me up and cast me down:" verse 11, "My days are like a shadow that declines; and I am withered like grass."

Oh, but I am not only so far discouraged, as to refuse comfort for soul and body, but my soul refuses duty, and casts off duty too for the present.

3. Therefore, it is possible, that a good and gracious person 's discouragements may extend thus far too. You will think it strange that I find an instance for this in that holy man Jeremiah; yet if you look into Jer. 20:7—9 you find it made good. Indeed, he says, "The word was as fire in my bones, and I could not forbear."

But for the time he did resolve to forbear preaching in the name of God, which was his duty, which he had commission to do: for, he says, "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name." This holy, gracious man was under testing, he was much discouraged, and thereupon he said so.

Yet, verse 13, he says, "Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord; for he has delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil doers." But then mark the next words; "Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed." "Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born to you."

What a sudden change was here, even in the best of the saints, from encouragements to discouragements. Oh, but I haven't only cursed the day of my birth, as Jeremiah, and wished that I had never been born; but I am weary of my life, and have sought after my own death: and was there ever any godly, gracious person , that was thus discouraged, and cast down?

Yes. What do you think of Job? "I was weary of my life," 10:1. And in the 3rd chapter, Job, pouring out his complaint in regard of himself, he says, verse 20, "Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul?" verse 21, "Which long for death, but it comes not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures." Now you know, that those which dig for gold and silver, dig industriously and earnestly. Thus it is with me, says Job, I am so afflicted, and distressed; and in

such bitterness of soul, that I long for death, and dig for it as for hid treasures.

Oh, what a mighty deep discouragement, that the saints and people of God can fall into, and yet be godly, gracious!

Secondly, But why does God allow his own people and dearest children to be thus discouraged, and their peace to be interrupted? I know, will some say, that all our present joy and comfort, is just part of our natural being, and so may be eclipsed; and that Satan is near to the best of God's children, thrusting and pushing them forward into these discouragements, that they may be just like himself who is a discouraged spirit: but why will God allow it to be so?

In general, it is for their good, for their good they have, and for their good they do lack their peace and comfort. The star which led the wise people to Christ did not always go before them, but sometimes it appeared, sometimes it was hidden from them: but both appearance and hiding was for their benefit; its first appearance invited them to Christ, and its withdrawing made them more diligent in seeking after him.

So when Christ hid himself from his mother Mary, she sought him the more, and when she found him, she rejoiced the more: but both his absence and his presence, her fear and her comfort, was for her good; for his absence did increase and draw out her desires, and his presence did increase and draw out her joys.

When God is absent from us, then we have testimonies of our love to God, by our desires after him; and when he is present, then we have testimonies of his love to us, by the shining of his countenance; so that whether God shines or not, whether we have comfort or not, both is for our good. Thus in the general, but yet there is more in particular.

1. You know it is God's way and manner to deal with the children of people, according to their own dispositions, to stoop and condescend to their infirmities: therefore the prophet Hosea says, "He draws us with

the cords of a man." Hosea 11:4. Now it is man's disposition to come to God second hand: as long as man can find a fullness in any natural source, he doesn't come to God; unless at first he sees an emptiness in any natural person, duty and ceremony, and then he says, Oh what a fullness is in God himself, in Christ himself! "The widow that is desolate trusts in God," 1 Tim. 5:5; though a widow, yet if not desolate, sometimes, she would not trust; and therefore God allows a desolation to come upon her widowhood.

When David's people took up stones to have stoned him, then, says the text, "He encouraged himself in the Lord his God," 1 Sam. 30:6. So long as man has encouragement elsewhere, he doesn't encourage himself in the Lord his God. This being man's nature, and God having a design of love upon his own children, he suffers a damp and discouragement to pass upon all their comforts: their peace to be interrupted, their hearts troubled, and their souls discouraged, that so they may encourage themselves in God alone.

2. This inward peace and quietness of soul, is so great a commodity, that God would have the price to be enhanced and raised. Common and ordinary blessings once lost, and found again, are extraordinary: it is a common and ordinary mercy that a person goes to work, and is involved in his trade; but if he be sick for a while, lose his health, and not be able for five or six weeks to go to his work; if then he can get down but one day, Oh, he says, what an extraordinary mercy and blessing is it, that I should go down again: thus the interruption of an ordinary blessing does raise it to an extraordinary.

So long as a person has his health and strength, though he be able to travel forty, fifty, sixty miles a day, he isn't much affected therewith; but if he be sick a little, and at death's door, and then begins to recover, though he can but put forth his hand, or stir his leg, he blesses God, and says, Oh, friends, I can stir myself in my bed, I can move my hand, or my leg; what an extraordinary mercy and blessing is this!

So in this case, so long as a person has inward peace and quietness of soul, without interruption, he looks upon it as a common mercy and blessing; but if his peace is a little interrupted, and his soul buffeted by Satan, and then he recovers his peace, Oh, he says, what an extraordinary blessing and mercy is this! Now God will sometimes raise the price of this commodity from an ordinary to an extraordinary blessing, and therefore he allows his own children and dearest servants to be thus discouraged, and their peace to be interrupted.

A pastor I know has a standard liturgy for funerals. To personalize each service, he uses the Find and Replace command on his computer to replace the name of the deceased from the previous funeral with the new name.

The next morning, the funeral was going smoothly until the Apostle's Creed. "Jesus Christ," the congregation read from the program, "born of the Virgin Edna..."

3. God is a tender Father, and he would have all the love of his children; he would not have his children to love their nanny more than himself: our joy and peace and comfort, is but the nanny of our graces; now when God sees that his children fall in love more with the nanny than with himself, then he removes the nanny, and causes their peace to be suspended and interrupted: he will not have the nanny to be loved more than himself.

4. Sometimes God does allows this cloud to arise upon the peace and comforts of his people, that he may train them up to more perfection; comfort is the children's milk: you may observe, therefore, that the weaker Christian has sometimes more lively, sensible comforts, than the stronger Christian has; why? but because this inward joy and peace and comfort, is that milk and sweet honey, whereby they are drawn away from the pleasures and sweetness of the world; and as these comforts do

wean us from the world's comforts, so we have need to be weaned again from these weaners, which God does sometimes by restraining them, and so we grow up to more perfection.

5. Sometimes, again, God sees his children growing vain and light and frothy, careless and secure under their peace and comfort, and then he withdraws himself, hides his face, and so they lose their comfort. This was the case in Song of Solomon 5, where the spouse says, "My soul fails within me," at verse 6. But why? "I opened to my Beloved, but my Beloved had withdrawn himself:" and why had he withdrawn himself? He comes and makes a tender of love and mercy, verse 2, and she would none, verse 3, "I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" that is, I am now laid to sleep; they are words that import security, and upon her security he withdraws himself, and being withdrawn, her soul fails within her.

And thus it is many times with the children of God; the Lord sees that they grow secure, vain, frothy and careless under their peace and comfort, then he withdraws himself, and their peace fails.

6. Our Lord and Saviour Christ is a tender surgeon, who has set all our bones which we ourselves have broken by our sins. You know that a wise and an honest surgeon, though he desire his patient may be quickly cured, yet if he sees the plaster doesn't lie right, he takes it off again, for it isn't laid right, he says: so does Christ when he sees that the comforts of his people sometimes are not right laid, and therefore, he says, though I desire this poor wounded soul may be quickly cured, yet because this comfort, this promise, this experience doesn't lie right, it must be taken off again.

Now the comforts of the saints are so laid sometimes, as the very laying of them does breed discomfort. As in the sowing of seed; it isn't enough that the seed be good, but it must be well sown, else the very sowing of it may cause weeds: so though light be sown for the righteous, yet sometimes it so is sown, as that the very sowing of it breeds these weeds of fears and discouragements, that you may say, and that without

prophecy, Here is a poor soul that before long will be much discouraged, though for the present full of comfort.

But this is hard to say: can you predict a person's discouragements, even in the time of his comfort? Who is there among all the saints so comforted, concerning whom you may say, Surely this person will be much discouraged again?

When a person, a good person, does lay his spiritual comfort upon outward blessings, you may say beforehand, this person's comfort will never hold, but before long he will be much troubled; and this was the reason why the saints in the time of the Old Testament, laboured under so many discouragements, even because they measured the love of God so much by these outward blessings. Psalm 143:4, "Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me." Why so? Verse 3, "Because the enemy prevailed:"

He measured God's love too much by these outward things, and therefore when the enemy broke in upon him, he thought God did not love him, and so he was overwhelmed; thus in regard of all outward blessings. You therefore observe a person who raises his persuasion of God's love from the smiles of any natural person, say of such a person beforehand, Oh, this poor soul before long, will be in the dark, and under some discouragements.

When a person is unthankful for true peace and unhumbled over false peace, he cannot hold his peace long. Before a person is converted, he has inner peace: "For when the strong man keeps the house, all is at peace" but it is false peace: after a person is converted, he has inner peace, and it is true peace; God expects that a person should be humbled for his former false peace, and thankful for his present true peace. Now when God sees one both unhumbled for false peace and unthankful for his present true peace, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved, so it withdraws, and the soul is comfortless.

When a person raises his comfort only from somewhat that he does find within himself; from grace that he does find within, and not from grace on the surface; from Christ within, and not from Christ on the surface; then his comfort will not hold. A thing is perpetual, which has a perpetuating cause: surface grace is perpetual, Christ's own personal obedience in the merit of it is perpetual; but the actions of grace within us, are not perpetual, or not perpetually obvious to sight, and therefore cannot perpetually comfort.

Indeed, our inner grace, and obedience, is in some respects a cause of our peace.

1. A cause without which we can have no comfort; for a godly person can have no comfort, if he has no obedience.
2. A cause which removes what hinders our comfort, namely, our sin.
3. A witnessing cause: for are there three that bear witness, the Spirit, water and blood; water, which is our sanctification, is one.
4. A confirming cause; for by our obedience and sanctification, our justification is confirmed, and the sense thereof; so that obedience is one cause, but not the only cause of our peace, nor the principal: when therefore you see the streams of a person's comfort run in this channel, raising all his comfort only, or principally from his obedience, or acting of inner grace, then you may say, though the stream is now full, holds back even a little, and before long you will see it dried up, and this person will be much discouraged.

When a good person lays his comfort upon the impression or a word that comes to mind, instead of upon the written word itself; for example, suppose a person takes the Bible and upon the opening it pitches on some promise; for the present he is much refreshed and comforted, Or suppose that he doesn't open the Bible nor reads the Scripture, but sitting down in a dark condition some promise comes to him which he had not thought of. Now at the coming of this promise, his heart is much

raised, warmed and comforted, insomuch that he concludes, saying, Now I am a child of God, now I know that God loves me, that I have a share in Christ.

Either this person raises his comfort from the written word, or from the word that comes to mind; if from the written word, how can his comfort die? If upon the bare word that comes to mind, how can his comfort live? Because when a word doesn't come to mind, then his comforts fail.



We read in Psalm 16, that "he shall multiply sorrows that hastens after another:" your translation reads it like this, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hastens after another God;" but the word God, isn't in the Hebrew.

The whole verse contains the words of Christ. What does he say at verse 2? "Oh my soul, you have said to the Lord, you are my Lord, my goodness, holiness, or righteousness isn't for you, but for the saints that are in the earth, and for the excellent in whom is all my delight."

But O Lord our Saviour, what if we do not go to your goodness, holiness and righteousness, resting upon that alone? He answers, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who have en after another." And isn't this to

hasten after another, when people rest upon the bare coming in the mind of the word or the impressions on the heart that are made thereby?

Where do we read in all the Scripture, turning from one end of the Bible to the other, do we read that Christ has appointed any such way of comfort as this, that a person should raise his comforts from pitching, or by an opening of the book?

If I pitch upon a promise to-day, and so have comfort, may I not pitch upon a threatening to-morrow, and so have no comfort again? Where has Christ appointed any such way as this, that I should measure God's love, or cast my everlasting condition by the coming to mind of a particular word?

Indeed, God does sometimes by his providence, upon the opening of the Bible, cause our eye to fall upon some promise, which is a providential comfort; he does sometimes send a particular word to support and bear up one's soul in a particular distress or affliction, but not that I should measure his everlasting love, or cast my condition by the coming to mind of every word. This therefore is to have one after another; and how many sorrows are multiplied upon the hearts of God's people through this?

How many poor souls are there that walk in this way! God our Father sees it, that the plaster isn't right laid, and so he decides to take it off, but all from a design of love, to lay it right; and for these reasons God suffers his own people to be much discouraged.

Thirdly, but how can all this stand with grace? Can a person be thus comforted and discouraged, discouraged and then comforted again? Thus to and fro in his comfort, yet in Christ, yet gracious, yet holy?

Yes: for though there is much evil in this traversing up and down, yet in the saints there is still a mixture of some grace with it, some grace mixed with their discouragements.

Take the saints and people of God, and though they be much discouraged and cast down, yet still they mourn after God; and though they cannot wait so patiently as they would, yet they say in truth, if they did but know that God would come at last, they would wait all their lives; here is grace; and though they cannot mourn for sins past, for which they are most troubled, yet they dare not put forth their hand willingly to any present sin.

I have read of one that was so troubled and cast down, that he said and thought, I find so little comfort in my soul, that I would willingly suffer my body to live in burning fire until Christ's coming, so that I might but have the assurance of God's love and favour; and though I am persuaded I shall go to hell, yet my hope is, that my pains here will be mitigated there, in all which trouble, says my author, nothing in the world could persuade him to do anything willingly that was displeasing to God; this person was at the last comforted, and then he would often say, The devil took advantage of my sorrow for evil things, to make me unthankful for good things.

But I speak this to show that the saints are never so discouraged, but still there is a grace that is mixed with it, they dare not sin. yes, and though by their very discouragements, they do sin against the gospel in unbelief, yet by the same discouragements they are kept from their sins against the law, these discouragements being as the lees (left over yesst after fermenting) that do keep the wines.

Yea, and though they do rest too much upon their righteousness, whereby their feet sink into divers quick-sands, yet it is because they would be the more obedient to God their Father, and in the midst of all their discouragement profess in truth, I would give all the world for the presence of God; here is grace, a mixture of grace with it; no surprise therefore, that these discouragements may be in a godly gracious person

But is there no evil in this, to be thus fluctuating to and fro, comforted and then discouraged? Is there no evil in these discouragements?

Much, very much; I shall not enter into the particulars. But how can they improve Christ as they should in this condition? As long as a person's title for his land is in question, he cannot sow his ground, nor build houses; and if you ask him, Why don't you sow your ground, and repair your houses? His answer is ready, I dare not lay out much cost, because my title is in question: so here, so long as a person's title to Christ is in question, he cannot improve Christ as he should.

If a person is going a journey and doesn't know the way, he loses much of his progress and of the comfort of it in trying to get directions, and thinking whether he is right or wrong; when he comes to three or four different turn offs, he stops there while he might drive further on. Then he sees a shepherd in a field at a distance from him, he drives up to him to inquire whether he is going in the right direction or not.

Yes, and all the day long he is thinking of the direction in which he is going, whether he is right; whereas, if he knew the direction, he might have many precious thoughts of God and of the word. So in this case, while a person is doubting and fearing and doesn't know whether he is on the road to heaven or not, how much precious time is lost! Thoughts of Christ lost! Thankfulness for mercy lost!

Of all hearts, the Scripture says, an unbelieving heart is an evil heart; and when people's hearts are discouraged and cast down, are they not unbelieving? Who wouldn't therefore take heed of these discouragements, and of the interruption of their peace?

Fourthly, but suppose now that I have lost my comforts?

In previous times, my soul was full of joy, but now I am quite discouraged; what should a poor soul do to recover his peace and comfort again, that uninterrupted peace may be restored?

Going over our church finances I found a receipt from a local paint store signed by someone named Christian. I wasn't aware of anyone buying paint, so I called the store to point out its mistake.

"I'm sorry," I told the manager, "but there are no Christians here at First Baptist Church."

Some things by way of question; some things by way of doctrine.

1. Have you forgotten the years of the right hand of the Most High? Have you lost all your experience too? I know that usually when our comforts fail, our former experiences fail, yet not always; for the Psalmist says, "My soul is cast down," yet at the same time, verse 6, he says, "Therefore I will remember you from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." So Psalm 72, the Psalmist having said at the 7th verse, "Will the Lord cast off for ever; and will he be favourable no more; is his mercy clean gone forever; and does his promise fail for evermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious?" He adds in the same breath, "But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

You know what the disciples said, "Did not our hearts glow within us while he opened the scriptures to us?" Luke 24:32. Beloved! You have no comfort now, well, but you remember at such a time, when you were all alone in your chamber, and no soul was near you, how the Lord came and opened the scriptures, the promise to your soul, wherewith your heart did glow within you.

Have you quite forgotten the openings of those scriptures to you; (I don't speak of the glowing, for I suppose they are now gone) but are the scriptures gone that were then opened to you; didn't you say in your last

trouble and down-cast condition, if ever the Lord appear to me again, I will never doubt of his mercy again; and didn't he appear to you and open the promise to your heart; and have you now forgotten these things? This is your infirmity, why shouldn't you remember the days and times and works and experiences of the right hand of the Most High?

2. You may be using the means for the restoring of your comforts in such a manner, with the result that you lose them more? A person may have great desire after some preferment and place, which many, like riding horses in a fox hunt strive for, but one is so hasty that he rides over hedge and ditch, and thereby falls and hurts himself, so others get before him, and by his too much haste, he loses his place.

Thus it is sometimes with good people, they make so much haste to their comfort, that they lose it by their haste; they would have it sooner if they went on in an ordinary way of waiting on God without such hurry; but they must have it to-day; oh let me know my interest in Christ to-day, says one, or else I am undone forever.

Thus, by stinting and limiting God to a time, they test the Holy One, and so are more distant from their comfort; the more the child cries, and is contrary under discipline, the longer is the discipline continued.

Some seek comfort in a way of reason, and think to reason out their testing, and to reason in their comfort, but as one says well, Don't argue with God lest you be confounded, Don't dispute with Satan lest you be deceived.

Some again tire themselves in duty, neglecting of their calling; the truth is, prayer is a friend to comfort, and more than ordinary time is to be used in prayer for those that are troubled in conscience, but when people under testing, and without comforts throw up their callings, thinking that nothing is to be done but prayer, by throwing aside their calling, they lay themselves open to more testing of Satan, they so tire out their natural spirits in duty, that they are flat and dead in duty, so their testing

are the more increased, and their comforts more distanced. For this reason consider, if you would have comfort restored again, think about not using the means of comfort in such a manner, with the result of setting you at a further distance from it.

3. Whether you haven't strained, and reached for some out-ward comfort so far, as to lose your inward comfort? I read of Francis Spira, that when he was in horror of conscience, he could not with peace and quietness look at his wife and children, for, to get an estate for them he denied the truth, and therefore when they came before him in his trouble, he cried out in much horror, How terrible is the sight of these to me! They had been comforts to him before, yet now he could not away with the sight of them. Oh, thought he, for your sakes, and for your provision, I have denied the truth and yielded to these superstitions; and therefore he says, How terrible is the sight of these to me!

What peace or comfort had Judas in the sight of his thirty pence? Look for what outward comfort a person strains his conscience: that will be death to him to behold.

We read of David, that when his people had ventured for the waters of Bethlehem, he would not drink of it, but poured it out before the Lord, for, he says, "Why should I drink the blood of these people?" He did not sin in desiring of it, nor did he command his people for to venture through the enemy's quarters, for those Hebrew words, who will give me? are but words of wishing, who will give me to drink of the waters of Bethlehem; that is, Oh, that I had the waters of Bethlehem: according to the Hebrew language, but though he sinned not in his desires, yet when he had the waters, he poured them forth before the Lord, and said, "God forbid that I should drink the blood of these people;"

And will you drink the blood of your own conscience? In the past when you had peace and comfort, and by straining and stretching your conscience for your outward comfort, now you have lost your inward, won't you then take that outward comfort, and pour it forth before the Lord, and say, God forbid that I should drink the blood of my own

peace and comfort? How can any of you have peace, while those stolen and unrestored goods lie by you?

But alas! All my comforts do lie prostrate at the feet of my fears, that now I have no peace at all: what shall I do that my peace and comfort may be restored?

By way of direction, three things.

1. Look what you would do if you were to be justified, and do the same now: if I were to be justified, having a sight of my own sin and nature, I would, through grace, receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and leave the weight of my poor, guilty soul upon it; which act of faith would justify me, and give me peace; for "being justified by faith (says the apostle), we have peace with God."

And as faith justifies and give peace at the beginning, so the renewing of this act of faith does renew our peace; and what is my justifying faith, except in time of testing to leave myself and condition upon Christ alone, saying, Whether godly or ungodly, whether in Christ or not in Christ, now I do not dispute, but leave myself upon Christ alone: Do this again, and this will bring peace again.

2. You have now lost your comforts and the shining of God's face: either God has withdrawn himself for your sin, or not; if not for your sin, he will return again, and that quickly too; if for your sin, labour more and more for to find it out, and to be humbled for it.

I know you will say, Oh, but now in this condition I cannot be humbled.

But with all this remember, that in this condition, that goes for humbling which doesn't previously, and God will take that for humiliation now, which he would not take previously. Psalm 32 says David, "I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." He said he would do it, but did not do it fully, yet you forgave the iniquity of my sin. God took his humiliation although it was very

low. Why? Verses 3 and 4, we find him under testing and in much discouragement, for he says, "My bones waxed old with my roaring all the day long, day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer," yet how ready was God to receive an acknowledgment, and a little humiliation from him at this time.

Oh, but what is all this to us? This was David's case. No, says David, this isn't my case alone, for verse 6, "For this shall every one that is godly pray to you, in a time when you may be found." God will receive a little when you are much discouraged. Either therefore God has withdrawn for your sin, or not; if not, wait but a little, he will return again; if for your sin, labour more and more to be humbled for it, for he will receive that measure of humiliation now, which he will not do at any other time.

3. Are all your comforts gone, and would you have them gladly restored? Then read and read the Scripture much; if you cannot read yourself, get some others for to read them to you. When a person's mind is empty, as in testing and lack of comfort, it is empty of Christ, and full of fear, then it grinds itself as a quern (a simple hand mill for grinding corn) or mill when empty of corn, one stone grinds another: the more full a person's mind is, the more free from testing and fears.

Now Scripture matter is the most filling matter, the more you see Christ walking in the sweet shades of divine love toward poor sinners, the sooner will your faith revive, and your comforts be restored; and where can you see Jesus Christ walking, and taking his turns with poor sinners under the shades of divine love, but in the Scriptures? Stand there awhile, and you shall see him, and your heart will say, And why not one turn of love with me, oh my Saviour? Study, read, and read much the scriptures.

But if I do read the scriptures, and read them much, I shall then meet with some promise, possibly many, and now I cannot apply them being thus discouraged as I am, I shall see the promises indeed, and say, There

is such and such an old friend of mine, but it is now my enemy, the promise will not own me, and I cannot apply it, and so it will do me no good.

You cannot tell what the promise will do till you come to apply it; the promise never shows its power and strength till it is applied, it then works when it is put to work, and not before. When Moses saw his rod turned into a serpent, he was afraid of it, and fled from it, but when he put forth his hand and took it by the tail, it was a rod in his hand again, as it was before; it may be you look upon such and such a promise at a distance, and you say, Oh, there is my enemy, now it will not help me, it will sting me, it will undo me, but put forth your hand again to it, and it will become a promise, a rod in your hand, as comfortable as ever it was before.

And the promise doesn't come to you? Go to it. Sometimes the promise does come to us, sometimes we go to it; when the promise does come to you, you have joy, when you go to it, you have peace, and this peace may last longer than the other joy; but remember this as an everlasting rule, that very relying upon the promise makes it yours.

But if I read the scriptures much in this condition of my discouragement, I shall not only meet with the promise, but with a threatening, and that will discourage me more.

Not so, for if a threatening makes way to the promise, and does therefore come forth to meet you, that it may lead you to the promise, have you any hurt by it? Now as the law was a schoolmaster to bring to Christ, so sometimes the threatening is a schoolmaster to bring you to the promise.

Yes, and God therefore sometimes sends the threatening that it may lead you to the promise.

You know how God appeared to Elijah, first in a wind that shook the mountains and rocks, but God wasn't there; then in an earthquake, but

God wasn't there; then in a fire, but God wasn't there; then in a still voice, and there was God. So when God appears to a soul, sometimes he first sends a threatening, and shakes the rocks and mountains, and hard hearts, and his converting grace may not be there, but there is a still voice behind, the voice of the promise, God is there, and all this shaking of the threatening, is but to make way to the still voice of the promise that is behind.

Oh, but if I should read the scriptures much in this condition, I should meet with many other things which don't concern me, are there many histories in the Scripture which don't suit with my condition, and so I shouldn't get any good or comfort.

Don't say that; Christ cures, by way of divergence, as you do those that are grieved. If a friend have lost a husband, or wife, or child, you do not speak of the lost person and say, Oh, what a sweet friend, or husband, or wife, or child you have lost; but you speak of something else, and then afterwards you are able to speak of the person lost, but first you divert his mind from the matter of his grief, and so you cure his grief.

Thus Christ also does when he cures a poor, wounded, grieved soul, he doesn't always speak to the subject matter of grief in hand, but leads the heart sometimes into the consideration of other truths, and then afterwards speaks to the matter that is now concerning; he cures by way of divergence.

Study therefore, oh, study the Scriptures much, for in this way the Lord will pour wine and oil into your bleeding wounds, and in due time you will say, as David did, "In the multitude of my thoughts, O Lord, your comforts have comforted my soul," Psalm 94:19.

But suppose the Lord does restore to me the joy of my salvation that the bones which I have broken may rejoice; suppose there is a return of peace and joy, what shall I do then?

I shall not need to tell you what then, you will tell me what then, for you will say, Oh, now I must be thankful, now I must believe, now I will never doubt of mercy and of grace again. Only take these few words of advice.

Be sure that you understand your comforts rightly; don't be mistaken in them: labour to distil and refine your comforts. As there was a mixed company came out of Egypt, which set the Israelites murmuring; so there is a mixed company that comes with your comforts. Every person is born into the world with some filth; when you have comfort, labour to find out and separate the dross and filth, put away that mixed company. Rose leaves don't keep long in the leaf: distilled comforts keep the longest.

If you would be rid of Satan from invading your quarters, invade his; the way to keep the enemy out of our country, is to invade his. So deal with Satan, do him all the mischief you can; don't be barely offensive, get up and come against him aggressively.

If you would keep your comforts, put them all into the hand of Christ to be kept for you. A child who doesn't know how to keep his money, if he gets ten dollars from any friend, he brings it to his father or mother, and says, Mother, pray keep this ten dollars for me.

You have experience that you cannot keep your own comforts you will lose and spend them quickly. As Jesus Christ is the Lord Treasurer of all our graces, so he is the Lord Keeper of all our comforts; and therefore, when God is pleased to give in any comfort to you, go to Jesus Christ, and say, Lord, keep my comforts for me, keep my evidences for me, keep my assurance for me: you must not only depend upon Christ for graces, but for comforts; and as well for the keeping, as for the getting of them.

As you have any spiritual comfort from Christ, spend the lot for Christ: for though in temporal things, the way to have just a little is to spend much; yet in spiritual things, the more you spend, the more you have.

And therefore whatever comfort you have, spend it with the saints. Do as Moses did: when he was in Pharaoh's court and in great preferment, standing in the presence of the king, he went out to visit his brethren, and to comfort them under their burdens: "I will see (he says) how it fares with my brethren, under their burdens." So you do the same.

Has the Lord spoken peace and comfort to your soul, and do you now stand in the presence of the King of kings, having his face shining on you, with your comforts all restored to you? Now then go out to your brethren, and inquire who they are that labour under any burden, and with the same comfort wherewith you have been comforted yourselves, comfort others, knowing this for certain, that the more you spend, the more you shall have, and the longer you shall keep your comforts: yes, and this Christ expects, that what comforts we have from him, we should spend for him.¹



¹ I acknowledge the work of William Bridge, "A Lifting Up Of The Downcast" in this article on the interruption of God's peace. I am including his work in my magazine because it is a message not often given in churches and I don't want this important truth to be lost.



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The church was badly in need of a coat of paint. So
the pastor decided he'd do the job himself. But all he had
was one bucket of paint. So he got a bunch of buckets and
some water, and he thinned the paint enough to cover the
entire church. Then he spent all day painting. That night it
rained—very hard—and washed all the paint off. The
pastor was quite discouraged and asked God, 'Why...why
God, did you let it rain and wash off all my hard work?'
To which God thundered his reply, 'Repaint! Repaint!
And thin no more!'



The Gospel Faith Messenger

Equipping for Leadership in the Nations through the Power of the Holy Spirit



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Paul Christensen

This magazine's purpose is to build up the faith of believers.

I am an elder of St Aidan's Presbyterian Church in Conifer Grove, Auckland NZ. At present, I am assisting with the ministry of the church along with the other elders and very capable preachers as part of an elder-run church.

I am including articles from recognized, effective pastors and ministries that have proved themselves in having the Holy Spirit work with them in the conversion of sinners, effective and powerful impact that they have on believers, and in the growth of their churches. I think that it is important for the members of the congregation to have a range of ministry outside of their usual one-person ministry that has been the norm for a number of years before our current minister recently resigned.

You will notice that I have included jokes and humorous pictures in this magazine. I am a strong believer in humour as a healing resource. I believe that the business of sharing the Gospel is serious, but some become so serious that they are dour and humourless. I don't think that these people are a good advertisement if we want our church to grow and be filled with believers who are passionate for Christ and who approach their faith with joy. "In His presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11), and good, clean humour is an important part of that.

All articles are printed with the kind permission of the authors, who believe that it is important that the message of the Gospel gets out there, and the importance of walking with God in love and faith, along with unity among Christian believers.

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Once you have read this, pass it on to someone else who might be encouraged by reading it.