

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of**  
**July 2019**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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(see following pages)

## **Spiritual Blessing – Pt 2**

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

In considering this passage (Ephesians 1:3-14) in the context of Spiritual Blessings, last week we began by noticing that the passage answers two questions: what are Spiritual Blessings (as separate from earthly blessings, some of which all people on earth can enjoy)? And how can we enter into them?

So far having noticed that Paul groups the Spiritual Blessings (all of which are to be enjoyed by each and every true Christian – but only Christians) into three groups: present; past; and future. The present Blessings are – Adoption and Acceptance. While the past blessing is the redemption Christ has purchased through the shedding of His blood, making it possible for those that ‘God gave Him before eternity – the Elect’, to be adopted as sons and accepted by the Father, God.

To day we continue to describe the Spiritual Blessings: those in the future and then answer the second question posed last week: How do we enter into all these Spiritual Blessings? (which we come to at the beginning of next week’s study.

From past blessings to present blessings the Apostle now leads to consideration of Future blessings. There is no cloud over my future with God, when I am an adopted and accepted son. But what specifically lies ahead in the future?

Verses 8 to 10: Verse 8 tells us that God's grace has been *lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight*. We understand things that others don't understand! Verse nine: that God has made known to us *the mystery of his will*. The first thing to say is, that as far as the future is concerned, it's not a secret to us. Other people are left wondering. They're left guessing, about what the future holds. But we're not! Where in on the secret. It's been revealed to us. Revealed by the Apostles and formalised in the Bible. God has plans: When the time is right. When it is His time. His plans are going to be put into operation. God controls history says the Apostle there. And when the time is right God will do, what he's always planned to do. And what is this plan? He's planned that in the future, He will gather together in one, all things ‘in Christ’. Those things which are in heaven and in earth.

Paul's telling us what he's told us lots of times: This rebellious Universe won't always be in rebellion. The time will come when the only rule will be the rule of Christ. The time will come when everything that has ever shown dissatisfaction with Jesus Christ, at last will have to own (acknowledge) His Lordship and honour Him. There's a great disorientation in this rebellious universe. This disorientation will all be finished. Will be brought back to its original unity, where everything submits to Christ. Marvellous! This mocking world, will one day see the elevation of Jesus Christ, for itself. And every knee shall bow, you know, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father. That's no secret to us for the future.

And at that time, verse 1, at that stage, we will enter into the promised inheritance. We're the adopted children. we're the chosen heirs. We've been chosen and adopted, so that we can enter into the riches, which the Father has prepared for us. And we will!

*<sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ...* There's no chance that we will fail to enter into the inheritance, because everything in history, fulfils God's will. The whole of history is moving forward to the great climax when everything submits to Christ. When Christian people enter into their inheritance. What is the inheritance? Well the Apostle Paul doesn't tell us here. But we're told else where in scripture: Changed into the likeness of Christ – our bodies like His glorious body; no tears; no pain; no sin; no parting; no curse; no darkness, the Lamb is all the light of the place. Enjoying the dwelling place of God. Unrestrained fellowship with the Living God. With all His holy Angels. With all his Elect people. Forever and ever, without any need for respite or interruption. Nothing to spoil. No sin. Marvellous! That's where we're going.

But somebody might have a fear this morning: Paul is quick to recognise this possibility and to allay the fear. The fear is, when all the people are welcomed into their inheritance, it's going to be millions of them. Maybe God will forget me! He'll be saying, "Come into a kingdom that's been prepared for you before the foundation of the world". But perhaps He'll forget me! Perhaps I won't get noticed.

Paul is quick to say that something happened to you. Something wonderful happened to you, when you first became a Christian. (Verses 13 & 14)

When you became a Christian, God put a 'mark' on you. Paul mentions that you were 'sealed'. In the early world, very often, a merchant would 'seal' his goods. So that he knew which were his and which were fakes, counterfeit or spurious. (Like a famous artist might write a distinctive signature at the corner of his work) So a personal 'mark' or 'seal' is put on the articles to confirm ownership. "When you first believed", says the Apostle, "you were 'sealed'. You were 'sealed' with the Holy Spirit." Now that's not something that the Holy Spirit did. The Holy Spirit Himself, IS the 'seal'.

However someone might say, that earlier translations of the New Testament might say, (verse 13) '...in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Here in the Greek we have an example of the contemporaneous aorist participle. Notice that in the Gospels when Jesus answered a question it literally seems to say in the Greek, "After He answered He said." (Matthew 16:2 – and others) Which is not an appropriate meaning (to our English Language way of understanding things). How can you say something after you've answered already. So despite what it says in the way the Greek words are ordered, what it clearly means is, "(when) answering He said." or "As He answered, He said" Which is the way to interpret the contemporaneous aorist participle. (Participles in Greek – unlike English which only has two forms, past and present – can have a wide variety of forms and purposes

depending on the set of extra letters added to the verb from which they are derived and the actual context of the rest of the text.

Paul uses such a Greek participle here. Older translators translated the Greek in such a way as to retain the order of the Greek words, but in doing so obscuring the meaning to an English Language reader. The meaning of the form of this participle in the accompanying context is that the believing and the sealing of the Holy Spirit was contemporaneous – not the belief and then separately (and later) the sealing.<sup>1</sup>

At the moment of 'believing' you were 'sealed' with the Holy Spirit Himself. God marked you out as belonging to Him, by giving you there and then the Holy Spirit. And to underline his point (verse 14), Paul talks about the Holy Spirit as the guarantee ('earnest' KJV) or down payment of our inheritance. Paul, we have found already, was brought up in Tarsus, he was used to sitting near the docks and seeing the ships being loaded and the goods traded. Here is a merchant who wants to buy something: he hasn't got the full price at present, so he gives an earnest (a down payment), which is a pledge or deposit to guaranteed he will complete the purchase later. The same with the Holy Spirit. God's given you the Holy Spirit at the moment of believing. At the very moment you believe. To show to you that everything else that is promised will eventually be yours! And to show to you that you've really been purchased.

Everyone of God's children then, have been 'sealed' by the Holy Spirit. Every one of them has received the down payment. So at the last day, God only has to collect those men and women, who being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are 'marked out' as the redeemed. Nobody can be overlooked, because all the redeemed are marked with the divine 'mark'. Conversely, implies Paul elsewhere, any without the 'mark' of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit are not God's Redeemed Children: not a Christian at all! You can tell whether you are a Christian by asking yourself: "Have I received the Holy Spirit?"

"You can tell if you've received the Holy Spirit", says the Apostle John, (1 John)

- "If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with all your heart and soul (doctrinal 'mark');
- you long to obey the Law of God in your heart of hearts – you long to please God (moral 'mark'); and
- you love Christians like you love nobody else on earth (social 'mark'), then you have received the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

1 Although it is certainly possible to translate this last text as "after hearing ... after believing you were sealed," both the grammatical possibility of contemporaneity and the overall context lead me to believe that the aorist participle is contemporaneous here. Contextually, the threefold praise to the Godhead is in the first two instances due to God's prior action (election, redemption). To be consistent, it should be this way for the third leg (in the least, sealing should not follow believing). Further, in the following context (2:1-10), this theme of God's saving grace is given greater articulation. The metaphor of death in that passage as the state from which the elect were delivered gives no confidence that conversion precedes regeneration.

2 John goes on to say that when at times your heart (emotions) makes you doubt if you are a Christian (damages your Assurance), then God is the judge of the evidence of your possession of the three 'marks' and rejects your doubts (to restore your Assurance). Giving a clear guide that the true Christian Gospel is one of knowledge/understanding/mind and not special-experiences/emotions/feelings. (1 John 3:19-20) – see also [http://www.knowyourbible recordings.org/sermons\\_locked/1JN07.mp3](http://www.knowyourbible recordings.org/sermons_locked/1JN07.mp3)

The sign of receiving the Holy Spirit isn't 'tongues'. All sorts of spiritualists, speak in tongues, but they haven't received the Holy Spirit! The sign of having received the Holy Spirit is not great feelings of elation. You can get that with various drugs from the doctor. The sign of receiving the Holy Spirit is a spiritual change. By which one believes differently; walks differently; and loves differently.

It's wonderful isn't it, to be a Christian. In this life we enjoy adoption and acceptance, because we're the redeemed children of God with all our sins forgiven; We walk with confidence in this life, knowing that we're indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and that when at last we go to the grave and then resurrected, God won't forget us because His unique 'mark' is upon us. That unique 'mark', even in this life, is a marvellous comfort. It shows us that we belong to Him and the Spirit cries in our hearts that we are children of God. There's no chance whatever that we will fail to enter into the Promised inheritance. That colours all our thinking, in this present world.

However we need to stress, that all true believers have been 'sealed' by the Holy Spirit: There are some people today, Christian brothers and sisters, who are teaching, that we received all the other blessings that we've mentioned, in Christ, on the simple condition of being a Christian. BUT then after you've become a Christian there is a special experience that might be personal or communal, which elevates you to a higher spiritual realm, and that this special experience is called the 'sealing' of the Holy Spirit. This teaching is swapping even reformed circles to which we gladly belong. As we've already seen it's a nonsense! Ephesians chapter 4 verse 30, confirms what a nonsense it is. Paul writes there, <sup>30</sup> *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Paul takes it for granted that every Christian is 'sealed'. It is unthinkable, that the only people who can grieve the Holy Spirit are the people who have had a 'special' added experience of the Holy Spirit! It's unthinkable that the only people on whom God has put the 'mark' of ownership are such, so-called, superior children. It is unthinkable that the only people who will be recognisable as Christian's on the day of redemption are those who have had a 'second' experience.

Those who haven't received the Holy Spirit aren't Christians at all, you know! Those who haven't received the 'sealing' of the Spirit, and haven't received the Holy Spirit as a down payment (an earnest) are in no way Christians. It's clear that the Holy Spirit Himself is the 'seal' that is, the 'sealing' of the Spirit is not something that the Spirit does, but the 'sealing' of the Spirit IS the Holy Spirit Himself. The 'sealing' of Promise! All the prophets promised, that in New Testament days, believers would be marked out by the indwelling of the Spirit. It was promised on the day of Pentecost, that when God called you to be a Christian, you would at the same moment, receive the Holy Spirit. The 'sealing' then is the Holy Spirit Himself. And to be asked, "Have you been sealed by the Holy Spirit?" Is to ask, "Are you a Christian at all?" There's no difference between these questions.

It should be a great source of regret to us all, that this further example of a PLUS theology exists at all. It's muddling tens of thousands of Christians, who are yearning and searching for some mystical, indescribable, something, that they can't quite put their finger on what it is. But they are wanting it more than anything else, on the basis that they've been taught that the 'sealing' of the Spirit is something extra. When the Apostle is insisting that all Spiritual blessings are ours, upon the simple condition of being 'in Christ'.

We are very rich this morning as Christian people: Redeemed; forgiven; adopted; accepted; and sealed, so that we are bound for Glory.

We can only join together and say, <sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ...*

[2250]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

1 Nothing to pay! ah, nothing to pay!  
Never a word of excuse to say!  
Year after year thou hast filled the score,  
Owing the Lord still more and more.  
Hear the voice of Jesus say,  
Verily thou hast nothing to pay!  
Ruin'd, lost art thou, and yet  
I forgave thee all that debt!"

Refrain:

Nothing, nothing nothing to pay!  
Hear the voice of Jesus say:  
"Ruined, lost art thou, and yet  
I forgave thee all the debt!"

2 Nothing to pay! the debt is so great!  
What will you do with the awful weight?

How shall the way of escape be made?  
Nothing to pay, what must be paid?  
Hear the voice of Jesus say,  
Verily thou hast nothing to pay!  
All has been put to My account,  
I have paid the full amount." [Refrain]

3 Nothing to pay! yes, nothing to pay!  
Jesus has cleared all the debt away,  
Blotted it out with his bleeding hand;  
Free and forgiv'n, and loved you stand.  
Hear the voice of Jesus say,  
Verily thou hast nothing to pay!  
Paid is the debt and the debtor free!  
Now I ask thee Lovest thou Me?" [Refrain]

## **Spiritual Blessing & Teaching on Election**

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

With reference to spiritual blessings and referring to verses 1 to 14 of Ephesians we first of all, introduce 3 questions.

The first question is the carry over of question 2 from the last couple of weeks where we considered what are the spiritual blessings, both now; in the past; and in the future. The carryover question which now becomes question 1, is: how to enter into these spiritual blessings? Answer: on the simple condition of being 'in' Christ. Look at verse three: <sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ...* Now verse four: <sup>4</sup> *even as he chose us **in him** ...* And verse five: <sup>5</sup> *he predestined us for adoption as sons **through Jesus Christ**, ...* 'in Christ'; 'in Him'; and 'through Jesus Christ'. Also verse six, the end of it: *... with which he has blessed us **in the Beloved**.* Verse seven: <sup>7</sup> ***In him** we have redemption ...* Verse ten: *... all things **in him**, ...* Verse eleven: <sup>11</sup> ***In him** we have obtained an inheritance, ...*

A little while ago we mentioned Dr Ernest Kevin: (a great theologian who is also a brilliant speaker to children) he had these bricks that fit inside one another: One brick was called 'perseverance'. He explained that we only persevere in the Christian life, because we're sanctified. So the 'perseverance' brick was fitted inside the brick called 'sanctification'. We only have a changed life – that is sanctified – because of adoption. So 'sanctification' fitted inside 'adoption'. And we are only the adopted Sons of God, because we are justified – put right with God, So the 'adopted' one fits inside 'justification'. And we're only justified because of what Jesus Christ has done for us, all the rest fit into largest brick called 'Christ'.

All spiritual blessings fit inside each other and they are all in Christ! So that once we have Christ we have all spiritual blessings. An excellent illustration, which is why we've used it twice in a short time.

It's all in Christ! The Apostle emphasises it there – 7 times, in 14 verses. It also says that all these spiritual blessings are ours, when we ourselves are 'in' Christ. When we have Christ. When we're united to Christ. When Christ is ours. When we're in a Saving union with Christ. How do we enter into spiritual blessings? In Christ.

Which raises the second question: How then is Christ received? I want to receive Christ so that I can receive all spiritual blessings. So how do I receive Christ? Look at verse 12: <sup>12</sup> *so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory ...* So here is Paul writing as an Apostle and he gives his own personal experience. Then by the use of the word 'also' he applies the same to all believers: <sup>13</sup> *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, ...*

Now our forefathers, used a lot of Latin in the pulpit. This is a facility that is not available to many of us, these days. However here's some Latin words: In Faith, by which we receive Christ, there are three elements. First there is Notitia,<sup>3</sup> which means that we know something. Then there is, Assensus.<sup>4</sup> Which means that we assent to (agree with) something. Then there is Fiducia.<sup>5</sup> Which means that we 'rest' upon (trust) something.

That was the experience of Paul himself. And that was the experience of the Ephesians as he describes it in verse 13. First of all they heard the truth (Notitia) – they knew something. They heard the gospel. The gospel of this letter. The gospel of the New Testament. Which announced the existence of God; how we've offended Him by breaking his Law; how Jesus Christ fully kept the Law, where we failed; How Jesus Christ bore, in his body, the sins of others – the penalty of breaking the law; the necessity of repentance – turning from the people that we are and the life we are living; and 'resting' ourselves entirely on Christ. First of all, they heard that. Nobody is in Christ today, who has not heard the Gospel.

But they didn't only hear the Gospel, they assented to it! There are plenty of people who have heard the Gospel, but they don't believe it, in any sense of the word. But these people had not only heard the Gospel, but they came to the conclusion that the Gospel message was true (Assensus).

However, there's more to it than that: That's why in verse 12 and in verse 13, he mentions 'hope' and 'believing'.<sup>6</sup> So they heard and believe the Gospel and also came to rely or rest on it with a forward-looking believing hope. Not only heard and believed the Gospel they also came to rely (rest) on it with a forward looking believing hope. So they didn't just believe a set of propositions they relied on the Christ whom they heard about.

[Again using the terminology of an earlier generation, they experienced recumbency. Meaning in essence, what in the physical sense, you are doing as you sit in your chair. Clearly your chair didn't give way. You had faith in the system – that the manufacturer knew how to make a chair that would support you. You gladly, without any concern, put your whole weight on it. You rested yourself entirely on the work of another. Afterwards you found that it didn't collapse or let you down. Your hope of what would come to pass in the future was vindicated. That's what future hope, belief or trust (as used in the KJV) means, in the New Testament.]

- 3 Notitia refers to the content of faith, or those things that we believe. We place our faith in something, or more appropriately, someone. In order to believe, we must know something about that someone, who is the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4 Assensus is our conviction that the content of our faith is true. You can know about the Christian faith and yet believe that it is not true. Genuine faith says that the content — the notitia taught by Holy Scripture — is true.
- 5 Fiducia refers to personal trust and reliance. Knowing and believing the content of the Christian faith is not enough, for even demons can do that (James 2:19). Faith is only effectual if, knowing about and assenting to the claims of Jesus, one personally trusts in Him alone for salvation.
- 6 In both places the AKJV uses 'hope'. However in verse 12 the Greek word used (its only occurrence in the NT) is **προηλπικότης** (proēlpikotás) meaning 'to hope in advance of other confirmation'.

I hear that Jesus Christ lived the law on behalf of others; I trust Him! That when He lived the Law He did it on my behalf. I hear that Jesus Christ died in the place of others; I trust Him! That when He died, He died on my behalf. I rest all my hopes, of being accepted by God, upon the life and death and rising again, of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's how people come to be 'in' Christ. United to Christ. To enjoy Christ. To have Christ. That's how it comes about that they have every spiritual blessing.

So how do we enter into those Spiritual blessings? By coming to Christ. How do we come to Christ? By knowing and hearing and believing and trusting. Which raises a third question:

Many people have heard the Gospel and haven't believed. We do. Many people have been in contact with Christian Truth, and yet in the final analysis it's left them untouched. Why are we different? Why us, and not others? Paul anticipates and answers that question also.

Look at first three: <sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing* – the original language gives the sense of 'giving'. Anyone who is experiencing spiritual privileges this morning, has had them given to them. But why has God given them to us, and not to others? Look at verse four: <sup>4</sup> *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world,...* Let the Apostle speak!

Look at Verse 5: <sup>5</sup> *he predestined us ...* And Verse 5 again: *...according to the purpose of His will,...* He chose us; He predestined us. Not because some were better than others, or some were more appealing to God than others, *according to the purpose of His will, ...* Look at verse 6: <sup>6</sup> *to the praise of his glorious grace, ...* He chose us, and adopted us, made us accepted, not because we deserved it – it was an act of Grace. Undeserved favour. Unmerited kindness. God did it as a gift, to the undeserving. That's what 'grace' is.

Look from verse 7, the end of the verse: *... according to the riches of his grace,* <sup>8</sup> *which he lavished upon us,* It's by an overflowing gift from the kindness of God, that we are saved this morning!

Look at the end of verse 9: *... according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ...* God chose those He was going to save, but His purpose was in Himself. He didn't consult with another. He didn't take anybody else into his confidence. He wasn't moved by any outside factor. He didn't look down upon us and see that there was some merit in us which, in some way deserved His attention. All! All his decree to save us, was according to His good pleasure (His purpose) in Himself.

So look at verse 11: <sup>11</sup> *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ... "Every virtue that we possess, and every Victory won, and every thought of holiness is His alone"* <sup>7</sup> We should greatly glorify God for His Grace this morning. If you're 'in' Christ you have every Spiritual blessing. It's because God in His grace, reached down, doing it because He chose to do it, and nothing moved Him except His own heart. He wasn't moved or influenced by any external factor whatever. It is all the kind purpose of His own will. All according to His good pleasure (purpose), that He reached down to you. To save you, so that you are 'in' Christ this morning! We should greatly glorify His grace. That's one of the things Paul says. See verse 6: <sup>6</sup> *to the praise of his glorious grace,* And see verse 12: <sup>12</sup> *so that we ... might be to the praise of his glory.* Further verse 14: *... to the praise of his glory.*

There's perfect logic, of course, in what Paul says. If my salvation had anything to do with me, then my praise would have to be mixed. I could give a great deal of worship to God, but I would have to retain some praise for myself. I could give immense credit to the Saving God, but I would have to keep some for myself. But that's not the way it is! The Lamb is all the glory, in 'Emmanuel's land'. So we should notice that nobody enters into spiritual blessings without election. That's why we should never play-down the doctrine of Grace. The temptation today is to pare away the edges. To blunt the sharpness of that truth a little bit. To dilute it. To bend it. So that it becomes more amenable and acceptable to men and women who listen to it. But the Apostle Paul won't do that. Because Grace is Grace and Grace is the theme of Heaven. And Grace should be the theme of the church on earth. He states it in the baldest but warmest terms. That everything we owe, we owe to God's electing purpose. He loved us because He loved us and we love Him because He loved us first. It's the whole spirit and movement of the New Testament. We dare not, for a minute, detract from or play down the doctrine of Grace.

On the other hand, notice, that none of the elect, ever entered into their spiritual blessings, without receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. And people don't receive the Lord Jesus Christ, unless they hear the word of Truth – the Gospel of your salvation. And just as surely as we owe everything to the decree, we also owe everything to hearing the Word of God in the practice of evangelism. We have here in Paul's mind, a perfect marriage, between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. No person was ever saved who was not chosen to be saved. But no person was ever saved, without hearing the Gospel. The **God who decreed who should be saved, also decreed by what means they should be brought to Salvation.** One decree is as certain as the other! Therefore we are moved and motivated to evangelism with equal enthusiasm to the way that we hold to the great doctrine of Grace. We find the doctrine of Grace and the doctrine of practical evangelism, are no contradiction, but are the closest of friends! They're found here together in the same passage.

Of course once you believe in election, evangelism becomes very exciting. When we first converse with the unconverted, we have no idea who the elect are. We only find

out when they come to Faith. If they hear the Gospel and come to believe, we know that's because of the electing decree of God. We're able to read in the events of history, what's been written in the books of eternity. A marvellous privilege!

So Paul is writing this passage to move us to praise God for our spiritual privileges. He's going to show us later in the book, how to live consistently with these privileges, and he's moving us already, to give ourselves not only to Christian living, but to Christian work.

Next week we will spend this time together by stating and answering 10 of the common objections that have been raised over the centuries to this teaching, which is so plain, in the first 14 verses of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians – and to us.

[2234]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

## **Spiritual Blessing & Teaching on Election – Pt 2**

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

In our consideration of this opening chapter of the letter to the Ephesians (and to us), the conclusion is clear: that our spiritual blessings come to us through the Sovereignty of God. He loved those He chose because He loved ('knew') them first. Only then could we love Him. No one has ever loved God and was saved by Him, who was not chosen by Him to be saved. But this display of God's Sovereignty in His election of the saved is in harmony with the responsibility of each saved person, to respond to the 'call' of the Gospel. The God who decreed who should be saved also decreed by what means they should be brought to Salvation. The implication for the deliberate action of evangelism, by elect believers to provided this means of God's 'call' – the hearing of the Gospel message – is paramount.

Despite the clearest statement possible, in these first fourteen verses of Chapter 1, there has developed over the long history of the Christian Church, many reservations and outright denial of God's Sovereignty, expressed in the nature of election and the corresponding responsibility for the Church to evangelise through the means of the Gospel.

Ten such 'objections' are brought to mind and answered in the following. (some are included as footnotes, to be noted later):

It's recognised that some of these points don't apply to many sincere Christians today. You having been conquered by Ephesians 1:1 -14 long ago, so that your heart is at peace with this teaching, so that you have no stress or strain in your life as you hear about Predestination and Election. Yet you will remember that when you first heard this truth you didn't find it easy. It might have kept you awake at night. Even filled you with rebellion such that you almost felt that you should give up the Christian faith! You may have felt antagonism towards other Christians when you first realised this truth.

There are many objections to this teaching, which we must deal with. Since there are some who still find the teaching of Election very strange, hard to believe, with sincere doubt of it being in the Word of God.

Objection number one: God's election is based on His foreknowledge.

"So in other words", say the objectors, "God only chooses those that He foresaw would believe. As He looked down in history He saw those who would believe the Gospel and He chose them on the ground of what He foresaw beforehand, (what they may do

of their own will) to be His Children! We can use," say these people, "the following 2 verses to back up our belief." <sup>2</sup>*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, (1 Peter 1:2) and <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,' (Romans 8:29)*

However, although in the Oxford dictionary the word 'foreknowledge' means 'knowledge of something before it occurs', in the Bible it never has that meaning, wherever it may be found! Even if it did have this meaning, the verse would have to go on to say, that God foreknew their faith, it wouldn't be enough to say that He just foreknew people. But the word 'foreknowledge', in the Bible, always means 'predestination'. That's why the Apostle Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost about the cross, says, <sup>23</sup>*this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, (Acts 2:23)*

Additionally the word 'know' in the Bible, means 'to love intimately' – so x 'knew' y, his wife. They came into an intimate love, one for the other, expressed in the marriage bond. God says to Israel, *You only have I known of all the families of the earth. (Amos 3:2a)* And Jesus says of His People, *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, (John 10:14)* It means intimately love. And the word, 'foreknowledge' means the same: to intimately love beforehand. That decree of Election must not be misrepresented in the way the objectors do. The foreknowledge (intimate love beforehand) of God for the elect is a gift of God not a result of what a person so elected will be caused by God to be able to do later.

It wasn't a cold callous God lighting up the human race. It was the warmth of the affectionate heart of God, which moved Him to His decree of Election. You and I are believers today because we were elected. We are not elected because God foresaw that we would be believers. This is why Luke when he writes the Acts of the Apostles baldly states it like this: *and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48b)*

## Objection number two: God elects races and Nations but not individuals.<sup>8</sup>

8 Look at verses 3, 4 and 5 and then verses 11 and 12: You'll see that's exactly what Paul is not saying. He's writing to men and women and even to boys and girls, and we will see later in Ephesians, he's saying that you are believers today because you were chosen: men, women, young people, boys and girls! He's not talking about races. He goes on to tell us that some of them were Jews and some of them were Gentiles. They were elect from different races: Some of them were Greek; some proselytes; some Barbarians, but they're all one in Christ Jesus.

If you look at Romans 9, of course, we read that Isaac was chosen, but not Ishmael; Jacob was chosen but not Esau. The branches on the 'olive tree' that were stripped off, and the branches of the 'olive tree' that we're grafted on, were individuals. (Romans 11:17) It was individuals that were chosen by God before the world began! Amazing love. You may be aware of one of Spurgeon's great sermons: he said, "Before ever an angel, flew in the sky; before ever a mountain was formed, or a rivulet flowed down the side of a mountain. Before any of that, God's love was upon me; He thought of me; His heart was towards me! As long as God has been God, I've been in His heart."

Objection number three: "I don't understand: God is not willing that any should perish!"

9

Objection number four: Some will remind us that salvation is offered to 'whosoever'!

Again, this is true: <sup>16</sup> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life...* (John 3:16) And also: <sup>13</sup> *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* (Romans 10:13)

Any, who this morning, and who are in the presence of the preaching of the Word, are unconverted, can be assured that they can 'come to Christ'. Right now! All the privileges of the Christian Gospel are offered freely. Right now! The invitation is open to come to Jesus Christ. Reassurance is given that whoever they are and whatever the reason they are in the presence of the preaching of the word, they can 'call on the name of the Lord' and be saved. There is no restraint on that Biblical offer. There is no reservation upon it. It's free and full and pressed upon, whoever 'call on the Lord'. But objectors must remember that before they quote John 3 they must remember John 1:12-13. <sup>12</sup> *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,* <sup>13</sup> *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* So when you come to believe you see that the faith you have, is what God gave to you.

And Romans 10: *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*, is preceded by Romans 9:18 where just a matter of seconds earlier of reading time you read that, <sup>18</sup> *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.* Once again you have to bow down before the Scripture and say, "I can't understand how both can be true, but my Saviour Himself and His Apostle have declared both. I won't fall into the trap of just loving the one truth or loving the other. Pitting one truth against the other. But I will confess, my mortality, my humanness, and confess that such knowledge is too wonderful for me. I will embrace both, declare both and live both. Not compromise one and not compromise the other.

Objection number five: But it isn't fair!

If there were any one in the whole mass of the human race, who deserved to be saved and was lost, it wouldn't be fair. If the whole human race was composed of people who deserved to be saved and God save some and pass the others by. It wouldn't be fair. But every one of those men, women, boys and girls is not only a sinner, but a

9 Well you're right Ezekiel 33 verse 11, reports that God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. And 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9, says that very thing, (The Lord) ... *not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* So from the Bible we know that this is true. And likewise how do you know there is a decree of Election? Also from the Bible. Is it wise to use the Bible to contradict the Bible? Is it wise to say, "The parts of the Bible I like, I will accept, but the parts of the Bible that I don't understand, I will not accept? Is it wise to pick and choose from God's word? And accept what appeals to you, and reject what does not appeal to you or you don't understand? Isn't that what we've called for years: Modernism?

You can't pick and choose from God's word. If you believe the book at all you must believe all the book! The book that says, "He is not willing that any should perish." Which we accept gladly – and preach, also says, we believe because we were ordained to do so! So we bow in awe of God's word, recognising that it is not a human book. It teaches mysteries that we can't understand. It teaches truths in a holy and friendly tension, which the human mind can't reconcile together. The fault is not in the book. It's in our limited mortal understanding. (Could we ever claim to match God's Omniscience?)

willing sinner, and a deliberate sinner. A guilty sinner. They want to be the people they are! The wonder of it all, is that God saves anyone at all.

It must be fair, you know, because God did it. If God did it, it's fair by definition. Because God is fair and just by definition. (Would you want the idea of God to be any different?)

Be careful, if you say it isn't fair. The Apostle Paul had this to say to you: <sup>20</sup> *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, "Why have you made me like this?"* <sup>21</sup> *Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honourable use and another for dishonourable use?* (Romans 9:20,21)

Objection number six: But belief in election kills evangelism!

Remember when William Carey proposed: Going to the heathen to preach the Gospel. One old minister said, "Listen here young man", or words to this effect, "if God is going to save the heathen. He will do it without you and me!" There have been others in history who have argued like that. And there are still a few who won't believe in election, because they say it kills evangelism. If God's going to save who He saves: then why bother?

Why then do we go to the 'lost'? Do we go to the lost because we care about them? Because if we do, we don't go to the 'lost' very much, because we don't care like we should care! We go to the lost, fellow Christian's, because the Lord commands us to. Because as we said earlier, God not only determines who is to be saved, but how it should happen. And it happens through the preaching of the Word. We preach the Word to men and women, not because they have the power to believe it – because they don't. They are depraved and dead in their sins – but we preach the Word, because the word as it is preached, actually has the power to generate spiritual life. That's why we preach the Word!

Church history proves you wrong if you say that election kills evangelism. Because when election has been most fervently believed, (fervently believed) it has led to an evangelistic spirit. The reformation itself was the greatest evangelical movement, since the Acts of the Apostles. With very few exceptions, the reformers believed fervently, in the decree and teaching of election. And now, those like Olyott, who have been a Christian for a very long while, have met very few (a very few) who believe in election, who aren't engaged in 'soul winning'.

Of course they're engaged in 'soul winning'. Because they know that the Good Shepherd has died for his sheep, and when the sheep hear His voice, they will follow Him. And therefore, they 'sound out' the Shepherd's voice, knowing that whenever the sheep hear that voice they will follow. They are optimistic, they are like Paul, in Corinth. He wanted to give up. God came to speak to him in the night. This being before there were very many conversions at all. <sup>9</sup> *And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,* <sup>10</sup> *for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my*

**people.”** <sup>11</sup> *And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”* (Acts 18:9-11)

God had many people in that city whom He intended to save. That was a good reason, to stay. So Paul stayed to preach the Gospel, and they were converted, because God had His 'love upon them', before ever Paul preached to them.

Election doesn't kill evangelism, election actually drives evangelism. Election will even make a man go to the worst, because once you believe that God saves people, not because of anything in them, but because of the purpose of His own will, you know that God is going to save some of even the 'lowest of the low', the 'worst of the worst', or the 'dregs of the dregs'!

Objection number seven: But God loves everybody alike!

So how can there be such a thing as election? God is indeed good to all men – alike. His sun shines and His rain falls on the just and unjust alike! But the teaching that he loves all men and women alike, is not taught anywhere in the Word of God. Look at Romans 9:11 to 13 if you ever doubt this. Prepare yourself for a verse, which startles our Western thinking: Speaking of some unborn twins, it says, <sup>11</sup> *though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—* <sup>12</sup> *she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”* <sup>13</sup> *As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*

So if you think there is unrighteousness with God, then Paul goes on to answer that later in the same chapter. It's perhaps because people have never grasped this that they have problems with election. God's love throughout the Bible is a distinguishing love. Love by definition has to be distinguishing!

Objection number eight: Even if election were true shouldn't it be kept a secret? <sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Some would say, "We should pray as though it all depended on God; and we should work as if it all depended on man." We shouldn't accept that. Imagine going to a prayer meeting with one's Christian friends, rejoicing in the decree of election, and then say nothing about what I rejoice in after the meeting. Or in private devotions, thank God for loving me before I loved Him, but never mentioned to other people that He loved me before I loved Him. We shouldn't tirelessly contradict what we say to God, by what we say to people around us. We shouldn't behave as though the so-called Calvinistic system and the so-called Arminian system are in fact not contradictory, because that would be to disperse something that is not true. Should we adopt the position that anybody could be helped by hiding portions of God's word from them?

Jesus mentioned election in the presence of unbelievers. So why shouldn't we? Remember when he said: <sup>28</sup> *Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* <sup>29</sup> *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* What a free offer of the Gospel that was. But have you forgotten that before He said that, He prayed publicly before those people: *“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;”* <sup>26</sup> *yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.* <sup>27</sup> *All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

So our Lord spoke of election publicly, before men and women, but even more publicly in John's Gospel: When the Pharisees were murmuring about why He came into the world, He said, John 6:39 *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.* He speaks about the fact that the Father had given him 'certain people'. And further when He was reproving the unbelieving Pharisees, and other Jews, for their unbelief, He said this: (John 10:26) <sup>26</sup> *but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.* He didn't say that you're not in my flock (are my sheep) because you don't believe. He said you don't believe because you're not of my sheep! Thus reminding them of the decree of election. It's a Christ-like thing to speak about election in front of non-believers.

Objection number nine: Well if God elected some people. He must have 'passed by' others.

How could a God of love and mercy, predestine people to damnation? It's true that God has purposed to pass by some. Jesus said so: (Matthew 11:25) *"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from (some) ... and revealed them to ..."*

But who are the people that God has passed by? Are they just, neutral people? Neither good nor bad, somewhere in between, just walking an in between road? Oh no. Every person in the world, without exception (the only exception being our lord Jesus Christ) is a willing sinner! Wants to be like that. Chooses to be like that. And is like that by nature. He is what he wants to be (his own 'free will'). It's true that God has 'passed some by'. But they go to hell not because He's damned them, in that sense, but because their sins cry out for damnation!

It's not from neutral people where He might say, "I'll have those and I'll damn those." It's wicked people, who want to be wicked. The wonder of it is that He should want any of them at all! Once we see it like that, we see that the decree of election tells us a lot about the love and mercy of God. We certainly can not use the decree of election to strike at God's love and grace.

Objection number ten: People will say the doctrine of election makes assurance impossible.<sup>11</sup>

We should address our Christian friends and others that we meet, with the assertion of the truth of this Biblical teaching. That the wonder of Ephesians Chapter 1, is that Paul is content to rejoice in election, when he says, *blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. And he's content to teach it. Now if he rejoices in it, we should not be content to do anything less.

If we encounter unbelieving people, who come to notice this teaching either in a Church Service or elsewhere, we should be ready to assure them in the following way: The decree of Election does not give any the excuse to remain as they are. Rather it shows the way forward. Yes, salvation is in God's hands. If any are to be saved it must be God who saves them. It is God alone who can save lost, perishing sinners. The assurance is, if you desire God; if you desire Christ, it's because He desires you.

<sup>11</sup> "If I believe in election," some people will say, "I will have to go throughout life wondering if I'm elect or not!" But it's exactly the opposite of this. The Believer says to himself, "Why do I believe? My family's heard; my friends have heard, but I've come to believe and have a sense of kinship – in fact son ship – with God. Why do I now have peace of conscience, because my sins are forgiven? Because He chose to work in my life! So my salvation depends on His decision. His choice. Upon His grace. He's the unchangeable God. Is He going to fail to bring to Heaven the person He has saved? Is He going to fail to complete the work that He began. And once my heart becomes flooded by assurance, I know that I do love Him, because He first loved me. That I have chosen Him and do choose Him today, because He first chose me! My salvation is in God's hands. Not in the final analysis in my own. Therefore I feel more sure of my safe arrival in heaven than I could ever otherwise, ever feel."

And the offer is quite free: Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now you know what to do. To be saved you address yourself to God. There's nothing you can do at all, which can save you. You must address yourself to God. Now is the time to do it. Humble yourself and say like the man Jesus spoke about: *"God be merciful to me a sinner"* You'll go home justified to your house.

And to those who are already believing Christians, the concluding message is: Think of it, you're a Christian because God chose you to be one. He's always loved you, and because He's the unchangeable God, that means as long as He's been God, He has loved you particularly, individually. Then you must feel your heart 'well up' with a new sense of Worship. It's time for a new sense of worship when we remember our election. We find that our heart is overcome. It's been from before the foundation of the world, that we've been chosen for the privileges that we now enjoy. We were not a people, but now we are. We were far off, but now we're near. (We were damned, you know!) But we're now the children of God. We were Hell bound. We were racing towards the jaws of Hell, but because He chose in kindness, He snatched us from the destination we wanted to go to, and changed us. Through Christ, He placed us on a different road, which leads to a Heavenly inheritance.

"On such love, my soul, still ponder, love so great, so rich, so free; say, while lost in holy wonder, 'Why, O God, such love to me?' Hallelujah! Grace shall reign eternally! (Rejoice! 102 verse 4)

[2928]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

Ephesians 1:15-23

## **What to Pray for Young Converts**

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

We've been studying the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. Today we pick it up again from Chapter 1 at verse 15 to the end of the chapter.

In this passage, Paul tells us, that from the very beginning, when he heard of the Ephesians' conversion, he prayed for them. So he tells us explicitly and exactly what he prayed. This then is Paul's prayer:

So in studying this passage, we will ask it 3 questions, and the answer to each question will be in two parts.

So to the first question:

1. How did Paul know that the Ephesians had become real Christians? The answer is twofold and it's there in verse 15.
  - o firstly, they had faith in the Lord Jesus: *because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus*. Recently it was explained to us that there are three, aspects to faith. Firstly you must 'know' something; must 'assent' to it; and then you must 'rest' upon it. The third of these is illustrated by the idea of recumbency: You are recumbent on the chair on which you're sitting. You have trusted the whole of your weight to it, because you believe that it won't let you down! You 'rest' on it. That's the way the word 'trust' and the word 'faith' are used in the New Testament.

So Paul heard that there in Ephesus, (he had been there for a long time, after all), they not only knew the truth and they assented to the truth, but they actually rested their whole weight upon the message that they had heard. On the Person who was the centre of that message they had heard! So he writes, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus."

So before we go any further, we should put this question to ourselves: Do you have faith in the Lord Jesus?

Faith shines in its own light, and there's a really easy way to find out if you really have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You do pray don't you! Why should the Great God listen to your prayer? Why should He not turn you away? Why should He not say, "I'll have nothing to do with this man, this woman because of his or her sins?"

You still approach God knowing that you're a sinner. So what do you rest on for your acceptance by God? That is the key issue.

If you rest on the fact that you pray often, then that's no sign of faith in the Lord Jesus!

If you rest on the fact that you're a little bit better than others; or your religious; or your pray with great urgency: that's not a sign of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

If every time you pray, in your heart of hearts, you expect to be heard, because of what Jesus Christ has done, that is the mark of true faith. You expect to be heard because God won't turn away a sinner, because all the punishment due to you, has fallen on the substitute. God won't turn away a sinner, because all you ought to be, to be accepted, Jesus Christ is! It's because you rely upon Him; and 'rest' upon Him: trust Him! And all your hopes up are upon Him. It's because of that, that you expect to be heard. That is the great 'mark' of faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul as he preached in Ephesus, and as he later heard about the Ephesians, knew and heard that they were men and women like that. All their hopes of being accepted by God, 'rested' on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's how he knew they were real Christians.

- But there was the second 'mark': looked again at verse 15: *because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your **love towards all the saints**, ... .*

There are many words, for love, as we know, in the Bible. Paul chooses one, it's 'agape'. It means a love where I seek the other person's welfare, however much it costs myself. So Paul says I know you're real Christians, because I see that sort of love: where you seek the welfare of other people however inconvenient it is for you. And the welfare that you seek is the welfare of the saints.

[Be careful! The word 'saints' is always used in the plural, in the New Testament (except once in Philippians, where it is in the phrase 'every saint' – Philippians 4:21). The New Testament never speaks about St John, St Matthew or St Paul – and nor should we.

However there is a community of people, who have faith in the Lord Jesus; have been set apart by God's decree of election – as we saw last week. They've been set apart, because God called them by the Gospel. They've been set apart because they live a different kind of life. The word 'saint' means someone who has been set apart and the sign of a Christian is that you seek the welfare of that community of people. You live for their good, and for their benefit, because they're like family to you. You live for their benefit, however much it may cost you. However inconvenient it is, and however much it hurts.]

When John writes his first letter: 'love' for the saints is one of the three marks of a believer, which he gets in every chapter of his book. It's still a mark of a Christian.

So once again we must ask ourselves the question: is it a mark in your life? It's an inevitable consequence, surely, of been adopted into God's family. That you have a sense of family with the people of God. That you consider Christian believers to be not something other than yourself. But the same as

yourself. You belong to them. They are your people. They belong to you!

So you seek the family welfare: if you stay away from church the family is deprived. So that when you feel like not coming: you still come.

You know that your tongue, could greatly hurt the fellowship, and therefore you keep a restraint on it. So that it doesn't say anything that would hurt another believer.

You use your home, because you know that new Christian's can be tremendously helped, in their Christian Life, by hospitality. By just sitting around the fire or a table, with fellow Christians in just speaking about the things of God. Of just being in their company!

You give: both of your time and talents and money, for the welfare of the people of God. That's a mark of being a Christian.

Paul, as he looked at the Ephesians, saw that 'mark'. They weren't only people who, rested on Christ for their acceptance with God, but they showed that there had been a spiritual change, since the whole nature of their life was different. For example, they loved all saints. And notice that they didn't just say that they were going to love all – except him and her. Implying that their 'agape' had limits. But they made up their mind, that whoever, named the 'Name' of Christ, as evidence of being a brother and sister, they would live for his or her welfare.

Paul saw the 'marks' and he knew therefore that the Ephesians were real Christians! So our first question is asked and answered: How did Paul know the Ephesians had become real Christians? The answer was in two parts: He heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and their love unto all the saints.

2. Now the second question from the passage: What did Paul do when he heard of their conversion? What do you do when you hear of conversions? That's the question and once more the answer is in two parts. Both parts are in verse 16:
  - when Paul heard of their conversion, the first thing he did was, he 'gave thanks'. <sup>16</sup> *I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,..* . A direct result of hearing what was going on in Ephesus was that he went to God. In fact verse 16 shows he did this *ceaselessly*. He was constantly at prayer: thanking God, for what was going on in Ephesus. Of course he was! We learnt previously that salvation is God's work. Anyone who's a Christian at all is a Christian because God chose him to be. Whether we understand that or not! Anyone who's Christian, is a Christian, because God moved first in their life. We're all Christians because of the grace of God. If God had left us to ourselves we'd still be lost. So, whenever we hear of somebody becoming a Christian, our first reaction is not to write them a letter of congratulation. Our first reaction is to go to God, and give thanks, that He's still at work in the world!

Once again we need to ask ourselves. How do you react when you hear of conversions? Do you go to God at all? Do you *ceaselessly* go to God? Do

you praise God that even in Bunbury, Jesus Christ has His sheep that have been loved by the father before the foundation of the world? But not, only in the wider Bunbury region, what about in our own families, where they are? And colleagues and classmates and personal friends?

There are those that the Saviour has always loved, and when they hear His voice, they have come to follow him, by the calling of the Gospel. Conversions do happen! People come to Christ. People that had no faith now have it. People who had anything but, love for the people of God, now are filled with love for the people of God. Such a radical transformation! It's been done by God. It's a wonderful thing and a privilege to be able to witness it. When Paul witnesses it. Even when he just heard of it, he thanked God!

So what did Paul do when he heard of their conversion? He gave thanks.

- But that's not all he did (still in verse 16): He remembered them, in his prayers. He didn't just thank God for them, he prayed for them. Christian people, as we've already seen in this letter, there are people who have come into spiritual blessings. Heavenly blessings. They've received spiritual life. They're in a new realm. But how, fellow Christian's, is spiritual life fed and sustained? Well it's sustained by spiritual means. And the paramount means is prayer. So although, Paul, at this stage, was absent from the Ephesians, he could help sustain and feed and strengthen, their spiritual lives by speaking to God about them. So that was the second thing that he did.

Let us pose the following question: Can the young Christians (and by young we don't mean Christians under a certain age, but those of any age who have recently come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – new believers) can new believers in a church fellowship, count on your prayers? God is at work in their lives, so sometimes we say, "It's amazing: God's at work in their lives!" and we sit down and do nothing, because we're convinced that God's at work in their lives! But in Scripture that's not the way it is. When we are convinced that God is at work, we're told to pray: that God should work! (This cuts right across the reasoning that we usually use – because God is at work, we're to pray that he continues to work.)

Everything that needs to be brought about in a believer's life, can be brought about by the prayers of older Christians. The spiritual development of new believers, lies with me and with you! It lies in our prayer life. And whether those new believers, will be as they should be, depends on our prayers. This is why it is stressed, and needs to be stressed, that we do it affectionately and often. Not only private prayer but praying together (which the New Testament teaches: has a particular power).

Whatever else we do in this world, we should come regularly together with God's people to pray together – even at the expense of other duties.

There is nothing that a new believer, needs more, than our prayers. And all of us to do it. Even if we are absent from them, we can still pray for them. If we

are ill for some time, or our job takes us away, we can still pray for them. There is not one Christian amongst us who cannot sustain this ministry! Whether new converts who may be among us are to be what they should be, depends upon the prayer life of the church. <sup>23</sup> *Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.* said Samuel (1 Samuel 12:23)

So we have asked two questions: How did Paul know that they were true Christians? Because they had faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints. And what did he do when he heard of their conversion? He gave thanks to God and then he prayed for them.

Next week we will continue: to explore our third question – what precisely did he pray: for the new believers?

[2246]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**