

Unbelief – The Primary Cause of Trouble

WE ARE HERE FOR A PURPOSE – TO REVEAL CHRIST TO THE WORLD. How are we doing?

If the people of the world were to see something in Christians that gave them the impression that believers were living a life of consistent joy, happiness and triumph, then I'm sure they would be very anxious to discover the secret to this successful and fulfilling mode of living. So we can only conclude that the reason the masses remain outside of, and disinterested in, Christianity is that believers are living and showing something different.

Inconsistent living, demonstrating lives that are largely unhappy, downcast, despairing, depressed and unfulfilled – believers in this state – and the world is looking on and wants none of it. It is often something of the past, a regret about some choice made; fear of the future, wondering how they will cope; looking out with fear at the 'waves and storms' of circumstances or adverse situations, with 'sinking' feelings; weary of well doing over many years, and feeling worn out; lack of discipline, facing the result of undisciplined lives; discontentment, not happy with their lot in life; troubled by some past sin, which they think is unforgivable ... and so on. While all of these issues have one common primary cause, time will only permit for us to focus on the latter one – being troubled by past sin.

Today we will look at the primary cause for the lack of joy and fulfillment and seek the answer to a vibrant, joyful and fulfilled life.

1 Tim 1:12-16 (KJV) ... *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; ¹³ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in **unbelief**. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. ¹⁶ Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."*

1 Tim 1:12-16 ... *"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in **unbelief**; ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. ¹⁶ Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."*

Unhappiness, stumbling, failure, confusion, guilt, and a whole host of similar things often plague many believers. This mostly stems from a glib, superficial view of Christianity which considers that so long as a person has signed a 'decision card,' or prayed the 'believer's prayer,' he or she is a Christian and must, therefore, be perfectly happy, and that everything in life must run smoothly. But it is very clear from experience and the history of the Church that this is far from being the case, and this kind of superficial view leads only to trouble of one form or another.

There's no dodging the fact that there are always Christian people who face difficulties for a number of reasons, and this is very evident if you read the New Testament Epistles. If believing that accepting salvation meant everything thereafter would be plain sailing, then these New Testament Epistles would have been unnecessary. However, Paul, John, Peter and others did write their letters because

the New Testament believers, those who had believed and were born again, were, on occasions, facing trouble of one form or another. These folks were often unhappy and were not enjoying their Christian life. Some were looking back with guilt on former sins; others were facing temptations; and others were being persecuted, or facing adverse circumstances. So, the Epistles show clearly that unhappiness is a condition which can and does afflict Christian people, and why, but they also provide the reason and answer.

Unfortunately, some 'ear tickler' preachers do propagate the error that if you are facing trouble, you must have committed some sin, and that God's children should live without any trouble. But this is not so. Being unhappy or facing trouble is no indication that you are not a true believer. In fact, if you have never faced trouble then it is doubtful you are a believer at all!

Otherwise, why would we have Scriptures like ... *"fight the good fight of faith" ... "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course" ... "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."*

You see, from the moment we are born again we become the special objects of the devil's attention. There are two things that occupy the devil's attention – blinding people from the truth so that they do not come to Christ, and doing all he can to make those who are born again as miserable as possible because he knows the world is watching them and wants the world to think Christianity is undesirable. He attacked our Lord when He was man on earth, and he continues to attack Christ who is resident in us, the born again. Praise God, Satan cannot rob us of our salvation, but he will do all in his power to make us miserable. And it's only if we are foolish enough to listen to him, that we will seriously limit the enjoyment of our salvation. That's constant his aim, and that in turn is why we have the teaching and instructions provided through the Epistles.

Now, one prime way the devil attacks believers, is to get them depressed about something from their past. Some sin they have committed, or something very bad that they have done or said. Possibly a promise never kept, or a vow made to God but dishonoured. It may be that they have done or said something they think is unforgivable, some sin they think is so bad God can't possibly forgive them. The passage we read from 1 Timothy 1:12-16 alludes to this, where Paul talks about his past misdemeanors. ... *"I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor."*

This being haunted by the past can, and does, happen to many Christians; born again folks who are very clear about their salvation, but who are depressed or unhappy about something from their past life. Something they seem unable to forget, and are always talking about it, and invariably it comes up in their conversation. They are constantly thinking about it, and condemning themselves about it. Because of this they are constantly unhappy and downcast.

So, what is going on in the minds and lives of people like this, the unhappy, downcast believer? Well, firstly, they are succumbing to the work of the devil, whose prime objective is to prevent folks from coming to salvation, and failing that, to make the born again as miserable as possible. While he cannot rob us of our salvation, he can steal our joy if we give in to his dirty tactics.

Now, while the outcome is unhappiness, loss of joy, and depression, the cause is almost entirely due to ignorance of doctrine – the doctrine of salvation. And the remedy is not to pray over and over for forgiveness concerning whatever this past issue is about, for all that will do is make one think over and over about the problem and reinforce the guilt in one's mind, but rather to start looking to the truth in God's Word and thinking on what God has said.

Just look again at what Paul said: ... *"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because*

*He considered me faithful, putting me into service,¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in **unbelief**;¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.¹⁶ Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."*

Notice here, Paul is telling us one of the reasons he was born again was that the Lord Jesus Christ saved him in order to set him up as a model, or pattern, for us. A model? How? A model for those people who think their particular sin somehow or another exceeds the limit of the grace and mercy of God. The Apostle's argument is that his case alone is sufficient proof, once and for ever, that we must never think in this incorrect manner. This erroneous thinking stems from believing that there are different levels of sin, and so they make distinctions between particular sins. They classify them, thinking that some are forgivable and some apparently are not. So, Paul deals with this telling us, "whatever you have done or said and think, just look at me. I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Could anything be worse?" He used to go about doing everything and anything to destroy believers in Jesus Christ. Talk about hating Christ. That's as bad as it gets! But Paul says, So I am the example you're to consider; "whatever you have said or done, put it up against my past and see where you stand." So, start by thinking about it, realizing that if Paul could obtain mercy and be forgiven for his evil past, so can you, and so have you been forgiven.

But we must be clear here, the Apostle Paul is not making a differentiation between sins. He is not grading sins. On the surface it may look like that when he says "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief", as if to say there are big, medium or small sinners. But he did not and could not mean that, because that would be to contradict the very doctrine of salvation. What Paul is saying is that the nearer a person gets to God the greater they see their sin. The greater our revelation of Christ and His holiness the more this will expose the blackness of our hearts. Like Paul, when someone sees the blackness of their own heart, they say: "I am the chief of sinners"; and it is only a truly born-again person who can say that. People of the world will never make such a statement. They always go about trying to prove how good they are.

And to make his point clear, here's where Paul brings into the doctrinal argument a very important fact when he says: "*I did it ignorantly in **unbelief**."* By saying this he demolishes any grading of sin. He makes it very clear that there is only one sin and that all and every sin is summed up in this one sin, the sin of unbelief. That's where it all begins and ends; **unbelief**.

So instead of thinking in terms of particular sins and grading sins, we have to only think of sin in terms of our relationship to God. Sin is simply the absence of, or break in, a relationship with God. Just think about it for a moment: often when we hear people's testimonies, we tend to think that some conversions are more remarkable than others. But they're not, because it takes exactly the same mercy and grace of God to save the most respectable person as it does the most lawless person in the world. Nothing but the mercy and grace of God can save anybody, and it takes the same mercy and grace to save everyone. But, unfortunately, often we don't think like that. We think some conversions are more remarkable than others. It's when we lack full understanding of the doctrine of salvation that we differentiate between sin and sin, and think some sins are worse than others. True doctrine shows us that it all comes back to our relationship to God; it is all a matter of belief or unbelief.

Right from the beginning, Adam did not believe God's word, he chose to believe the devil's word. Unbelief broke man's relationship with God. It's not the particular actions or statements we have made that are the problem, the real issue hinges around our relationship to God. Do we believe in

Him and His word or are we driven by unbelief. That's why Paul puts the focus, not on particular sins, but on the fact that he acted in unbelief. Unbelief was the problem. The cause and entry of sin, the break in relationship with God, is unbelief. It's not the sinful actions we have committed ourselves, but unbelief that separates us from God. Separate from God we lack righteousness and live in sin, performing sinful actions.

So back to the unhappy, downcast, depressed believer who thinks they have committed some unforgivable sin. The real trouble here is that this person does not really believe the Scriptures. Just think about it. The Word of God is clear, pure, true and indisputable, but a lack of belief in what God has said is the real problem for this person.

Look at 1 John 1: 9 ... *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*. God's word here puts no limit on what can or cannot be forgiven, it makes no differentiation between sin and sin. Whatever your sin – no matter what it is – it makes no difference, *"if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* The problem comes when one does not believe this word, and goes on dwelling on the particular sin they think is so bad and unforgivable. The problem is unbelief. Nothing else.

Think about Peter as recorded in Acts 10. He had gone to the housetop to pray, and feeling hungry, while meal preparations were underway, he suddenly went into a trance and saw a great sheet coming down from heaven with all sorts of four-footed beasts on it, and heard a voice saying to him, "Rise, Peter, slay and eat". But Peter answered: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." God's immediate response was: "What God has cleansed, that call thou not common (or unclean)." So, to the person who is questioning God's word concerning their sin and whether it is forgivable or not, God is in effect saying: "What God has cleansed – by the blood of His only Begotten Son – don't call that common or unclean." For God has said: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" and all unrighteousness. Believe the Word of God. Don't go on praying frantically to be forgiven whatever sin you think is so bad. Your prayer may well be an expression of unbelief. Simply believe God's Word. Don't ask Him for a message or a prophecy about forgiveness. He has given it to you. Believe Him and His Word.

Realizing and fully understanding what our Lord did on the Cross on Calvary's Hill is so important. Especially the working out of the implications of Christ's sacrificial, atoning death. The angel announced to Joseph at the very beginning that Christ would *"save His people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21). The angel did not say that He shall save from all sins except this one sin that you think is so different. Listen to Peter saying something similar: *"Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes we are healed"* (1 Peter 2:24). There is no qualification here, and no limit. And listen to Paul's words when he says: *"He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin: that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Every sin was included, every one, all sin, and none are left out. On the cross Jesus said: ... *"It is finished"*. One sacrifice, once for all – all our past, present and future sin was dealt with once and for all. Nothing was left undone – *"it is finished"*. When God's word says: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved"*, it means exactly that. Believe that on the cross Jesus finished the work of dealing with your every sin once and for all. For He said: *"It is finished"*. And if He said it, you had better believe what He said, not any thought to the contrary that the enemy has fed into your head.

What is really great and something we must keep in mind constantly, as declared in these scriptures we have just read, is that our justification includes not only forgiveness of our all and every sin, but that we have been made and declared righteous by God Himself. The moment we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemptive work and we are born again, Christ, the Righteous One, takes up

residence in us, and when The Father looks at us all He sees is the righteous nature of His Son in us. 1 Cor 6:17 ... *"he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."* He sees us no longer as a sinner but as His righteous child!

Much of our trouble comes through failure to realize our union with Christ. Salvation's real purpose is to make us one with Christ – union with Christ means one in His righteousness, holiness and every other communicable divine attribute. That was what the Father purposed for us before He formed the world and before he formed mankind, and before sin entered the scene. Eph 1: 3-4 declares: ... *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him"*. Every spiritual blessing In Christ in us includes holiness, blamelessness, and righteousness – and this is what Father God wanted for us before the foundation of the world! And it is what Christ came to restore to us at the cross.

Look also at Gal 2:20 which declares: ... *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me"*. The only life you and I as the born again possess is the life of Christ, and His is a holy, righteous and blameless life! Col 3:3 ... *"For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God"*. Rom 6:11 ... *"Even so consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus"*. The old man and every sin that belonged to him has been crucified. Every sin.

So, to deal with any unhappiness, confusion or guilt about any sin the one thing we must **not** do is look back with a sense of woe and despair. Rather we are to praise God and thank Him for His grace and mercy toward us in Christ. In accordance with the passage from 1 Tim 1:12-16 do as Paul did; he admitted he was *"formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor"*, but he didn't stop there and go into depression, but rather he acknowledged, praised and thanked God for His mercy and grace in transforming him from sinner to being righteous and appointing him as minister, apostle and example to others. *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" ... "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting"*.

This is the way you and I are to look at our past. Yes, we were sinners separate from God. Yes, we may have committed some terrible sins. Yes, like Paul, all of this because we acted in unbelief. But on the cross every sin, past, present and future was dealt with and we are now righteous, blameless and holy in Christ. So, believing, rise up and realise the truth about yourself that every sin has been forgiven and blotted out and you are one with Christ – holy, righteous and blameless! And remember, *"what God has cleansed, call thou not uncommon (unclean)"*. Rejoice in the love, mercy and grace of God!

It's no longer what you were, but who you now are in Christ!

Go to the place of prayer each day and focus on the grace, mercy, love holiness, and goodness of God and thank Him for all He has done for you.

Praise Him for the plan and purpose for which He created you and redeemed you – that you may be HOLY and BLAMELESS before Him. Thank Him that in Christ you are holy and blameless. Rejoice in Him!

As we live a life of constant and consistent thankfulness and praise towards God the world will be watching and seeing our joy will want what we have – Christ!

While this discussion had focused on the issue of dealing with depressed thoughts about past sin, the principle (belief versus unbelief) applies to all the issues we stated at the beginning

So, don't act in unbelief listening to the lies of the devil, but rather belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He has said and promised, and as Paul has encouraged us:

Phil 3:1 ... *"Rejoice in the Lord"*

Phil 4:4 ... *"Rejoice in the Lord **always**; again I say, rejoice!"*

Heb 12:2-3 ... *"**Fixing** our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart."*

Phil 4:6 ... *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

Yes, rejoice in who you are in Christ and let the world see your joy! Be a 'model' or 'pattern' for others to follow!