

February 2019

Dear neighbours,

This is the 98<sup>th</sup> bi-monthly letter to those who live within “commuting” distance of our church, in all of which I have sought to explain some aspect of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, coming from different angles and approaching them, sometimes, as events in the wider world have dictated. I have never written distinctly Baptist views but have declared those things which evangelical believers have consistently held about the whole faith.

I hope to reach the milestone of the 100<sup>th</sup> letter by June, if my health allows.

But I have always been distinctly Biblical. Without the Bible we could know very little of Christ (only those things which Greek and Latin writers alluded to) and nothing of His saving power. The great distinctive which defines the Christian faith, in my view and the view of Friston Baptist Church, is that the Bible is the word of God. He said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis 1.3) and we believe that the Bible is the record of all that our heavenly Father intends us to know, of the things which He has spoken, for our salvation and welfare.

This time, however, I thought I would do something in a slightly different style. It concerns entering upon and holding to a vigorous faith in Christ. The apostle Paul wrote, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1.12).

It might be tempting to argue that Paul was different; a great man. But the Bible position is always that what happened to others is an example for us. About that famous prophet Elijah it is written that “he was a man subject to like passions as we are” (James 5.17) and that if he prayed and his prayers were answered, so we can pray and our prayers will be answered. By the same reasoning, Paul’s example is achievable by us.

Firstly, he says that he knows Christ in his soul. I have met the Queen (when she came to the Moot Hall in Aldeburgh, about 50 years ago, for the opening of the Snape concert Hall I believe) but I do not know her. Paul means first of all that He **knows** Christ. I can say the same about the Saviour. All believers may affirm it. The Christian journey begins by knowing Him.

How? That “falling in love” moment, which may, as in all love, be instantaneous or gradual, occurs when a sinner feels the weight of his/her sins, acknowledges them and, like a child who rushes into a parent’s arms when hurt, rushes in the spirit of their being to the Saviour who alone can heal.

Just like I’d heard of the Queen from books, articles, and news on TV before I met her, but even then wasn’t admitted to friendship and so couldn’t say that I knew her (and she certainly wouldn’t remember me) – so we may have heard of Christ, and it may be we have read the Gospels; but the only way of being admitted into close friendship is in His personal dealings with you in your spirit beginning with your sins; the nature of which no one else knows.

That is indeed where it all begins. And when you know His forgiveness; the removal of the guilt of your sin by the Saviour’s atonement on Calvary, before a holy God who requires perfection, the power of your devotion to him knows no bounds.

So Paul says, “I know whom I have believed.” It **is** a matter of belief because Paul lived after the Saviour’s time on earth. Jesus said to Thomas, who had believed when he saw Jesus after that He had risen from the dead, “blessed are they that have not seen (me), and yet have believed” (John 20.29). So it was with Paul and so it may be with us.

He speaks of “persuasion.” No one else persuaded him except the Saviour Himself; it was internal. But persuaded he was. Utterly convinced that the Saviour who forgives sins had forgiven **his** sins.

This went to the heart of his being, as it may with us. And the more he thought about it, the deeper his sense of repentance; because those who have been forgiven most, love most (Luke 7.42-43).

He was persuaded that "he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." "Keeping" means "guarding", as in a castle's keep, and "guarding" because "treasured." We see that Paul made a commitment. It was a personal commitment to the Saviour, a sort of oath of loyalty, privately and from deep within his being.

It is this which characterises the vigorous believer. In any sphere commitment is essential to achievement; and where that sphere is welcomed and congenial it becomes a labour of love, whatever earning power it yields. Faith is not entered upon, let's say, for eternal life. That, with many other things, is a by-product of faith. A personal devotion to a known Saviour (known because of his personal interest in forgiving your sins) is the essence of a believer's commitment.

He treasures the soul, the spirit, the very being of a believer; of one who is committed to Him. In this you are truly valued, truly accepted. The love which the Saviour feels for the one who serves Him with commitment guarantees that He will treasure all you have and are. He will not let the believer down because such an one is too precious. There is not a sense of being valued which is greater than that which the Saviour affords to them that love Him.

He is certainly able to do these things. He has power over all flesh to give eternal life to those the Father has given Him (John 17.2). "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). And it will be at that very time when it matters most.

This is what "against that day" means. "The day" is the time of Christ's return and the day of judgment which follows. At the time when our lifetime's sins would be exposed before the eyes of the Father with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4.13) were it not for the atonement which Christ has made and to which we have gladly committed ourselves. The Saviour will speak on our behalf and the Father will count us forgiven. So shall we be faultless, unblameable and unreprieveable (Colossians 1.22), reconciled, despite former sin, to a holy and a just God. We have been blamed in our lifetime for so many things, what a relief that will be!

The changes, pressures and pains of life can really only be adequately handled by a vigorous faith in Christ. Of course, we may put our faith in others. The question then becomes their ability to deliver. The whole Bible is aimed at us to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul put these words in writing for us because he had discovered how true these things are. And 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, like those of us at Friston, know the experience and would beg you to commit to it.

Yours affectionately,