

SKY-WAY MESSAGES

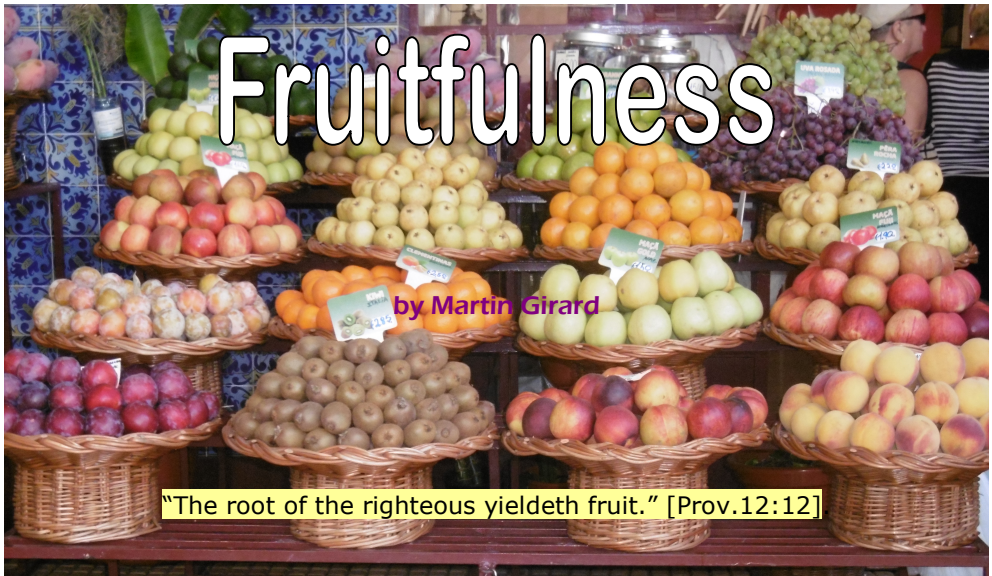


Pointing People Heavenward

Internet Bible Materials

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The subject of fruitfulness is an important one in Scripture. Although a number of passages deal specifically with fruitfulness, numerous brief references to it are found scattered throughout the Word of God. So often in life we find that the physical realm can teach us lessons relating to the spiritual realm. Consider how frequently the Lord Jesus used an illustration from nature to present spiritual truths. Fruitfulness is a prime example of this.

If someone familiar with the Bible were to be asked to identify passages of Scripture dealing with fruitfulness, several well-known texts would no doubt come to mind. There is “the fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5, as well as the Lord’s discourse on the vine in John 15. Then there is Psalm 1, which compares the godly man to a fruitful tree, while Colossians 1:10 refers to being fruitful in every good work. In Hebrews we read of “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (12:11) and of “the fruit of our lips” (13:15). These are just a few of the many references to fruit in Scripture.

TWO OUTSTANDING PRINCIPLES

There are two outstanding principles to note at this stage. The first relates to the purpose of fruit-bearing. Fruit-bearing must never be a selfish activity. God did not create the apple tree to bear fruit for its own pride or pleasure. Neither was it God’s intention that it simply be admired for its enormous crop of fruit. The primary object of fruit-bearing is that the crop may be *shared*. We might say that the exercise is intended to be *helpful*. If the apples are not picked, they will simply rot and fall to the ground.

In Nehemiah 9:25 we read of God's people of old enjoying so many of His blessings, including "fruit trees in abundance", but doing so selfishly. They enjoyed the produce of the vineyards and oliveyards, but they "became fat" in the process. In effect, it did them no good. Indulgence resulted in laziness. It was rather like Israel in Hosea 10:1, a nation which was "an empty vine", bringing forth "fruit unto himself". Corresponding with the increase in fruit was an increase in idolatry. The fruit in this case was for Israel's own selfish ends, contradicting the purpose of God. The Old Testament Law made it abundantly clear that the Lord was to receive His portion first. Exodus 22:29 stresses the need for the first of the ripe fruits to be offered to the Lord. These "first fruits" (as they were known) were exclusively for the Lord. Every time Israel fulfilled this part of the Law, the people taught themselves a very important object lesson. By offering to God His portion, they were reminding themselves that the harvest came from Him.



The second principle relates to the condition of the tree or plant. In order for fruit to be produced, the tree or plant bearing the fruit must be in a *healthy* condition. "The root of the righteous yieldeth fruit" (Prov.12:12). That which is righteous, in Scripture, is good and right. Thus the root which is "right" and healthy is the one which can be fruitful. **Healthy** There is a distinct connection between being right and acting in obedience. Israel, in Old Testament times, was promised a fruitful land which they could enjoy in complete safety. But the promise was not unconditional – like a blank cheque. All hinged upon Israel's obedience and faithfulness. "Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety." It was only by Israel's obedience that the people would enjoy the fruit of the land, as we see in Leviticus 25:18,19.

DIVINE RESOURCES

We cannot bear fruit when we allow our lives to become spiritually dry. We need the divine resources which have been made available to us. In addition to this, our spiritual health must be *maintained* if we are to be effective for our Lord in this world. Fruit-bearing is not a pain-free experience, but the bearing of fruit will *prove* that we belong to the Lord. Are we ready to face the challenge? May the Lord help us to live lives that are fruitful for His glory and pleasure.

The root of the righteous yieldeth fruit

Proverbs 12:12

ROMANS – JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

by Martin Girard

Paul's epistle to the Romans is the first New Testament epistle and has the distinction of being the longest. Its theme is "the gospel of God" (1:1). This concerns "Jesus Christ our Lord" who descended from David, humanly speaking, but was "declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead" (1:3,4). As a messenger Paul longed to visit Rome and preach the gospel to the inhabitants of that city because he was convinced that there was latent power within the message which could save lost souls (1:15,16).

COURT-ROOM DRAMA

The theme of the epistle is illustrated from the drama of the court-room. Although the court of Paul's day was not exactly the same as we are familiar with today, we can still appreciate the significance of the illustration used. The opening chapters present the evidence that all – Jews and Gentiles – are "under sin" and "guilty before God" (3:9,19). The evidence against us is found in numerous Old Testament passages which reveal our guilt in word and deed before the Almighty. We have broken His commandments and are silenced in His presence with not a word that we can utter in self-defence (3:19). Having broken the Law of God we cannot endeavour to obtain God's favour by keeping that Law (3:20). How, then, can we be justified (declared righteous) before Him? Is there some other way by which we can become righteous?

“JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE”

Having revealed the bad news to his readers, Paul then brought before them the good news that we can be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:24). The work has been done once at the cross. God’s own Son took our place and offered His perfect life as a sacrifice for guilty sinners. We can be “justified by faith” (3:28) simply by accepting what He has done for us. There is no ground for us to boast: justification is God’s work, not ours.

This conclusion does not mean that we reject the Old Testament. Far from it! The patriarch Abraham was not justified by works but by faith – just as we are. He “believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (4:3). Similarly, we must “believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (4:24). Christ “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (4:25). Through His completed work “we have peace with God” and access into His holy presence (5:1,2). Whereas sin reigned in this world, grace now reigns “through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21).

The fact that grace reigns, however, does not mean that we are free to live as we please. In answer to the question, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (6:1), the emphatic words “God forbid” (6:2) indicate the folly of such thinking. Believers are identified with Christ not only in His death but also in His resurrection. We should now “walk in newness of life” (6:4) – our lives being very different from what they were before conversion. Sin, of course, has not been eradicated from our lives, but its destructive power has been broken. Although we will struggle to overcome it in our own strength and often feel how “wretched” we are (7:24), the Holy Spirit has been given to indwell us and provide constant assistance. God is working all things for the ultimate good of His people, and although we may be beset with problems we are assured of being “more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (8:37). Nothing is “able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39).

ISRAEL

In chapters 9-11 Paul returns to consider Israel. Has the nation been permanently cast aside and been replaced with the Church? Paul explains that Gentiles have been brought into blessing through grace, but there is no room for presumption on their part. God is at liberty to bring His earthly people back into blessing again, if He pleases. In fact, He *will* do this in His own good time (11:25-29) because He cannot break His covenant with Israel. Unless we interpret “Israel” literally, these chapters will make no sense at all.

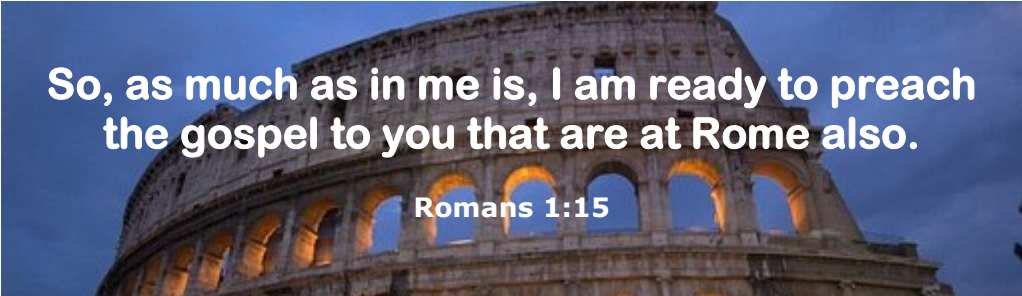
THE CONCLUDING CHAPTERS

The last five chapters are practical in nature and explain how those who are justified ought to live in this world. A believer should be surrendered to the will of

"the perfect will of God" God (12:1,2). Instructions are given as to how we ought to view the human government which is over us, accepting it as divinely instituted and being subject to its decrees. We must live according to superior principles, being submissive and pleasing our Master in all things. (Of course, if human government requires us to do something contrary to the teaching of Scripture, we must obey God rather than men, as Acts 5:29 teaches.) We are accountable to God and shall one day stand before Him (14:12). It is therefore important to live responsibly, aware of that future time when we will stand before Him. In the meanwhile we must "awake out of sleep" (13:11) and live prayerful and God-glorifying lives. The final chapter contains personal greetings written by Paul to brothers and sisters in Rome whom he remembered with affection. These verses add a living dimension to the epistle.

THREE MAIN SECTIONS

Although the gospel is the principal theme of this epistle, it is explained not so much for unbelievers as for the benefit of believers who must grasp its unchanging truth. This is expounded in detail in the first eight chapters and comprises the first section of the book. The second section, considered above, explains God's *present* dealings with the Gentiles against the background of His *previous* dealings with Israel (chapters 9-11). In the third section we are shown the conduct of believers that befits the gospel. The epistle closes with a brief doxology of praise "to God only wise" who has made known to us "the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (16:25-27). Paul's epistle to the Romans is therefore not simply a dated letter for early Christian believers long ago. It is part of God's living Word and contains vital revelations of truth for us to read, believe, and obey.



**So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach
the gospel to you that are at Rome also.**

Romans 1:15

A photograph of a man in a blue and white striped shirt and light blue trousers sitting on a wooden cart. The cart is being pulled by a white donkey. The man is holding the reins of the donkey. The background shows a concrete wall and some greenery.

TYCHICUS - A BELOVED BROTHER

by Martin Girard

Tychicus, like many others, is mentioned by name a few times in the New Testament. His name, which means *fortunate*, is found in Acts, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Titus. By comparing the Scriptures where he is named it is possible to draw a few helpful conclusions.

Perhaps the first *chronological* reference is Acts 20:4-5 where he is named as one of a group of seven men travelling with Paul, probably around AD57. These companions reached Troas before Paul and waited there for him to arrive. Tychicus would thus have witnessed to miracle of Eutychus being restored to life after falling from an upstairs window while Paul was preaching.

Whether or not he travelled with Paul after this, we cannot be sure. However, two similar references follow. In Ephesians 6:21 we read of Paul sending Tychicus, “a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” to Ephesus. Paul had every confidence in Tychicus and knew that he could be trusted to give an accurate report of Paul’s circumstances. Colossians 4:7 uses the same terms and also refers to him as a “fellowservant in the Lord”. Again, Paul had no doubts over Tychicus; he was aware of Paul’s condition and would provide the Colossians with current news of the apostle. In addition to this, Paul had sent Tychicus to Colosse to obtain news as Paul was interested in his friends who lived there. He also knew that Tychicus would encourage their hearts (Col.4:8). Although we cannot be certain, it is quite likely that the epistles to Ephesus and Colosse were both written about AD62 when Paul was in prison in Rome.

In Colossians 4 Tychicus was associated with Onesimus, the converted former runaway slave who had lived in Colosse. He was therefore capable of working harmoniously with others. In the next reference he is again linked with somebody else. Titus 3:12 names Artemis and Tychicus, one of whom would be sent by Paul to Crete. It is generally believed that Paul wrote to Titus in AD63. Perhaps a year later, in Paul's final epistle, we read of Tychicus having been sent by Paul to Ephesus (2 Tim.4:12).

FILLING IN THE PICTURE

What do these scattered references reveal to us of Tychicus? Clearly he was a messenger who was ready to respond to a need. If Paul required someone to carry an epistle, Tychicus was prepared to go. He was a co-operative individual. Although not one of the apostles, he was ready to help in the work of the Lord. The reference in Titus shows that he was available to be sent, while in 2 Timothy he had actually been sent.

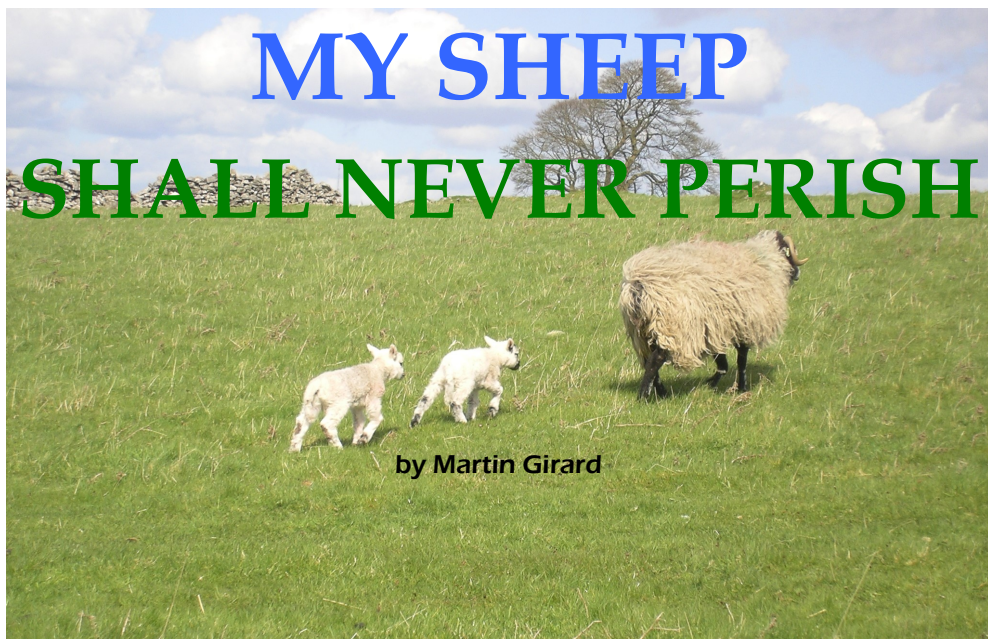
He was dependable and able to encourage others. He did not feel the need of taking centre-stage. He would gladly take news of someone else and bring back news of those he had visited, rather than having to use the first person in order to report on his own mission.

The little glimpses of his character are also worth pondering. To Paul he was “a beloved brother” (Eph.6:21; Col.4:7) because he happily co-operated with Paul. Twice he could be commended by the apostle as a “faithful minister” (Eph.6:21; Col.4:7). The term “minister” does not signify a position of status. It could equally be translated as “servant” or “deacon”. It describes one who is an attendant. In that role, Tychicus was “faithful” and was therefore reliable and trusted. He had been given tasks to perform which he carried out conscientiously. Finally, in Colossians 4:7 he is identified as a “fellowservant in the Lord”. Although Paul was an apostle to whom truth was revealed, he saw Tychicus as one who worked alongside him. There are certainly no New Testament epistles from Tychicus, but this does not mean that his role was unimportant. Paul saw Tychicus as being like he was – simply a servant.

Not much may be recorded about this brother, but clear practical lessons remain. Are we prepared to do “lesser” things than others for the Lord? Can we function in harmony with others and prove ourselves responsible? God looks for servants who will be faithful in their ministry, like Tychicus was. Can we join him?

Tychicus ... fellowservant in the Lord

Colossians 4:7



In recent times there has been considerable controversy over the question of eternal salvation. Articles have been written in Christian magazines, opinions have been expressed in programmes, and discussions have arisen over the nature of salvation.

The expression, “once saved, always saved” has, in some cases, generated disagreement. Some sincerely preach that those who believe the message and are saved will *always* be saved. Others say that it is possible to fall from grace. They point out that the expression “once saved, always saved” is not found in the Bible and has done considerable harm. They will tell of those who “believed” at one time but now have no interest whatever in following the Lord. Salvation, for such, was simply as an escape route from hell. People “believed” or “said a prayer of commitment” but carried on living as before. There was no evident change in their lives.

How can we reconcile such opposing viewpoints? Many reading this article will have no difficulty identifying people who at one time made a profession and were in fellowship with the Lord’s people but are now immersed in worldly pursuits and have no interest in Christian activities. From time to time we may even encounter individuals who will tell us that although they once believed they have now become unbelievers. What has happened to them? Have they lost their salvation?

SOME CLEAR PRINCIPLES

First, in seeking to answer this question, it must be stated that there is no simple answer. There are many things which will remain beyond our ability to understand. However, at the same time there are a number of facts which are clear. In order to help us, a few simple observations can be made. Consider a statement made by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:19: “The Lord knoweth them that are His” (KJV). We must allow the full force of those words to be impressed upon our minds. It is **the Lord** who knows those who are His. In other words, looking at others *I do not know!* We may look at certain people who are found in the company of Christians and think that they are believers too, but in reality only the Lord can recognize His true people.

Ephesians 2 is very clear concerning the matter of salvation. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (v.8,9). Salvation is a gift. We cannot earn it by any merit of our own or through any good deeds we may perform, for it is “not of works” done by us. We do not deserve salvation; it is a gift graciously bestowed by God upon those who are completely undeserving. According to this passage, it is simply received by faith. In other words, God offers salvation on the basis of Christ’s atoning death, and we accept the gift humbly and without question.

When someone repents of their sin and asks God for salvation, receiving Christ as their personal Saviour, the Holy Spirit comes to live within the heart. The Bible speaks of believers being indwelt, or “sealed” by the Holy Spirit (Eph.1:13). A believer receives a new nature, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. However, although all of this is true, the believer does not become sinless. One who has been forgiven by God can still sin because the old nature has not been removed. Passages in the New Testament speak of “walking in the flesh” rather than in the Spirit. A believer can still tell a lie, say things which should not be said, be unkind, act dishonestly, or engage in immorality. But when we sin *as believers*, we are responsible to get matters put right. John was writing to believers when he stated, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn.1:9). In the previous verse we discover how wrong we are if we dare to suggest we “have no sin” in our lives. Such a declaration is utterly false and contradicts the truth of God. Those who confess their sins to God can be forgiven because of the cleansing found in the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son (v.7).

the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin

CONTRASTS

Perhaps the best-known illustration in the New Testament of a believer sinning is of Simon Peter denying his Lord. Peter was a loyal and devoted follower of Christ who had declared his willingness to lay down his life for Christ's sake. The Lord Jesus warned Peter of his frailty and of his imminent denial, but Peter would have none of it. He remonstrated with the Saviour and again announced his determination to be unswerving in following Christ. Yet the self-confident Peter failed and denied his Lord three times. He was brought to his senses when the cock crowed and the Lord looked at him. Leaving the high priest's court Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk.22:60-62). We may wonder what thoughts went through Peter's mind. He must have felt like an utter failure. But the Lord restored Simon Peter to fellowship and to usefulness, as subsequent history shows.

Simon Peter

We can contrast Simon Peter with Judas Iscariot who also failed the Lord. Judas has always been remembered as the disciple who was a traitor. He was the one who led the Lord's enemies to Gethsemane in order to arrest Him, kissing the Lord in an abhorrent act of betrayal. But when Judas realized the gravity of his offence, he did not break down as Peter did. Instead, filled with remorse, Judas went out and hanged himself. Earlier, the Lord Jesus had referred to him as "the son of perdition" (Jn.17:12). Judas was never a true believer. Although the other disciples saw him as one of their number, the Lord knew Judas' lost condition. He might mix with all the others, but he had never been saved.

Judas Iscariot

Since this happened among the disciples we should not be surprised by the same scenario today. Individuals may pass for believers and be actively involved within a church, yet a work of grace has not taken place in their hearts. They may have had some kind of spiritual experience without ever having been born again. Living a double-life, they carefully shield their true selves from the eyes of others. Just as the disciples were not aware that Judas Iscariot did not belong to the Lord, we can make the same kind of mistake today. As we have already said, it is *the Lord* – and *not us* - who knows those who belong to Him.

"ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED"?

The expression "once saved, always saved" needs to be clarified as it can all too easily be nothing more than a glib saying. In explaining the gospel, salvation is sometimes likened to a ticket that has been purchased for us in order to bring us to heaven. Some travel tickets allow a passenger to disembark from a train, for instance, as it travels to its destination so that a person can explore other



places on the way. This may be interesting for tourists who are in no real hurry to reach their final destination. However, we must not think of salvation in this manner. We have not been saved simply to escape from eternal punishment and to live as we choose on our way to heaven – like getting off the train in order to pursue our own interests and then get on board once more. To emphasize the analogy, the “ticket” for salvation requires that we remain on board right through to our final destination, not leaving the safe environment of the train.

Changing the illustration, salvation is not simply an insurance policy to get someone to heaven. Anyone who thinks of it in this way has failed to grasp the message of the gospel. We are called to repent of our sin, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to give our lives to Him. He is not only the *Saviour to trust* but also the *Lord who must be obeyed*. Conversion speaks of a life that has been changed and is no longer what it was before. We are called to follow Christ and to be different.

In Romans 6 Paul raised the matter of grace and the Lordship of Christ. He asked the question, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” and answered it with an emphatic, “God forbid!” (Rom.6:1,2). Are we saved so that we can live as we please and sin without being too much concerned about it because God is gracious and always ready to forgive? Absolutely not! The expression could be translated “Perish the thought!” Anyone suggesting such a thing has failed to appreciate the true grace of God. It is not a flimsy indulgence with which we can trifle. The believer who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit must “walk in newness of life” (v.4). If we meet someone who claims to be a believer but whose life has not been changed, we may well question the reality of their salvation. The true believer will have the desire to be found walking in newness of life.

MY SHEEP WILL NEVER PERISH

In John 10 the Lord Jesus used a significant expression when He referred to “My sheep” (v.27). In the first part of the chapter the Lord revealed Himself as the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep (v.11). He then explained that, as the Good Shepherd, He knows His sheep (v.14). If the words “My sheep” identify those who belong to Him, clearly there are also those who *do not* belong to Him. Jesus said to the Jews, “But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep” (v.26). These words reveal an important fact. Sheep belonging to the Lord are those who *believe* in Him. Although the Jews to whom He was speaking were descendants of God’s Old Testament people, they did not accept Jesus as Messiah and therefore did not belong to Him.

The next verses have brought great comfort to God’s people. “My sheep hear My

voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand" (v.27-29). The question of eternal security is answered conclusively here. Let us note carefully what our Lord is saying about His sheep.

As we have already seen, those who belong to Him are believers whom the Lord knows. They have been purchased by Him through His sacrifice on the cross, but they have also been given to Him by the Father. Their eternal security is guaranteed by the Lord Jesus. He assures them that He has given them eternal life and therefore they will never perish. If they *could* perish, the life given by Him would not be eternal. While those who fail to exercise saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ *will* perish (Jn.3:16), the believer is eternally safe in a twofold sense for no power can snatch him from the hand of the Lord Jesus or from the Father's hand. Do we need more assurance than this?

eternal life

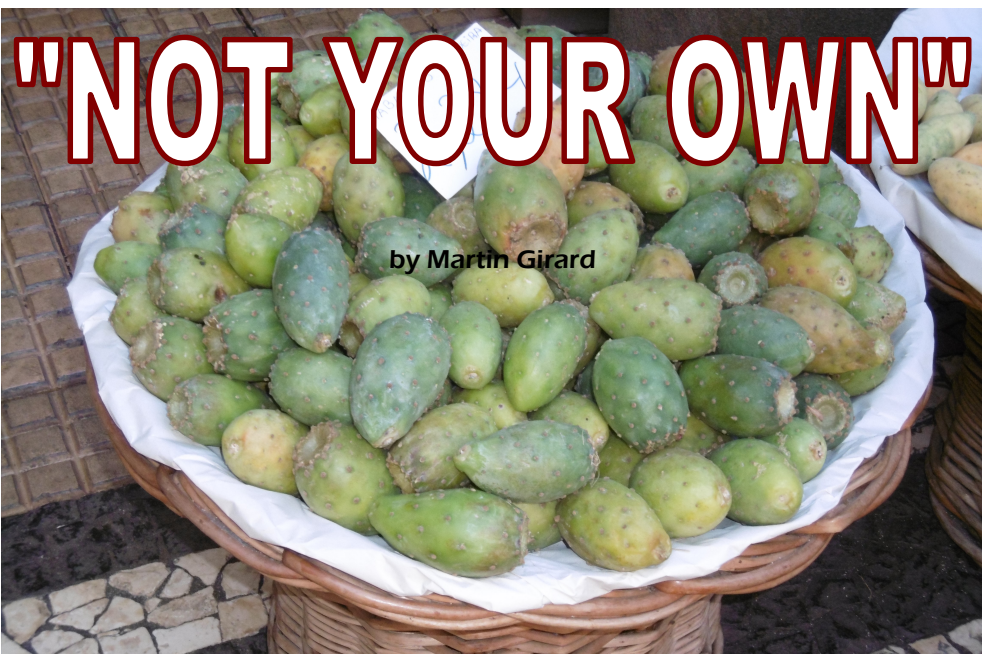
It is interesting to note two characteristics of the sheep: they *hear* the Shepherd's voice and *follow* Him (v.27). The true believer therefore knows the Lord Jesus personally and gladly listens for His voice in His Word. In addition to this, the true believer is a follower of the Lord Jesus. His life is not marked by carelessness and indifference. Rather, he is genuinely concerned to please his Master.

SALVATION IS OF THE LORD

In drawing these thoughts together, perhaps we understand a little more about the "once saved, always saved" controversy. A true believer, born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, cannot be lost. Christ's sheep will never perish. Salvation depends upon Him, and God will "save ... to the uttermost" those who come unto Him through Christ (Heb.7:25). However, there are those who only *profess* to believe. No real work of grace has gone on in their hearts. They may have listened to a superficial presentation of the Gospel where they have been told "just believe" – without understanding what it really means to be a follower of Christ. They have not known true repentance or genuine surrender to Christ, and eventually their lives will demonstrate that a real work of the Spirit was absent.

If we know the Lord as our Saviour and Shepherd, we must keep near to Him in order to avoid falling into sin. Remember Peter. He did not lose his salvation, but he lost his joy and usefulness. If we have been saved, let us never cease to thank the Lord for His mercy to us. As we consider the greatness of His love, it will make us want to live near to Him, seeking to please Him in all that we do.





“Put it down! It’s not yours!” Have you heard those words before? They may have been spoken to a small child who had picked up something interesting. Proudly holding his newly-found treasure, the child had expected the parent to speak approvingly. Instead, a fundamental lesson had to be taught. The object did not belong to the child but to someone else, and therefore it must be given up. Early in life the child needed to discover that we must not help ourselves to what does not belong to us. Appropriating something that rightly belongs to another person is tantamount to stealing.

This important lesson is applied to our spiritual lives in Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. Reading the epistle, there seems to have been a serious misunderstanding as far as the believers in Corinth were concerned. Paul appeared to remonstrate with them as he declared, “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you,” (1 Cor.6:19). Had they forgotten the meaning of redemption? The presence of the Holy Spirit within them was proof that their lives no longer belonged to themselves. Paul explained this truth with the words, “For ye are bought with a price” (v.20). What price did he have in mind?

NOT YOURS – BUT HIS

The question is answered by Peter, who reminds us that we have been redeemed, not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet.1:18,19). A

transaction took place at the cross where Jesus died. A price was paid in order to save those who were lost in sin and faced eternal doom. Willingly, the Lord Jesus laid down His life in order to purchase a people who would belong to Him. In one sense silver or gold *could* have been given as payment, and those purchased in this way would rightly have belonged to the One who had paid the price. But something of infinitely *greater* worth has been given. Christian believers recognize that “the precious blood of Christ” was shed to provide redemption, and this fact ought to touch our hearts. We have been purchased in order to *belong* to the Lord – but the cost was great. It did not simply involve someone generously paying a vast sum of money which might have diminished their resources. In an act of unbounded compassion God gave His only Son, and out of infinite love the Lord Jesus laid down His life in order to redeem us. Does this not prove how much He loved us? Should it not cause us to love Him greatly in return?



HIS – FOR EVER

“Ye are not your own,” Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19. We have been “bought with a price” (v.20) – and what a price! “The precious blood of Christ” was shed for our redemption so that we might belong to Him. If we have received Him, the fact is that we do not belong to ourselves any more: we belong to Christ eternally!

We must apply this truth to our lives. If we belong to Christ, it follows that we are not at liberty to live as we please and run our lives in the way we choose. The indwelling Holy Spirit has sealed us (Eph.4:30) and is the proof that we belong to God. It is because we have been bought with a price that we must “glorify God” (1 Cor.6:20). God’s purpose in salvation is that we might live to bring glory to Him. We cannot glorify Him in our own strength but only as enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

On the basis of “the mercies of God,” Paul exhorts us to “present [our] bodies [as] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” which is the only “reasonable” thing for us to do (Rom.12:1). We have been purchased by the Lord, spirit, soul, and body. Since the Lord Jesus gave Himself for us, it is only right that we should willingly yield ourselves to Him.

Paul knew these demands – for when he was converted on the Damascus road he asked the Lord what He wanted him to do (Acts 9:6). He

knew that his life was no longer his own. He had been brought under the authority of a new Master. If we belong to the Lord Jesus, we are His as well. Our daily ambition should be to please the One who has saved us from eternal loss.

***a living
sacrifice***



"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" [Isaiah 5:20-21].

It would be difficult to compose a better description for our day than this one which was written by Isaiah some 2,700 years ago. How incredibly accurate these words are! We often think of believers who passed away, perhaps fifty years ago, and say how they could not believe the changes that have come upon us. In the name of progress all kinds of abhorrent and God-defying laws have been passed by our politicians. What were once criminal acts are now acceptable practices which we are asked to respect and endorse. Such radical changes in society are really unbelievable.

Isaiah's words have been quoted in full because they are so clear and forthright and hardly require further comment. The reversal which he witnessed in his day is

Reversal

happening all around us. The laws of our country at one time were founded upon the teaching of God's Word and in many respects were *good*. Now humanistic and atheistic laws have replaced them while the teaching of the Bible is ridiculed. Many activities which God classifies as sin and which were therefore *evil* are now called *good*. Attempts have been made to extinguish the

light of the Bible while the *darkness* of ungodly thinking has been promoted. The *sweetness* of the Gospel and its associated blessings has been rejected, and the *bitterness* of false religions been given elevated status. Prominent politicians have actually issued apologies to those who in the past were criminalized and imprisoned for committing sodomy. We must have become so enlightened! Those who have introduced the new standards are proud of their moral (read “immoral”!) revolution. Truly, they are *wise* and *prudent* in their own estimation!

ALL UPSIDE DOWN

Social conditions in Israel were all wrong in Isaiah’s day. The prophet wrote: “As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them” (3:12). Everything seemed to have been turned upside down. God’s plan for His people had been rejected, and leaders were bringing in new ways which were diametrically opposed to His divine purpose. Instead of *men* being in positions of leadership, women had usurped these roles. Children, rather than being under control, had the upper-hand and were ruining society. Progress was impossible, and God’s people were drifting further and further from Him.

Do we not see something paralleling our society in this verse? Gender distinctions are rapidly disappearing, and traditional roles are being reversed. The Church of England is now ordaining as many women as men. Putting all denominations together, about 20% of today’s church ministers are women, while a third of today’s Members of Parliament at Westminster are women. I am certainly not implying that they are *less* capable than their male counterparts but simply pointing out the rise of rampant feminism. The situation in the church is, of course another matter because God has entrusted *men* with leadership responsibilities. But there is another observation which can be made from Isaiah’s day. Like the prophet we see a new generation, deprived of the benefits of discipline and loudly demanding rights. How many young people today are involved in anti-social behaviour, crime, and even murder? Often after a killing has been reported we hear that the offender cannot be named because of their age. There are no satisfactory deterrents to curb the youth’s sinful appetite. Leniency in the courts means that he will not pause to consider the consequences of his action and the effect a punishment will have upon his own life.

New Society
How Soon

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes

Isaiah 5:21

WE ARE BEING DESTROYED

"O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths" [Isaiah 3:12].

Our spiritual paths today are being destroyed by leaders who are obsessed with alien "British values" and who are blatantly opposed to divine truth. Truly we *are* being destroyed! Government and the church are both responsible for causing us to err and leading us astray – away from the ways of the Lord.

Surely it is time for us to hear the verdict of the Almighty. What does *He* say about those who have turned us away from His Word? Very simply, His response is, "*Woe unto them.*" One thing alone awaits them, and that is the righteous judgment of a thrice-holy God. They have done a wicked thing by depriving others of godly direction and sound, common-sense values. They will unquestionably face God's wrath.

THE ONLY SOLUTION

There is *one* solution – and one only. We must return to the Bible and to the ways of God. Only by doing this can disaster be averted in a society which is destroying itself – but will this happen? Sadly, for the immediate future we can see little hope. Politicians are influenced by powerful pressure groups, and Parliament seems dominated by people intent on imposing upon us the latest bizarre and unbelievable sociological fads.

The situation is deteriorating fast – not improving. News items are becoming more and more unsavoury. While society spirals towards ruin, let us hold on to the truth and make it known. God, in His mercy, may yet reverse things. Whether or not He does, the Bible's message is one of *hope*: Christ is coming again. His people can lift up their heads: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."



"Return unto Me"

Malachi 3:7

GUILTY!

by Martin Girard

The court case was nearing its conclusion. Evidence which had been given seemed overwhelming. The defence had been silenced and had no further submissions to make. The judge had announced his verdict in a single chilling word: *Guilty*. One thing only remained, and that was the passing of an appropriate sentence.

Imagine the uproar in the court if the judge then relaxed and said, “I think I’ll just let him off.” The prosecution would quickly respond by saying, “You can’t do that! The evidence was overwhelming, and the offence was serious. Wrong has been committed. In your own words you pronounced the suspect guilty. You cannot simply dismiss him because he might be a danger to society and is likely to re-offend!”

HERE WE ARE!

We are in the suspect’s place. In the court of God we have all been found guilty of breaking His law. In fact, “all the world” stands “guilty before God” (Rom.3:19) and deserving punishment. The sentence for us is death (Rom.6:23).

God is just and cannot overlook sin, but God is also love and sent His Son to die for our sin. Willingly the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven to suffer in our place at the hand of a righteous God. Through His substitutionary death we can be pardoned and “justified freely” (Rom.3:24). We can be declared righteous with all the record of our sinful past removed. But for this to happen we must accept what Christ has done for us. This involves admitting our guilt before God without making any excuses and yielding our sinful lives to Christ for Him to cleanse and renew by His Spirit. It involves walking “in newness of life” (Rom.6:4) and living to please God.

Accept what Jesus Christ has done when He took the guilty culprit’s state. Humbly give your life to the Risen Saviour. There is no other way to find pardon. Those who refuse remain guilty before God and one day will pay the price of their own rebellion.

**He took the guilty culprit’s state and suffered in his stead;
For man – oh, miracle of grace – for man the Saviour bled.**

Anne Steele