

THE BASIC FACTS OF OUR FAITH

By J. C. JAMIESON

- The Fact of Christ
- The Fact of Sin
- The Fact of Salvation
- The Fact of God's Message
- The Fact of the Church
- Facing the Facts



TWO SHILLINGS

TPCB

THE BASIC FACTS OF OUR FAITH

*For use by Bible Classes, Fellowships,
Conferences, and also Adult Groups.
Six Studies — but giving sufficient
material for at least twelve evening
meetings.*

BY
J. C. JAMIESON

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INTRODUCTORY

CHRISTIANITY began as a row of facts rather than as a cluster of ideas. This booklet seeks to call the mind of thinking youth back to these primary facts and their significance for life. Behind the most familiar material facts, the growth of a blade of grass, the use of electric light, there lie mysteries that bewilder the intellect. The facts of the spiritual realm are still more deeply rooted in mystery. Nevertheless, they are essential for complete living. We ask our readers, therefore, to sit down quietly before the central facts of Christianity, and to let them make their full impression on their minds. Faith must feed on facts if it is to be strong and vivid.

The danger of the Discussion Method is that the members discuss some other question more or less related to the Scripture rather than finding out exactly what is taught in the New Testament. The aim of the leader should not be to get up an interesting argument but to bring the members into touch with the eternal realities. Decision, and not debate is the one thing needful.

"The Fact of Christ," by Carnegie Simpson would be very helpful to the leader. Moffat or Weymouth or some modern translation should be consulted, and in private study much time should be given to the life-giving Scriptures. In the meeting it will be necessary to deal with a limited selection of the material, or extend the studies over a number of meetings.

J. C. JAMIESON.

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STUDY 1

The Fact of Christ

"All centuries, all races, both sexes, all ages, find in the Master their values consummated."—Fosdick.

Daily Readings

1. What Jesus meant to Peter. 1 Peter 2: 21-25.
2. What Jesus meant to John. 1 John 3: 1-16.
3. What Jesus meant to Paul. Gal. 1: 1-5; 2 Cor. 5: 14-21.
4. Great Facts. 1 Cor. 15: 1-11.
5. Christ's Claims. Matt. 11: 25-30.
6. Final Claims. Mark 14: 60-65.
7. The Great Companion. Acts 5: 29-32; 9: 17; 18: 9, 10.

The primary thing in our religion is not some experience in ourselves, or some good deed we do for men, or some ritual we perform together, but the Acts and Words of God, Facts outside of ourselves and true, independent of anything we feel or do. Christianity begins with objective facts.

Too often people dwell at the circumstance and not the centre of the Christian faith. They attack or defend some outworks of doubtful value, and not the castle itself. They are arguing about some precarious inference from the faith and not the faith itself. In this booklet we ask you to study some of the vital and central issues. The first of these is the Inescapable Christ.

Jesus constantly pointed to Himself as the source and sum of the religion He taught. Other religious teachers made everything of certain ideals, principles, or ceremonies. He alone puts Himself as the centre. "Whom do men say that I am?" "Come unto me." "Follow me." "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He was the central fact of the New Way. As Herrmann says, "He knew no more sacred task than to point men to His own person."

Certainties about Jesus

1. **Jesus lived, and lived a life such as is pictured in the Gospels.** Paul was a contemporary of the Master, and his four great Epistles — Galatians, First and Second Corinthians, and Romans—were written between A.D. 48 and 58.

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These early letters are independent witnesses confirming the essential things in the Gospels—the spotless purity of Jesus, His power, His death, His resurrection (2 Cor. 10: 1; 5: 21; Rom. 1: 3-7; Gal. 1: 3-4; 1 Cor. 15: 3-8).

The Church had been created by His life and resurrection before any of the books of the New Testament were written, and the Church was the real primary witness to these great facts.

Moreover, the Personality exhibited in the Gospels was so contrary to the ideas and expectations of the Jewish people and indeed to the whole thought of the age, so high above even His biographers, that it must be original and real, drawn from life. His disciples would never have imagined a character of His type, nor could they possibly have invented such a peerless life or such matchless teaching. In the Gospels we are up against reality — a genuine portrait from real life.

2. **His Character was Unique.** A distinctive mark of the Jewish people was their sensitiveness with regard to sin, their sense of the Holiness of God and how far they themselves came short of His glory (Psalm 38: 3; 32: 5; Is. 53: 6). Jesus shared their view of the Holiness of God, and cherished still more exacting standards of personal holiness in thought, word, and deed. And yet, unlike the Jews and Paul and all good men since, there is in Him no hint of any sense of personal sin, no consciousness of failure or unworthiness, no contrition (John 14: 30; 17: 4; Matt. 11: 27).

3. **His Claims.** When an unknown doctor comes on the scene of accident, he had to claim to be a doctor for the sake of the suffering. So the Great Physician with considerable reserve claimed to be certain things. To some these claims seemed to be blasphemy. To others the claims carried complete conviction. He claimed to do things which really only God could do, to forgive sins and to judge men at the last, to be the very Son of God, knowing God and revealing God as no other could (Mark 2: 5; Matt. 7: 22, 23; 11: 27; 25: 31; Luke 7: 49-50; John 5: 18; 19: 7).

4. **His Teaching.** How visionary, how impractical and

impracticable seemed His principles of the world-kingdom of universal love, based on fellowship, treating all as brothers without respect of race, rank, or sex, a kingdom where even the child was of infinite value ! Yet here, after 1900 years of study and research and sad experiment, all sorts of thinkers are coming to the conclusion that the only way out of the chaos is to go forward to Christ. Voices everywhere are saying, "It is Christ or chaos." In Him are the principles which lead to world peace and brotherhood. In Him is the motive to toil for the better, and the power to change human nature and so make a New Era possible.

It is a fact that Christ has the world-programme that the world to-day needs. We steadily grow away from other teachers. We have not yet, after all these centuries, caught up on Jesus Christ. Never man spake like this man.

5. **His Influence.** Let us think of His influence in four directions —

(a) His power to change individuals. Compare the transformations that have taken place in lives like Paul, Augustine, Bunyan, George Muller, Hsi, Kagawa.

(b) His influence is seen in His power to awaken the most enduring and the most intense devotion to Himself. Millions upon millions have lived, toiled, and died in the most complete allegiance to Christ — Martyrs, missionaries, and everyday folk. Our hymn book, and such biographies as those of Sundar Singh or David Livingstone or Mary Slessor will furnish ample illustration of this passionate devotion.

(c) His influence again is shown in His leavening power over the thought and life of communities. The influence of Jesus upon the thought of humanity has been immeasurably great. Ever since He lived on earth God has been more near and more real to men and women. Christ gave a new respect for the ordinary man, a new status to woman, and a new reverence for the child (Matt. 18: 1-5; Mark 10: 13-16). He brought God out of the clouds and placed Him in the everyday life of the cradle and the shop. He wove the supernatural into the natural. His conception of religion as unlimited fellowship has been working revolutions, and

there are vaster changes yet to come. His influence has been thus summed up by Lecky, the great historian, not in any way partial to Christianity — "The brief record of three short years of active life has done more to soften and regenerate mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and than all the exhortations for moralists." Think over what is implied in that sentence.

(d) There are two points in which the influence of Christ is very amazing. Other men's influence decreases with time. How Plato, Aristotle, Hillel, Aquinas, once dominated the minds of men ! To the world to-day they are but names. Not so Jesus. More people of more nations are studying every morning His teaching than ever in the world's history.

Other men's influence decreases with space. Confucius has less influence over the Maoris or over the Fijians than over the Chinese. Robert Burns does not thrill the Indian as he does the Scot. But Christ is as mighty in Melbourne or Rotorua as in Jerusalem. He moves the Japanese poet Kagawa, or the African educationist Aggrey, or the Scottish doctor Dugald Christie, as much as He did His disciples in Galilee of old. The men who knew Him best and were with Him in His most trying scenes and experiences, worshipped Him. The men of the twentieth century also worship Him with the same unshakable conviction. He is the contemporary of every age, the brother of every race. His influence grows with the changing centuries. His daring prophecy is being slowly fulfilled (Mat. 31: 31-33; 26: 13).

6. **His Living Presence.** Men and women are sure that He is alive now. In His own day they were certain that He had risen from the dead. Hundreds of them had seen Him after His resurrection. Multitudes of them were certain because they had experienced His power and felt His Presence. They could say, "The Lord spoke with me and strengthened me." On this experience they lived entirely new lives and faced cruel deaths with peace and joy.

All down the centuries it has been just the same. People do not look back to Jesus. They do not cherish His memory as we cherish the memory of a fine Christian or our mother. They look to a Living Christ. They accept orders from Him.

They are conscious for His help in daily life. He is the living Comrade, the ever-present Leader, a dynamic Fact in the Present. The greatest day in their lives was the day on which they burst the veil of the material and realized Jesus as the great Companion and began a new life under His direction. The experience of that day endures all the shocks of time, the temptations of youth, and the sorrows of age—

"No dead fact stranded on the shore
Of the oblivious years;
But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He."

(Whittier.)

Gaston Frommel, a Swiss writer, says, "I was following out my life, pursuing my own desires, when Christ advanced to meet me, placed Himself before me, and barred my way. He stopped me; He made a silence in my heart; and then He held me with a solemn interview in which He spoke as He alone could speak."

Here we deal with a world of present reality. Multitudes drawn from every stage of culture and every race have had the same experience as Whittier and Frommel. Anybody can have that experience who is willing to fulfil the conditions.

What is the meaning of this basic fact? We should sit down before Christ as the scientist sits down before nature, with a quiet, open mind, and give Him a chance to speak to us and allow the meaning of this fact to sink into our minds. Surely **God was in Christ** reconciling the world unto Himself.

What is to be our **response** to this fact? The Christian is one who responds to the Christ and His challenge. "What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ?"

Assignments

1. Why is it so important to study the basic facts of our faith?
2. In what sense is it true that Christianity is Christ?
3. What is there exceptional in the character and claims of Christ?
4. Where does His influence differ from that of other religious teachers?
5. How do you explain the meaning of this fact? What should be our response to its challenge?

STUDY 2

The Fact of Sin

"No great book of creative literature was ever written without sin at the centre. Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, Faust, Les Miserables, Romola, The Scarlet Letter—let the list be extended any direction and any length! Always the insight of the seers reports one inner peril of the race. . . . Sin to every seeing eye is the one most real and practical problem of mankind."—Dr. Fosdick.

"We need a quickened sense of sin, we need a profounder realization of the majesty and purity of God."—Lord Tweedsmuir (John Buchan).

Daily Readings

1. Sin Rises in the Heart. Mark 7: 5-23.
2. Social Sin. Matt. 23: 13, 14; James 5: 4; Is. 58: 1-7.
3. Invisible Sin. Matt. 5: 21-28; 1 John 3: 15-17.
4. Shortcoming is Sin. James 4: 17; Matt. 25: 44-46.
5. Sin Deceives. Heb. 3: 7-13.
6. Sin Separates and Defiles. Is. 59: 1-3; 1; 15-18.
7. Sin Enslaves. Rom. 7: 14-25.

The supreme practical problem of the world is human sin. Discussion groups and world congresses draw up excellent remedies for all the world's ills, but in the long run they are largely defeated by human obstinacy and selfishness. In every Garden of Eden the serpent appears. Greed, lust, hate, cruelty, pride, contempt, and the subtle craving to dominate are the real problems of humanity. Sin is no invention of religion. It is the most terrible and universal Fact of human life. Until we have dealt with sin we have not faced reality. The only religion that is of any value is the one that can deal effectively with the guilt and power of sin.

What is Sin?

Our ancient Catechism says, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God."

The Moral Re-Armament Groups say, "Sin is that which keeps a man from God or from his fellow-men."

Mrs. Wesley, in a letter to John, gave a most practical answer to this question, "Whatever weakens your reason, whatever impairs your tenderness of conscience, whatever obscures your sense of God, whatever takes off the relish of

spiritual things—that thing, to you, is sin.”

Remember it takes time to have a realizing sense of sin, just as it takes time to have a realizing sense of God. Take time to think out the consequences of sin.

Sin is primarily an offence against the love of the Father (Psalm 51: 4), self-assertion against God, whether in doing things contrary to His Will or in neglecting to rise to the life which His power has made possible. But sin goes deeper than deeds. It includes the attitude of the soul, our words, our secret thoughts, and our omissions. Sin is any lack of loyalty to God. But loyalty to God always involves loyalty to man. Therefore sin is also any anti-social way of living, manifested either in doing hurt to man or in failing to render him the friendship which he needs. Sin is the violation of the law of fellowship by adopting an attitude of self-will towards God or selfishness towards our fellows. Sin is not so much an isolated thought or act as it is a disposition. When we do wrong deeds it is a sign that we are wrong (Luke 6: 45; Mark 7: 20-23). Sin is primarily the soul set in opposition to God. Other evils are the results of the heart-separation from God.

Aspects of Sin

Sin has *shades of difference*. There are sins of the body, such as drunkenness, and there are the more subtle sins of the spirit, such as pride, jealousy, ill-temper. Let us look at some of the many words used by Scripture to describe the various forms of this evil. Sin (*hamartia*) means missing the mark; trespass (*paraptoma*) an offence, falling where one should have stood; transgression (*parabasis*) stepping over the line; ungodliness (*asebeia*) impiety; iniquity (*anomia*) lawlessness; debts (*opheilema*) failure to give what is owing. Let us remember that failure to fulfil the meaning and purpose of life is sin (Jas. 4: 17). Indeed, R. L. Stevenson would go as far as to say, “We are not damned for doing wrong, but for not doing right. . . . The sins of omission are in my view the only serious ones.”

Social and Corporate Sins

Much of the sin fiercely condemned in the Bible is sin

against society or the lethargy that fails to do anything adequate to remove the evils of society. Respectable folk may be utterly condemned because they are failing to do their duty towards their neighbours or their employees. James, believed to be the brother of Jesus, holds up to scorn religious people who make distinctions between rich and poor, or fail to pay just wages (Jas. 2: 1-6; 5: 1-5). The Old Testament was equally vehement against social sins (Is. 58: 6, 7; Amos 8: 4-8).

The Bible contains stern denunciation of *corporate* sins, where a community casts off pity and brotherliness (Amos 1: 9-12; 2: 4-7; 6: 3-8). Quite often a party or firm or nation will do a heartless thing which the individuals in it would not do. During recent years, we have seen in countries abroad, much ruthless tyranny, and, nearer home, the toleration of slum buildings, the neglect of unemployed youth, and on rare occasions the unfeeling treatment by a congregation of a minister who has worn out his years and strength in the service of the Church. A corporate body may be very pitiless and unconcerned, but it is a fact of history that collective sins bring retribution upon individuals. We may sin two by two. We pay one by one.

The Consequences of Sin

The supreme consequence of sin is that it separates us from God. The other results flow from this supreme tragedy as effects from a cause. The explanation of all our failure is that we have broken contact with the Power-House, we are out of touch with the Father.

(a) *Sin injures the personality of the sinner.* It is an offence against one's better self, a form of self-destruction. It eats away character. It is soul erosion. Sin is impurity, poisoning the springs of life, making us unfit for the presence of God. It weakens the will, deafens the ear, blinds the eye to a whole world of reality. If we compare ourselves with Jesus, we see the havoc sin works upon us. One part of that havoc is to lose the power to see the havoc. The continued choosing of the easy wrong rather than the hard right brings with it degeneration. Tito Melema in “Romola,”

and Arthur Donnithorne in "Adam Bede," well illustrate this secret and deadly process. Sin white-ants the soul.

(b) **It weaves a mess of habit.** It produces a "set" in the life of the sinner. Its mesmeric fascination sucks the soul in as relentlessly as the dreaded quicksands. There is no escape except by a Power from above. We see that sin is slavery in the case of alcohol or opium, but it is equally so with greed, lust, pride, bad temper. Sin is a habit-forming drug (Rom. 7: 21-24).

(c) **Sin deceives the sinner.** The scriptures speak truly of the "deceitfulness of sin." Sin in its beginning has glitter and glamour, the lilt of music, the whirl of swift emotion. It conceals the fact that its end is slow, sordid, ugly, ghastly. Sin is a hag disguised as a bewitching girl. It persuades the sinner that it is not really very bad, and will open the doors of life—"ye shall be as gods." Lust is 'love', or at the worst "an indiscretion". Selfishness is "business acumen". It deadens the conscience, so that, the more one sins, the less conscious one is of sin. Like Samson, we think we shall go out just "as at other times" (Judges 16: 20; Heb. 3: 13). Even if we have done wrong we imagine it is not really our fault. Sin is a narcotic drug, blinding us both to the sinfulness of sin and to its inevitable consequences.

The deceitfulness of sin is called by psychologists **rationalization**, the art of finding a pleasing reason for an act instead of facing the true cause and motive. Meanness is disguised as thrift, cowardice is decked out as humility. Drunkenness is heartily condemned, but underpaying the minister, dismissing an employee whose youth is departing, being censorious in the Church and bad-tempered in the home is not recognized as a sin. A man drowns the call to personal consecration by talking about the evils of capitalism and the coldness of the Church. The Pharisee does not know he is a Pharisee. The censorious Christian does not know he is censorious. Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (17: 9).

(d) **Our sin injures other people.** Primarily our sin creates a chasm between us and God, but even our secret

sins lower the spiritual tone about us. We infect the atmosphere in which we live. We rob our friends by being incapable of giving them the inspiration which God meant us to give them (1 Kings 15: 34).

Penalties of Sin

Is sin punished? Christ and all scripture affirm that it is in the strongest language (Rom. 1: 18; Matt. 5: 28-30). The world is so arranged that no sin ever escapes its penalty. True, no judgment flashes from heaven, but every sin is punished immediately, here, in this world, and punished in proportion to the offence by inner degeneration and the certain crippling of personality. Sin is suicide. Lust renders one incapable of love —

"But och! it hardens' a' within,
And petrifies the feeling."

Pride, with its lack of sympathetic imagination, shuts one out, as by a flaming sword, from the highest fellowship. Sin renders one incapable of seeing the highest, much less of entering it. Hesitation to follow the light is punished by the closing in of the darkness. Head Tennyson's "Vision of Sin" (the retribution upon sensual sin) and "The Palace of Art" (the penalty of refined selfishness).

If there are penalties in this world, surely these penalties will run over into the next world. Let no one say that the Bible makes too much of sin. Consider the horrors of war, the dull despair of the slums in our cities, or the misery caused by refined selfishness in a home. These are the pitiless products of sin, and retribution must follow.

A picture. Genesis 3 is a primitive picture of the psychology and penalty of sin. Sin comes as a crafty serpent (Gen. 3: 1; 2 Cor. 11: 3; Rev. 12: 9). Doubt is cast upon God. His restrictions are unreasonable. Breaking them will exalt life, and no judgment will follow. The woman concentrates on the idea until its fascination masters her. Sin is rebellion against God through the desire for self-exaltation. Through Eve's contagion the man also falls. The sense of guilt seizes them, and, with uneasy consciences, they try to keep away from God (3: 4-8, 10).

The man blames their condition upon God and the woman, the woman passes on the blame to the serpent. The outcome is separation from God and from Paradise (3: 12, 13, 24), and yet there is a gleam of dawn in the darkness.

Jesus and Sin

What points did Jesus specially stress with regard to sin ?

(1) Jesus looks at the secrets of the heart. His emphasis was upon the inwardness of sin. Hate is mental murder, lust is the essence of adultery. The callous heart, all indifference to human needs, all contempt for people, awakened His burning indignation (Matt. 5: 28; 23: 25-26).

(2) Jesus severely condemned all pious show in religion, all unreality, all pretence, all compromising for the omission of the big thing by exalting the petty things, like the man who paid tithe on mint, and neglected "justice, mercy, and faithful dealing". Jesus was moved to anger, not by the woman taken in adultery, but by the respectable people more concerned about their theories than about relieving human need (Mark 3: 5; 12: 38-40; Matt. 23: 23). So a man to-day stays away from the theatre because it is "worldly", and yet in his "meeting" cruelly slanders other servants of God who differ from him on this or that point.

(3) Jesus teaches the wickedness of negative goodness. Not to serve is to sin. To fail to love is to sin. To miss the mark is to sin. Men are condemned largely for what they have **not done**. Read those terrible words in Matt. 25: 41-46, and compare Luke 10: 31-33. So the fruitless fig tree and the man who hid his talent are condemned.

We miss the searching nature of the Lord's Prayer if we substitute the weaker work "trespasses" for "debts". We may sin grievously without trespassing. We "owe" love and service to God and to man. These are our debts (Rom. 1: 14; 13: 8). We are responsible for what we could do if we were fully yielded to Christ and energized by His spirit. My possibility in Christ is my responsibility before God. Any coming short of that is sin. This principle explains John 16: 9, "of sin, because they believe not on me." Unbelief is shutting the soul against God, refusing to receive

the divine resources which would raise us up to an entirely new plane of life and helpfulness. Trust lies at the heart of every right relationship, and so unbelief is sin and the cause of further sin.

(4) Jesus demanded a radical cure for sin, a new heart, a new birth, and then a life of energetic, positive goodness. We cannot cure sin by attacking its symptoms. The disease itself must be dealt with by an inner change — "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people **from their sins**" (John 3: 3; Matt. 5: 8; 12: 33-35; 23: 26).

It is only as we put our lives alongside the spotless white of His life, and as we understand what sin cost Him on Calvary, that we realize what sin is and how terrible are its consequences.

What to Do About Sin

(1) Face the facts. "Am I coming short of real fellowship with God and active goodwill to men in thought, word, and deed?" My sin is sin, and its narcotic power will increase surely and imperceptibly. Delay is dangerous. The matter is desperately urgent. Agonize to get in, for the door will close (Luke 13: 24, 25).

(2) You can be saved from sin in the most real way, saved from its stains and its chains. The cure for all kinds of sin is to get right with God. Consider how vast and immediate are the promises of God to every seeking sinner (Isaiah 1: 18; 55: 7; Psalm 103: 12).

Assignments

1. How many of the world's problems are, at bedrock, the problem of sin ?
2. What do you think is the best description of sin in this text-book ? How would you yourself define sin ?
3. What is meant by social and corporate sins ? Have we been less awake to them than to personal sins ?
4. Which of the consequences and penalties of sin are the most serious ?
5. What two things in the teaching of Jesus about sin impress you yourself most ?

STUDY 3

The Fact of Salvation

"The message of the Kingdom is a message of supernatural release from sin's tyranny."—Professor Hogg.

"The miracle of renewal is a reality that overlaps every boundary of space and bridges all time."—B. C. Prowright.

Daily Readings

1. The Forecast. Jer. 31: 31-34; Ezekiel 36: 25-27.
2. Songs of Salvation. Psalm 51: 7-13; 103: 1-5; Rev. 5: 9-10.
3. The Mission of Jesus. Matt. 1: 21; Luke 19: 1-10.
4. A Radical Change. John 3: 1-7; Col. 1: 12-14.
5. A Woman. Luke 7: 44-50.
6. An Opponent. 1 Tim. 1: 11-17.
7. How It Comes. Acts 16: 30-34; Eph. 2: 8-10.

The Fact of Conversion

We live in an age of science, when people are coming with open minds to study facts, whether material or psychological. Conversion is one of the most indisputable and significant facts in the mental and moral world. Conversion means turning unto God from the old life to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1: 9).

Professor Romanes, the eminent scientist and intimate friend of Charles Darwin, wrote an impressive book in favour of utter atheism. Later on, he found his way back to faith. One of the factors contributing to this change was the study of the revolutions in the lives of men. He said: "St. Augustine, after thirty years of age, and other Fathers, bear witness to sudden, enduring, and extraordinary change in themselves, called **conversion**. Now this change has been repeated and testified to by countless millions of civilized men and women in all nations and in all degrees of culture." He saw that it was no mere change of opinion, but "a modification of character, more or less profound". He urged that it was worth considering "that the revolution effected by Christianity in human life is immeasurable and unparalleled by any other movement in history". ("Thoughts on Religion", by Romanes.)

These words have increased meaning to-day. Millions more of the most varied types have found this experience. Biography and autobiography furnish us with a literature

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depicting the facts of release, of freedom, of new life, of fresh power. We see it in people brought up in anti-Christian traditions, such as Sundar Singh, Pandita Ramabai, Hsi, and Kagawa, in great sinners, in men of culture, and in women of the world. Recent years have been prolific in unexpected and varied spiritual awakenings, such as those of Ivan Menzies the comedian, Hambro the Norwegian statesman, Kitchen the business man, Redwood the journalist, Emil Brunner the Swiss professor, Dr. Duks the Dutch barrister and Socialist member of Parliament. (See "God in the Slums" and "God in the Shadows", by Redwood, and "Life-Changers", by Harold Begbie).

It is to be noted that spiritual awakenings are of two types. In the one case a person bound by sin or indifference is released by the power of God and enlisted in the service of God. In the other, a person who has been living a respectable but unsatisfactory life turns to God and enters upon an entirely new experience of spiritual purpose and power. He passes from a self-directed life to a Christ-centred, Christ-controlled, Christ-energized life.

In both cases the distinctive thing is that the convert is deeply conscious that God wrought a change in his life which no human power could have effected (2 Cor. 4: 6; 5: 17-18). He knows within himself that God has touched his spirit. Sometimes (though not always) he can point to the very hour and place at which the new life surged in upon him. Frommel, the Swiss professor, said, "That day now lies a long way behind me in the past; but it shines there as the day of a new birth."

Conversion has been a fact in the scriptures and a fact in history, and it is a fact to-day. We have no right to deny an experience because that experience has not yet been ours. It is certain that through surrender to Christ a power comes into life which, judged by its permanence and results, must be nothing less than God working in us, "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1: 16).

But Salvation is a wider word than conversion. Spiritual awakening and conscious dedication to God are but part of the vaster process of salvation. They are the birth which initiates the conscious life and growth.

What is Salvation ?

Salvation is the gracious work of God in Christ, wherein He freely forgives all our sins, brings us into fellowship with Himself, and gives us power to live here and hereafter as His children. The verb "to save" has **three tenses** in the New Testament—"He **hath** saved us from the guilt of sin" (Luke 7: 50; Tit. 3: 5); "He **is** saving us from the power of sin" (1 Cor. 1: 18); "He **will** save us from the very presence of sin" (Rom. 5: 9-10). These three tenses correspond to what is known as justification (or conversion), sanctification, and glorification (Rom. 8:30; 1. Cor. 1: 2; 6: 11).

Salvation is the gift which we received when we trusted Christ, which we are appropriating in larger measure day by day, and into which we will enter fully at the end (1 Pet. 1: 5; Rom. 8: 18). The culmination of salvation lies beyond this life. Even now we know we are the children of God, and are looking forward confidently to the day when we shall be like Christ in character and glory. Meanwhile in the strength of that amazing expectation our lives are being purified more and more (1 John 3: 1-3; 2 Thess. 2: 13-14).

Salvation is both the act of God imparting a new life and the process of character-transformation by His Spirit. Frequently the term salvation is applied to the crisis of decision, the enlistment of the Christian soldier, the matriculation of the student, the welcoming home of the prodigal, the great transaction. "He saved us" (Tit. 3: 5; Luke 15). The wedding of the soul may take place, in one glorious hour, but there are still many adjustments to take place in settling down to the new task in the new home. Notice the crisis in Col. 1: 12-14, the growth in 1: 10, and the consummation in 3: 4. Compare the same three stages in 1 John 3: 2-3.

Not Strange

Salvation is certainly supernatural, but there are very real analogies in ordinary life. Thomas Carlyle tells of the experience that came to him, a depressed man, on the Leith walk, when "all at once there rose a Thought in me. . . . And as I so thought there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul; and I shook base fear away from me for ever." John Stuart Mill and Mark Rutherford found a

permanent uplift in the poems of Wordsworth. George Gissing stepped into a new enjoyment of life amid the flowers and spring sunshine of Devon. "To me the flowers became symbolical of a great release, of a wonderful awakening." The moral recoveries of Jean Valjean in "Les Miserables" and Sydney Carton in "The Tale of Two Cities" and the power of human love to exalt a life are further illustrations. Not only may a man "love at first sight", but that love may change the whole outlook and direction of his life.

We must not think that spiritual awakening is for the prodigal son only. The most far-reaching awakenings have often taken place in the lives of men of excellent character, such as Calvin, Wesley, Chalmers, Charles of Bala, John R. Mott, Robert Speer, Samuel Shoemaker, where the change was from an ineffective religion to a vital faith.

What is Included

(1) The primary thing is salvation, and the source of all the rest, is the **forgiveness** of sins, the restoration to partnership with God, the full glory of sonship with no cloud between. Sin is a burden on our conscience. The burden is rolled away. Sin is a barrier between us and God. God breaks down the barrier. We are reconciled, and **welcomed back into friendship with the Father**. This is the meaning of the Parable of the Prodigal and of Bunyan's story of the Pilgrim at the Cross (Luke 15: 20-24; Psalm 103: 12).

(2) Salvation means the **cleansing** of the **inner** life, the washing away of the stains on the nature, the purifying of the very springs of life—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The hard disposition, the unholy desires, the rebellious feelings are displaced by a new and warm spirit (Psalm 51: 10; Ezekiel 36: 25-27). Henceforth we follow the highest because we love the highest. The good becomes not a precept above us but a passion within us.

(3) Salvation includes **liberty and harmony**. Where Christ is unknown, men dwell in a world of fear: fear of failure, fear of the future, fear of one another, fear of death. To realize that the hand of Christ is upon the helm of the universe and that we are loved and led by Him is to be

delivered from all our fears and ushered into the peace of God. Sin is a bondage. Christ the Liberator sets us free. Augustine is released from his lust, Hsi from his opium, Gough from his liquor, and multitudes from their futile ways of living (John 8: 34, 36; Rom. 6: 22).

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free,
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me."

Psychologists speak of **integration or reharmonizing of personality**. Many a person has a civil war raging within, he has "two men inside his skin", what the scriptures call "a double mind", "a divided heart". Like the Latin poet they know and approve the better, but they follow the worse. This war within means misery, weakness, failure —

"Two souls are ever striving in my breast,
Each from the other longing to be free."

Salvation gathers all the scattered energies into one united stream, where the whole nature serves the one great purpose. Then one can say: "**I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.**" Integration is the miracle of the changed centre. Copernicus made a revolution in astronomy by shifting the centre of the solar system from the earth to the sun. Salvation is the revolution caused by shifting the centre of a human life from self to Christ. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." "To me to live is Christ." The changed centre brings order, harmony, peace, smooth working into the personality.

Frank Buckman went into a little church near Keswick with a divided will and all its frustrations. There he had a vision of the Crucified One, and obtained liberty and unity of life. From this change arose his rare power as a Student Movement leader and later as founder of the Group Movement.

(4) Salvation means **power to live** in the new way as children of God. The last promise of Jesus was, "Ye shall receive power," and the early Christian literature throbs with the energy of a supernatural force at work in the lives of men. It was this that attracted Pandita Ramabai to Christ. It is thus described by the Scottish scholar, David S. Cairns: "The age which followed the death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ witnessed the most wonderful outburst of moral and spiritual energy that human history has ever seen." He declares that the spiritual splendours of those days are meant for our day. "The fountains of life in God have been opened once for all." ("The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith," Chapter 4.) Here is power to lift us out of ourselves, to give us poise in meeting life's situations, and to make us adequate for our tasks in our circumstances, the masters of ourselves and the helpers of others.

"Whence, then," says the Rev. T. E. Riddle of his intimate friend, Sadhu Sundar Singh, "came the power that lifted the Punjab village boy to such world fame and usefulness? Undoubtedly it was that he apprehended the glorified Christ as a living presence with him." In other words the Sadhu had learned to draw upon those resources of God which make men adequate for every human situation. Read again with alert minds words that have been dulled by familiarity, words such as we find in Acts 1: 8; 4: 29; 13: 52; Eph. 3: 20; Phil. 4: 13; Rom. 8: 35-39.

Present and Positive

Salvation, then, is no insurance policy that takes effect after death, but a positive quality of life here and now (John 10: 10; 8: 12). We are saved **from** the things that blight humanity, and saved **into** all that exalts and enriches life. We no longer wander like people lost in a mountain fog. We are saved for a life of meaning and purpose. Every-day affairs have become sacramental. There is a spring-time of the soul, and the "glory of the lighted mind." The conversion of Hugh Price Hughes was "the prelude of a singular bursting forth of his mental powers". How often among the depressed peoples of heathen lands and congested areas of great cities conversion has meant the sudden welling up of unsuspected powers and gifts.

Salvation is an "illumination", "a coming out of darkness into marvellous light", "a passing from death into life" (Heb. 10: 32; 1 Peter 2: 9; 1 John 3: 14).

Real salvation is salvation **into service**. The redeemed are in fellowship with God, sharing His plans and purposes, lifted above old habits by absorption in the world's struggle

for a new era of fair play, brotherliness, and peace (John 4: 34; Acts 20: 24; 1 Cor. 3: 9; Rom. 14: 17). Salvation is the most dynamic, creative, world-visioned experience possible to man.

Witnesses

Salvation of this kind is a fact, visible in farmers, industrial workers, heads of colleges, girls in offices, mothers in homes. Its persistence over the centuries shows that it is no passing illusion. "That day," says Gaston Frommel, the Swiss professor, "shines there as the day of a new birth. And, in fact, all things thenceforward became new to me." Think of George Williams, founder of the Y.M.C.A., merchant, and from sixteen years of age, unceasing worker for young men. Think of James Balfour, Victorian business man, political leader, unceasing worker for Christ and His Church. Think of James Smetham, artist and letter writer, who speaks of "twenty-three years of such experience which inwardly is as great and as simple a fact as the facts of seeing and hearing."

Think of men brought up in heathen ways and surroundings. Donald Fraser of Africa says, "I knew a man whose hands were red with blood from boyhood; whose manhood was famous for deeds of bravery and wild, passionate cruelty. To him God came, and the whole current of his life was changed. He became a gentle husband, a tender father; he was known throughout the land for his hospitality and courtesy, respected by the Government for his progressive activities, loved by black and white alike. He was an ardent evangelist, and was ready for ordination when God took him. . . . Ask his children to-day what changed their father, and they will answer, 'The Cross of Christ'."

John Masefield in his poem, "The Everlasting Mercy", recognizes the reality of the change—

"The bolted door had broken in,
I knew that I had done with sin.
I knew that Christ had given me birth
To brother all the souls on earth."

How It Comes

Salvation is not man turning over a new leaf, but God

imparting a new life; but God's ways in the soul are as varied as His ways in nature. A few things, however, are certain.

(1) Redemption is the **work of God**, not a human reformation, but a change wrought by God Himself, deep, central, and enduring (Phil. 1: 6).

(2) Salvation comes **through Christ**. It is an indisputable fact that spiritual awakenings take place not through hearing about Confucius or Huxley or Lenin, but through the knowledge of Christ. People do not say, "The knowledge of Karl Marx, or Huxley, or Emerson saved me from my sins, enabled me to love my enemies, and to live in all honesty, and purity, and charity." But millions do say that about Him whom they call "the Saviour" (Acts 4: 12).

(3) Moreover, this new life comes, not through studying the social and ethical ideals of Jesus, necessary as they are, but **through men and women realizing His death** for them. It is the Christ who died and rose again, who has this life-changing power. A profound thinker, speaking from experience, says, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." It is "the blood", the sacrificial death, the supreme sacrifice of the Son of God which has His deep, purifying influence. What man tried to do by means of the bleeding lamb, God has done in Christ by taking on Himself the infinite cost and sacrifice of redemption. Examine John 1: 29; Matt. 26: 28; 1 Pet. 1: 18-19; Rev. 1: 5.

At the centre of Christian worship we find an open Bible and the Communion table. Both proclaim salvation through Christ and His Cross (1 Cor. 1: 18; 11: 26). There are mysteries here which we cannot fathom because here the finite touches the infinite. Nevertheless the fact remains that the self-sacrifice of Christ, culminating in His death, exercises the deepest influence over men —

"He hath given me rest by His sorrow,
And life by His death."

(4) Redemption is **received by faith**. In redemption there are two factors, the divine action and the human response. "By **grace**" are ye saved "**through faith**". The divine action is always at flood tide. Therefore whenever the human response begins, salvation floods the soul. A Christian is

one who has responded to Christ. Faith is the response to the divine offer, the reception of the divine gift. Now it is a matter of sure experience that salvation comes to men, not by self effort, but by the receptivity of faith. Canon Streeter in "Reality" says : "The idea so often recurring in the New Testament that moral progress is secured less by the effort of our conscious wills than by the surrender of our whole man to Christ in joyful faith is curiously confirmed in modern psychology." Examine Luke 7: 50; Eph. 2: 8.

Personal

1. This study reveals Jesus as standing alone and unique. The rarest saints are conscious of defects and are passionately grateful to Him for salvation. He alone is the Saviour. They all are the saved. He is not the highest flight of humanity. He is the descent of divinity, the coming of God to man; He comes from above, from the Beyond. When men begin really to understand Jesus Christ, they cease to eulogize Him as the greatest Leader of men; they kneel to worship Him as the Son of God; and to trust Him as their own Redeemer (1 Tim. 1: 15-17).

2. Just because salvation is the work of God and the gift of His mercy, it can begin now for the weakest or the worst. The decision of a day may determine the direction and destiny of a lifetime. In a moment the soul may say an unemotional "Yes" to the divine challenge, and at once begin the long, slow, upward climb. In a moment there may come one flash of discovery, one spark of faith which may fire the whole life with new meaning and energy — "Behold, now is the day of salvation."

Assignments

1. Is conversion a fact? What exactly is conversion? Where is it different from turning over a new leaf?
2. What do you include under the term "salvation"? Which of these benefits are in danger by being overlooked?
3. Is salvation an act or a process? Do respectable people need salvation? What difference does it make to their lives?
4. How would you answer a man who said salvation was all imagination and excitement?
5. How is the Lord's Supper a parable of salvation?

STUDY 4

The Fact of God's Message

The human heart was always groping for an unveiling of God which would set the race to living on a new level. The longing rose among the Hebrews to a steady passion which burned brighter as the clouds in their national sky grew blacker."—Rufus Jones.

"Revelation is the first and foremost what the word itself implies—an unveiling of God; and what is offered to men in revelation is not a doctrine about God, but the living God Himself."—Dr. W. Temple.

"The division between those who accept and those who deny Christian revelation, I take to be the most profound division between human beings." —T. S. Eliot (author and journalist).

Daily Readings

1. God Speaks in Nature . Psalm 19: 1-4; Rom. 1: 19, 20.
2. Through the Mind of Man. Rom. 2: 14-15; Luke 11: 11-13.
3. Through the Events of History. Amos 4: 6-13; 1 Cor. 10: 6-11.
4. Through Israel and the Prophets. Jer. 1: 7-10; Heb. 1: 1-3.
5. Through Jesus Christ. Matt. 11: 27; John 1: 1-4, 14-18; 14: 8-10.
6. By His Spirit. John 16: 12-15; Eph. 1: 17-18.
7. Fact and Response. 2 Cor. 4: 4-7; Acts 17: 11-12; 1 Thess. 2: 13.

Is there a God? Does He speak to men? As we trace our way back through history, we find always the belief that there is a "speaking" God. Socrates said : "The prophetic sign which I am wont to receive from the divine voice has been constantly with me all through my life until now." There is a God. God speaks to men. We must take care to listen to God. That is the wisdom of the centuries. It is a fact that whenever the soul lies open to the Infinite, it is very sure of God. If there is a great Father, we must expect Him to speak to His children. Our craving for Him is the response to His search for us. The Bible is unique because it contains the records of Christ's revelation, the preparation in Israel for that revelation, and the interpretation of it in the experience of the early disciples.

God Speaks

1. God speaks in nature. The majesty of the great, the marvel of the small, the eternal snows of Mount Everest, the mysteries of the electron, the beauty of the flower, the

strange music of the sea, are voices speaking to us of a wise Creator. The Bible clearly recognizes this **general** revelation of God—"The heavens declare the glory of God." "His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly visible from His words" (Psalm 19: 1-4; 8: 1; Rom. 1: 20). Brother Lawrence was converted at the age of eighteen through considering a tree stripped of its leaves in winter. That view of the leafless tree set him loose from the world and on fire for God. Poets and philosophers alike have felt a "Presence",

"Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man."

2. God speaks **in man and through man**. Paul speaks of the Gentiles having the Law written in their hearts (Rom. 2: 14-15). No nation is left without an inner witness. According to Kant, two things fill one with awe, the starry heavens above and the moral law within—and we can add, in both we hear God speaking to man.

The highest in ourselves suggests something of what God is like. The love of the father, the self-sacrifice of the mother, the loyalty of the friend, all give hints of the heart of God. God is like us, but infinitely better. That is the argument of Luke 11: 13; Isaiah 49: 15.

All this condemns sad and grim superstitions about God which have darkened many lives in past generations. God is better than the best and kinder than the kindest and wiser than the wisest. He is the Father, in whom we rest with confidence (Matt. 6: 30).

3. God speaks **in history**. In the long roll of the ages we see a slow but sure tidal movement towards God, an urge upwards which is God-directed. In the movement we see revealed (to use the words of Matthew Arnold), "the Eternal Power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness". We see this Power also in the nemesis that follows wrong-doing. Arnold goes on to say, regarding both nations and individuals, that "whoever is shipwrecked, is shipwrecked on **conduct**". It is the God of Israel steadily and

irresistibly asserting Himself, the Eternal that loveth righteousness". Compare 1 Cor. 10: 6, 11.

4. Religion is primarily fellowship between God and man. We cannot have high fellowship even with our brother man until he of his own free will opens to us his real self. So also in religion. God must reveal Himself in a fuller and clearer manner than was possible through the universe or the life of man. So God spoke **to men and women more clearly through the history and literature of Israel**. The literature towers above all others in its sublimity and insight. Even now, after two thousand five hundred years, that literature is lovingly pondered by people of every culture and every race. Why? Because God spoke to Israel as to no other race. "The Jews," says Temple, "are forever the specialists of the human race in religion. Greece gave us philosophy and art; Rome gave us law and social organisation; Palestine gave us religion." God chose Israel to receive the Message, assimilate it, and transmit it to the world. God gave the light to them so that they might be "a light of the Gentiles", and "pass on the torch" to all nations. The Old Testament is a forward-looking book, clinging passionately to the expectation of a coming Leader and a coming Era of universal blessing.

We do not overlook the fact that the revelation to Israel and human understanding of the revelation were gradual and progressive. Some of it was only for the kindergarten of the race. The treasure was in an earthen vessel. The wine had the flavour of the cask. But though the teaching came in the language of a past day, adapted to the viewpoint and capacity of a primitive people, that teaching contained a revelation of the nature of God and the duty of man, social and religious. "Everywhere in these growing pages we meet the living God in His revealing and redeeming agency."

But what do we mean by "revelation" in this **Special sense** of the word? It is the self-disclosure of God: God making known to us what we could never have discovered by human research or genius—"Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:

17; 11: 25-27). Revelation is the living God breaking in upon men, as it were from above, with deeds and thoughts and a Person, all in startling contrast to the mind of that day, or even of centuries later, and yet that Person and Message are increasingly seen to be fitted to the needs of all time. Thus ye are driven to believe that this Message is not a work of human genius, but the unveiling of truth by God Himself. The consciousness that the Message came not from them but through them is the great feature of Scripture-writers — "Thus saith the Lord." They delivered what they had "**received**". "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Read 2 Pet. 1: 21; Isaiah 6: 8; 48: 17; 50: 4; Amos 7: 15; Micah 6: 8; John 14: 10; Gal. 1: 11-12; Eph. 3: 3.

5. **God speaks in Jesus Christ.** The writer to the Hebrews draws an illuminating contrast between the Message through the Prophets, in "many fragments and by various methods", and His Message through a Son, who is infinitely above all angels and prophets. It is God who has been speaking all the time, formerly by promise, law, type, sacrifice, poet, prophet, and priest. Now God speaks again through a Son who has the intimate knowledge of the Father's nature and purpose which no prophet ever had. He has all the qualities that make Him the one Ideal revealer of the grace and glory of God. Examine carefully Heb. 1: 1-4; John 1: 14, 18; Matt. 11: 27.

What the Hebrew teachers expected, what heathen sages dreamed about, was fully realized in Jesus Christ. "We will wait," it said in one of Plato's dialogues (Alcibiades), "for one, be he god or inspired man, to instruct us in our religious duties and . . . to take away the darkness from our eyes." That One has been found in Jesus Christ. His teaching contains and elevates all that is good in all systems, and reveals truth about the Father and the way of salvation not known to any other. Here in a Person is a definite, supernatural unveiling of God and of the way to fellowship with Him. "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," says John (1: 18). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," says Jesus.

We see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," says Paul (2 Cor. 4: 6).

In 1 John 1: 1; 5: 7, Jesus is called "the Word". A word is the expression of a thought, the unveiling of a mind. Jesus is the "divine self-expression". He revealed God in His matchless teaching, in His deeds of love and charm, in His redeeming cross and resurrection, and in His Personality which was greater than His words or deeds. Jesus was not like a mirror reflecting God, because a mirror shows a person without being the person. But "God was in Christ". In Him we see the divine Life itself in operation. In Christ God Himself touches us. Good men reflect the glory of God. Jesus is the Glory of God (John 1: 4, 14).

The Lord Jesus has made clear and impressive to our hearts the Fatherhood of God, the immeasurable worth and dignity of every person of every race, and the new way of living, and He has brought to us the Power by which high life can be lived in time and eternity.

But while the **revelation** in Christ is **final**, our **interpretation** is **not final**. Future progress will spring from the discovery and unfolding of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Only slowly are we coming to see all that is in Him. Again and again fresh light has broken forth from His Word, as men have become capable of receiving the light. Slavery was seen to be incompatible with the rights of personality, and there are other educational, social, economic, and international revolutions to follow. Christ's principle of fellowship is destined to work incredible changes in the centuries to come. Even now the Holy Spirit is leading us into implications of our faith (John 16: 12, 13).

6. **God speaks through the Bible.** Plato in "Phaedo" speaks of clinging to the best of human words as a raft upon which to sail through life, "if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him". We believe that in the Bible we have found the record of a divine word. Robertson Smith's words deserve frequent meditation — "In the Bible alone I find God drawing near

to man in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation, and this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul." Revelation consists in certain specific **acts of God** wherein He Himself has very **specially** come to men. The Bible is the witness of these revealing acts of God.

The Bible, however, is not a mere record, a dull, distant echo of a departed voice. The Bible is a present tense book. As I read the Scriptures, God speaks to me, and I am conscious that it is the voice of God. The Bible is the great means of intercourse with the living God. Through the Bible God comes to me. Through the Bible I come to God. Every day the voice of God in the Bible is as fresh as the dawn breaking in upon us from the east. The witnesses to this experience are a great multitude. Thomas Bilney, who led Latimer to the light (read 1 Tim. 1:15) says, "When I read these words, it seems as if in the middle of a dark night day suddenly broke." Truly "the word of God is full of life and power, and is keener than the sharpest two-edged sword" (Heb. 4: 12, Weymouth; compare Jer. 23: 29). The Bible is not a museum of doctrines, but a fountain of living truth. If we yield ourselves to the inspiration of the Spirit, He will speak to us through the Scriptures. The Bible carries its own authority to the open mind. The Spirit of God within us witnesses to the Word of God in the Bible. The final authority is not some isolated text, but the Spirit of Christ speaking now in the Scriptures to the soul and to the Church.

7. God speaks to men **directly** (Acts 22:21). The Oxford Group have made much of "listening in to God" and having a daily "quiet time", seeking guidance. Undoubtedly God does speak in this way. The writer has had experiences of divine calls and guidance which admit of no other explanation. Dr. Alexander Whyte, of Edinburgh, a man of great intellect and cautious judgment, tells of an experience on a lonely Scottish road, when "what seemed to me to be a Divine Voice spoke with a Commanding Power in my

conscience. . . . I shall never forget the exact spot where that clear command came to me." Dr. Dugald Christie, that eminent Scottish doctor and educationist, believed that God called him to found an efficient Medical College in Mukden, and no arguments could shake his faith in the voice within.

It is true that men may easily ascribe their own wishes to God, just as they project their own theories into the Bible. The Christian should **most carefully test** his guidance by the written word and by consultation with the Church. The triangle of truth consists in the witness of Christ, personal illumination, and the guidance of the Church. It is when these three voices speak in harmony that we can be the most assured that indeed God has been speaking to us. Undoubtedly God speaks through the Church. We all need to check our individual, limited inspirations by the accumulated wisdom of the Church (Acts 13: 1-4; 15: 23, 28; 16: 4).

Our Receptivity

Some may say, "No voice has ever come to me! I don't believe in revelation. It is all a delusion." Millions have seen no beauty in poetry and have never listened on the wireless to voices from over the sea! But the question is, "Can negative testimony outweigh positive testimony?" The old-time Australian aborigine saw things and heard things which to the city man were quite incredible, but the positive testimony of two black trackers who saw footprints was more valuable than the scornful denials of a thousand white men who saw no intelligible marks. The poet, the musician, the naturalist, come to see and hear things of enthralling beauty and meaning which are hidden from others. So the spiritual man sees and hears spiritual realities to which others are blind and deaf. He sees. He knows. He has been illuminated (Heb. 10: 32-34; 1 Cor. 2: 9-15).

The prophets were men more sensitive to the unseen world and more in communication with Heaven than their fellows. Jesus heard the voice of God as no one else has ever done, because he was perfectly in tune with the infinite. Here in Melbourne is a man listening to a service in West-

minster Abbey, London, while across the street ten men hear only a passing motor car. The one has adequate receiving facilities. The others have not. Dr. McKenna says: "A piano-wire, tuned to a certain note and stretched across a room, will vibrate in harmony when that note is struck upon a piano; and the mind of men in tune with the Divine Mind will catch the whispers of God's voice to which other men are deaf." The outsider's objection can be answered only by his ceasing to be an outsider, and, by his personal surrender to Jesus Christ, tasting the experience of His saving power. Obedience is the way to certainty. **Revelation from God requires receptivity from man.**

What Follows from this Study ?

1. Christianity is based on the rock of objective facts. Our faith casts its anchor outside the ship. The order is fact, faith, experience. Faith is an experiment which ends in an experience.

2. We need a new devotion to the Bible. Connected, intelligent, direct Bible Study should have an infinitely greater place in our programmes. We should go to the Bible to discover God and His plans and power—"They searched the Scriptures daily . . . therefore many of them believed."

3. We should seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit, so that the richness of the divine word may dawn upon us (Psalm 119: 18). Even a work of art, music, or painting yields its full meaning only to sympathy and imagination. It is only as we approach this book with imagination and prayer that we shall hear in it the Word of God. God speaks to the surrendered heart. Cleansing from sin opens the ear to the voice of the Eternal.

But Why the Bible ?

Someone will say, "Why should we spend time day by day over the Bible, when there are so many modern books available?" Because though the Bible in its externals reflects the ancient and the oriental, in its essence it is modern, the Message of God to us. Our one need in these shattering

days is God. If we find God, we shall find the vision, the power, the enrichment of personality which is needed. It is a "basic fact" that the moral energy of God passes over into the heart of man through the study of the Bible. Saints of old and sages of to-day are at one there. Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them" (Jer. 15: 16). The Thessalonians received the Message "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2: 13).

Finally, let us consider the verdict of two of the very greatest of all modern thinkers. Professor Emil Brunner says, "In the Bible we hear a language which we hear nowhere else, we meet a God whom we meet nowhere else. . . . That is why we believe in the Scriptures." Professor Karl Barth says, "The Bible lifts us out of the old atmosphere of men to the portals of a new world, the world of God."

Assignments

1. Why do thinkers to-day (like T. S. Eliot) look upon the question, "Does God speak to men?" as an issue of the utmost practical importance?
2. By what ordinary or natural means does God speak to men? Which of these has proved most helpful to you yourself?
3. What do we mean by divine revelation? Is the Old Testament really a revelation of God?
4. Is Jesus Christ the supreme revelation of God and man? Where is the revelation in Christ different from all others?
5. How does God speak to us to-day? If we have never heard the voice of God, what is the explanation? How can we "listen in" to God?

The Fact of the Church

"I do believe that one supreme necessity of the hour is a re-discovery of the Church of God, its true function and its true place in human history."—Dr. Campbell Morgan.

"The vastness of the new world-task which has so suddenly arisen upon us is, I believe, in the long run, sure to awaken anew in the heart of Christendom the sense of the vital importance of the organized fellowship of believers."—Dr. D. S. Cairns.

Daily Readings

1. The Ancient Congregation. Psalm 84; Psalm 122.
2. Christ and the Church. Matt. 16: 13-18; 18: 19, 20.
3. Fellowship Fundamental. 1 John 1: 1-7; 1 Pet. 2: 17.
4. Organizing for Fellowship. Acts 4: 31-33; 14: 23; 20: 28.
5. The Voice of the Sacrament. 1 Cor. 11: 23-26.
6. The Church's Messages. Luke 24: 44-53.
7. Our Duty to the Church. Eph. 4: 1-7; Heb. 10: 23-25.

The Church is a fact. Whether one loves the Church or dislikes the Church, the Church is a very solid and enduring fact. East or West everywhere you find the Church raising its spire to heaven, calling people to worship, speaking of God and fellowship. Often when no building has been seen, the real Church has been there, meeting in secret to elude its persecutors.

Moreover the Church is a basic fact of our faith. Christianity is more than a relationship between myself and God. It is a social religion. Christians are members of a corporate Body, of a Family, "Togetherness" is an essential of the Christian faith (1 John 1: 2, 3; Acts 2: 41-44; 12: 12). The Church answers two of the God-planted and deepest cravings of human nature, the instinct for worship and the longing for fellowship in the higher things of life. The Church is the divinely created fellowship of believers, bound together by the Spirit of God for worship, for the transmission of the divine message, and for the active service of God and man.

The Christian Community tends to run in two streams, the sect and the Church. The sect splits off on some issue which it overstresses, and views the larger bodies of

believers with suspicion, as less holy or enlightened than itself. The Church is firmly rooted in the past, is more inclusive, more tolerant of differences of opinion, more balanced in its emphasis, and realizes itself as part of the Catholic Church.

In any case, a Fellowship for the propagation of the Gospel is a fundamental feature of our faith. The Church was before us and will be after us. We do not challenge the Church. The Church challenges us and every new generation.

There are other helpful Fellowships in the world, some with a very intense life, but they are essentially different from the ancient and world-wide Church, which cares for all the spiritual needs of all people. Some care for one sex only, or for one class only (the Student Movement), or for one period of life, or for some particular need, but the Church embraces all races and classes in one great family, so ancient and so modern that there is none like it.

Facts about the Church

(1) **The Worship of the Church.** Around the world for over 1900 years groups of people have been meeting in caves, catacombs, bush schoolhouses, and cathedrals for worship. In externals this worship has varied much. At heart it has been always the same. Pliny, the Younger, a Roman Governor, about 112 A.D. reported to the Emperor that Christians met on a certain day of the week before daybreak, and "sang a hymn to Christ as to a god", and solemnly bound themselves to abstain from every kind of crime. They came together later to eat a "harmless meal". We live in a changed world, but Christians still sing praises to Christ as God, and seek to have fellowship one with another, and seek to mould their lives on higher principles.

The Lord's Supper has been observed in unbroken succession, often at the risk of death, from the night before the Crucifixion until now. This continuous and growing stream of worship and sacred rite is a fact and a witness to the facts of the death and resurrection of our Lord. The first day of the week became a special day of worship in com-

memoration of the glorious resurrection (Acts 20: 7; John 20: 1).

(2) **The Fact of Its Devotion to Christ.** All these centuries men and women of every type, temperament and culture have loved and worshipped Jesus Christ, have toiled for Him with unceasing sacrifice and, where necessary, have even died for Him. In our generation there have been thousands of martyrs for Jesus Christ. In the Boxer Riots, for instance, multitudes of Chinese were buried alive when uttering one phrase to deny their Lord would have saved them. The Christian to-day has the same love for Christ as the Christian of the Catacombs (1 Pet. 1: 8).

In the last sixty years, some 20,000 members of the Student Movement have abandoned careers and privileges to go to fields of danger and difficulty, as missionaries of the Church. The cultured Kagawa plunges down into a Japanese slum, suffering prison for his principles. The privileged Sundar Singh throws up all to wander amid the blizzards of Tibet. Charles Studd, the Test cricketer, renounces fame and wealth to live and die in heathen lands. Charrington, son of a liquor magnate, forfeits immense wealth and gives his life to service in the slums of London. The manses and the monasteries have been centres of social service, centuries before the phrase was invented. Every week in ordinary life there are millions of unnoticed folk doing gracious service in the Church for the aged, the sick, the needy, and the training of the young, all for the sake of Him, "Whom, having not seen, they love", and to whom they render glad obedience.

(3) **The Homes Created by the Church.** One of the first distinctive things visible in the early Christian Church is the new type of home. Again and again statisticians have proved that the sons and daughters of ministers of all Churches have exercised an influence in history out of all proportion to their numbers and have achieved distinction more than any other group. The homes of Church members, even where fighting the direst poverty, have been like lights in a dark world. Abraham Lincoln was brought up in the roughest of conditions—at one time not even a door to the hut where they lived — but even there the lamp of the

Church was kept burning by the mother, and Lincoln never forgot. Think of the homes of the Huguenots, the Waldenses. Read the biographies of Barrie, Alexander Whyte, David Livingstone, John G. Paton, the Puritans, the Methodists. Read the picture, drawn from life, by Robert Burns in "The Cotter's Saturday Night". Church homes have been the salt of the earth.

(4) **The Fellowship and Good Understanding Fostered by the Church.** The Church is the most unifying influence in the world. About 200 A.D. a slave was bishop of Rome, says Professor Kennedy. In his boyhood Dr. Stuart (later of Knox Church, Dunedin) was impressed by the fact that of the two elders of his congregation, one was a marquis and the other a stone-breaker. Among the lay leaders of the Presbyterian Church in recent times we have seen Lord Guthrie, the judge, Marshal Haig, a Viceroy of India, Governor-Generals, a Theodore Roosevelt, a Woodrow Wilson, and also labour leaders and obscure working men. In the Church racial differences are submerged. Christians in China pray for their Japanese brethren. If the world instead of weakening the Church by criticism and hostility, would adopt the principles of the Church, war would disappear, and a new age would be in sight.

The Church is a centre of friendship, and friendship is something more intimate, more democratic than kindness or social service. It involves a giving and taking, a mutual sharing in the deepest things (Rom. 1: 12; 2 Tim. 1: 3-5). The Church as a matter of fact has kept alive this high friendship as nothing else has done. He who does not know this does not yet know the inner life of a real church.

(5) Familiarity has dulled our sense of wonder at the **Church's literature.** Christ left no documents. He created the Church. The life of the Church created the New Testament. There is no literature in the world like the New Testament. It is unique for its moral purity and elevation, for the glory of its central Character, and for its world influence and universal adaption to the needs of all people in all times. It is a fact that this literature created, preserved, and translated into a thousand tongues by the Church is the most dynamic creative possession of humanity.

The fact of Christ then is supported by the further facts of the Lord's Body (the Church), the Lord's Day, and the Lord's Book. He that hath eyes to see, let him look at these and think! (Matt. 13: 16, 17).

(6) **The Influence of the Church.** We know that there are people inside and outside the Church who are for ever denying the value of the Church to the world. Often such people overlook the way in which that influence works, the way of leaven, of secret penetration, rather than of sound-ing publicity. An egg concealed in a pudding is as much an egg as one in an egg-cup. Some are biased against the Church because it does not give itself up to some theory of prophecy or politics to which they are devoted. Others look more at what the Church has not yet been able to accomplish than at what it has done. They also fix their gaze more upon Churches that are not Churches than upon those that are living Fellowships. It is hardly just to judge music by music that is not music, or medical science by hospitals that are not hospitals, or the Churches by Churches that are not really Churches, not really Fellow-ships of regenerated men and women. The critics all forget the slowness with which human nature rises to rare heights, whether of music or learning or spiritual religion. It is the greatness of the Church's enterprise that makes its success seem like failure. The Church has done great work in the past, and it must be exceedingly more in the future.

What has the Church done for the world? In the words of the Rev. F. W. Rolland, the Church "through the centuries and in many lands has been an undying witness to the grace of God, a bulwark of national and spiritual liberty, a virile moral force, and a leader in philanthropy and public service." Lecky, an historian, not in sympathy with the Church, admits that in spite of the defects and sins which have defaced the Church, "it has preserved in the character and example of its Founder an enduring principal of regeneration." Men admit the extraordinary influence of Christ over the world and the extraordinary influence of the New Testament. The Character pictured there has been not only "the highest pattern of virtue, but the highest incentive to its practice". But it is the

Church that has preserved and made the teaching of Christ available to men. Find a land where the Church is **not**, and you find a land where the influence of Christ hardly exists. Find a place where the Church is weak and you find a land where Christ's influence is weak, and there also you find one of the world's danger zones. The real Church of Jesus Christ is certainly not a dominant fact in any country, but if it was as great a factor in all countries as it is, say in Scotland, Switzerland, or Wales, the world could face the future with an entirely new courage. The Church has done for the nations what **no one else has done. It has been bringing Christ to them.**

(7) **Its Power of Survival and Revival.** The power of surviving blows from without and disease from within, the power of self-recovery, is surely the finest proof of inherent vitality. Again and again, when the Church has seemed to be dying, it has risen from the dead with a new capacity for self-correction and self-revival. Think what the Church has survived. It began with a handful of obscure people in an obscure province. Everybody who was anybody was against it, powerful and attractive rival religions, the sword of the soldier, the pen of the philosopher, the scorn of society and of scholars, the hatred of the rich and mighty, the ruthless power of the Roman army, with its fire, rack, torture, and death. The conquerors of the world failed to conquer the unresisting Church.

Diocletian, the Emperor, after a well-organized perse-cution, struck a coin to commemorate its extinction — "Everywhere the Christian superstition is destroyed." Centuries later Voltaire attempted the task with his pen of genius and his acid tongue. He was confident of success, but he died, and his house became a Bible depot! In spite of the folly of its friends and the skill of its foes, the Church holds on its way. Strong tides are running against the Church to-day, but its approaching death has been predicted every week for nearly two thousand years. When to-morrow some critic has buried the Church once more, he may be sure that before he finishes the operation some new Christian Brotherhood has been initiated somewhere, and the Church as a whole has become a better Church.

The Church marches on. It is easy to magnify the failure of the present. People tell you that not two per cent. of the people in America ever go to Church! The latest investigations show that the proportion of Church members in recent years has increased to over 50 per cent. A little over sixty years ago there was no Protestant Church in Korea. To-day the Presbyterians alone number at least 300,000 and there are at least 150,000 Methodists and many others, all worshipping Jesus Christ, and seeking to send the Gospel to others. In spite of Sunday counter-attractions, the world enrolment in Sunday Schools shows a remarkable increase in recent years.

The Church grows in insight and value. It won't die! It has an indestructible life. It has in its heart the song of spring and the secret of perpetual youth. Why? **Christ lives in the Church**, and He says, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Acts 28: 22; Matt. 16: 18; Rev. 17: 14).

Practical

(1) Have faith in the future of your Church. The real musician does not abandon music because so many prefer the stadium to a Bach recital! Let us believe in the future of the Church which Christ founded and which He loves with an everlasting love. The Lord is keeping watch over His own.

(2) We want to make sure that our Church is really a Fellowship of Believers, who **share** in worship, study friendship, having intercourse in thought and service, reciprocal giving and receiving in the deepest things. It is for our readers to join a local congregation and seek modestly and very persistently to make a real contribution to its life and its world enterprises (Heb. 10: 23-25).

Assignments

1. Why should we include the Church among the basic facts of our faith?
2. Which of the criticisms of the Church would you regard as somewhat unreasonable?
3. In what directions has the influence of the Church been greater than people have imagined?
4. What are some of the facts centred in the Church? Which of these impress you most? Why?
5. What is the best contribution we can make to the Church?

STUDY 6

Facing the Facts

"To apprehend God's Revelation, to respond to the act of Redemption, to recognize and use His gift of Grace—that is Christianity."—R. S. K. Seeley.

"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days,
I fled Him, down the arches of the years,
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind."

—Francis Thompson.

"Oh, that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."—Isaiah 48: 18.

Daily Readings

1. The Neglected Voice. Is. 48: 16-22.
2. The Future of the Church. Eph. 5: 25-27; Rev. 17: 14; 19: 7-9.
3. Victory Anywhere. Rom. 8: 35-39.
4. Frustrating God. Gal. 2: 16-21.
5. Facing the Cross. Is. 53: 4-6; 1 Pet. 2: 21-25.
6. Christ's Way. Luke 15: 20-24; Tit. 3: 4-7.
7. The First Step. John 12: 42, 43; Luke 5: 27-29; 7: 48-50; 19: 8-10.

These basic facts of our faith call insistently for a deep and radical change in our lives, and this we may be unwilling to grant. We may shrink from anything which marks us out from the crowd —

"I would have lived their life and died their death,
Lost in their ranks, eluding destiny."

Hence men try to evade the full significance of these stupendous Facts.

One of the strangest powers of the human mind is its skill in dodging unwelcome truths and all the time concealing from itself that it is so doing. This strange power may easily be used in avoiding the full appeal of the facts we have been studying.

The Call of the Church

Much of the criticism of the Church seems like a defence mechanism, an attempt to silence conscience by blaming the Church. Criticism is very often self-defence and self-

deception. People feel better if they have exposed the faults of the Church. Much criticism is prompted by pique because the Church will not adopt some theory, social, political, or religious, which the critics think of supreme importance. If the Church differs from them about prophecy or economics or methods of obtaining world peace, then of course the Church must be wrong and must be condemned. It is unreasonable to expect perfection from an individual. It is still more unreasonable to expect perfection from a vast aggregation of varied individuals, such as the Church to-day is to be found quite outside its specific organization, in the growing demand among men for a Christ-like world.

When ministers and members dwell and dwell upon the defects of the Church, they are doing more to weaken its influence for Christ than all the attacks of rationalists and communists. The Church claims our love and unstinted service. Letting the mind dwell upon the undoubted points of failure in the Church gives me a gratifying sense of superiority and enables one to elude the Church's call for utter loyalty.

Scholars have had many defects and will continue to have them. Sometimes schools have created in youth a positive dislike for learning. Nevertheless, the future of education is bound up with the school. Where schools are backward, education will lag behind. Where the schools are efficient and happy, learning will prosper. The way to promote learning is to throw one's influence behind the schools and support them with new insight and devotion. All this is true of the Church also. The Church has always fallen below its own ideals. Sometimes it has forgotten its supreme function of prevailing upon men to accept Christ as their Saviour from sin and the Lord of all their living. But where there is no Church, Christianity is weak. Whenever there has been a revival of the Church, morality and religion have taken on fresh life. The future of Christ's Cause depends, not upon isolated free-lances, but upon the steady work of the organized Fellowship of God.

Dr. Walter C. Smith, the Scottish poet, says :

"Dear to me the Church of Christ,
Sweet the memories lingering there,

Sweet the place of solemn tryst,
Sweet the house of prayer,
Where the glory ever pours
Through the everlasting doors."

He who has not had that vision has missed one of the richest experiences of the Christian faith and should never rest until he finds it.

The best thing we can do for the world is to co-operate with all sorts of people in the work of the local Church. Let us not for any reason turn a deaf ear to the call of the Church and its great spiritual enterprises. Face the Fact of the Church.

The Voice of God. Shall We Listen ?

Let us honestly consider the fact that God is speaking to this generation, speaking through the great sweep of scripture truth and through His Spirit in the receptive mind. How clearly people escape hearing that voice ! They come to the Bible with their minds made up and pour their own ideas into the words of scripture. Some read it only in snippets and never get a vision of its growing revelation. Others are too busy telling Heaven their needs ever to hear the still small voice of God.

Dr. A. T. Pierson, the friend of Moody, came to the conclusion that God might be wanting to speak to him and never getting an opportunity. So he set aside a time each week for quiet listening. Let us resolve that in future we shall read the Bible more intelligently and expect messages from it — "I will hear what God the Lord will speak" (Psalm 85: 8; Acts 8: 29; 13: 2). Every Church and every Youth Society should do far more connected, direct Bible study than is being done to-day. God is speaking to this generation, and they are too busy giving their own ideas to understand what God is saying.

Too many are living on the accumulated momentum of the past generations. They have multiplied machinery, but they have not been digging deeper and deeper into the divine mines of truth for the energy without which the whole Christian Movement must slow down and cease. On the other hand, how true are the words of Dr. Cairns :

"You are at the very springs of power when you are dealing with the Divine Word, and if you get that power there is absolutely no limit to what you may be and to the mark you may leave upon the history of man."

The Supreme Evasion

Our great danger in our country just now is religion without regeneration, Church of activities and movements, in which a respectful but minor place is given to the saving work of Jesus Christ, a religion whose main stress is upon the seen and the temporal (2 Cor. 4: 18; 5: 20). Therefore we should give special heed to the three closely related facts of sin, salvation, and Christ. Have we ever faced frankly the fact that our lives may not be right in the sight of God and that we cannot redeem ourselves? Salvation is always a divine intervention, the coming of God into the heart of an individual, a rescue by the mercy and power of God. The Church is not achieving its real destiny if it does not bring men one by one to gaze upon this supreme fact and persuade them to respond to its challenge. Christ is not a beautiful memory, but a Living Person knocking at the door just now. It is said of a certain poet that he refused to look Jesus Christ in the face. Christ offers at once deliverance from sin and futile living, a new experience of God, and a new moral power. These gifts challenge us to look Jesus Christ in the face and make a complete and immediate break with the past and to launch out upon an entirely new departure under entirely new management.

Side-Tracking One's Very Self

How skilfully people disguise from themselves the ways by which they try to escape from the Hand that knocks and the Voice that calls (Rev. 3: 20-22). In John 5: 44 we read of some unable to exercise faith because they had an eye to personal prestige. In 12: 42-43 we hear of important men who believed that Jesus was in the right but never took sides with Him against the world through fear of consequences. In the light of these wrong motives, love of popularity, fear of men, let us read Luke 12: 4-8.

Do we plead our sins as a reason for hesitation? He is still seeking for sinners and not the righteous — "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." There are no "incurable wards" in Christ's house of healing. **Do we plead our temptations, our entanglements?** God is mightier than all these. Think of converts in Corinth or in the Solomon Islands with their vile upbringing and degraded surroundings. Yet they made the great confession and even won others to the faith. There were "saints in Caesar's household". We have a God who is equal to any situation. "He is able" (Heb. 7: 25; 1 Cor. 10: 13; 6: 9-11; Rom. 8: 35-37).

Do we plead it would not last? I remember a drunkard of 68 years being changed one afternoon. Then years later he was still treading the upward way, a proof to his neighbours that what God does will last (Phil. 1; 6). "Not last!" Where is the spirit of adventure? Shall we abandon the supreme thing in life without a venture? We have not understood the New Testament, we have not understood the Comradeship of Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit until we see that there is open to the ordinary man and woman new and amazing possibility of moral victory and continuous mastery over self and circumstances. "All things are possible to him that believeth," said our Lord. (Compare 2 Cor. 5: 17; Jude 24: 25).

Do we plead our intellectual difficulties? Every day we act upon beliefs which we do not fully understand, but which work. We do not refuse the use of electric light, heat, and power because the electrons of science sound like a fairy tale. We find electricity works, and we proceed upon that. It is equally true that faith is Christ works. That faith is an experiment which ends in an unshakable experience.

Are we allowing some spiritual glow in a meeting or after some good deed to serve as a fatal substitute for personal contact with Christ? Are we avoiding vital union with Christ by turning away to our own struggles and good works?

The constant danger is that we stop short of the real

thing and put to sleep our conscience by doing something easier. We make void the searching challenge of Christ by substituting some effort of our own for a personal surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. Herod listened gladly to John the Baptist, "and when he heard him, he **did many things**," but he did not do the one thing essential, the turning to God to receive power for a completely new life. There is no need to wait until we can work up some merit of our own. "All things are now ready." The feast is spread. The hand is outstretched. God waits for our response to His finished work. That is the meaning of the Cross. Examine Isaiah 53: 5-6; 1 Pet. 2: 22-24.

Does the **lingering love of sin** plead for postponing that decisive break with the old life? Augustine "feared as much to be freed from all hinderances as I ought to have feared to be hindered by them". He prayed for deliverance from his sin—"only not yet. For I fear lest Thou shouldst hear me soon." Remember God wants our best years. Habits will grow upon us. Decision becomes more difficult. The desire fades as the light is sinned against. But there is no need for any delay. In one great choice the weakest or the worst can pass from the down track to the upward road —

"So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved."

But How ?

What then must we do ?

(1) Understand the way of the Gospel. Let us grasp at once that there are two competing conceptions of religion which are as wide apart as the poles. The one finds its centre in man. The other finds its centre in God. The one offers good advice. The other offers good news. In the one, man strains after a high ideal, marshalling all his inner energies to be the best he can, with, of course, the help of God. In the other, the prodigal receives a welcome he does not deserve, and a feast and a dress he has not earned. In the one, religion is a burden. In the other, it is a bridge. In the one case it demands. In the other it gives **gifts** valuable beyond all imagination. This kind of religion puts zest into service, energy into the will, and a song in the

heart. The glory of Christianity is that it is the **religion of grace, of gift, of faith** (Luke 15: 20-24).

Salvation means that God gives a sinner the assurance that he is received into the family and trusted with responsibility as the child of God, and this is done not as a reward after probation but as a boon at the beginning. Salvation is not a human achievement but the Son of God coming into the life and changing all thought and thus making real achievement possible. The Christian works **from** Salvation, not **towards** it. Salvation is a gift at the beginning, not wages paid at the end of the day (Rom. 6: 23).

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

(2) Christ is received **by faith**. Examine John 1: 12; Rev. 22: 17, and we see that "receive" and "believe" are the same thing. But how can we take hold of an invisible gift? We have opened our lives to human friendship. So also we can open our lives to Christ's friendship. We can trust a person whom we see. We can also trust this Person whom we have not seen. "Blessed are they," says our Lord, "who have not seen, and yet have believed." We can look at His promise and lean our whole weight upon His word (John 5: 24; 4: 50).

(3) Dare to **avow** allegiance to Christ. Tell some friend what you have done. See your minister about joining the Church. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness: with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10: 9-10).

Why confess Christ? The implicit must become explicit. Confession honours our Lord. It puts an end to our hesitation. It seals the great contract. It leads others to Christ as nothing else ever will.

(4) Make your acceptance very **definite and quite final**. Kneel down before Christ with your book open at Mark 11: 24. Ask Christ to forgive all the past and give you power for the future. Trust Him to receive you there and then. Believe that He has forgiven you. On your knees **thank Him** that it is done. Rise **up** and act as if it were done. Hence-

forth regard yourself as a forgiven sinner who belongs for ever to Jesus Christ. Make it definite by writing down your decision and signing it, or by some other act that will commit you for ever. "Believe that ye **have** received and ye shall have" (R.V.). There comes a time to cease seeking and to begin trusting.

Personal

A writer in a recent magazine tells us how he faced two facts — first, the extraordinary vitality, joy, power, and fellowship visible among the early Christians, and, second, that there things were missing in his own religion. After all this study about the Christian way of living he had to confess, "It has seemed to me lately that I have everything about Christianity except the essential thing." He made a completely fresh start in life by seeking God's forgiveness and power. Some of our readers also may need to face these two facts. They can discuss freely about Christianity, but may never have yielded to God, or come to rest in the saving power of Jesus Christ.

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Assignments

1. What are the right and the wrong attitudes to great spiritual realities ?
2. How may we (a) evade, and (b) face fairly the facts of the Church and the New Testament ? Do they get their proper place in our religion ?
3. What are the greatest hindrances to immediate surrender to Christ ? How would you deal with each of them ?
4. If someone said to you, "I have been trying to be a Christian, but my efforts seem to make little difference," what would you say to him ? What scriptures would you quote ?
5. What is the biggest thing you have learned from these studies ?

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