

# Difficulties of a Missionary

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Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Vol. 8, 1916, p. 229.

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Comments on a letter from the Foreign Field, in which certain perplexities are stated, and a complaint uttered over the dearth of manifest blessing. While the paper is submitted in the first place for the consideration of missionaries, yet it should yield help and interest to all who serve the Lord.

My dear Brother,

Your correspondent in China "would like to see something in your pages dealing with the difficulties we as preachers of the Word face, in the failure to see the signs following which from the Scriptures we are led to expect." After suggesting that a good deal of declension on the part of missionaries and native helpers may be due to this, and commenting on his own long service and scant success, he proceeds: "I would like to know what others have found revealed in God's Word about this. Because I feel many drift into error, when overwhelmed by the startling apathy of heathendom and the continual disappointments in really spiritual results." Finally, with a message of thanks for the valued "bits" in your magazine, he finishes by saying rather sadly: "We keep on sowing in faith, but I cannot but sympathize with some who have turned aside in face of the curious contradictions they find — promises pleaded that don't seem to hold good, — and so on."

I have selected the above as giving the tone of his letter, and will seek grace to answer some of the perplexities he names in detail.

One can hardly have been for nearly twenty years engaged in arduous work among heathen in Central Africa without feeling most sympathetic toward the writer in the difficulties he finds in his distant field. You have suggested that I compress within a short compass any considerations that might help; and though brevity is at times taken for brusqueness, I will endeavour to set out the thoughts that arise while pondering over his communication

### (1) By whom is the Servant Sent?

The first inquiry would naturally be on the lines of our Lord's question to His opponents: "*The baptism of John whence was it? from heaven, or of men?*" (Matt. 21: 25). A servant of God will not shrink from asking himself, "Was I sent here by God? Or is my appointment of and from men?" All

confidence in our after-life and experience may be said to turn on the answer we are able to give. If one be able humbly to reply, "I know that God sent me where I am," then — come long waiting for success, or come success speedily — we are encouraged to go on. But if otherwise, and our movement be on the initiation, and under the dictation, of men, who though servants of God are not the Master, maybe God has a controversy — not with our preaching of the gospel everywhere, but — with our state of soul which waited not on Him. It will be noticed that there are two Hormahs in the Book of Numbers. Both are concerned with the heathen Canaanites. In the first case the Israelites went against them on their own initiative; and the Hormah in Num. 14: 45 referred to their own cruel disappointment and discomfiture. In the second case they first placed themselves in the Lord's hands, and then were sent by Him; then the Hormah in Num. 21: 3 was the discomfiture of the enemy. Be it remembered that for a messenger sent of God to the heathen it is written, "*To whom He was not spoken of, they SHALL see; and they that have not heard SHALL understand.*" We have personal experience of this. We were seven years working with our Congo tribe ere we could baptize a convert. But God fulfilled His word broke down the apathy and the opposition in numerous directions, and encouraged His servants in widespread interest and much blessing, continuing at this day.

## **(2) The Effect of the Condition of Christendom.**

The second thought that impressed itself on me as I weighed your correspondent's perplexities was that we cannot escape from the results of the general condition of the Christian profession. We are part of it; and the Spirit who dwells in us is He who dwells in every true Christian, and in the house of God as a whole. His power is undiminished, and He is working as distinctly for the glory of Christ as on Pentecost's memorable day. But the mode of His activities is very decidedly affected by the state of things amongst us. The rule in apostolic days was immediate blessing with the preaching. The rule in Laodicean days is for the mass to be heartless, and the individual, after some knocking, to be awakened to the voice of Christ and blessed. We have certainly passed out of the first; we are almost as certainly in the second. Man asserts his self-sufficiency, and alas! his steady progress towards Divinity; and can the Holy Ghost *trust* blessing into the hands of men whose trend is practically anti-Christian? Happy those who are delivered in spirit from this age, and seek to do the Lord's will in dependence upon Him; yet they must bear the sorrow of the state of the people of God, as did the prophets and men of God of old. Even Joshua and Caleb, with all the individual faith they possessed, and the readiness to go on that they showed, were required to identify themselves with the people of God as a whole, and the success they longed to see was in their case postponed for thirty-eight long years because Jehovah was grieved with that generation. But it came. The experience of most missionaries who look for new birth and true discipleship in their converts is that the Spirit of God keeps them waiting for a more or less extended time ere blessing takes a widespread form.

## **(3) The Need of the Fear of God.**

With the third consideration I have to offer all may not agree. But it is put out as a personal conviction, and — speaking as to wise men — your readers may judge what I say. The gospel was not presented in the ways of God till the testimony of His Creatorship, and of His righteous law, had had their place. The approximate result in souls who were affected by these testimonies was the fear of God on the one hand, and moral exercise on the other. The truth that "God is" has its corollary in this, that "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." The ever-present thought of God before the mind leads it into exercise as to the difference between good and evil. There is no inherent power in man to

attain the good or to conquer the evil; hence soul distress, which it is the genius of the gospel to meet. Applying this to the question of labour in a heathen field, broadly speaking we may find ourselves led to press primarily the truth of the Being of God, His majesty, and power, His Omnipresence, and Omniscience. Later the way may open more clearly to show how the questions of good and evil are raised by such a Being in relation to men who have revolted and rebelled against His goodness. Here the searching claims of His holy law may be brought to bear, showing how holy He is and how sinful sin is. "*By the law is the knowledge of sin.*" Finally, scope will be found for the application of the gospel's healing balm where sin-wounded souls are found. All this requires time, perhaps years of plodding, patient work. It is on the principle of "one soweth and another reapeth." The Lord gave a true value to all the prophetic basis that had been laid in the nation of Israel, as preliminary to the apostolic blessing about to follow (John 4: 38). Do not let your kind readers misunderstand me. While this general line of regular progressive ministry may be followed, there may arise a hundred, a thousand, occasions for the servant to meet individual inquiries, to lead special cases right ahead into gospel light and liberty. But I speak on the one hand of the progress of God's ways in the Scripture leading up to the gospel; and on the other hand of the very reasonable inference that something corresponding to those ways should mould our dealings with the masses of heathen met with. In passing, one may commend the study of Peter's address to the Jew in Acts 2, to the Gentile seekers in Acts 10 (in whose case the fear of God and the working of righteousness were discernible), and Paul's addresses to the heathen in Acts 14 and 17.

#### **(4) Satanic Opposition.**

Fourthly, in reply to your correspondent's opinion, "For myself I believe the lack of better results is probably due to Satanic opposition, such as in the case of Daniel 10: 13," I submit that such opposition has least to do with it. "*All power,*" said the risen Christ, "*is given to Me in heaven and in earth.*" If He work, opposition is useless. Our part is to be in absolute touch with Him, in dependence upon His power. Of this dependence prayer is the tangible expression. Prayer is the link between the gospel commission of Luke 24 and Acts 2. The apostles, and the mother of Jesus, and the brethren are all found in the position and spirit of prayer in Acts 1, and so they made room for the putting forth of the might and power of Acts 2. Where was Pilate on that day? Where the Romans? Where the religious opposition? Where the power of Satan? The enemy may rage and fume and organize when the blessing has come, but he cannot prevent it coming. Hallelujah!

#### **(5) The Practical Results.**

Then comes the complaint in the fifth place, that converts have so little sense of sin, and so little intuitive knowledge, apparently even by the Spirit, of what is becoming to Christianity. He says: "Years after our converts have been recognized as Christians we find that their consciences still seem dead as regards most glaring sins. We have to tell a man 'This is wrong,' or ' You must not do that,' about most ordinary things; as if even years of Christian exercises had developed no sense of spiritual guidance or inward perception. "Now let us remember that there are cases where the grace of God refuses all method. In heathendom souls are at times undoubtedly converted who have had little previous self-knowledge, little light as to the absolute holiness of God, scant experience of the bitterness and heinousness of sin. They are suddenly snatched as brands from the burning, and handed over from the devil that sought their doom to the Saviour who loves them. These have a whole world of spiritual exercise to confront, the discovery of the perverseness of a natural will opposed to God's

control, the diagnosis of every habit and custom of their lives in the light of a slowly growing knowledge of Scripture, the temptation at every turn to do what they have been accustomed to do in their heathen days without asking counsel of God, the immoral training of their generation which leads them to think many things meritorious which we know to be wholly foreign to the Christian regime. For all these things the grace of God provides; but souls are slow even in nominally Christian lands to lay hold of grace's provision for a godly walk. Let us have patience. Nearly all the epistles bring us up against the conditions in which the early converts moved, and many a sad fall was there, many a state that caused the apostles anxiety, some things that well-nigh caused disruption in the church (certainly compromising gravely the truth of the gospel) and deeply serious moral scandals. Some were met by discipline, and some by ministry; but all only served to bring out in more detail and in permanent form the conduct suitable to that grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men. If the preaching of apostles had such setbacks, may we expect less?

## **The Ministry of a Living Person.**

Then in ministry, do we present the living personal *JESUS*? If we speak of the miracles or parables or incidents of the Gospels, do we expound *them*, or present Him? In telling of Him in His suffering, triumph, and present glory, do we ourselves throb with the reality of His love, realizing Him to be near and dear, and not only everything that *we* need for time and eternity, but also the Exponent of the Living and True God to us, His resource for all the requirements of the universe, and of the saints through all ages? Affections formed for Him, desire for His company, and His approval soon induce a distaste for sin, a keen instinct against it, which faith alone even in the great verities of Christianity — will not do.

## **For What Kind of Results Do We Look?**

Further, be it noted that great writers, and thousands of prominent Christian workers, mistakenly look for the influence of Christianity in due time on the great unchristian faiths of the world, and suppose there is to be a great movement among religiously inclined people in the direction of a wholesale reception of Christianity. One such writer issues a book styled "Conversion by the Million," cherishing the vision of the total abolition of Poverty, Ignorance, War, and Devilry. Many seek to pave the way for a sort of 'rapprochement' between Buddhism and the Christian faith, popularizing the latter by showing in how many features Buddhism resembles it! The true inward meaning of the Lord's coming for His own, the present eclectic calling of the church, and the change of testimony after the church has gone, seem to be missed by such. Perhaps wilfully by some, for it involves the utter condemnation of man as he is, and the consequent uselessness at bottom of many of the philanthropic efforts to evolve him successfully in which they glory.

## **What is Success?**

Finally, being assured before our God of the divine character of the service to which we have been called, let us seek in every way to be conformed to God's ways and will in that service, knowing that when the Lord Jesus returns and all our deeds done in the body will be reviewed, and our work inspected, He will reward good and faithful work. Where there is this, the good and faithful work, *He* will find for Himself the kind of success for which He sent His servant. Was the cross success? Was His spending His strength for nought success? Was a cursing Peter, a cowardly lot of disciples, a

betraying Judas, success? Was a compact of Jew with Gentile to crucify Him success? Yet said He, "*My judgment is with the Lord, and My work with My God*" (Isa. 49). It was good and faithful work, and His God gave Him *in resurrection* a countless host of souls, the result of His self-sowing into loneliness and death. If we find long years after our earthly service is closed that God gave the greatest results to our sowing after we were supposed to be dead and done with, will the discovery not reward us amply for our *apparent* lack of success?

May the Lord encourage each tried worker in every part of His work.

Faithfully yours in His service, *Wm. Hy. Westcott.*