



God's Testimonies to Mankind.

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NEWPORT (MON.):
Stow Hill Bible Depôt & Publishing Office.
LONDON:
15, PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

—
2s. per 100, post free.



GOD'S TESTIMONIES TO MANKIND.

ALL persons know something of natural faith concerning the affairs of this life, but natural faith cannot profit by a testimony about God. The Lord spake in the parable of the sower of some who received the seed, but "because they had no root withered away" (Matt. xiii. 6); and later on we read: "Simon himself believed," but afterwards the Apostle Peter said to him, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts viii. 21). There was no work of God in these cases. Thus God must either give man up altogether or He must impart living faith to him. This faith is the gift of God (see Eph. ii. 8) and produces works (see James ii. 26). It comes by

hearing (*see* Romans x. 17), and is a divine operation in the soul. The new birth is a new beginning formed in a man, and then he becomes responsive to God's testimony in whatever way that testimony may be borne. The testimony which God gives is always regarding Himself, but He has varied the manifestations of it according to different periods.

In Hebrews xi. we have a list of persons from the outset of man's history, to each of whom some fresh testimony was given, and they proved their faith by responding to it. They were pioneers in the path of faith, because each one was called to follow some fresh light which had never been given to any one before. The special truth God gave to each of them, tested them as to whether they had faith to respond to it. Each of the persons as they came on the scene had the light of what had gone before, but it was the fresh testimony which brought out their faith.

With Abraham's seed (the children of Israel) a *special* testimony began, the chief privilege of which was that they had committed to them the oracles of God (see Romans iii. 2), which advantage was continued to them till they rejected their long-promised Messiah. When the Holy Spirit came down as a divine Person from heaven at Pentecost He formed the church, which became the depository of the testimony of God, and then the gospel of Christ was sent out into all the world. There were no restrictions placed on the gospel—it was to be preached to every creature.

Wherever this gospel was preached it tested the hearers, because it brought to them more light than had hitherto been given to them.

This testimony was very exclusive, for the apostles said, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12). It allowed of "*no other name*" but

the name of Jesus ; and *no other terms* than faith on Jesus.

Thus it remains as the testimony for to-day wherever the gospel of Christ is proclaimed.

The apostles wrote in their various epistles of the privileges into which believers in this gospel were brought, and all this continues, because it has not been withdrawn, nor any additional revelation given.

Thus God gave special testimony of Himself to certain individuals, as recorded in the Book of Genesis ; then to a company of men who were to be blessed on earth, called Israel, the beginning of whose history is found in the Book of Exodus ; and, later still, to a company who are called the Church, formed on the day of Pentecost, who are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, the records of which are found in the apostolic epistles of the New Testament.

There still remains a question of great interest. What about the masses of mankind who have been

without the privilege of *special light*? "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts x. 34), and has from the outset of man's history maintained a universal testimony to His wisdom and goodness. We read: "The heavens declare the glory of God . . . day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Psalm xix. 2). In this way God calls the attention of men to Himself in His wisdom and goodness. Further, when men had turned to idolatry and God allowed them to walk in their own ways; "He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts xiv. 17). Again, "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (Acts xvii. 27; *see also* Romans i. 20 and 32).

Thus for some 6,000 years God has had to do with those who

departed from Him, beginning with Cain and his family, but after the flood with the descendants of Noah. These turned to idolatry: they worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever (Romans i. 25). Nevertheless, during this long period some turned to the Lord.

The Apostle Peter testified that in every nation "He that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him" (Acts x. 35). So we read of such persons as: Abimelech, king of Gerar (Genesis xx. 5); Jethro, priest or prince of Midian (Exod. xviii. 12); Hiram, king of Tyre (1 Kings v. 1); the queen of Sheba (1 Kings x. 1); the wise men (Matt. ii. 1); the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts viii. 27); Cornelius (Acts x. 4). These persons were all born outside the circle of *special* testimony, but they evidently used the light they had, and God gave them more by bringing them into contact with His favoured people. The last two obtained the light of

Christianity, and no doubt got the full blessing of it.

There are millions of the human race who are to-day outside the present testimony of the gospel, but they still have the light which has shone during God's past dealings with men. It is written, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. iv. 3). With the testimony of the heavens and the fruitful seasons alone, no one could know anything about the salvation which faith in the gospel brings, but God counts every one righteous who believes. Those reckoned righteous from the dark places of the earth will be a witness to the faithfulness of God in giving them a testimony which has always been *clear enough for faith*. Faith has always pleased God wherever it was found. Two notable instances of Gentiles having faith are given in Matt. viii. 10 and xv. 28, and Jesus called attention to them. He further announced that "many shall come from the

east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. viii. 11).

When God intends such persons to have the *further* light of the gospel of Christ, He either brings them to it in some providential way, or causes some of His servants to carry it to them.

Into which of the many families in heaven or earth (*see* Eph. iii. 15) God may place these persons, scripture does not say; any more than where those who have died in infancy will be placed.

No man can help being born in the darkness of idolatry, but God has provided that wherever man is born he shall have some testimony regarding Himself, both from the heavens above (Psalm xix.) and the earth beneath (Acts xiv. 17). And this testimony is loud enough to test him and demonstrate either faith or unbelief.

The privilege of being born in the full light of God, as revealed in Christ, cannot be over-estimated,

and while those in the place of this light may not value it any more than those who are in less light, yet in the day of judgment each will be dealt with according to his works.

The basis of God's actings with men has always been the same, that Christ "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. ii. 6), and redemption is by "the precious blood of Christ—who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter i. 18-20). So before Christ came to do the actual work on the tree, God acted towards men on the ground of *that work* which was *yet to come*.

Faith has always pleased God, in whatever degree of light it was found, because God had Christ in view, whatever ignorance there was on man's side.

Faith is the same whether found in connection with God's testimony of Himself in creation and providential goodness, or in connection

with the clearer testimony in Israel in days gone by, or in the clearest testimony of the gospel of Christ.

The beginning in each person is the same, but the *development* depends on the light God is pleased to give, at each particular time.

One result of receiving the light of the gospel is that the receiver is brought into the spiritual enjoyment which the gospel proposes; and another is, there is a great desire that relations and neighbours should know it too. Some think of the heathen who are ignorant of the present gospel, and who have only the light of creation and providential goodness, and they desire to carry to them the light of the gospel of Christ.

In this matter special guidance is needed, for while the *commission* was, "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15), and again, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luke xxiv. 47), yet *direction* both

where and when to preach was special, as we read: "Go, stand and speak in the temple" (Acts v. 20); "Arise, go toward the south" (Acts viii. 26); "Arise therefore, and get thee down" (Acts x. 20); "Come over into Macedonia" (Acts xvi. 9).

In the matter of *direction* even restrictions were at times given, as: "Were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" (Acts xvi. 6); "They assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not" (Acts xvi. 7).

Thus, in going to the heathen, direction is of the greatest importance. The devil is worshipped in idolatry, and he will not give up his place as ruler of the darkness of this world unless obliged to do so by the Holy Spirit causing men to be born anew. The Spirit directed the servants in the Acts to where He was working, and there were mighty results. We do not find conversions recorded in the Old Testament writings, although

there can be no doubt, persons were converted, but they came to the light in a very gradual way. The dispensational darkness had not then passed, and the true light was not then shining. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, with the subsequent descent of the Holy Spirit, has brought out light so strong that those who received it at the beginning of Christianity were suddenly converted. The apostolic writers frequently refer to the manifest results of believing the gospel in the day in which they lived (*see* Rom. i. 8; 1 Thess. i. 8). This was plainly seen when converted Jews gave up Judaism, and the converted heathen gave up their idolatry. The work of God to-day is more amongst those who *outwardly* confess Christianity, so that when they believe with the heart the change is not so manifest *before men*, although as real before God as at the beginning.

Where the bright light of the gospel of Christ has not reached,

there remains still amongst the heathen the same light which shone before Christ came. That light when received by any man in faith is counted for righteousness, but that does not of itself bring the person into new covenant blessings, nor into the church, but rather into one of the other families mentioned in Eph. iii. 15 (read "every family"). The church was formed by the Holy Spirit on the testimony of the gospel of Christ ; but God is sovereign, and may still work outside this particular testimony, as He did before it came.

God may frequently have ordered it that some one who had faith in God as Creator, and in His providential goodness, should be brought into the further light of the gospel, and so into peace and entrance into present grace, with hope of the coming glory. Such persons would belong to the church.

Since the apostles' days the gospel of Christ may have been presented in a feeble and even corrupted

form, yet it has brought light beyond the testimony of creation, and this additional light has tested the hearers.

When once the gospel of Christ has been presented, men cannot go back to a former testimony ; they either receive the gospel by faith and come into the present blessings of it, or they refuse it in unbelief and turn to what they like better.

Thus God's ways are past finding out, but as we know more of Him so we understand some of the wisdom of His ways : and "Wisdom is justified of all her children."