

### **396 No cunningly devised fables**

In Fanny Crosby's fine old hymn "To God be the glory", we sing of how the Lord Jesus Christ has "opened the life gate that all may go in", words based on Matthew 6.13-14. That "going in through the life gate" is an entrance for the individual into the Christian Faith, which consists of a body of God-revealed, God-wrought, objective, ultimate Truth, rather than a collection of mere personal beliefs under a heading of "My Faith".

The "going in" is brought about by the Holy Spirit, who conveys the Father's gift of faith, and prompts the willingness to confess, that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (eg., Romans 10.9-10). It is only when the life gate has been passed through that this newly-brought-in believer in Christ is now seen to have been, all along, one of the "foreknown, predestinated, called, justified and glorified" saints (Romans 8.28-30), whose name has been written in the Lamb's book of life since before the foundation of the world! (egs., Philippians 4.3b / Revelation 3.5; 13.8; 17.8; 20.12,15; 21.27; 22.19 / Luke 10.20 / Hebrews 12.23).

What a spur is this realisation to our witnessing! - for it shows that we are living among people whose names are, like ours, in that Book of Life right now, but who have not yet been called by the Holy Spirit. No wonder then that we are to "hold forth the word of life" (Philippians 2.16a) courteously and appropriately as opportunity is given, for God's Word to the unsaved the word still stands - "Whosoever will may come" (Acts 2.21, based on Joel 2.32 / and eg., John 6 37). Thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit may well use even our, perhaps feeble, holding-forth efforts as He brings more souls through the life gate into salvation and glory.

Our Christian living and witnessing are of course kept on track by our giving careful attention, like a steady, underlying drumbeat in our lives, to "the holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (from II Timothy 3.15, KJV). May we indeed "hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them ..." as the old Prayer Book Collect puts it for the Second Sunday in Advent.

In II Peter 1.16 the Holy Spirit, through Peter, emphasises the solidity of both the Christian Faith itself, and of the Scriptures in which this Faith is clearly set forth: Peter explains - "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (KJV). After explaining about their experience on the Mount of Transfiguration

(eg., Matthew 17.1-8), Peter is caused to write that “we have a more sure word of prophecy” which “ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts ...” (1.19).

What is now for us the Old Testament, described here as “the prophecy”, “came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake [as they were] moved by the Holy Ghost” (1.21 / and eg., II Timothy 3.14-17). We can think here of Jesus likening His own teaching to the house built upon the rock which “fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (Matthew 7.24-25).

In other words we are fully justified in accepting by faith the truth of the Old Testament, and now also of the New Testament too, for such faith is founded on the solid-rock grounds of historical events, meticulously fulfilled prophecies and ample personal experience (eg., John 7.17). The Reformers’ old adage, “What the Bible says, God says”, still holds good.

Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, a devout Christian and renowned Confederate General in the American Civil War, explained, “My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter when it may overtake me”. He spent his Christian life, which for him involved leading his men as well as he could in real and terrible battles, being entirely at peace with God through faith in Christ: quite an example for the rest of us.

We too are soldiers, soldiers of the cross, entrusted with fighting real spiritual battles with mighty spiritual weapons (egs., II Timothy 2.3-4 / II Corinthians 10.3-5 / Ephesians 6.10-20). Until the Rapture or physical death comes for each of us, we too “keep our hand to the plough ... press on toward the mark ... not weary in well doing” (Luke 9.62 / Philippians 3.14 / Galatians 6.9).

Thomas Jackson’s last words before he died of wounds and pneumonia in 1863 were simply, “Let us cross the river and rest under the shade of the trees”. One day, praise God, all who are in Christ will join him there, “resting under the shade of those trees”.