Articles by A. E. Horton

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The Faith of Christ (July–August 1971)

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Editor's note: A. E. Horton is a missionary in Angola. His many years of diligent and productive service add weight to his convictions in regards to the Christian Faith. His article merits deep consideration.

Colossians 2:6 is a verse which is often quoted with mistaken emphasis; one frequently hears it with the emphasis on the verbs "As therefore ye received so walk." And one has heard it explained as, "How, then, did I receive Christ? Certainly, by simple faith. That is how I am to walk in Him: as I received Him, by faith alone."

The thought so stated is, of course, in accordance with facts. And undoubtedly God has used this interpretation to help many believers to peace and to power. For it is quite true that we do not enter into life by any efforts of our own, but simply by relying upon Him who has come for our salvation. And it is equally true that we will never be able to live the Christian life by our own self-effort or struggle, but only in the same way in which we were saved: by reliance upon Him who alone can save us in daily living.

This emphasis is, however, not the correct one in the verse we are considering. We do have the truth of reliance on Christ in Galatians 2:20, where "I live by the faith of the Son of God" means simply that "I live (daily living) by that faith which has the Son of God as its object"; that is, by continual conscious reliance on Him.

The R.V. translates the idea correctly as "the faith which is in the Son of God."

A similar use of the construction is found in Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16; 3:22; and Philippians 3:9. Revelation 14:12 may have the same thought, or may denote that faith (as the revelation which is to be believed) which is concerned with the Person of Jesus Christ.

The true emphasis of Colossians 2:6 lies in the words "Christ Jesus the Lord" and "in Him." A literal translation would read "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, in Him be walking." This is in accord with the theme of the Colossian epistle. Colossians was written to counteract false doctrine which (like all false doctrine) detracted from the Person of Christ. It robbed Him of the place of pre-eminence which is His alone. It tended to dilute the faith of believers, directing their confidence to things and to other entities: to ascetic practices and to other supposed mediums of salvation. It thus destroyed the faith which is from God, which has the Lord Jesus Christ as its only Object.

Hence what the Apostle exhorts here is, "Since (at the time of your conversion) you received (not any thing, or some other one, but) Christ Jesus the Lord, go on now walking in Him. Let Him be the sole Object of your faith, now as then; the Receiver of your hearts' devotion; the Sun around whom all your thinking shall revolve."

From this exhortation we may observe three things:

1. The gospel as proclaimed by Epaphras to the Colossians was not a gospel concerned primarily with things or with doctrines. It was concerning a Person: the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Naturally, that

gospel could not be presented to men apart from the statement of certain facts concerning Him; facts whose definitions are what we mean when we speak of "doctrines." (The modern idea that we may dispense with doctrines while holding the Person of Jesus is mere superficial ridiculous nonsense.) Epaphras, like Paul, did preach about sin, coming judgment, about the necessity of repentance and of faith to salvation, and about a good many other things as well. But all these doctrines, these statements of facts, essential as they were then and are today, were but the background of the gospel; not the gospel itself.

For the Good News is that God has sent to us a Saviour; that that Saviour died for us, to pay the penalty of our sins; that He rose again victorious; and that He lives today (I Cor. 15:3, 4), Lord over all (Acts 10:36), calling men to repent and to submit to Him for salvation. He is God's good news, and Paul so preached Him that men, moved by what they heard, were moved to seek Him, and to receive Him into their hearts and lives.

2. Paul not only preached the Person of Christ: he preached Him as Lord. He writes in 2 Corinthians 4:5, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." or, as the R.V. renders it, "Christ Jesus as Lord." His gospel was not merely of a Saviour, but of a Saviour to whom God had given the Name which is above every other Name, decreeing now that at that Name every one should bow the knee, confessing Him as Lord of their souls (Phil. 2:9-11; Rom. 10:9. cf. also Peter's word in Acts 2:36, where the words Lord and Christ are in the emphatic position).

3. The effect of such preaching was to impress the Person of Christ Himself upon the hearts of hearers, so that when these were moved by the Word of God, it was not merely to seek forgiveness of sins or salvation from judgment. These they did indeed receive, but they received them only in their receiving the exalted Christ Jesus as their Lord. It is on this fact that the exhortation is based. The Colossians received everything else in their submitting to Christ as Lord, for all is to be found only in Him (vs. 9, 10).

These are not mere theories, since they are facts clearly revealed by God in His Word, and facts which we will controvert (as, alas, they are sometimes controverted today) only at our peril. We may note here three things in the light of these facts of the Word:

1. Those of us who are called to engage in the preaching of the gospel should most carefully examine our preaching in this light. What is the object ever before our minds as we preach? Is it, as it should be, the glorified Person of our Lord Jesus Christ? Is our aim so to present Him in all His present glory (as gracious Saviour, certainly, but as Saviour exalted to the throne), that men will see Him, and be moved to acknowledge His authority? What is the impression we leave on the minds of our hearers? Is it merely of things, even legitimate things such as sin, judgment, and urgency of salvation? Or is it of Him in whom alone all blessing is to be found? For true gospel preaching will always be a "lifting up" of Christ, and such "lifting up" will always draw men to Him. God's purpose is to exalt His Son, and so should it be ours.

It is not at all uncommon to hear "gospel" preaching which does not so make prominent the Person of Christ; preaching in which, if He is even mentioned, it is almost as an incidental, secondary to the main consideration of salvation. The hearer may be impressed with the fact of sin and the necessity of doing something about it. It may leave him anxious and concerned, but may not leave the Person of the Lord Jesus Himself as the predominant figure in the picture which has been put before him. And men may be moved to seek the things they need, in themselves, rather then to receive into their hearts the Glorious Person in receiving whom alone those things are to be obtained.

2. Nor should this presentation of the Person of Christ be that of a Saviour alone. There are probably few doctrines which have done more harm to men than the popular idea that one may receive Christ as Saviour, without receiving Him as Lord. The conception is based on a very superficial understanding as to what the gospel really is. For it should be evident that even faith in Christ "as Saviour" is quite impossible without submission to Him as Lord. Saving faith is not, as sometimes misconceived, mere credence in the truth of certain revealed facts. It has such credence as its foundation, but not as its substance. Saving faith is faith in Christ Himself, not merely about Him. It is such credence as leads to action; to submission of the will. Christ comes now personally to the soul, desiring to do certain things for that souls benefit. It should be noted that it is He personally who saves, but that He cannot save until the individual is ready to allow Him to do what He will. Without such submission of the will He can do nothing. It is demonstrable that one may believe the

truth of the facts, without yielding to the Lord for Him to act. But such submission is nothing less than an acknowledgment of His Lordship, even though the one who thus yields to Him may not at once realize all that is implied in his submission.

3. The harmful results of a gospel not centred in the Lordship of Christ can be seen on every hand. How many there are who call themselves "believers," but who have never really yielded to Christ, and who, as a result, have never really passed from death to life! Such may be convinced that, at a certain time in their lives, they "believed in (actually, about) Christ as Saviour." But their daily living shows no evidence whatever of eternal life. They have no real love for the Lord Jesus Himself. They have no love for His Word. They have no desire whatsoever to order their lives according to His will, and to please Him. Indeed, to many such, the idea of being governed in all things by Him is repugnant, and savors of fanaticism! Self is lord, not Christ; They are still "of the world" and their speech and conduct is "of the world." Such "believers" need to wake up to their terrible lack, before it is forever too late; before they hear the Lord say, as He Himself said He would have to say at last to some, "I never knew you!" (Matt. 7:21-23).

It has very often happened, in teaching on the Lord as the Christian's Life, that certain people, who have been "believers" for years, but have never known what it is to be ruled by the Lord, are reached by the Word, receive a vision of the glory and beauty of Christ, and so at last yield their all to Him. They then enter into an experience of devotion to Him and of joy, peace, and power for daily living, such as they have never known. What has actually happened in many such cases of "revival" is that they

have for the first time entered into the real experience of salvation! A true conversion will always result in a transformed life, and where there is no such transformation, it should be questioned whether there is really any life at all!

Oh the tragedy of "believers" who are lost because they have never really been saved! Brethren, let us realize that "Jesus Christ is Lord"! Let us see to it that He is really Lord of our lives; of all we have and are. Let us proclaim Him as Lord to all, and press upon all the necessity for them of God's command, not merely "to receive Him as Saviour," but to bow the knee to Him as Lord! Let us make it plain that, apart from such submission to Him, there can be no salvation.

And then? Let us ever remember that in our salvation, "we received Jesus the Lord." We did not accept something, we accepted someone. "So let us walk in Him." Let Him be the One who dominates our thinking, to whom our minds always turn. May He thus continually sit on the throne of our hearts, and He alone!

An Important Choice (Feb 1960)

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Scripture reading: Daniel chapter one.

The book of Daniel is, as we all recognize, one of superlative importance in the Bible. It is important, both for its revelation of the program of God through the ages, and for its outstanding examples of courageous and conquering faith. It reveals God's sovereignity, both in the affairs of men generally and in their experience particularly.

Having in view the importance of the events outlined in Daniel, we may wonder why the first chapter narrates such a seemingly trivial event. Why, at the beginning of such an important book, should we find the relation of such a comparatively unimportant happening as this, when we find some young men refusing to eat certain things? Actually, this event is not so trivial as it may seem at first glance. In this incident we find a definite choice made; a definite course embarked upon, which resulted in the chain of events which followed. Had the choice which Daniel made in chapter one not been made, the book of Daniel would never have been written. Let us consider what was involved and what the circumstances were.

In the first place, let us note that God was in need of a man through whom He could work. He wanted a man through whom He might reveal to the king the course of the ages, as we see in chapter two. He wanted a man through whom He might make known His own sovereign Deity, as we see in chapter three.(Daniel's name is not

mentioned in this chapter but, as we shall see, we are justified in concluding that his influence was behind what happened then.). He wanted a man through whom He might warn the king, and so again witness to Himself, as we see in chapter four. He wanted a man through whom He might rebuke the ungodly, as we see in chapter five. He wanted a man through whom He might again witness to His power to save, as we see in chapter six. He wanted a man to whom He might reveal His purposes in visions, so making known His secrets to others, as we see in chapters seven and eight. And He wanted a man who would intercede for his nation, as we see in chapter nine.

Now Daniel himself knew nothing of that which became known only much later. But he made a choice at the beginning: a choice which enabled God to find in him the man whom He was seeking. So today, God is seeking men and women for work which He has in hand: to reveal His mind to men who do not know Him, and to make known His power in their lives. We may not know at the first His purposes for us. But everything will depend, whether we realize it or not, upon the choice which we make at the beginning, upon the course we embark upon at the first.

The other day we started out from Union City headed for Kearny. We aimed for Route 3, but we missed the fork of the road. Before we realized it, we were on the Jersey Turnpike, with no turning back, and we finally came out, not in Kearny where we wanted to go, but down in Newark. We missed the road, and how many Christian young men and women miss God’s road for them, and come out at a place far different from that which was in His purpose for them!

Second, note the circumstances in which Daniel and his friends found themselves at the time. One could hardly imagine circumstances less conducive to faithfulness to God. Yet it was in those most uncongenial circumstances that Daniel and his compatriots resolved to remain faithful to their God.

There was nothing conducive to piety in Daniel's nation at the time. They had long since drifted into idolatry, and had stubbornly persisted in that course even though God sent prophet after prophet to them to warn them of the inevitable result of their infidelity. Even in Babylon we find, when the chastisement of removal and captivity had at last come upon them, that the people were still as a whole unchanged in heart concerning their conduct. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah continued to warn them while they were away from their own land, but they had not learned their lesson. Later on in this book, when Nebuchadnezzar sets up his image for worship, only the three young men are spoken of as refusing to bow down to the image. We are justified, I think, in concluding that they, almost alone of their people, resisted the king's decree. Their faithfulness was not the product of a national faithfulness among their own people. None of their own people would have judged them for being unfaithful.

Not only so, but they found themselves in a particularly uncongenial atmosphere in Babylon. There was not even a tacit acceptance of the worship of Jehovah there. His name was not even recognized. In Jerusalem there had been the form of godliness, even though the power was denied. But here there was not even the form. On the other hand, they were surrounded on every side by the practices of idolatry. Daniel's own name we find was

changed to that of “Belteshazzar,” and Nebuchadnezzar himself says that it was “After the name of my god”(4:8). In the very atmosphere of ungodliness, what would their choice be? And when you find yourself in such an atmosphere (for instance, when you are called up for military service) what will your choice be, what will be the course which you set yourself from the very first?

And then again, note their discouraging position physically. They had been uprooted from their own land. We get some idea of the resulting homesickness, the longing for their own country, in Psalm 137, for example. All sacred associations were gone; they were in a strange land. But there was more. We find that these men were victims of that barbarous custom which then maintained (and perhaps still maintains) in some eastern countries, whereby they were forever deprived of the hope of family life and posterity. You may note that in verse 3, when you see in whose care they were placed. Family life means much to us, it meant even more to the Jew. Their whole attitude in their dreary captivity might have been one of hopelessness—one of “what is the use, anyway?”

Even so, Daniel chose. He purposed in his heart not to defile himself. For the food eaten in Babylon (at least the meat and the wine) would be unclean. It would be unclean in that it would consist of things which God in His law had forbidden. And, it would be unclean in that it had been offered to idols. And so Daniel’s choice was that of a whole-hearted devotion to and obedience to his God, let others do what they might, and, let circumstances be what they might. “He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.” God is still looking for men and women like that and not finding too many!

First, he and his companions were made wise by the God Whom they honoured (1:17). They were taught of God. God's purpose is that all His people shall be taught of Him, and this is realized in His bringing them to Himself. But He also desires to impart to them wisdom, in conforming them to His will, and in revealing to them His secrets. This He can do only in the case of those who, like Daniel, devote themselves to Him and to His pleasure. Only those who put God first can be admitted to His counsels.

Second, he became a help to others. Note that it was Daniel who purposed in his heart, but there were three others who associated themselves with him. That is undoubtedly why the events of chapter three are related as they are in this book. As we have noted, his name is not mentioned in that chapter. But behind it we can assuredly trace his influence. What a tragedy it would have been had Daniel chosen differently in chapter one! What a tragedy had the three young men followed a different example! Not only would Daniel have lost much, but he would have caused others also to lose. What do men get from our example, profit or loss?

Third, he became a man whom God could use according to His purposes. He was able to do with Daniel what He wanted, because Daniel set out on the right track in the beginning. What a contrast with many today, who, in much more congenial surroundings and with increased knowledge (giving increased responsibility) live for themselves, and are of no use to God or man!

Fourth, he became a man greatly beloved of God (9:23; 10:11, 19). God loves all His own, it is true. But there are some whom He loves in a special way. These are

they who are willingly conformed to His will, and who enter into His mind. So the Lord loved His own (John 13:1) but even so, John was “the beloved disciple” beyond the others, for he loved his Lord with a special devotion and entered into His thoughts beyond the others, as we see in the Gospel which he later wrote. This is a thing we may well covet, to be “greatly beloved” by God in this special intimacy.

Lastly, we may note that Daniel gained for himself an everlasting name. And wherever the Scriptures go, in all lands and all languages, the name of Daniel is honoured, and has become a synonym for devotion and resolve. Nor is this without meaning for Daniel himself, for he has gained a fame which shall never die among the redeemed and before the face of his God. It is not wrong for us to desire place before our God. What is wrong is to seek place in a wrong way and with a wrong motive. God Himself desires that we may win the crown of honour, and an everlasting fame for our exploits with Him.

Who can estimate the loss and tragedy had Daniel taken the wrong path at the beginning!