

Living Letters

by David Ord

Has anyone ever said to you, 'I might believe in your God if I could see Him?' What would you say? Would you explain that since God is invisible, we have to take it on faith that He exists? Or would you perhaps present the creation as evidence for Him?

Millions remain unconvinced by all such arguments. They strain for something more meaningful. Why should they believe in a God who cannot demonstrate His reality? When it comes to the question of Christ, the issue is even more complex. Historical records seem remote. Even if we concede He walked the earth, where is the proof He is God?

"I used to have 'seven proofs' God exists. Creation, for instance, seemed to demand a Creator. Didn't the run-down of radioactive elements demonstrate there had been no past eternity of matter? I knew nothing of stars that are continually coming to birth even today. Besides, I had an innate distrust for 'God-defying science!'

Another 'proof' was the concept that 'design demands a Designer.' Wasn't this obvious? How could the incredible structure of a bird's wing come into being unless Someone planned it? But why weren't intelligent minds convinced? I realized that others accept that things are the way they are because in a given set of circumstances they could not be otherwise. Plants respond to light. Rain falls, sun shines, and grass grows. If we ask why it is this way, it might be answered that it has always been. 'Ah, but that is a cop-out!' But when someone says God has 'always been,' we face the same problem. If God has always existed, why not laws?

The Bible certainly seemed like 'proof' of God. Hadn't God said that Tyre would be destroyed and never rebuilt centuries before it happened? Wasn't it the most impregnable fortress on earth? But every empire has fallen down through history. And besides, there is a city called Tyre today. We might argue it is not the same city; but it is Tyre, in the same general location. Babylon, too, seemed to 'prove' the Bible right. But someone might reason that it was not overthrown in an instant, but gradually declined over many centuries. And though the Arabian was not to pitch his tent there, many Arabs live in Babylon today.

I saw that my 'proofs,' though helpful to me, were inadequate. People with greater knowledge could baffle me. And I began to question: is there really a God? Is faith in Christ truly viable? Former certainty diffused into doubt. If God exists, He ought to be real. And He wasn't, at least to me. I still felt He existed, but I couldn't be sure.

It was in this uncertainty that God began to reveal Himself in a new way. I didn't do anything to help the process along; but when I faced squarely the fact that my external crutches could be no more than pointers - that in themselves they could not make God known to me - an inner 'knowing' began to formulate. There are many whose minds tell them from the evidence about them that there ought to be a God. So they 'take it on faith' that He exists. And that is fine insofar as it goes.

Actually, even the atheist has this kind of faith. He sees certain external evidence, such as all the suffering in the world, and reaches conclusions based on what he sees. Since he has access to only a fraction of the spectrum of knowledge in the universe, he cannot know there is no God. He must 'take it on faith.'

This kind of faith is not what the Bible means by faith. *'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.'* It is not putting one's trust in an external set of evidences - I see certain facts and draw conclusions from them, then proceed to trust my conclusions. No, faith is an inner knowing - an inner assurance. It is not being convinced, but convicted.

Paul asked *'that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him,'* and *'that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened'* to know the Christ within. It takes an inner revelation to move into the kind of faith the Bible speaks of.

"Now, I 'see' God; not with eyes, but in my heart. I have moved from external trust to inner faith. I have begun to function in a whole new dimension, a different realm from the physical world I see about me. Faith has become substance, its own proof. I have experienced the wonderful little insight that 'doubt is the seed-plot of faith.'

But how can this help the atheist or agnostic?

When Jesus came on earth over 1900 years ago, God made Himself known in human flesh. Jesus 'grew in favor with God and man.' Thousands flocked to be with Him. Though all they could see with human eyes was just another person, Someone Else was 'coming through' from within the veil of flesh. There was a concern, a love, a joy, a sense of peace in the fact of tragedy, that was superhuman.

Tough fishermen in all their raw carnality were attracted enough to give up their livelihood. Thieving money-dealers began to go straight. Brazen prostitutes left the streets. Thousands were willing to be thrown to the lions or to undergo other similarly hideous deaths because of what they had seen in this man.

The life of God lived through Jesus' flesh spoke volumes. It accomplished more than all of the evidence of creation, the Bible, or any other witness to God's existence. People saw God in Him, and that reached them as nothing else did.

It is the same today. People are going to be turned on when they see God. Polls show that something like two-thirds or more of the American nation believe in a God. They are *'holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power'* (2 Tim. 3:5). Belief in the concept of God needs to move into inner faith, and for that to happen God must reveal Himself in human flesh. When the person with faith in an external support concept (either of God, or of no-God) sees God veiled in flesh, he will be moved to desire such a revelation within himself.

So many believers focus on the Jesus of 'good old Bible times,' or on the Jesus of the second coming, that they haven't time to manifest the Christ of today. If only they knew that Christ is coming in human flesh at this very instant! Instead of running from meeting to meeting to learn about the Jesus of the past or the Jesus of tomorrow, they would live ordinary human lives that would manifest the Christ of power instead of the confusion and barrenness of religious form.

Do we really believe the historical Jesus upon whom we focus so intensely? Listen to His words:

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."

“You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I.

Things are better now that Jesus has gone! Strange? Not if you know the Christ within. Although uniquely the Son of God made flesh, Jesus was just one man. He could affect only so many lives. There were physical limitations to how many He could speak to, live amongst, and manifest God to. But today, He is unlimited by a material body. We are His Body, and Christ in millions of people is far more effective than the man Jesus.

“*He who has seen Me has seen the Father,*” explained Jesus. He was the image of the Father. John adds that “*as He is, so also are we in this world.*” We are branches who manifest the Vine. The world doesn’t see the life of the Vine, it just sees the Vine in branch form. It sees us, and the fruit that we bear as Christ in this world. Yes, we are Christ in this material dimension, even as your physical body is you as far as material eyes can see, though you are an inner spirit. We are the materialized form of Christ, His Body. (See 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27, where in speaking of us collectively as the Body of Christ Paul refers to us by the words ‘so also Christ.’)

‘Oh, but I’m so imperfect!’

In the outward flesh, yes; but in the inner man of the spirit, you are the righteousness of Christ. “*The spirits of the righteous made perfect*” (Hebr. 12:23).

‘But people will see all my faults. How can I look like God?’

Many found fault with the faultless Christ. Is the servant greater than his master? Sure they’ll see the vessel as a cracked pot. But the glitter of the treasure within will soon take many eyes off the pot!

‘I’ll let God down.’

Wonderful! Since when did you think you were the treasure?

Jesus was a clay pot too. Admittedly He was a clay pot without feet of clay, and we are clay pots with feet of clay. But when He walked the mountains of Judea, He got sweaty, and if He didn’t bathe He smelled like you and me. His feet got dusty and needed to be washed. He was ‘like a root out of parched ground,’ not a tower of manly strength and the epitome of masculinity. He had ‘no stately form or majesty . . . nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.’ He was such an ordinary looking Jew that Judas had to kiss Him to point out which one He was.

We’ve heard so much about feet of clay in our churches, it’s time we put our emphasis on God living in the human flesh. God can be manifest more today than in the man Jesus. Jesus said so! Despite all our weaknesses and failings, God’s glory can be seen in us. Yes, glory! The foreknown have been predestined, the predestined have been called, the called have been justified, and the justified have been glorified (Rom. 8:29-30, past tense). As Jesus said, “*And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them*” (John 17:22). Glory isn’t just a nice charismatic word. It is God living in people, shining through the earthen vessel. Someday, it will transform even the vessel.

If any of God's people ever had feet of clay, it was the Corinthians. They encouraged sins worse than the heathen allowed, thrived on jealousy and disputes, created a babble of confusion out of the gifts of the Spirit, were drunk at the Lord's Supper - and still Paul called them 'living letters' of Christ! "You are our letter of commendation," he told them, "*known and read by all men.*"

So much stress has been placed on the outer vessel's failings that God's saints focus on the vessel instead of the treasure. Instead of "*recognizing no man according to the flesh,*" we have looked at the clay pots and limited the glory that could shine from them by emphasizing what we aren't instead of Who we are.

God can be seen today. He lives in us through Christ. It's time we believe it and live in the fixed awareness that we are He in this world. We'd do a lot better to be ordinary people manifesting Christ in our homes and jobs, among our neighbors, then running to so many meetings to learn about what Jesus did or what He will do, when we've heard it all a thousand times before anyway.

If our meetings consisted more of two or three families getting together spontaneously, on a frequent basis, and simply inviting the people next door to join us for ice cream or a barbecue, sharing our lives together instead of trying to act religious, God would have a chance to show Himself to the world.

Jesus held no regular meetings. When someone asked Him about His life, He didn't tell them to 'come to my church at 10:00 next Sunday morning.' He just lived, spontaneously - and people lived alongside Him, sharing in whatever He did. His friends weren't the churchgoers: they were the fishermen, the prostitutes, the ordinary blue and white collar workers of His society. And because He spent time among them - sometimes even going off for days with a great crowd of them together - they got to see the treasure that shone through the earthen vessel of His very ordinary human body.

Why do we make such a 'thing in itself' out of believing? We have to have a special building, a special time, a special format. That was the way the old covenant was, and it served to keep people at arm's length from God. How radical Jesus must have sounded when He said that the physical situation doesn't matter a hill of beans!

"Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father . . . But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers" (John 4).

Christ indwells the whole of our life. Whatever we do, it is to be to His glory. That means God is seen in our work, in our family life, in our recreation, in our meal times, no matter where we are or what we are doing. No part of life is more 'holy' than another. If I sing praises in a meeting with other Christians, He shines through my flesh; and if I sit in a coffee shop sharing experiences of the day with a workmate, He comes through. A love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and so on, that people know I don't have of myself, just 'comes through.'

Somehow, we've got the idea that to be 'holy' means to act in a certain manner. When I say that 'God is seen in our work, in our family life,' and so on, that immediately conjures up the idea of really trying to 'be like Jesus' in all those situations. No, that's not what I mean! I'm not talking about trying to act like a believer is supposed to. I'm talking about being natural-

being yourself - and through that every day, normal you, comes life. That is glory. "*Christ in us is our hope of glory*" (Col. 1:27).

Putting our best foot forward with God is a waste of time. He knows we're just clay pots, so we're not fooling anybody. What He calls for is rank honesty - just being ourselves. Then He will live through us. It is His life that is going to be glorious, not our seeming limitations. Holiness is knowing that we are one with Him, and letting Him shed abroad love, joy, friendliness, concern through us as vehicles, where and how He chooses.

Our playing religious games, trying to be good, doing what we are 'supposed' to do, doesn't fool God - neither do we fool the world. Religion turns most people off. Jesus was so right when He said, 'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing' (John 6:63). If we would just live where we are 'at,' being real, instead of putting on a religious act, God's glory would be seen in us.

The question is, do we believe it? That is the key. This glorious salvation is "*from faith to faith*"; it begins in faith, and it is carried out in faith to the very end. If we would really believe that we are living letters - that Christ is our life, and that He is quite capable of shining through the veil of our flesh - the rivers of living water would flow spontaneously out. We don't have to try to direct them; we just have to live normal lives, and the lives of others will be watered, often without our even knowing it.

So we have come full circle. Faith is the way God lives in our flesh and is seen by those around us. But to have faith, God must reveal Himself in us; until that time, we are trusting only in an external concept. And the only way to break into this vicious circle is to be honest about where you are at.

If God has revealed Himself and you know Him within, be bold in it. Confess you are a living letter, despite the outer vessel. And if He hasn't yet revealed Himself within you, don't take crutches for a substitute but ask Him to create within you that fixed inner 'knowing' that you and He are one. Then confess that it is so, and in due time the manifestation will come forth and faith will become its own evidence.

Before you know it, the rivers will begin to flow and people will encounter Christ as they encountered God in Jesus 1900 years ago. And that, dear friends, is glory.