

Facts – The Foundation of Faith

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to I John, Chapter 1. I shall ask you to give closest attention to the 3rd verse. Great profit would come to your heart were you to memorize this verse. It is, I believe, one of the key verses in the important theme that's engaged us for these many weeks. I believe you will understand the import of it better if I begin with the 1 verse.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Our faith rests upon facts, historical facts, the first of which is set forth in this text, the fact that Jesus Christ is from the beginning. Writing of Him in his larger Gospel, the Apostle John established once and for all the identity of our Lord Jesus Christ. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not” (Joh. 1:1-10).

But John declared that the fellowship to which he had come and to which he called those to whom he wrote was based upon this fact, that Jesus Christ was eternal God, that by Him all things were made, by Him all things continued to be sustained, that He had been, and was, and ever would be the sovereign ruler of the universe. This is the foundation fact of Christianity, that the Man, Christ Jesus is none other than eternal God, “that which was from the beginning,” without beginning and without ending, “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (Rev. 1:8). He has identified again in this little letter the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also know that the fact that joins to this is that He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. And our faith rests upon this fact, the supernatural entrance of Jesus Christ, eternal God, into the world by means of the Virgin Birth. We hold to be true, absolutely and incontestably true, that Jesus Christ was born of a Virgin, conceived by the direct, supernatural, and immediate operation of the Holy Ghost.

We further hold that He lived a sinless life. This is a fact, that He was without fault, without sin, that of Him the Father broke the silence of the ages while man had walked on earth and said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Luk. 3:22). He could say it of none other. He did say it of none other. The Lord Jesus Christ.

We also hold to be a fact that He was tempted at all points, like as we are, yet without sin, that His identity with us was so complete and so perfect, that He could put Himself in our place and feel the full weight of resting, tearing temptation, yet without sin.

We hold further to be a fact that the Lord Jesus Christ died, certainly at the hands of men, taken by His consent. For when He used His Name, I Am, the soldiers fell on their faces in His Presence. He could only be led by a slender rope, because He consented to be led. In His prayer in Gethsemane's Garden, He had identified Himself with me and with you, and was thus in His eyes and the eyes of the Father, laden with our sin. And because we deserved no escape, He accepted no escape.

We hold that it was men who judged Him wrongly, and called for His death, that Pilate in cowardice refused to uphold the law that he ought to have upheld, and gave Him over to that death which was demanded by the people out of fear, and that He died, not at the hands of men by their sword; He died of a broken heart, releasing His Spirit, for the wounds that He received were not the cause of His death. The cause of His death was the release He gave when He declared, “Father, into Thy hands I

commend My Spirit" (Luk. 23:46). And He died voluntarily. He died of His will. He died for me and for you, in your place instead, to satisfy the laws just and last demand. We hold this to be a fact.

We further hold it to be true that Jesus Christ was bodily raised from the dead, that the 3rd day that God life, which could not die, returned to that bruised body, and He came forth in the triumph of His resurrection, breaking every band, and bursting every shackle, to stand forth now, leading captivity captive; and the resurrection body of Jesus Christ we hold to be today in the Heavens at the right hand of the Throne on High, as the first fruit of the resurrection, and the sign, and the seal, and the testimony that God has accepted the death of His Son in the place of sinners.

We further hold it to be a fact that every son of Adam, every daughter of Eve under the sentence of death, laden with sin and guilt, seeing their crime and knowing their just condemnation, that will come and stand at the foot of the Cross, and see Jesus Christ dying in their place and in their stead, and submitting themselves to His saviorhood and to His sovereignty can know forgiveness, will know pardon, will know peace, will pass from death to life, and will become a partaker of the Divine Nature.

Now these are facts, facts that are the foundation of our faith. We hold them to be so. These facts have been attested by honest men, unlettered men and unambitious men, men that were engaged in their occupations and were content to pursue them, until Jesus Christ came to them and called them, not to some grandiose scheme, but to Himself, to an absolute and total submission to His undefined and unexplained will and purpose; that these men had no reason other than their loyalty to Him and love for Him to leave their tasks and the security that these tasks represented. They were not ambitious in that final sense of ambition. They were submissive in the final sense of submission, and they did follow a Person.

We hold that these men, in cowardice, fled when Jesus Christ was taken, and was accused, and was led before the judges. Many of them fled out of fear at the earliest, others followed afar off, one fled when accosted by a little damsel who accused him of having been associated with Christ, and the others fled, one even leaving his coat in his hurry to escape detention. We hold that these men demonstrated that their faith and their confidence in Christ had wavered. They were prepared to in despondency speak to one another concerning what they had hoped and thought might have been, and there is no evidence from the record that as He was buried they had any personal confidence in His resurrection. But the 3rd day, raised from the dead, revealed unto Peter and to John, and then to the entire company gathered in the Upper Room; these men became convinced that Jesus Christ was alive. And on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came upon them, assembled as they were and waiting as they had been instructed, so clothing them, so possessing them, so filling them with the resurrection life of Christ, that when one of them spoke on that day, 3 thousand bowed their knees to Christ. And of this company of 11, all died martyrs deaths, save one, John the writer, who was martyred and sentenced to die by being boiled in a cauldron of oil, but being extracted from the cauldron was instantly healed; and thus, because he had submitted to the demands of the law and had been delivered from it, he was exiled to the Island of Patmos to finish there his days with certain release that finally came to him.

These men sealed their testimony with their lives. They were simple men, they were humble men, they were tradesmen, they were not philosophers, and they were not the wise of the train. And these men, having testified that Jesus Christ was God come in the flesh, that He lived a sinless life, that He died an atoning death, that He was gloriously and bodily, and triumphantly raised from the dead, and bodily ascended into heaven, established the foundation upon which our fellowship rests. And thus when John declares that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of Life, he is giving to us the firm foundation upon which our fellowship presently rests, and all Christian fellowship through the ages has had to rest. But unfortunately it is thought by some that Christian fellowship can be solely and only in the facts. And this is regrettable, because it is extremely difficult for one to have warm communion and joyous fellowship in facts. As important as these facts are, and essential as they are, if your fellowship today in the Christian community is solely and only upon the facts, it is orthodox, but it is very likely joyless. It is true, but it is possibly lifeless. For our fellowship must not finally rest upon the facts. It must always rest upon the facts, but not finally rest upon the facts. For the fact declares that Jesus Christ is alive from the dead, and the early church found its fellowship, not primarily on a creed, but in a Person who was alive from the dead, and who would reveal Himself to everyone who would submit to the facts, and the demand of these facts. And Christianity loses its vitality, loses its strength and its vigor, loses its

impact upon any community where it is thus revealed to be entirely upon facts, for then it is soon to be that these facts will be challenged, and their import eroded. And gradually it will come that men give lip service to a creed, but heart service to some other interest. And this certainly characterizes 20th century Christianity, where men will avow that they believe the 39 articles of the Episcopal Church, and then systematically do everything they can to destroy and any vestige of confidence in the articles. For men will say that they believe in the Westminster Confession and so affirm their faith, and then systematically and regularly do everything they can to destroy the last vestige of confidence in that Catechism and Confession.

Whenever Christianity finds its fellowship in a Creed, there is the immediate erosion of that fellowship, and the distortion of it, and the pollution of it. Creeds are necessary because they are extractions of truth, but fellowship that is based upon a creed is a dwindling, a dying, a receding, and a disintegrating fellowship. And John, having established for us that our faith rests upon the foundation of facts, hurriedly proceeds to say that this is not the foundation upon which the fellowship rests. For he says, "The life was manifested. We have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us. That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that you may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

The facts are there, never to be discounted. The facts are certain, never to be challenged. The facts are necessary, never to be abandoned. They must be facts. But fellowship cannot be on facts. On the foundation of facts, one can have fellowship with a person. I hold that anyone who challenges these facts cannot have, if he deliberately challenges them, knowing the alternative, cannot have fellowship with the Person of the Son of God. We hear today about many mystical experiences and supernatural visitations of one kind and another, but if it is of God you will inevitably find that these facts are there, adhered to and held, and the foundation upon which such rests. I agree completely with John of Ruysbroeck¹ who, speaking of one in his day who claimed to have had a vision of Christ outside the truth of the church, said of himself, "If I saw a vision of Jesus Christ and Moses and Elijah didn't come to stand one on the right hand, and one on the left, I wouldn't believe a word that that visualized Jesus said." He meant to say was that anything Jesus Christ said would agree with the law and with the prophets.

So we have the Word as the rule, the Word is that safeguard. There is a highway there, and a way, said the prophet, and the way faring man, though a fool, need not err therein, because the Word is the rule.

But our fellowship can't be in the text. It can be upon the text, in Him; but if it is in the text, we are Bibliolaters, and not Christian. And I am afraid that today there have been some out of a mistaken sense of loyalty to the Word have placed their fellowship upon their mutual ignorance, or their mutual understanding of the Word. They have established little esoterically achieved laws of interpretation, schemes and patterns of understanding, and they find their fellowship in this. If fellowship is in an organization, it is less than Christian fellowship. It is merely in a human enterprise that has taken religious names. If fellowship is in a person other than Jesus Christ, it is similar to any other fan club-as far as its moral and spiritual significance is concerned, it is but a human enterprise, graced with Biblical names. If fellowship is in a task, it is similar to any other task around which men will gather and congregate, the Tuberculosis Association, or the Society for the Removal and Cure of Muscular Dystrophy, or even the carrying of the literature of the Gospel to some Tribe. If fellowship is in a task, if fellowship is in a person, if fellowship is in an organization, if fellowship is in a creed, it is less than Christian.

Now Christian fellowship will have all of these, they will be present, but they will not be grounds of fellowship. And so we have established for us once and for all that Christian fellowship must first be with the Father, and with the Son, before it can be with others. It becomes less than Biblical, less than New Testament, less than Christian. You can get even devils to join an organization that has a statement of orthodoxy as the foundation of its fellowship, because they would hold it to be so, and never submit to it. You could get any humanist or philanthropist to join an organization that has as its task the relieving of human misery and suffering in distant lands. You could get anyone to join an organization that has as its end the intricate maneuverings and manipulations of that organization. For we are people who like order and love organization. And it can all be graced with Christian names and Christian terms and Christian titles, and Christian ritual, and be less than Christian; because

¹ John of Ruysbroeck (1293-4-1381)

Christian fellowship has a presupposition, and it is that one has fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, and on the basis of this immediate, personal, subjective, interior fellowship with God he can then have fellowship with others who have fellowship with God.

And John is saying once and for all that the foundation of all Christian fellowship with other people is first fellowship with God. And if you and I meet on our mutual understanding of this Book, if we meet on our mutual interests in a mission task, if we meet on our mutual interest in organizational operations, or in ritual peculiarities, we may or may not have fellowship; but it is not implicit in the fact that we so meet. We only can have fellowship when we have fellowship with the Father, and fellowship with the Son. And because we have fellowship with the living God, then we can have fellowship one with another.

Oh, this is so important, this is so supremely important, this is of the utmost importance to you. I am confident that I am making bold and probably subject to censor when I say that multitudes of people that have had fellowship on doctrine and creed, will find themselves in Hell. Multitudes of people that have had fellowship in orthodox organization will find themselves there. Multitudes of people that have had fellowship in a task will find themselves there. Multitudes of people that have had fellowship in a ritual, and a ceremony, and in an observance will find themselves there. In fact, I will make so bold as to say, The only people that will find themselves in Heaven are the people that in time have had fellowship with the Father and with His Son, that this is the foundation of all Christian testimony, this is the foundation of all Christian life, and this is the foundation of all Christian fellowship.

Now where came we to the pass that we might be found today, generally speaking of our Christian world, why is it that it is thought that because a person agrees with a doctrinal statement he can assume he is Christian. I think it goes back to the conflict of Deism and Liberalism a hundred years and more ago when there were those that challenged the inspiration of the Bible, and challenged the Deity of Christ, and challenged His sinless life, and His atoning death, and His bodily resurrection. And our fathers in the faith said, We hold these to be facts, and our fellowship must be based upon these facts. And so there was a break a hundred years ago in which the church was divided into two camps, liberal and fundamental. And I hold absolutely with these fundamentals. I hold them, as we have stated, as frankly and as fully as I know how to that they are essential. In fact, though the term has become opprobrious because of the accusations of its enemies, I am prepared to call myself, because of my implicit and absolute confidence in the necessity of the facts, a fundamentalist. Because I believe Christianity cannot be Biblical Christianity apart from these fundamentals.

But that same hundred years ago, there were men who saying fellowship must be with Christ on these facts, then turned around and said, You become part of the fellowship by holding to these facts. And so it wasn't long until people were being inducted to the church, into the church, on the basis of their consenting to these facts. And it was then assumed that if they held these things to be true, they could presume they were Christian. And so through the decades that passed, there was a gradual erosion of significance in Christian life and testimony until finally in the 20th century we have come to the place where some have thought that if anyone even said Jesus is Lord and muttered it even in an imprecation that they would absolutely be saved, because all that was necessary was to utter certain facts.

No, salvation today is as it ever was. It is absolutely necessary for one to understand the facts in order to be saved, but it absolutely necessary for one to submit to the Person, identified and revealed by the facts, in order to be saved. And thus we hold that repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus are the indispensable prerequisites for forgiveness, and to repent is to change one's mind about who is to rule in the life, and who is to be boss and it is to unquestionably, and absolutely, and finally, and irrevocably give over into the hands of Jesus Christ the control of one's life, to receive Him as He is presented. The facts say that He is eternal God, the sinless man, virgin born, died and was raised from the dead. It isn't just to hold this to be true, but it is to receive Him, to receive Him as He is presented as Prince and Savior. We hold that it is absolutely and necessary for one to repent, though we do not hold that we need spell repentance, or to know it; but he has to have done it. Many people have been wonderfully saved, and the context of their witness that came to them did not know the Word, or did not use it, but that is what they did when they hear it. They say, Yes, that is what happened to me.

We further hold that faith is not merely in agreeing to these facts, but faith is a commitment to the Person revealed by the facts, that this is what faith means, this is what it means to believe on Christ.

We further hold that when one has truly repented of his sin, and savingly received Christ, he is born of God, and God by the Spirit makes Him a new creation, and God by the Spirit joins Himself to that one, and he knows that he is a Christian, because he has begun to have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Related to this, we say that there is only one person in all the universe that has a right to tell a soul they are saved, and that is the God who saves them; because salvation is the impartation of life by a sovereign and a supernatural act of God. And so the Christian life must begin with an encounter with God, wherein one is drawn out of the natural-on the basis of the facts, yes, but on a leap of faith that reaches out to embrace the Son of God and so relates one to Him that they are born of the Spirit and passed from death unto life. And they know they are saved. The Word of God is clear. No question about it at all.

For in I John 5:10 we hear it said, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness within himself." The witness in the Word is not discounted thereby. But on the basis of the Word, to receive Him one knows because He has come to bring life.

Again we read in Galatians 4:4-6, "In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law that they might receive the adoption of sons." And since we are sons, "He has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." And it is the "Spirit of His Son in our hearts, crying Abba, Father," telling us that we are born of God, that allows us to know that we are beginning to have fellowship with the Father and with His Son; because His Spirit within us is crying Abba, Father. And we know, because He has revealed Himself to us.

How tragic it is when people have savingly received Christ, but they have received their assurance from their friends. And they haven't recognized the still small voice of the Spirit of God speaking in their hearts. And so never having had beginning consciousness of fellowship with God, it is so extremely difficult for them to have continuing fellowship with God. And this is why in dealing with the unsaved, we ought to press them and crowd them, and move them to Christ so that the very first step over the threshold they know Him who is invisible to their eyes, but real to their hearts, and who assures them they have passed from death to life, and enables them to cry Abba, Father.

Let me ask you, Is your fellowship in the Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ? or is it merely in facts? Oh, I must not use the word, mere. For these are the facts upon which our faith rests, and without which no one can know Him. Should I say, Is your fellowship only in the facts and not in the Father and in His Son? For the Father and the Son are not only known by the facts but through the facts. They are known immediately, and personally. And it's this that John said, and this that he brings to us, that the Christian fellowship is a fellowship that begins with an immediate, personal invasion of your heart by God through the Spirit wherein you know you have passed from death to life, and you have had converse begun that can continue and enlarge. We must leave it at this point.

We come to the Lord's Table, and as we come it is His Table. Who are those that are welcome to it? Who are those that can have fellowship about it? They are those who have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Do you belong to that fellowship? Do you know with that inner knowing that you have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son? It is His Table. And this is the fellowship that binds us together, not only that we have seen Him set forth, we have heard of the truth concerning Him, we know that He has been handled and looked upon, and we know that there are facts are so, but we know Him, we know Him. For life is in the Son, and "he that hath the Son hath life" (I Joh. 5:12). And if you have life, life in the Son, then you are welcome to His Table.

But there is a Table for you that may not feel welcome to this Table. It is another Table of which this is but the picture. It is the table in the Wilderness, and in the midst of your enemies, God's dear Son became bread and wine, His body given to the cross, His Blood poured out in death that He might redeem you. And so, if you say, Well I do not have that certainty of which you speak, then He waits to meet you, and will make real to you the fact that you have passed from death to life. And then you can have fellowship in the Father, with the Father, and in the Son and with the Son. And so no one is excluded. If you do not feel welcome to this Table, you are welcome to that where He died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring you to God. And

falling before Him, as did the publican crying, God, be merciful to me a sinner, you can know pardon and forgiveness, and the sweet witness of His Spirit to your heart enabling you to cry, Abba, Father. You see, if you haven't, you can. And so there is no one omitted in the breaking of the Bread.

Let us bow our hearts together in prayer. We thank Thee for Thy Word, our Father. We thank Thee for the affirmation of our faith. We thank Thee for the foundation of our faith. We thank Thee that it rests upon facts, incontestable and true. But, O our God, we are so grateful that when standing upon these facts we reach our hands out in faith to receive Jesus Christ Thy glorified Son as Lord and Savior, we are passed from death to life, and He comes in to make us new creatures, "Christ in us the Hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). And should there be, and undoubtedly there are among us those who do not know Him in this vital real way, though church members they may have been, or be, might they today see the absolute necessity of having fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Not just as a word, not just as a logical deduction to their faith, not as an inference from their acts, but a Person whom they have met, in vital transforming reality. Seal to our hearts the truth, and grant that as we continue to consider it in its aspects and meaning, that our hearts shall be enriched and our fellowship shall become that kind of fellowship that we see set forth in the Word, a fellowship that is first with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ in order that it might be that rich, full, free, and meaningful fellowship that our Lord Jesus died that it could be.

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, as we wait this fleeting moment in His presence, ask your own heart, How real is He to you? How certain are you that you know Him? If there is any vestige of doubt, then this whole ministry is to the end to help you to answer questions, to clarify difficulties, to help you. And if you will but remain, there will be someone, kindly and competent in heart and spirit that will be so happy to talk and pray with you. We invite you to make known your need following the service. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle, New York City on Sunday Morning, December 2, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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