

Communion

God knows us by name

Tim Maurice

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The gift of faith

We all know that Christians need to believe and have faith. But just *what* are we to believe? What faith are we to have?

We can't generate Christian faith, no matter how hard we try, for this faith is not within us and can't be produced by us. It is given to us by the Lord:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;" (Ephesians 2:8)

We *all* need the faith God gives, for unless He gives us faith, all we have is our own blind hopefulness. Without *His* faith, we have no ability to believe the truth and therefore, we believe something other than the truth, something that is not true.

The apostle Paul taught that faith comes to us as we believe, and we then speak accordingly:

"Having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written¹, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you." (2 Corinthians 4:13-14)

When the Scripture says, "I believed, therefore I spoke", it does not mean, 'I believed and spoke what was in my own head or from my religious experience'. Our own convictions, however sincere they may be, are not necessarily the truth. Unless God gives us *His* faith, we have nothing substantial to believe. Without Him we *cannot* believe the truth. We can only speculate and live by our personal convictions or emotional biases.

Many Christians hold deep, personal convictions about a whole raft of things: about the Scriptures; about what the church is (or should be); about who they and other people are and should behave; even about who God is and how He lives (or should live) . We can lean on all kinds of understandings, but there is only one *true* understanding, and that is God's.

If we are led by our own thoughts or feelings about God, people, the church or anything else, we will base our actions on these self-sourced views that may feel very comfortable and be consoling to us but are based in lies rather than the truth. Indeed, the whole world is consoling

¹ Psalm 116:10

itself with false views that have become so widely believed and deeply held that they form the convictions and foundations of the world's moral codes and actions. But when we console ourselves with strong convictions that are only comfortable lies, we feel empowered but are left deluded. The apostle Paul warned us that the consequence of refusing to love the truth would be delusion (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11).

A name and a pathway given by God

The point we are considering today in relation to Christian belief is that without the wisdom of God, we cannot know who we really are or understand our way (Proverbs 14:8; 20:24).

Cain, the firstborn son of Adam, believed in God. He believed in offering. He knew that approaching God was a better way to live than not approaching Him. He knew God's covenant because he'd been born into it. The trouble was, he had no idea *how* to offer or bring himself into fellowship with the Lord God. Cain had no idea of the way he was to go because he didn't understand his name. And when the Lord spoke to him to reorient him to his name, Cain became very angry (Genesis 4:1-5).

The Lord has prepared or predestined for each person a name and a unique pathway for them to walk according to that name. No other path we can define for ourselves has any true substance. Take the apostle Paul, for example. Living by the faith God had given him, Paul could not define himself as a teacher instead of the apostle he was named to be; nor could he decide to do the Christian work he thought would be best. He could not formulate his own unique work of evangelism, equip other Christians to follow his formula, then send them out to do the same work. By the faith Paul had received, he could not forego the pathway God had for him when that pathway took him through great suffering. Paul chose

God's will for his life, and for him there was *only* that will and no other. There was for him only the specific predestination God had for him. No alternative. No modification.

Just as Paul's name and call from God, and his obedience to that name and call, were very specific to him, so your name, call and obedience are very specific to you. If you *don't* walk according to the specific name and way God has prepared for you, then you will not be walking in obedience. You will instead be going merrily on your own way, mistakenly thinking that because you believe and speak Christian things you are living a Christian life and have God's blessing. But that is not what the Bible teaches, and God is dealing with this mistaken belief in us, polarizing the issue for us, so that we can believe His gospel and not a nonsensical lie that will land us in hell.

There is no path for our feet except *His* path for us, and His grace is operative toward us only as we walk on this path. When we are exhorted to make straight paths for our feet, those straight paths are the effective paths that *He* sets, healing what is lame and sustaining us on our journey so that we are not turned out of the way (Hebrews 12:13).

In His mercy, God causes what is lame in us to trip us up so that we can see the lameness and turn to Him. While ever we walk in a pathway that He has not set for us, we will be lame and weak in coping with life. But when we turn to the Lord and come to Him, He sets our feet in the true path that *He* has set for us to walk blamelessly before Him.

The path God has fashioned for us will at times be difficult and involve things we don't want, but it is the pathway to life. It is the way we grow up; it is the medicine that will heal us. Holding on to our own fake religion only infects

us with problems, leaving us without true light and without understanding who we really are.

Known by individual name

Every person is born with a unique identity. We know that our individual consciousness is different from everyone else's. We have individual initiative and we want our life to have purpose. Even people who are dead in sin desire to endow their lives with meaning, but they are driven in this desire by their need of personal validity and verification. This need motivates people to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). However, whether we are a believer or not, whether we are in God's house or not, making a name for ourselves is rebelling against God.

It is all too possible to believe in Christ's work *for* us yet still rebel against the Father's naming of us. Jesus was referring to this when He spoke of people who would come to Him claiming to have done many good works and performed miracles in His name but whom He would not know (Mathew 7:21-23). Acting on our own initiative instead of in Jesus' name, we will really be making a name for ourselves - a name unknown to God. Truly, Jesus will *not* know those who live this way, and will turn them away as workers of iniquity who chose not to abide in Him and His way for them but to turn from His way and go their own.

A worker of iniquity is someone who will not work the righteousness of God that is given to them. They build their own righteousness by which they live and in which they will die, unknown to God and forever separated from Him. We need to heed this warning! It is all too possible for *us* to work iniquity, being in the house of God, even performing miracles, yet walking in our own path, never receiving the life of God but blindly proceeding to damnation.

Here is a critical point: the truth of our name is written in heaven, just as Jesus told the disciples:

"...rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20).

That does not mean that the name you go by is listed on a roll somewhere in heaven. It means that the identity God has given you is written in heaven. Before each of us was even conceived, God fashioned a pathway, or predestination, for each one of us as a vessel of honour and mercy *if* we will choose what He has chosen for us. But the grace of God is not irresistible. It is possible for us to reject the name and path the Lord sets before us and instead make our own name and go our own way.

God's pathway or our own

Just as there is a pathway to life for each person, so, if we reject that pathway, there is a pathway to damnation. God's way for us leads to life. Our own way leads to destruction, even though it seems right to us and we may seem to get away with it for years (Proverbs 14:12). But the way we choose for ourselves will eventually unravel. No matter what we believe to the contrary, our way will not prevail. If it is not God's purpose or His will, and if we keep pursuing our own way, we will in the end find only destruction.

Sometimes our own way is a counterfeit of God's way, and we work very hard by religious reasoning, even manipulating the Scriptures, to convince ourselves and other people that our way *is* God's way. Only, it isn't. It is wayward, and inevitably produces fruit that shows what is actually going on.

Any person will walk the pathway to damnation if they rebel against God's naming of them. This was the case for the disciple Judas, who, by his own choices, became a vessel of wrath instead

of a vessel of mercy (Acts 1:16-25). If we choose *not* to go God's way, then in the end, He will give us to the path we have chosen, and we be left without a choice. People may think they make and choose their own way, but truly, once a person has chosen to reject God, they are propelled down a pathway over which they have no control.

Jesus said to His disciples:

"You did not choose Me but I chose you..." (John 15:16)

The scope of our choice is this: we either receive the Lord's word or we harden our hearts and reject His word. God's thoughts toward us are so much higher than ours they don't even enter our minds (Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9)! It is God who does all the choosing in relation to our path and what we are to do. He does not leave us freewheeling in the dark, trying to find the way. His pathway for us is the path of faith, the path of the just, shining brighter and brighter (Proverbs 4:18), and the word of God illuminates this path to us.

It is by hearing the word of God that faith comes to us (Romans 10:17). This faith is the gift of God, not something that we can source within ourselves (Ephesians 2:8). When we believe that God is, He rewards those who earnestly seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). God spoke this to Abraham, saying:

"Do not be afraid... I am your shield; your exceedingly great reward." (Genesis 15:1).

The word of God that came to Abraham completely reoriented him and gave him the pathway of his predestination. When God spoke of Himself as Abraham's reward, He was speaking about the specific purpose of Abraham's life. It is the same for us. The reward of God is not like a prize, like giving lollies to children or money to contest winners. The reward is Himself. *He* is our reward when we

obediently follow Him, walking as He walked, all the way to death. *That* is where we find Him as our reward, for His resurrection life flows to us as we die with Him.

From fear to faith

When God addressed Abraham, He gave him the gift of faith and commanded him not to fear (Genesis 15:1). Fear is an elemental principle of the world that drives the behaviour of every single person under the sun. *Everyone*, irrespective of nationality, tribe, or tongue, does what they do and keeps on doing what they do based fundamentally on fear. We get up each day and we get on with the day. We do all kinds of things that look and sound positive but underneath them all, whether we recognise it or not, is fear.

Abraham's fear needed to be addressed. His promised heir was slow in coming. More than two years after the promise was given, he had become rather downcast and fearful because nothing of the promise had apparently come to pass. So that Abraham could live by faith, God addressed him in his fearfulness, commanding him, 'Do not be afraid' (Genesis 15:1).

If *we* are to live by faith, we need God to address our fear, for until He does so we cannot even *begin* to learn to live by faith. When God *does* address our fear, it won't mean that we will never be afraid again, but it *will* mean that fear will no longer drive the way we live.

In addressing Abraham's fear, God gave him *His own* faith. When He said to Abraham, 'I am your shield', He was giving *Himself* as Abraham's shield - his shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16). Now, we know that faith works by love (Galatians 5:6), so as well as giving Abraham faith, God was pouring in His love. By His faith and love poured in, the Lord completely changed and reoriented the purpose, direction, and attitude of

Abraham's life, and became Abraham's reward. Previously, although God had promised him a son, Abraham had been anxious about *not* having a son to be his heir, and had resigned himself to making his steward, Eliezer of Damascus, his heir. But when the Lord gave Himself to Abraham as his shield and reward, the faith and love of God was given to Abraham to believe what was planned for him instead of being afraid.

Prior to this, Melchizedek had shared communion with Abraham, but this had not addressed his fear (Genesis 14:18-20). He needed the gift of God's faith regarding the birth of the promised son. God had appointed Abraham to be the father of a nation. The wonder of this promise had been beyond Abraham's imagination, faith, and capacity to fulfil - but well within God's. It is the same for us. What God has written about us has not even entered our hearts or imaginations. And even if we could know it His plan, we couldn't fulfil it. We can *never* find the capacity within ourselves to bring His plan for us to pass. We can't even obey Him! To walk in the pathway of our inheritance is a miracle of God, just as it was for Abraham. If we are to walk in His pathway for us, and inherit what God has for us, we *need* His miraculous gift.

The pathway of faith

If we hear the Lord's word to us and think either, 'I can't measure up to that word so I won't even try' or, 'I'm such a terrific Christian I will certainly do that,' then we will not find His pathway. How, then, do find and we learn to walk on our pathway of faith, just as Abraham walked on his?

Paul gives us the answer:

"Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes,

who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other." (1 Corinthians 4:5-6)

The Corinthian Christians were a very gifted but carnal and divided church. Differing opinions and factions were rife among them. Although the church had grown rapidly in numbers and in spiritual gifts, they were faring poorly, unable even to agree with one another. They were certainly not abiding in a fellowship of one spirit. Therefore, Paul addressed them, reminding them of the gospel he had taught them:

"...when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling..." (1 Corinthians 2:1-3).

In bringing the gospel to them, Paul taught them about the weakness of God and how that weakness worked in him. He described Apollos and himself as living, walking models of the gospel; as ones who had heard the word of the cross and were living it among them to show them how to live; to teach them not to exceed what was written about them, just as Paul did not exceed what was written about him.

Paul understood what was written about him. He knew his name. The Corinthians' problem was that they evidently did not know theirs. They were full of religious mania, immorality, and factional hatred. They didn't realise what they were doing but were puffed up against

one another. Described by Paul as ‘mere men’, they were carnal (1 Corinthians 3:2).

Although we are ‘mere men’, we are not to be carnal! We are to be spiritual. God gave Apollos and Paul to the Corinthians and to us to model this spiritual life - a life they lived and walked out among the Corinthians. Paul had given them the whole scheme and shape of the gospel, and himself as a type of it, calling them to follow his example so that they would learn not to exceed what was written (1 Corinthians 4:5-6).

‘Mathēte’, the Greek word the Scripture uses here for ‘learn’, is related to the word for disciple. To learn is to be a disciple - an essential aspect of Christian life that is not negotiable. We become disciples of the word of Christ, which we hear preached and which we read in the Scriptures, when we observe the word applied in the lives of those who teach us.

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7).

The eternal life of God is a fellowship

Abraham followed the faith of God, as we are to do. And surely, if we are in a fellowship of those who know their God-given name, we can walk together and follow one another's faith. We can testify to the faith of brethren who have walked faithfully with us and whose faith we have followed over many years. The faith of Yahweh comes from, and is found in, His fellowship, into which we are called by name.

The Christian life is an absolute of life. God lives a certain way, and this is the way He wants us to live. We are not to follow our own faith, full of our own convictions and commentary about life. We are not to be authorities unto ourselves, puffed up against one another.

Neither are we to be carried away with strange doctrines. Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday, tomorrow, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The doctrine to which we were delivered is the doctrine of our baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and this doctrine is to be our master. If it is not, then we will have a lot of strange doctrines floating around in our head.

In His fellowship, God can deal with the issues and problems we have, even those that have troubled us for a long time. He is patient. But if our problem stems from the fact that we are serving a master other than God, a doctrine other than our baptism into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, we are placing ourselves outside God's help.

In fellowship with our brethren in Christ, we can receive the faith that God has for our lives. We can learn to understand the truth that is written about us - the truth of our name. As we learn and believe this truth, we will therefore speak. We will be emboldened to testify truly (2 Corinthians 4:13).

Christians are not solitary. God has called us into His fellowship in His body, the church. However, it is possible to attend church in a very solitary way, being self-sourced, self-referencing and self-determining, speaking what we think to be true instead of the testimony of faith we are *meant* to speak.

The testimony of faith is the evidence that the faith and grace of God have come to us, strengthening us to walk in obedience to the specific name He has fashioned for us and given to us. The testimony of faith is not vague or theoretical and doesn't base itself in Christian ideals or aspirations. The faith of God believes God and enables us to walk in God's way by the grace God gives us to walk in that way. God does *not*, however, give grace to us to walk as

we think fit, and if we walk that way, our testimony will not be the testimony of faith.

When we are living according to God's way for us, we are participating in the dialogue of the Lord and can therefore speak in a fellowship of faith among our brethren. That is what Abraham was called to participate in when God appeared to him as the Three Men at the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 15). We have spoken previously about prayer in the secret place as a meeting of four - a dialogue between the Lord God² (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and you. God wants to meet with you as the one He has named you to be, the person you really are. He does not want to meet with your alternative version of who you think you are, or who you want to be.

The Lord God is completely who He is. He is *I AM*, and there is no shadow, turning or lie in Him. In His dialogue, Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not declare or promote their individual perspective or capacity. In true fellowship of love, they make offering, and in this fellowship, Jesus confesses our name before the Father.

When Jesus spoke to the presbytery of the church in Sardis, He said:

"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.'" (Revelation 3:1)

Although He was speaking to a dead presbytery, He is also speaking through the Scripture to every person, including you.

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die..." (Revelation 3:2).

A pathway of faith received

'Be watchful' reminds us of Jesus' command to His disciples to watch and pray with Him in Gethsemane. If we have been rebellious, going our own way, unwilling to join His death, then we are going to need to strengthen what is left and dying; what has so far avoided being devoured but is about to go the same way because of our fear of death. Jesus does not want what remains to die, and so that it doesn't die, He is warning us to strengthen what remains.

"...for I have not found your works perfect before God." (Revelation 3:2).

The Lord has this to say to all of us. He has *not* found our works perfect before Him. But when we hear Him say that to us, through a messenger He sends, is it the end of the world? Is it not rather a beginning? When we hear that we are doing poorly, we have opportunity to stop doing what we are doing, turn to the Lord, and by faith, start doing what God is asking of us.

"So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent." (Revelation 3:3)

Paul had to remind the Corinthians that they were not the source but recipients of the word of God. A messenger had come to them in much fear and trembling with word of the cross (1 Corinthians 4:7). The word did not come to them through theological training or their own introspective study of Bible meanings. They received something they did not have; something that had not entered their hearts until they joined God's fellowship. We, too, need to remember how the word of God first found us, and hold fast to what we have

² Yahweh Elohim - the Three who are One

received. Wherever we have *not* held fast, we need to repent.

“Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.” (Revelation 3:3).

This is a warning to us! If we will not watch and pray with the Lord, and join His fellowship, we will be unaware of whatever things we have chosen and named for ourselves. Then Jesus will come as a thief and take the choice out of our hands. We will find ourselves in all kinds of trouble, accusing others of having done the wrong thing by us; thinking and behaving as if we are victims; unresolved and agitated. That is not how we want to end up, so take heed to Jesus and watch and pray with Him!

“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” (Revelation 3:4-5).

The overcoming Jesus is referring to here relates to their remembering and keeping of they had heard and received, and to their repentance. Jesus is also commanding *us* to overcome this way and therefore be clothed in white garments, not blotted out from the book of life. Rather, Jesus will confess our name before the Father and His angels. The Son of God, our Good Shepherd, will stand and say of us, ‘This one is with Me. He, or she, is Mine.’ Jesus will not lose even one of those who are with Him, who watch and pray with Him, whom He helps. We need to hear His exhortation, be diligent, and overcome in *this* way.

If you have been stuck in a place of deadness like those in Sardis, God wants you to be

unstuck! He doesn't want to condemn you - He wants to get you out of the mud.

A journey of humble obedience

It would be very foolish, when someone with a tow rope comes to drag you out of a mire, to berate them for suggesting you are bogged. You can hardly pretend you are just enjoying the view from a dark pit. If you are bogged down, will you let some brethren help you? Will you let the Lord help you? Will you humble yourself and admit you have a problem that needs overcoming?

The Son confessing our name before the Father is an extraordinary and wonderful thing! And He does confess our name as we overcome. Not forgetting how the word came to us; ceasing from thinking we are pretty good Christians; not being the source of our own interpretation of God's word; repenting of exceeding who God says we are. Even if we didn't know we were going our own way, we still need to repent. Just because we didn't know doesn't mean we're off the hook...

As we remember what we have received, and turn from our own way, we will begin to know true fellowship. As it begins to dawn on us that we have a name from God, we will not be like Cain anymore, running around offering our good ideas. We will come to Christ and find genuine ability to meet and be met.

Christ modelled this kind of overcoming for us. He overcame the temptation from Satan to remove Himself from the fellowship of God and act on His own initiative. Jesus *could* have acted alone when the devil tempted Him, if He *was* the Son of God, to turn stones into bread; to act in His own name, power, and right without the Father and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:3). But Jesus refused to become the source of His own initiative. He was a true disciple and

would not live any other way. He would say nothing but what He heard the Father saying (John 12:49). This is how He lives, and why He is calling every one of us to live this way and not our own way.

Had Jesus become the source of His own initiative, He would have violated the order of fellowship in the Godhead and prevented Him from proceeding by offering. According to what was written of Him, Jesus resisted Satan.

We need to stop trying to prove ourselves. We need to stand up, put away childish things, gird ourselves as men and women of God and get on with the gospel. The world needs the light of God!

Jesus does not minister life by simply quoting what is written in the Bible. It is not the letter of what is written that brings life but the spirit and the application of it. The Scriptures are applicable to each of us personally. When Jesus answered Satan's temptations by saying, 'It is written...' (Luke 4:1-12), He was guarding the sanctity of His fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. His refuge was in the knowledge that His life was found in every word that proceeded from the mouth of God in the fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:4). He refused to take up His personal capacity to turn stones into bread, or indeed, to do anything that was not laid down to Him by the Father in Their fellowship. Jesus did not exceed what was written of Him but was obedient unto death, even death upon a cross (Philippians 2:8).

The obedience of Christ is the miraculous obedience that we are all to learn. This is what the apostle Paul was exhorting the churches to learn. He urged them to follow in the example of those who walked this way (1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 13:7). Until we learn this, we will keep exceeding what is written, and find ourselves

isolated, factionalised, alienated, unable to join in fellowship and feeling like victims.

Paul learned this obedience and wanted to teach it to the Corinthians. They had become factional and partial. They possessed an overblown sense of their own grace and capacity. Paul's model for them, his only model, was Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). He had applied to himself and Apollos the word of the cross which he preached so that the Corinthians could learn not to exceed what was written; so that they could learn to walk humbly within the boundaries of their name. Paul was not seeking his own benefit but that the Corinthians could walk with Christ, hearing their name confessed before the Father.

What a joy it is when this takes place, for then as Christians we can believe and speak the faith of God. We receive His faith as a gift from Him and begin to be recovered to our name in joyful, easy fellowship among our brethren. This is what God wants for us!

Jesus is the Great Shepherd, who was struck for us. Don't we need to really respond to Him? We do! But we need to respond in accordance with the word He brings to us, not as it suits us. If we agree with His word and then determine our own terms of response, we will default to our own perspective of what our response should be. Controlling our own response is neither obedience nor fellowship.

If the Lord is putting His finger on you, you need to respond to His word, and you *can* respond because the word from the Lord's mouth always comes with His grace to respond. We need to be diligent in responding to Him.

Jesus made His response in the fellowship of the Godhead. Our response is also to be in that fellowship through fellowship with our brethren in Christ. This fellowship protects us

from deciding, on our own, that we already know what to do. Truly, we *don't* know!

The Lord is stretching out His hand today to give us faith as we hear His word. He knows our situation exactly, and He desires to heal us; to affirm us; to reveal our name; and to show us our pathway. He desires that we grow in the knowledge that we are precious in His sight.
