

## The Christian Life: Sanctification

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### Do You Place Conditions Upon God?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

**We often say with Thomas, "Unless I see...I will not believe." But our Lord says to us, "Believe — and you will see."**

#### **"Unless I See...I Will Not Believe"**

In John 20:19-23 we read that on the day of His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples as they were locked away in hiding for fear of the Jews, and said, "Peace be with you." Having said this, John tells us, "He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." The tense of the verb in Greek gives the literal meaning, "They were glad from that point onward, having seen the Lord." Jesus had wiped away their doubts about the reality of His resurrection, by showing them His hands and His side, proving that it was He himself.

But in the next verses, John tells us that Thomas was not present when this happened:

"Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.' So he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'

"And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands;

and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.'

"And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."  
(John 20:24-31)

In so many ways, we are like Thomas. Beginning with today's article, we're going to examine some of them. The first is the fact that we often demand empirical evidence of God's working in order to believe. We set conditions upon God. But as we see in this passage and elsewhere in the Word, God is not at all unwilling to give us observable evidence of His working and power. He is gracious to do so, but it must be on His all-wise and loving terms.

### **The Demand of the Unbeliever**

The so-called atheist<sup>1</sup> says, "Unless God shows Himself to me, I will not believe." But Scripture tells us that the atheist's proud protest doesn't even qualify as a lame excuse for unbelief:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not

glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Romans 1:18-21)

### **We As Believers Often Make the Same Demand**

But we as believers also demand empirical evidence that God is there, and that He is at work. We often say, with Thomas, "Unless I see...I will not believe," when in fact God is doing a greater work than we could ever imagine, but one that is yet unseen by our eyes.

We say to God, "Unless I see...I will not believe." But our Lord says to us, "Believe — and you will see." We say, "Unless God does things according to my conditions, I will not believe." But Jehovah says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways...For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty [literally, humanly inaccessible] things, which you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3).

### **God's Mightiest Works Are Often Unseen — At First**

A friend of mine and his wife recently saw this vividly demonstrated. They had prayed for the salvation of his sister for decades. Over all these years there has been no "empirical evidence" of the working of God in her life. She vehemently rejected every attempt at Christian witness by believers in her family, and seemed ever more entrenched in her sin. She is now in her seventies, confined to a wheelchair. But her believing relatives, despite frequent feelings of hopelessness in the realm of the flesh as the years advanced, never stopped witnessing, never stopped praying, and never stopped asking others to pray.

And one day a few weeks ago, this lady's believing relatives came to see her, and they found that everything had changed. Although there had been no additional

witness, no walking forward in a church service, no dramatic event by human calculations, the most "great and mighty thing," a humanly unimaginable thing, had taken place: God had brought spiritual light and life to this darkened soul while she was in her room, by herself. She now understands her sin, she now understands what Christ has done, and a heart of hatred and rejection of the Gospel has been replaced by a heart of faith and repentance. She has a brand new hunger and thirst for the Word of God and the things of God. Even her physical countenance has changed. Although she is advanced in physical years, she is a new babe in Christ, and feeding on "the sincere milk of the Word" (1 Peter 2:2).

Was God at work in all those years when, by empirical judgments, nothing seemed to be happening? Absolutely! But as the writer to the Hebrews says, "faith is the substance [the foundation and realization] of things hoped for, the evidence [the conviction and proof] of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). God calls upon us to have the heart and mind of Abraham, "who contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations" as God had promised him (Romans 4:18). "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

### **"Lord, I Believe — Help My Unbelief!"**

If you are reading this as a believer in Christ, are there issues in your life where you are saying, "Unless I see...I will not believe"? Go to Christ, as the father of the demon-possessed child did in Mark chapter nine, crying out, "Lord, I believe — help my unbelief!" Literally, the man was saying, "Come to the aid of my unbelief." As Jesus answered the cry of that man and healed his son, your Heavenly Father will answer your cry and deal with the issues that are gnawing most deeply at your soul.

### **Let Us Therefore Come"**

Remember this exhortation: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

"Let us therefore *come*," the writer says. In the original this speaks of approaching or drawing near. It's a term that was used in many ancient writings to describe what took place when someone came into the court of a monarch or ruler. We need to remember that we are drawing near and approaching the Holy God and Sovereign of the universe.

And this verse says, "let us *therefore* come." In other words, "because these things are so." To what things does the writer refer? He's saying, "let us *therefore* come," because there remains a rest for the people of God, in Christ (Hebrews 4:9). Because you need to cease from reliance on works (verse 10). Because you need to be diligent to enter into your rest in Christ (verse 11). Because God's Word reveals who you are and what you are (verse 12). Because God knows you intimately, and you can hide nothing from Him (verse 13). Because Jesus is a High Priest who can sympathize with your weaknesses (verse 14). Because Jesus was tempted in all points as you are, yet without sin (verse 15). Because of all these things — "Let us come!"

### **"Come Boldly"**

And not only that, "let us come *boldly*." This does not mean let us come brashly, or presumptuously, or without proper respect or reverence. But it does tell us about two aspects of our coming.

First, it tells us how we may speak to our Lord. It says that you may have freedom in speaking as you approach the Lord. It says that, within the bounds of reverence, you may be unreserved in your speech. You may, and indeed you should, speak to your God openly, frankly, without concealment.

Secondly, the word "boldly" speaks of the attitude with which you may come to the throne of grace. It tells us that you may come with free and fearless confidence; with cheerful courage; with assurance that as a believer in Christ you have the right to come, and God wants you to come.

### **Come to the Throne**

Also, we're reminded that it is "the throne of grace" — in the original, the phrase is literally, "the throne of *the* grace." It's a very specific way of speaking. The "throne of grace" is the throne from which grace proceeds or emanates. It is the source.

The grace that you so desperately need — first for salvation, and then for all of the issues of life — that grace originates in and proceeds from the authority and sovereignty of God. When you approach God's throne as a believer, you can be confident of His benefits toward you, because of grace.

### **Come Expectantly**

And the writer reminds us that we come before the throne of grace in order "that we may obtain." You can expect something at the throne of grace. The sense of this phrase in the original is to come in order to receive a benefit where the initiative rests with the giver, but the focus of attention in the transfer is upon the receiver. It's a phrase that shows both our inability to help ourselves, and the extent of God's care for His people. It's a phrase that indicates God's personal care for individuals and for the body of believers as a whole. You may cast all your care upon Him, as First Peter 5:7 says, because He does care for you.

And what is it that you may expect to obtain when you come? First of all, "mercy." There are several words for mercy in the New Testament. This particular Greek word is one that is used several times in the New Testament to describe God's attitude toward His people when they are in distress. It is a very interesting word in that it

speaks not simply of feeling pity for someone, but of actually doing something about it. That is God's attitude toward us.

### **Come to the Source of Endless Supply**

It is one thing to have pity on someone without being willing or able to do anything about it. We often hear about situations, in which we are not directly involved, where someone has experienced great difficulty. We may pity the person's plight, especially if we have been in similar difficulty ourselves. But we may have no real desire to do anything to help that person, and we may not have the means or the opportunity or the resources to do so.

But that is not the kind of pity this passage speaks of. The word used here assumes need on the part of the one who receives mercy. But this word for mercy also assumes that the one who takes pity has the resources that are adequate to meet the need of the one in distress, and that the person who has those resources at his disposal then takes the initiative to help. Our God not only shows us pity in our need, but He has all the resources necessary to meet our needs, and He reaches out to us in our need. He does something about your need. He takes the initiative, and He does so from a position of all wisdom, and all power, and of endless resources.

### **Well-Timed Grace**

The writer also reminds us *when* we shall receive mercy and grace to help us. It will be "in time of need." Literally, this means *well-timed*. You must remember that Christ's intercessory work on your behalf, and Father's response, are on His timetable. You may tend to grow impatient waiting for answers, and you may say with Thomas, "Unless I see...I will not believe."

You may fear that God has not heard your plea. You may think that the answer isn't coming because something is wrong with you. And you certainly need to examine

yourself to make sure there is no un-confessed sin standing between you and your God.

But the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that we come before the throne of grace through the merits of Christ. You don't come on the basis of your own works. The writer also reminds us that Christ your Intercessor not only knows exactly what you need, but exactly when you need it, for your good and for His glory.

Jesus was more than willing to give empirical evidence of the reality of His resurrection to the ten disciples. He was more than willing to give it to Thomas as well. But this gracious work had to be at God's initiative, on God's all-wise terms, and on God's timetable.

A more literal translation of Hebrews 4:16 would read like this: "Approach therefore in freedom of speech and fearless confidence the throne of grace, in order that receiving mercy, pity, compassion and grace you may find help that is perfectly timed and perfectly suited to your specific need." This is truly rest for our souls. This is the promise of God. You can rest in the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. God will provide empirical evidence of His work on your behalf, in this life to be sure, and infinitely more abundantly in the life to come.

**Next: Do You Forget the Promises of God?**

#### **References:**

1. See our article, [\*\*Does the Bible Really Teach That There Are No True Atheists?\*\*](#)

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