

THE CONQUEST OF TIME BY ETERNITY

Study 11

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*Take courage; I **have** conquered the world! – Jesus (John 16:33b)*

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen... (Hebrews 11:1)

*'...eternity is doing far more for time than time is doing for eternity'
(P.T. Forsyth)¹*

Aware of the complexities of life, the tragedy of war on a global scale, satanic power, and the blindness of humanity among nations, faith sees Jesus! *The Justification of God* is written that the church might re-establish a renewed confidence in Jesus Christ, and the gospel, on a grand scale. P.T. Forsyth confidently asserts his gospel convictions:

Faith is more than an individual calm; it is the Church's collective confidence on the scale of the world for the destiny of the world. The evil world will not win at last, because it failed to win at the only time it ever could. It is a vanquished world where men play their devilries. Christ has overcome it. It can make tribulation, but desolation it can never make.²

ALL THINGS ARE YOURS³

The writing of P.T. Forsyth continues to be a highly valuable gift to the church. Forsyth belongs to us. Our appreciation of Forsyth's enduring theodicy, should serve us well in our ministries - bearing faithful witness to Christ, in the face of all things.

All things are ours, even that victory, that elevation over a world's sin in us; and our very relapses cannot rob us of it. It is easy to believe with a poor sense of what the holy is, of what it makes sin to be, of what the world is, and can do, for the devil. But it needs the supernatural courage of the Cross to believe (at such an hour as this, say,) in the completeness of the Cross and its eternal victory. But there, the more horror, the more hope. The most damning light is the saving light. Therefore, the more holy fear, the more the Cross is working in us; and the sense of the Cross's judgment is the effect of its grace.⁴

In 1 Corinthians 3:21, Paul - having warned his hearers against following party or theological factions - reminds the church that we can learn from and make good use of all

¹ P.T. Forsyth, *This Life and the Next*, London Independent Press Ltd., 1918 (1948), p. 81

² P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1988, p. 223

³ For the wide application of this short biblical phrase, I am very grateful to Geoffrey C. Bingham, *All Things are Yours*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1991 (1996).

⁴ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 222-223

things – *For all things are Yours!* Forsyth may not say everything well.⁵ However, he belongs to us. And we can learn much from him. Forsyth himself, skillfully attributed measured praise to the negative, critical work of the German philosopher - Friedrich Nietzsche⁶, who *felt as millions feel, that life culminated in its tragic experiences, and that whatever solved the tragedy of life solved all life.*⁷ Sadly Nietzsche, a vehement critic of Christianity, suffered debilitating mental illness towards the end of his life. Forsyth comments upon this influential man's failure to find his answers in the cross of Christ (a salient warning, I think):

To grasp the real, deep tragedy of life is enough to unhinge any mind which does not find God's solution of it in the central tragedy of the Cross and its redemption.⁸

Our plethora of 'why' questions concerning injustice and the matter of evil, are resolved in the action of Christ's cross. For especially here, Jesus gives active praise to the Father, for the rightness of his just and true judgments, as he personally and willingly enters the furnace of God's holy judgment upon sin, and bears the guilt and evil of humanity. We can replicate the observations of Jesus early ministry, now applying them to his cross, and the fruit of that event for all eternity: '*He has done everything well.*' (Mark 7:47).

FAITH IN CHRIST FOR ALL CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE

In the light of:

1. The worst evil – murdering Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and Author of Life, and
2. The best news of all – the resurrection of Jesus as Man, which opened possibilities, and a reality, not previously dreamed of,

the early church knew that all things were working together for good for those who loved God and were called according to his purpose. They learned to *give thanks in all circumstances* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Through the cross, understood by faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit the church down through history is assured that nothing is outside of God's control, *nothing is exempt from being used for the purposes of God.*⁹

Life begins as a problem, but when it ends well it ends as a faith: a great problem, therefore a great faith. Ordinary experience gives us the first half, it sets a problem; but the second half, the answer of faith to us, comes from God's revelation of grace. As we here pass from the one to the other it should be on large lines, not that we may simply descant on life in a literary way, but that we may magnify the greatness of Christ.

⁵ Indeed Forsyth's final book commends prayers for the dead, and displays a troublesome tendency towards *Universalism*: See P.T. Forsyth, *This Life and the Next*, London Independent Press Ltd., 1918 (1948). It is worthwhile reading it. But many will have strong reservations about some of his statements.

⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a significant influence in the establishment of an understanding of life known as Existentialism. This is a movement in philosophy that says that it is not God, but rather individuals, that create the meaning of their own lives.

⁷ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 210

⁸ P. T. Forsyth, p. 210

⁹ P. T. Forsyth, p. 4

FORSYTH'S CLOSING RÉSUMÉ

The final chapter is a *résumé* of all that Forsyth has been writing about in this book. He expands upon the following 9 essential points:

1. 'Life, then, is a problem. It offers a task rather than an enjoyment. The soul must be achieved. The kingdom is above all a gift, but it is also a conquest. We are here to fight the good fight rather than to have a good time. The people to whom life is only an excursion, a picnic, a stroll, or a game grow more and more outlanders in society.'¹⁰
2. The problem of life is tragic, and no mere riddle. It is not a war game. 'We are in no *Kriegspiel*'¹¹, but in the real thing always. It touches the nerve.'¹² 'Life is not a seductive puzzle; it is a tragic battle for existence, for power, for eternal life'.¹³
3. There is a solution to the problem. *Our battle is not a sport for heaven*. The solution is given to us rather than won by us. Already done and not merely shown.
4. The solution is practical, not philosophical. It is not really an answer to a riddle but a victory in a battle. A life problem cannot be thought out but lived out. Man conquers by faith and not by philosophy.¹⁴
5. The practical solution of life by the soul is outside life. The destiny of experience is beyond itself. The lines of life's moral movement and of thought's *nisus* converge in a point beyond life and history.¹⁵
6. This world is only complete in another; it is part and prelude of another, and runs up into it, and comes home in it as body does in soul. What is meant when we speak of another world? We do not mean only one that begins at death. We do not mean a new tract of time beyond the grave, but another order, another dimension, of things, that both haunts the precincts and fills the spaces of this life always.
7. All the crises of His [Jesus] life, I have been saying, had themselves a crisis in His death, where the victory and the solution was won once for all. He did not cheer the disciples with the sanguine optimism of the good time coming. It was not a sanguine optimism, but an optimism of actual faith and conquest. It was not the hope of a conquering Messiah soon. 'He is here,' was the Gospel.¹⁶
8. The solution in the Gospel is wrought once for all because it was on a world scale, an eternal scale, because He, and He alone of all men, was on such a scale. He was on a scale, which made the New Testament writers give Him not only a human and historic influence but a cosmic, nay, an absolute. He was to command not only the race but the universe, and save not only the soul but the whole groaning and travailing creation.¹⁷
9. Trust God. 'We cannot solve life by moral thought or effort but by trust, which unites us with the invincible, eternal, moral act of God in Christ. Christianity is not the sacrifice we make, but the sacrifice we trust; not the victory we win, but

¹⁰ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 208ff.

¹¹ *Kriegspiel*: A full-scale war game between two nations.

¹² P. T. Forsyth, p. 209

¹³ P. T. Forsyth, p. 209

¹⁴ P. T. Forsyth, p. 211

¹⁵ P. T. Forsyth, p. 212

¹⁶ P. T. Forsyth, p. 219

¹⁷ P. T. Forsyth, p. 219

the victory we inherit. ...Christ crucified and risen is the final, eternal answer to the riddle of life. One day, when we sit in heavenly places in Christ, we shall see the tangle of life unroll and fall into shape. We shall see death as the key of life. Our own dead could tell us so already. We shall see guilt destroyed; and, with that, death, wrong, darkness, and grief.¹⁸

FAITH GREATER THAN THOUGHT

Forsyth's profound thought rouses us to give our own thought process a solid workout. However, the relationship between thought and faith, is an important one to understand:

Thought is a mighty and precious power, but on the last things it does more to enlarge our field than to steady our feet. It gives us range, not footing; a horizon rather than a foundation. It does not establish the soul, but widens its vision. It extends our reach more than it fixes our grasp. It therefore often magnifies the problem rather than solves it. Truly, that is a great service. To greaten the problem is to prepare for a great answer. Faith is not there as an asylum for those who are too lazy or shallow to think. But, though thought may tax faith mightily, it cannot do its work. It gives it a grand challenge, but it has not faith's final word.¹⁹

Rich thought can certainly expand our horizons, but faith steadies our feet, causing us to *stand* firm, securely, *in the strength* of the Lord's power (Ephesians 6:10-18):

There is something that gives us power to live and conquer, where thought may only raise challenge and doubt. Thought opens a world ahead of us, but faith forces us back into the soul and its case. Faith must be more conservative than thought; for it is deeper. The vaster the world that thought opens, the vaster is the question it puts; and the answers, the solutions, that fitted a small world, go out of date in a large. But the solution, the secret, of the soul, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is Christ dead and risen that has the key of life. It is living faith in His living, giving, and saving God.²⁰

It is good to finish our study book! Faith fortified. Yet, of making many books, there is no end. Much study is a weariness of the flesh (Eccl. 12:12). Jesus said: You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life (John 5:39-40).

TO THE LAST WORD – LET US COME!

We only ever say second-to-last words; God, the Word always has the last Word. So then, let us come to the Word, Jesus Christ in faith, in prayer, in praise and thanks, resting in His finished work, assured of the glorious future, glorified in Him: *Thank you Lord, for your servant, P.T. Forsyth!* May his writing and insight continue to be a blessing, to many! Jesus you said: *be of good cheer*. Jesus, you have overcome the world, triumphed over the power of evil, and secured eternal life. You are our future, and our Life. Amen

¹⁸ P. T. Forsyth, p. 220-221

¹⁹ P. T. Forsyth, p. 211

²⁰ P. T. Forsyth, p. 211-212