

Lesson Thirteen

THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE #5 - The Fire on the Wall

We continue our study of Pilgrim's Progress in the House of the Interpreter which is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit of God. It is at this point the Christian has progressed to. He is now a new convert, and he needs to be taught some things in order to be prepared for the battle that lies ahead. Therefore, he is directed by Jesus Christ to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who would teach him all things needful for him to be enabled to fight the warfare and to face the wiles of the devil, which will lie ahead of him between the time he was converted until the time he enters into the Celestial City. We all need the interpreting ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We have encountered from the words of Bunyan that we go through the House of the Interpreter. In the first room the new convert was led into, he saw the picture on the wall which symbolized or set forth the ministry of a true gospel preacher, who he could trust with his well-being, and where he could go to get his spiritual food. This was the type of individual that the new convert was to look out for, because there would be many other false teachers in the way.

The next room that the individual was led into was the dusty parlor, and this set forth the harmony between the law and the gospel. The law preaches human responsibility and human duty. It raises the conscience and makes us aware that **"all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23). Then the precious gospel comes into the room and is sprinkled on the dust. The gospel settles and cleans the conscience and prepares the heart for the entrance of the Holy Spirit to come in and dwell. So the parlor of dust represented the relationship of the law and the gospel.

Then in our last setting, we found the third room where there were two small children whose names were Passion and Patience. These children set forth two types of characters. The older one represented "the man of this world" who lived for everything in the now and the present. He had no thought of what the next life was going to hold. His philosophy was "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die." So this was Passion or the unruly child. The other child was named Patience. This was "the man of the next world" who was patiently waiting upon the coming of the Lord and had peace and contentment in this life knowing he would receive his reward when the Master came.

This evening, we are going to be led into the fourth room where we will see a new and most important scene that the Holy Spirit would teach to a new convert. Regardless of whether you are a new Christian or not, this is a most valuable lesson you need to learn. So, I am going to read to you how Bunyan described this room.

Then I saw in my dream, that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and the one standing by it, always casting much water upon it to quench it: yet did the fire burn higher and hotter.

Then said Christian, "What means this?"

The Interpreter answered, "This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the devil: but in that thou seest the fire, notwithstanding, burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that." So he had him about to the back side of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast (but secretly) into the fire.

Then said Christian, "What means this?"

The Interpreter answered, "This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart; by the means of which, notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of his people prove gracious still. And in that thou sawest, that the man stood behind the wall to maintain the fire; this is to teach thee, that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is maintained in the soul."

Here is a very short paragraph and yet a beautiful portrayal setting forth the sustaining work and power of the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of grace. Look at the picture briefly. On the left you see a fire which is burning upon the wall. We see a man who is throwing water on that fire in an effort to extinguish or to put that fire out. From this side of the wall, the new convert can only see this man, and he doesn't understand why the fire isn't extinguished, because water will put out a fire. But the more the water was poured on the fire, the higher and hotter the fire burned, and Christian couldn't understand this. The Interpreter (Holy Spirit) said, "Come around to the other side of the wall and I will explain what is happening." When they came around there, Christian sees an individual with a bowl of oil, and he was pouring the oil down at the base of the wall. The fire is drawing its strength from that oil. The explanation is this: The fire stands for the faith that has been

implanted in the heart of the Christian, and it is burning strong. When you become a new Christian, you have a zeal to do things for the Lord. You have found a new outlook on life, and yet it isn't long before you encounter the opposition of the devil. Satan would come along and attempt to put out this fire and squash it once and for all, because he does not desire an individual to live by faith. But there is a mysterious thing happening. Instead of the fire going out, we see the fire begins to burn brighter and hotter, and that is because while the devil is pouring water on our faith, God, in his marvelous grace, is pouring more oil into our lives so that this offsets the work of the devil. This is Bunyan's own terminology in just a few short words, he sets forth the true presentation of what is known as the perseverance or the preservation of the saints.

The question is, "Well, now you've got it, can you keep it?" That is the battle that has raged down through the years. "Now that you are a Christian, will it last? You are all fired up now, but can you hold out?" That is, of course, a most important

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question that any new convert would want to know. "Will I hold out? Will I make it? Yes, I believe that I have trusted in Christ, but I also know I have a strong adversary out here. Will that which has begun in my life continue, or will something happen to cut it off, and I shall never see the Celestial City?" This has been argued very thoroughly throughout the pages of church history, and it will continue to be argued. It involves this question, "Can a truly born again child of God have something occur in his life which will cause him to lose his standing in grace and then fall short of entering into the Celestial City?" This is the question that Bunyan would have the new convert to learn. Salvation has started now, but will it continue?" This question and the way that it is worded here in Bunyan's own words, shows the genius of Bunyan of being able to walk the balance in the presentation of the gospel. This presentation refutes the doctrine that holds that a truly born again child of God can lose his salvation. At the same time, Bunyan also cautiously guards the professor or the hypocrite who would use the truth of salvation by grace as a license to live in sin, and he does this in a most guarded way.

I want us to examine just how this can be true. I talked with a pastor of another

denomination this past week. We had a two or three hour discussion in the basement of my home involving the things of the Lord. He was of another doctrinal persuasion than I was, and we were able to sit down and agree to disagree. (My statements are labeled "Me" and his quotes are labeled "Him.")

Him: "You believe that God has a people and that those people are going to be saved, don't you?"

Me: "Yes that is right."

Him: "You believe also that once they believe in Christ, there is nothing that can happen that can take them out of Christ."

Me: "That is right."

Him: "I don't believe that."

Me: "Yes, I know you don't, would you please explain to me why?"
I had a good idea what his reasons would be, but he went ahead and explained them. Sure enough they were what I thought they were.

Him: "It is this way, Preacher, I believe that however a man is saved, that is the way he is kept saved. And I believe that man is saved by his own free will to come to Christ, and therefore, he is kept by his own free will. And if his own free will decides to, it can go away from Christ."

Me: "You are very consistent. That is, if you believe in salvation by the free will of the ability of an individual to conjure up his own faith and repentance, then it would certainly be true that if a person came to Christ of his own ability, then he could go away from Christ of his own ability."

Him: "You don't believe that? What do you believe?"

Me: "I believe in salvation by God's free grace."

Him: "What do you mean?"

Me: "It is God's free grace which puts the sinner in Christ, and it is God's free grace which keeps him there. In other words, God initiates the work and He continues the work. Your position is, you believe that man initiates the work of salvation, and man must continue the work of salvation."

So we had our clear-cut differences.

I want to present this tonight in light of what Bunyan has said, and it involves the question - Where does man get his faith to believe in Jesus Christ, because it is by grace through faith that we are saved. If this faith starts up from the natural heart with no assistance or no quickening of the Holy Spirit, then it is true that man is the cause of his salvation. But on the other hand, if it is God's grace which implants faith, then the question is, "will God continue His grace?" So, as a man is saved, that is the same way he will be kept saved. If man is saved by his own ability, he has to keep himself saved by his own ability. But if man is saved by the grace of God coming to him when he was dead in trespasses and sins, and then quickens or resurrects his spirit within him giving him faith, then he will be kept by that same means.

Now lets see what the Bible says. Go to the book of Romans chapter 1 to see how a man is initially put right with God. Romans 1:16 - the Apostle says, ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."*** Paul is saying that the gospel of which he was not ashamed, is a gospel that comes to the sinner in "power" and that it is the "dynamite" of God. The Greek word, *dudimos*, denotes here that God comes in mighty power to the sinner who is dead and set in his own sin. God quickens a new life in that individual thereby imparting repentance and faith to enable him to meet the requirements which He has set forth for man to do. That is the way that salvation begins.

Let's go to the Book of Ephesians and see this set forth. How many of you here tonight have believed in Jesus Christ? Let me see your hands. To what do you attribute your believing in Jesus Christ? What caused you to believe in Christ? Was it that you just made up your mind one day, and you cranked your will to get it started like the old fashioned jalopy? Do you older people remember how you had to get out of the Model T to crank it to get it started? It was dead so you had to crank it to get it started. I know some of you are old enough to remember that. Is that the way you believed in Christ? Did you just decide one day to take that old Adamic will that loves sin and just say "get in the back seat now, I am going to crank up my faith and believe in Jesus?" Is that where your faith came from? Or was there a mighty working power of God that came and quickened you into

faith? Do you see the difference? Where did it come from? Did it come from within, or did faith come from without? What does the Bible say? **"Faith cometh by hearing"** - it is not something left over from the fall, but it is a gift which God gives.

Now look in the Book of Ephesians chapter 1, verses 18-19. Paul is continuing his thought here on the redemptive work of Christ. He says, **"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the . . . exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power."** Do you see that? We believe in Christ, but we do so because of the mighty working of His power. What is He liking that power to? **"Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead."** The same power which brought back Jesus Christ from the dead is the same power which speaks to the sinner who is dead in trespasses and sin. You say, is that really so? Look over in chapter 2, **"And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins."** What does the word **"quickened"** mean? That is an obsolete word we no longer use today, and it means "made alive." When you and I were dead toward the spiritual things of God, He came to us in that state and quickened us and made us alive. Now look down in verse 5, **"Even when we were dead in sins, (God) hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved);"** In other words, in your experience, grace took the initiative in beginning salvation. Look also in verse 6, **"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"** now look at verse 8 - **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."** As Jesus Christ spoke in the creation - the waters were upon the face of the deep and darkness was there. Jesus Christ spoke, and what did He say? **"Let there be light."** What does the Bible say? **"there was light."** Likewise, when you and I were dead in darkness, in trespasses and sins, when we were not seeking after God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ came and said, "Let there be light" and you and I saw. Do you see the difference? He came to us in that state, and He began the good work in us.

Now go to Philippians chapter 1. If Christ initiated the work of salvation then will He continue it? Philippians 1:6 **"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you,"** (now is faith a good work? Yes, it was a work performed by

God who has begun a good work in you. How long will He perform it?) The Scripture says that He **"will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."** Until the day that Jesus comes back and we are resurrected if we have died, or when we will be changed and go into that state of glory, He will continue to carry out that work.

From time to time I talk to different individuals of different denominations, and they always emphasize that once man gets the process going, then God steps in and takes over. How many of you have ever

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gone to the store and see these little gerbils or mice in the cages? They take off running and they just run and run. Then they will stop and go the other way. I like to watch those things. My mom has a fit and won't even go in a store if there is one of them in there because she has such fear of mice. But I like to watch the little things run. As they are running, they have momentum going one way, and then they will stop and go the other way. By nature, which way is man running with regard to God? Is he running toward God or away from God? He is running away, isn't he? Does man stop himself and start the momentum going back the other way, or does God come in at that point to stop man, convert him, and start him going back the other way? I have individuals say, "I believe that once man takes the first step, then God comes and takes over." That is sort of like a man getting his head cut off and then picking it up and walking five miles. You say that would be a miracle. Yes, that would be a miracle. If he could take the first step, I'm sure he could make it the rest of the way. That first step is the problem. Do you see what I am talking about? He has got to put that head back on. He has got to have life. The first step is the important step, and if he can get his head back on, and take one step I will bet he will be able to make the next four or five miles. However, who begins the process in salvation? We have believed in Christ, is that not true? But is that an effect, or a cause of our salvation. It is by grace through faith. Faith is not that which merits grace. But God's grace provides faith, so it begins the salvation process.

Now, as a man is saved, so is he kept saved. As Christ initiates life to the dead sinner, so He continues to "pour the oil of grace" into the life of that sinner thereby assuring that through the down payment or the earnest of the Holy Spirit, that man's salvation shall

remain secure until the day of Jesus Christ. What God begins, He also continues is the basis of the security of the believer.

Look in the Book of I Peter, chapter 1. As the pastor of the other denomination said this past week, "I believe that God has done all he can do, then man must provide the faith, and when man gets together with a bargain like that, then you have salvation. So faith is

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man's contribution to salvation." He also said that since man's faith was his own gift to his salvation, in the same way if he doesn't continue to believe, then he won't continue to keep himself saved. Look in I Peter 1:3-5 - ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which***

according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" Notice again that this is found everywhere you look in the Bible. Notice that we were "begotten," that is "born," by the Spirit of God unto a living hope in the same way that Jesus rose from the dead. That is power. So continue, ***"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*** A person is saved by the power of God through faith in Christ, and a person is kept saved by that same power of God through faith in Jesus Christ. So the question boils down to this - if man's faith, which the devil is trying to put out, sprang up from himself, then I would ask this question, do you think your faith is stronger than the power of the devil? If that is what you believe, I don't know about you, but I know something about the devil, and I don't want to mess around with him when it comes to my own ability and faith.

But to you new converts or to those of you who are struggling with the matter of Christian assurance and are asking, "how can I know if I am going to make it or not?" The Bible says that if God's grace began to work in you, He will continue to perform it, and He will with every temptation make a way of escape, for he gives more grace, and God's grace is not exhaustive, His power does not run out. He who begins the work, shall sustain the work.

Now I want to read to you from one of the old Baptist Confessions of our forefathers in the founding of this country here in America. In the past, all the Baptist churches except the Free-will Baptists, went by this Confession of faith. It was called the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*. Here is what this body of Baptists taught years ago on the perseverance of the saints. Shall the saints persevere?

Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence he still begets and nourisheth in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality; and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet he is still the same,

Let me interject here. There are going to come times in a new convert's experience in which God's manifestation of Himself is not going to be as bright as it is at other times. However, that doesn't mean God has changed. He is still behind the wall pouring on the grace, and He will pour it on just when you think you cannot go a step further. How many of you have been to that point where you feel you just can't go on spiritually? Then when you think you can go no further, what happens? You find some strength. Where did it come from? It is a mysterious thing. Do you know what has happened? Somebody is behind the wall. God is giving more grace, and He pours more grace upon you at those particular times. However, that doesn't mean that in your Christian experience, everything is going to be rosy and you are going to be charging hell with a water gun every day. But nevertheless, God's grace is still going to be there.

Let me read on:

Yet He is the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palm of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity.

Now listen to this, Do you ever wonder why the Free-will Baptists do not identify or are

separate from other Baptists? The sad thing is, most modern Baptists belong with the Free-will Baptists. That is the absolute truth. Most modern Baptists have forsaken the old time faith and have adopted the "freewillism" of the Free-will Baptists. Why are you secure? How do you know you are going to hold out? Here is the answer.

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God, the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him, the oath of God, the abiding of his Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace;

Article No. 3: And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, (note, there is still corruption and sin within the heart of a Christian, it is still there) and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, yet they shall renew their repentance and be preserved, through faith in Christ Jesus, to the end.

In other words, the only thing that keeps a person saved is the same grace which begins the operation. Do you see the difference? If man begins salvation, then he is going to have to keep it going. But if God begins it, He will keep it going. That is the essence of the difference between the two.

But now, has Satan been kicking you around? When you think you can go no further, then all of a sudden, in some mysterious fashion, the fire comes and flames up again? What do you attribute that to? It is certainly not your own strength, because you were weak, weren't you? But Jesus interceded before the Father. Beloved, do you appreciate people praying for you? How many of you want the prayers of God's people? And I want you to pray for me. I want to share something else with you. I have somebody else praying for me. Do you know who that is? That is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He says, "At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you." (John 16:26). "My Father hears me always." Just when it seems I can go no further, Jesus Christ, who will not lay a testing upon me above that which I am able to bear, sends the Holy Spirit from the throne of God and strengthens and renews my faith. I

can't explain how that is done - it is a mysterious thing. But I know it comes, and I know it didn't originate within me, but somebody interceded on my behalf. When you have somebody like Jesus Christ interceding for you, can you hold out? Can you trust His grace? Can you cast yourself upon His unchanging purpose in grace? Those of you who have had to take your husbands and your wives to place them underneath the sod, and you had to stand there with broken hearts and say "I just can't go on, I can't do it God. I can't go on!" Have you been enabled by the grace of God like a mighty moving of the Spirit of God and has increased your faith. Then you have continued to serve Jesus Christ. What made the difference? It was God's grace working in your life, and that is what will enable us all to continue on. What are the words of the famous old hymn that John Newton wrote?

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.¹

Who gave us the sight to see with? Preachers cry out today and say, "Believe, believe, believe!" Oh yes, man must believe, but man needs something else. He needs Christ to enable him to believe. He needs to have a mighty working of grace. Now the third verse -

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come.

Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

There it is. Are you trusting in the grace of God tonight, or are you trusting in your own strength and your own ability to do this or that? My friend, if you are trusting in your own ability, you are a prime target for the devil. Satan is just like an old chicken hawk which loves to see a little chick out in the middle of a field away from its mother. If you think that you are going to make it to heaven by your own strength and obedience, you are a prime target for Satan. ***"Resist the Devil and he will flee from you."*** (James 4:7). How are you going to resist him? Claim the blood of Jesus Christ flee to that grace.

I want to read to you a statement by a modern author on this statement of whether the saints shall be secure. He said:

To feel that I were crossing the troubled and dangerous sea of life dependent for my final security upon the actings of my own treacherous nature were enough to fill me with a perpetual alarm. If it is possible I want to know that the vessel to which I commit my life is seaworthy and that having once embarked, I shall arrive in safety at my destination.

¹Amazing Grace by John Newton

I like that. In other words, before I set out to sea, I want to know whether the sea vessel is worthy, and whether it will get me to the other side. If I am going to put my faith and trust in any thing to get me to heaven, I want to know two things. First, I want to know if it is trustworthy, is it sufficient, is it an ark that will carry me to heaven? And next, will it get me there? Will I able to cross the sea? I hope that is where your hope is tonight.

We read on:

It is not until we duly appreciate this wonderful truth that our salvation is not suspended on our weak and wavering love to God.

Does your love to God ever waver? Is it stronger at times than others?

But rather upon His eternal unchangeable love to us that we can have peace and certainty in the Christian life. Only the Calvinist who knows himself to be absolutely safe in the hands of God, can have that inward sense of peace and security knowing that in the eternal counsels of God, he has been chosen to be cleansed and glorified and that nothing can thwart that purpose. He knows himself to be held to righteousness by a spiritual power which is as exhaustless and unvarying as a force of gravitation and as necessary to the development of the spirit as sunshine and vitamins are to the body.

May God bless his word by His Spirit to the hearts of my hearers this evening. Can you hold out? Can you make it? Remember **"the just shall live by faith."** (Romans 1:17). This is not only a one-time belief, but a continual living by faith. Can you make it? My friend, if you continue to cast yourself upon the grace of Jesus Christ and trust that grace, I don't care what comes, **"neither height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 8:39). The death of a loved one, the setback in the financial realm, the loss of a child, some terrible calamity in your personal life, none of that shall be able to separate the true saint of God from his inheritance which is in Jesus Christ. That is because we are rooted and anchored into God's grace. May God bless this tonight.

Shall we pray?

Our Father, we are made to see the reality of this doctrine. We know our enemies, we know our adversary. We know that he is going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And we know that in and of ourselves we can do nothing, but that through the

grace and mercy of your Son on our behalf, we are more than conquerors through You who loves us. So we would pray that when we are tested by our adversary who would destroy our very souls, that purpose which You have given us in Christ shall be continued, and that it shall be fulfilled. You shall strengthen us and You shall be able to put Satan under our feet, to be able to walk over what he would do to us and make us conquerors through faith in Christ. I would pray that whatever the needs are of individuals here tonight, in their particular stage in grace, that they might be shown that You have begun a good work in them, and You will not stop that until Your mighty power has landed them before Your throne in a state of glory. Use this for the strengthening of Your saints. Help us not to misuse it as a licentious teaching to impose our sinful lusts, and to utilize those to help us to humbly to be made to see that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, for we ask these things in Jesus' name and to His name and glory do we pray. Amen