acknowledging our sins, and praying that he would increasingly make us feel the burden of them. May we hate ourselves and ask his pardon, and glorify him in our midst by so doing. May we be strengthened by his Holy Spirit so that we know beyond all doubt that he dwells within us, and that we have been adopted as the children of God. Thus, we all say, Almighty God, and our heavenly Father, etc.

The True Children of Abraham

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Gal. 3:3–6).

As we are aware, all gospel doctrine is designed to make us forsake the world and cleave to God. This is only possible if we learn to fix our gaze more and more on things above. If we desire to increase in the knowledge of God, we must first diligently endeavour to correct the weaknesses that are ours by nature. Only then may we be equipped to forsake all that the world offers. Whilst it is true that God, in his mercy, has stooped down to us, we are not to remain firmly rooted in this world. God has, indeed, chosen mortal beings as his messengers, and draws us to himself using things which we can easily relate to; for example, by means of sacraments – visual symbols, employing earthly elements. Thus, we can see that he has been willing to limit himself to such an extent as to render us without excuse. We cannot extricate ourselves on the grounds that he is way beyond our reach. Whatever we may say, it cannot be denied that the main purpose of the gospel is to strip us of all that pertains to the flesh, that we might draw near to God.
Yet, sadly, men misuse God’s grace by making the visible symbols, appointed by God, the source of all their holiness. It is as if they expect to be saved by their own observances. This sin was not invented today, nor even yesterday; it has prevailed since the beginning of time and continues to this very hour. What is worse, men are not content to have simply perverted that which God has ordained to lead them to himself: they also devise and construct other barriers which distance themselves from him even further. We would, perhaps, have difficulty grasping what I am saying, had it not been so clearly demonstrated in everyday life. By the law, God appointed sacrifices which were types and shadows of the day. They were not, however, a sign that he delights in such base things, but rather an indication of the ignorance of the people, who were much like children. He was directing them to understand the nature of spiritual worship. Yet, it is written that these legal ceremonies were ‘carnal’. How are we to understand this? Well, God was seeking to instruct the people how they were to approach him through means which were familiar and easily understood. Yet, at the same time, we are told that the pattern revealed to Moses on the mountain was a heavenly one. There are, therefore, these two aspects to the ceremonial law.

Washing when one entered the temple, offering sacrifices, having a candlestick and perfumed incense, and special garments for the priest to wear – all of these were external and symbolic, and could, therefore, be termed ‘carnal’ and temporal. However, their significance was spiritual. Yet, how did the Jews respond to all of this? They became preoccupied with the figures themselves, instead of considering why God had instituted them. They believed that in going to the temple and performing what was expected of them outwardly, they would be blameless in the eyes of God. But they were creating a god in their own image, as it were. Indeed, it is this approach that God mocks through the prophets when he says that he does not dwell in a house made by human hands, for even the heavens cannot contain him in his infinite majesty (Isa. 66:1). But today, the Papists are not content to misuse God’s law; they add dogma upon dogma until they have filled an abyss with their follies. Yet, all the while, they claim to be worshipping God! Whatever they may say, it is a mere farce!

Let us come now to the words of our text. Paul makes a comparison between the Spirit and the flesh. What does he mean by ‘the Spirit’? The term here encompasses the whole of gospel teaching, which is of a spiritual nature and designed to free us from the types and shadows under which the Jews were required to live. In the gospel, God reveals himself to us fully. Having disposed of all the types and shadows of the law, he reveals that he desires us to come to him directly, allowing nothing in this world to hold us back. Under the law, it was the High Priest alone who was able to approach God; the people had to keep at a distance. The Lord Jesus Christ is our High Priest, who has made a way whereby we may approach God the Father: through his blood, as the apostle writes in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 9:11). If we accept the gospel in the way in which God intends, he deals with us as if we are now ready to approach him, without the need for ceremonies; for these were originally appointed for those who were unenlightened and ignorant with regard to God’s will. Paul reproaches the Galatians, who had ‘begun in the Spirit’. By this, he means that they knew the teaching of the gospel, and understood things which had been hidden from the Jews by obscure types and shadows. He reproaches them because they now sought to be ‘made perfect by the flesh’, that is, by base and inferior means. It is as if he is saying, ‘God has been gracious enough to show you his will at first hand, but you prefer to return to the ABC, and to the first principles. He has shown you high and lofty wisdom, through which you have received his incomparable love in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why must you now return to your ABC and forget all that you have been taught subsequently? It is illogical and irrational, and is a despising of the grace you have been offered.’ We know that, in our world, if a man wishes to learn something, he will start with the basics and, little by little,
acquire greater skills in his trade. If you were to teach a child the sciences, without having taught him his alphabet, or how to read and write, or the rules of grammar (which he ought to be learning by degrees), what good is it? Likewise, take that same child when he grows up and reaches manhood, having learnt many things; what a mockery it would be to make him return to his ABC! The same applies to mechanics. We all know that if a man has just joined a workshop, to start with he will be unaware of things that he will know after a year or two. First, he will learn the basic principles, and then he will build upon that knowledge. But if after four years of learning his trade he returns to that which he learnt on the first day, he is a fool who has wasted his time.

Now let us apply this lesson to ourselves. Yes, it may be true that we need someone to break down the doctrine we cannot readily digest, due to our carnality. Yet God has graciously granted us the privilege of being taught spiritual things to a higher and greater degree than our holy fathers enjoyed under the law. Think of Abraham – he did not enjoy our privileges, yet he became the father of the faithful, and we need to be like him, as we shall see shortly. Next, there is David, a most noble king and prophet, who nevertheless had only known the things we now know in shadow form. The same is true of all those who lived under the former dispensation. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ says that the eyes that have seen what we see, and the ears that have heard the message of the gospel, are blessed (Matt. 13:16). For now he has been made manifest to the world. Therefore, since God is willing to draw near to us and deal with us in such a familiar way, should we shrink back and choose to draw near to God by means of ceremonies and figures rather than sound doctrine, we should be wilfully rebelling against him. What does this rebellion prove, but that we do not desire God to show us mercy and compassion or to be the God he declares himself to be. It is easy for us to understand, therefore, the point that Paul is making here. He is rebuking the Galatians for behaving like crabs in retreat! For, having been taught the spiritual doctrine of the gospel, they returned to the shadows of the law. It is like a man in our own day knowing that our worship is founded upon the gospel and that our practice is that which is laid down in God's pure Word, adding something of his own devising. He says, 'Would it not be better if we could all do it like this?' This is returning to the flesh. Instead of God elevating us higher, we are pulled back to the things of earth. This is patently to enter into battle with God.

We must learn how to apply this lesson profitably. God has given us his Word, which we hear faithfully preached. Therefore, now that we know the manner in which he desires to be worshipped and served, let us not turn to the right hand or to the left. If we have truly profited from the Word that has been faithfully preached in the name of God, it should be evident to all that we value it. Indeed, the more advanced we become, the less excuse we have should we fall away. There are many that we know who have grown cold, or who have sought to sit on the fence. Whereas we expected them to have matured further and to have attained an even closer walk with God, they are taken up with vain fancies. Today, those who wish to escape persecution deliberately alter and falsify the Word of God by adding devices conceived in the mind of man. Knowing this to be the case, let us be all the more attentive to Paul's teaching here, that if God has granted us great knowledge, we ought not, like children, to return to our alphabets. What a terrible shame it is when those who have grown in their knowledge of the gospel, or who have had opportunity to do so, act like those who have never heard a single word of it. The apostle has to reproach the Jews in his Epistle to the Hebrews, saying, 'You ought to be teachers judging by the amount you have learnt, but instead, you are still novices' (Heb. 5:12). This is the first point we need to remember from this passage.

Paul's next question is, 'Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.' He wanted the Galatians to wake up to the fact that God had granted them the honour of being his witnesses – a privilege which they had soon...
forgotten. This is a point worthy of our attention, for God often grants his people such high privileges, for example, he uses them to declare his Word before men. If we fail in our duty, and do not endure to the end with the constancy with which we began, we ought to be doubly ashamed. Indeed, this ought to be considered a deplorable sin because it involves a double scandal. It is wicked ingratitude to stop serving our God when he has graciously stretched out his hand to us. We can even see such an attitude among the many people who boast and gloat that they have performed great wonders, when it is our Lord who has been using them as his instruments. 'What!', they exclaim, 'Have I not performed this or that miracle?' Oh yes, they will boast about their achievements, believing that God owes them something in return. Even if they have achieved a hundred times more than they say, they ought to be all the more indebted to God. They have certainly not achieved anything by their own industry, but by the power of God's Spirit. If, afterwards, they backslide, their sin and their offence is made worse. How is this? Well, they ought to have been progressing, but instead, they are withdrawing. They create more of a scandal than if they had never been in the public eye. It is as if God has placed them on a scaffold for all around to see, both far and near. For this reason, they cause offence to an innumerable multitude and their crime is even more heinous. Yet such sin is incredibly common today. Those who think they are defending the cause of the gospel believe themselves exempt from laws and rules. If we were to reprove them for their failings, they would say, 'What! Should you not rather be supporting me? I have done such and such for God.' Men will gladly excuse themselves in this way. And what is more, they proudly lift themselves up against God when he has graciously employed them in his service.

Now let us consider the words of Paul when he says, 'Have ye suffered so many things in vain?' He takes occasion to make a more serious accusation against the Galatians. They had already suffered many things for the sake of the gospel: they had been persecuted, they had had many trials in connection with both their possessions and their persons. How is it, he is saying, that all they have undergone has not persuaded them that God has called them to glorify his name? Indeed, what we endure for the sake of the gospel marks us out, and shows that God is placing us in a position of privilege! The greatest honour we could ever have is to be witnesses to his truth. However corrupt we may be, God will ratify the eternal truth which proceeds from him. Yes, he will even vindicate his Word through us, poor creatures though we are, nothing more than smoke, vapour, shadows, and less than nothing. Since God permits and appoints us to be his true witnesses to advance and spread abroad his gospel, has he not the right to bemoan the fact that, in the face of suffering, we fall away from him?

Therefore, having begun well, may we all take heed to ourselves. This warning is most worthy of note. Even those who are least in the church have a great debt towards God. After all, he has chosen them from amongst men, has taught them gospel doctrine, and has passed by those who are 'great' and those who consider themselves more worthy and more noble. This he did in order to choose those who are despised by the world. If such people fall back, they will surely have great difficulty when they are required to give an account of themselves. What, then, will become of those whom God has chosen to be his standard-bearers, as it were? He has raised up such people to be mirrors and examples to others. If they fall away, what possible excuse can they find? What about those who have suffered for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the teachings of his gospel? Some have been detained in prison, some tortured, some have been close to death. If such people apostatise, granting themselves greater freedoms than everyone else, they are (as much as lies in their power) effectively cancelling out the grace of God in their lives. They will resort to excuses, saying that they have suffered so much for the gospel’s sake, and that we ought to bear with them. But those who are afflicted the most ought to keep themselves on a shorter rein! For the
honour that God has granted them makes them even more indebted to him, and they ought to be vigilant and on their guard, not causing any to stumble. The gospel is attacked and ridiculed when people say, ‘That man ought to have been one of God’s martyrs, he has suffered so much to uphold the truth. Yet now he is a worldly man. What has happened to him?’ It is the name of God that will be blasphemed. Let us learn, therefore, that if we have served God for a time, and he has blessed our labour, the church being blessed and built up, then we need to walk circumspectly and make sure that we do not fall back into the world. Let us not be like the cow who, having produced much milk, then breaks the churn and spills its contents! If our lives create a hundred times more damage in this world than good, what can we possibly say in our own defence? Therefore, if we want God to bless our service, we must serve him with a constant, firm and sure faith. Then we will remain true to our calling and continue to mature daily.

Then, because Paul’s initial reproach was rather harsh, he moderates it by adding, ‘If it be yet in vain’. This indicates that he anticipated better things of them. If the Galatians had fallen away for a time, this was not going to last. Having been warned and exhorted, they would return to the correct path. This passage teaches us that when we are rebuked by the Spirit of God we are not to become angry, nor to be in such despair and vexation that we take the bit between our teeth. Rather, we should be led to repentance. God does not want to cast us down, then to abandon us. No, rather, having exposed our sin, he will call us back to himself and bring us to the point of repentance. For he is ready to accept us and receive us in mercy whenever we are touched by a sense of true humility for our sins and hate ourselves for them, making full and free confession to him. Let us, therefore, learn that when we are next rebuked for the sins we have committed, we must not be sour-tempered, or seek out subtle means to justify ourselves; we must, rather, pass judgment on ourselves. We need to have a patient and tolerant spirit to endure all necessary chastisement. When rebukes seem a little too pointed and harsh, let us always remember the end they had in view, and what fruitful results there may be. Indeed, when God deals sharply with us, let us remember that he will soon afterwards be ready to forgive all our shortcomings. This is what we need to learn. It is as if Paul is saying that although we have for a time sought (as much as was in our power) to deny the grace of God in us, God, for his part, will not allow his grace in us to die, but will make it precious to us once again.

However, Paul scolds us here because he does not wish us to remain stubborn in our spirits. If we have been so foolish as to have strayed from the right path, we ought to realise that, unless we add the sin of rebellion to our iniquity, our Lord is calling us back to himself and granting us opportunities to return. Just after speaking in this way, Paul immediately adds that God had poured out the gifts of his Holy Spirit amongst the Galatians through his gospel. This ought to have been enough to keep them true to the doctrines which they had accepted, without being led astray and following other paths. When he makes reference to the Spirit of God here, he is not speaking of him in the same way as we saw this morning, when we spoke of his common operation in all believers alike. No, here he is using a different argument, as we shall see by what follows. For although God had revealed himself in general to these Galatians, and adopted them as his children, he had also appointed prophets among them, and given them special gifts. Some had the gift of tongues, others gifts of healing, and so on. All this confirmed the gospel to them. Therefore, if they returned to the ceremonial law, they had to deny the power of the Spirit of God. We have already examined one point worthy of remembrance, which is that God communicates his Spirit to all, and because our nature is full of evil, without him we could not be Christians. We need God to transform us and restore us to himself in order for us to become new creatures. This is the usual way in which God makes us partakers of his Holy Spirit; by touching us with reverence for God, enlightening us concerning the faith, causing us to
seek salvation in Jesus Christ, encouraging us to take refuge in God by calling upon him, and setting us to obey his will. This is a summary of the way the Spirit of God commonly works in all believers, in all God's children. But he also grants us special gifts. For example, he gives us men who faithfully teach us about his Word and maintain law and order, and he grants many other gifts as evidences that he is in our midst, thus making us all the more dependent upon him.

Now let us examine the argument that Paul follows here. First, he accuses the Galatians of being ungrateful by refusing to acknowledge the source of their faith — the preaching of the gospel. The main reason why Paul needs to remind them of this is that men will always protest that they would never dream of rejecting the grace of God; yet, their actions prove the opposite! In what way? Some refuse to be taught anything by others; they drive away all ministers of the Word wherever possible. Some, through envy, seek to erase all memory of those whom God has appointed to sustain his people. In these various ways, people are declaring loud and clear that they wish God to keep as far away as possible. They will not come to him, even though he has provided the means by which they may draw near. They will not accept such things; they cast them aside. But when Paul accuses the Galatians, he does not simply say that they wanted nothing to do with the Spirit of God or that they were despising his gifts. Rather, he tells them that they had paid too little attention to the reasons why God had granted the blessings of his Spirit to the church. What, then, are we to retain from this passage? That if God provides the means to come to him, we must accept them and conform to his ways. For if we have the gospel preached among us, and then purposely forget what we have been told, we have rejected God, turned our backs upon him and sought to separate ourselves from his presence. Therefore, if we wish to continue to receive the grace of God, we must observe the things that he has ordained for us. This means there must be a willingness to be taught by those whom he has sent; we must all privately read the Holy Scriptures; we must respect those who have sufficient maturity to edify the church; and we must not shut the door upon the Holy Spirit. This is a summary of what we are to remember.

Paul is seeking to bring these believers back to the gospel. Let us, therefore, learn from this that if we fall away never so little, we are heading for perdition. The only way for man and God to be united is to have the gospel, as an unbreakable cord, uniting them together. Indeed, Paul refers here to 'the hearing of faith', thereby revealing how essential it is for God to go before us. Unless he stretches out his hand to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and lifts us out of the pit of confusion we are in by nature, what will become of us? How generous he is with us: he gives himself freely to us in the person of his only Son! This is more than if we inherited heaven and earth and all the treasures they contain. If we seek out a rival to the Lord Jesus Christ, we discover him to be incomparable. Therefore, although God says that we are void of all good in ourselves, he adds that he has given all for us. He has not shown himself to be mean or sparing in any way in his dealings with us. We can find in him all that we lack and this should content us; if, therefore, we stray even just a little to the right hand or to the left, we deserve to be utterly deprived and dispossessed of all that we have already received.

Paul continues by addressing the case of Abraham, the father of all believers, because through his example God teaches us the means by which a man can be justified and saved. There are not several different ways of entering the kingdom of heaven. There is only one way: the one set down for us here through the example of Abraham. Paul says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' We, therefore, need to be 'of faith' if we want to be the children of Abraham. Here we need to bring to mind what we studied before concerning the use of the term 'faith'. It is not enough to believe that there is one God who rules the world. We need to know that this God regards us as his children. This enables us to call upon him with great
liberty as our Father, because he accepts us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. By this word ‘faith’, Paul means being assured of the grace and fatherly love of our God through his promises, and having our eyes fixed upon Jesus Christ, through whom we have free access to the Father. Thus, in saying that we must be ‘of faith’ before we can be children of Abraham, he is, in effect, stating that we cannot be true Christians nor members of the church until we have faith. This involves being stripped of all thought of human ‘merit’; furthermore, it demands that we be so broken and despairing about our state that we do not know what to do. Once he has shown us our lost and damned state due to our sin, then we will seek no other means of salvation than the free bounty of God offered to us. It also involves continuing to place our hope of salvation completely in Jesus Christ. Man, being utterly lost in himself, and knowing that he is full of sin and cursed, must come to God, setting aside all merit. He must be clothed with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what it means to become a Christian. It is not enough to feel how lost we are. Think of Cain, who, feeling as if he were in hell, as it were, confessed his sin. Yet, he only did so out of a sense of despair, and as such he still incurred the guilt of murmuring and blaspheming against God. This is why he was cast away for ever. But as for us, we need so to taste the love of our God that we can rest upon it and be assured that he will accept us if we come to him through the gospel. We must approach him with confidence, not in our own thoughts or desires but in his promise: we will not be disappointed if we serve him and trust his Word.

This is what it means to be ‘of faith’. We must still bear in mind the point which Paul is seeking to dispute here. He argues against those who sought justification in the sight of God through the works of the law. Perhaps if we only considered this phrase, ‘of faith’, and not the argument that Paul brings to light, we would find the expression unclear. But Paul is saying that those who claim to obtain favour from God by their merits are puffed up with pride, and their arrogance prevents them from entering paradise. God will not deign to look upon them because they rob him of the honour which is his and seek to clothe themselves, as it were, in borrowed plumes. By robbing God of his rightful place, they thus blaspheme against him. Since Paul is addressing such an issue, we have no difficulty whatsoever in seeing that his definition of those who are ‘of faith’ concerns those who put no trust in themselves, are utterly despairing and yet turn to Jesus Christ, entirely leaning upon and trusting in him. Such people are the true children of Abraham.

Now think how few Christians there are in the world! Yes, it is true that the word trips off everyone’s tongue, but most are wickedly profaning the title. One day, God will assuredly disown all those who falsely claim to be his. In Popery, each person relies on their baptism, saying that God has given them this infallible guarantee of salvation. What! They only take the symbol and leave out the Lord Jesus Christ! Surely the Papists know nothing of what Paul is speaking about here. Worse still, they claim to have free will, meritorious deeds and satisfactions for sin. They have all this nonsense, abominations conceived by the devil, instead of the true worship of God, which they trample under foot and corrupt. Thus, ample evidence is provided to accuse them of being totally devoid of any Christianity. However, for our part, although we do not have the idolatries and superstitions which reign in Popery, we are still not yet so grounded in the gospel that we can freely offer ourselves to God, calling upon him with complete liberty, and finding ourselves gently led by him in return. Many are still like poor animals. They may protest that they do not hold to any of the superstitions or abuses of the Pope, yet when we speak to them of the rudimentary principles of the gospel, they know nothing of them! Some believe themselves to be most learned, yet when put to the test, they prove themselves to be full of nothing but hypocrisy. As the saying goes, they have been no more than chattering magpies in a cage! Thus, we need to take greater heed of Paul’s teaching here. In other words, we cannot be the children of Abraham, or members of the church unless we have faith in the gospel. This involves each
one of us renouncing all consideration of our own merit, and acknowledging that we are forever lost, finding ourselves in the pit of despair. Let us take refuge in the pure grace of God, and the mercy which he shows in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us come and plunge ourselves in the blood which he shed for our cleansing, knowing that, through this, all our debts have been paid. The wrath and vengeance of God has been appeased so that now we cannot fail to experience his favour.

In order to have a better understanding of this subject, we need to examine the way in which Abraham believed in God. We need to have a clear definition of the term 'faith', for without it this teaching will be of no value to us. We have already pointed out that the Papists fight against us without knowing why or for what reason. Their wrongful attacks upon us are conducted in an impulsive and haphazard fashion. They have never understood what faith is, and they show it! I am speaking about their great men of learning - they say that faith means believing in God, but if they believe in God, so do the devils! When Paul speaks of faith, he does not mean having a vague sense that there is a God reigning in heaven, but of knowing God to be our Father. We can be assured of this because of the promises he has made. We can be joined and united to the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that all he has is ours and that we have a share in it because we are members of his body. But when Papists speak of faith, they refer to it as something vague which will not be able to justify or save us. See how foolishly the Papists behave themselves, as if they have been completely bewitched by Satan! Indeed, it is a just punishment from God upon their pride, since they will not humble themselves to confess that they owe everything to God, having nothing in themselves that makes them worthy of his acceptance. They need to receive the grace offered to them by faith alone. This, therefore, is how we should understand the term 'faith'.

There is, however, a point here which will be of great help to us, and that is to know how Abraham believed in God. With this, we conclude. If Abraham had simply believed that there was a God in heaven, this could not have justified him, for the pagans believe as much. Or, if Abraham had simply believed that God was the Judge of all the earth, it would not have sufficed. But God said to Abraham, 'Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward', and 'I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee', and he also said that all nations would be blessed in him (Gen. 15:1; 17:7). God spoke thus with Abraham and testified that he counted him a member of his family, one of his own children, and that he would be his God. When Abraham accepted this promise, he was justified. How is this? Well, when God presented Abraham with his bounty and grace, Abraham believed and accepted God's Word. Thus, his salvation was completely secure.

Now we have a much clearer idea of what it means to be justified by faith. It does not mean we possess a vague notion that God exists, but rather, that we know him as our Father and our Saviour, since he reveals himself thus in his Word, and grants us a guarantee of it in the Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we are united and joined to God. Although we are wretched creatures, full of wickedness, he will still accept us as his own and find us pleasing in his sight. This is only possible because our Lord Jesus Christ mediates between God and man. Having such a promise, we must rest upon it entirely and not doubt that God will be favourable to us to the end. When we call upon him, we must find all our refuge in him, leaving the world behind us and pressing on in the hope of eternal life. This is having faith, and this is being justified! This is how our father Abraham believed. Without this, we cannot be Christians. For until we know what the gospel is really about (as Paul says in the tenth chapter to the Romans, verse fourteen), we cannot call God our Father. We cannot, he says, call upon a God we have not heard of or believed in. And how can we possibly know him unless he is revealed to us? Thus, we need faith to go before us. And how do we get faith? By hearing, says Paul (Rom. 10:17). Therefore, we need to be taught the gospel, otherwise we cannot have faith. Through this, we can see that what
the Papists call faith is pure folly. Why? Because they ignore the Word of God and, instead, call the most brutish things acts of supreme devotion: muttering words they do not understand, going on pilgrimage, etc. They will never find God while they entertain such foolish ceremonies and refuse to listen to a single drop of good doctrine. What great devotion and holiness they have! Yet we know that there is no Christianity at all without faith, and no faith without instruction in the gospel. Consequently, we cannot be Christians unless God has graciously revealed his goodness and mercy to us, as, indeed, he does daily when we hear the gospel. Then we can be assured that we are among the number of his own, and can call upon him with complete confidence; waiting to receive the perfection that he has revealed to us now by his own mouth, that is to say, through his Word.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and asking him to make us increasingly aware of them. May this draw us to him with such repentance, that not only will we ask his forgiveness, but that he may reform and change us until we bear the marks of his children. When we appear before his judgment seat, may our Lord Jesus Christ restore in us the image of God the Father, in order that he may acknowledge us as members of his body. In the meanwhile, may he support us in our infirmities until he has purged us of them all. May he not only show such grace to us, but to all peoples, etc.

If, as we would have others believe, we are indeed Christians, we ought to be very familiar with what it means to be justified by faith. Yet, how few of those who claim to love the gospel understand the justification spoken of so frequently in the Scriptures! This being the case, it is very important that we ourselves should know this doctrine, for without it we can have no assurance of salvation. Indeed, neither can we freely call upon God or find refuge in him in time of need. This is why Paul places so much emphasis on this teaching.

Last Sunday, we saw that Abraham was counted righteous because he believed God; we also learnt that we have no dignity of our own which can render us acceptable to God. We have to receive all from him. Abraham’s ‘belief’ relates to what had been promised to him. God had freely offered himself to his servant Abraham, and he came to be counted