

A GOOD REPORT

Michael W. Poole

I WONDER what sort of feelings you get when your parents are reading your school report. Do you feel that at last the moment has come when they can see how hard you have worked and how well you have done, or do you have the feeling that you are going to come in for [58/59] grumbling and criticism because you have done badly? One report which I received when I was a boy made me go all hot and cold, so much so that I can still remember it word for word. I was in the upper sixth at the time, and we had just had a new master for mathematics. Now maths was not my strong subject, but even so I had a big surprise, for the report ran 'Very disappointing indeed. He will have to do a lot better than this to have any chance of success'. I had never had as bad a report as that, and it shook me so much that I worked hard for most of the Easter holidays. Perhaps that was really what the master hoped I would do. Anyway, it had the desired effect, and in due course I passed my exam.

Some years later the position changed completely, for I became a teacher myself; so now I was the one who had to write the reports. During the years I have been kept busy doing this, and having made a quick calculation, reckon that since the day that I filled in my first report I must have written about 9,000. It makes me feel quite tired to think about it!

Most teachers are conscientious about writing reports, but being only human, and often very busy, some occasional slips do occur. Sometimes a teacher forgets who the person is when they are filling in a report and, instead of finding out, puts down a comment without much meaning such as, 'could do better', which is nearly always true of anybody, or 'trying' which might be true in more senses than one. Happily such thoughtless comments are rare, for most teachers take great interest in their pupils, and if you get 'could do better' on your report it almost certainly means that it is the considered opinion of your teacher and should help you to try harder.

Last summer I had to write a very different sort of report. Having finished marking several hundred Advanced Level Physics papers, I had to send in an account of the

work I had been doing in the form of what is called an examiner's report. This was a statement about the overall performance of the candidates, including among other things a comment on which questions were answered best. Imagine my surprise when, a few weeks after sending it in, I was sent back a report -- a report on my marking! Clearly I was wrong to think that I had reached the stage when I wrote all the reports, for here was one written about me.

One of the highest honours a scientist can receive is to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of science, and if you see the letters F.R.S. after anybody's name you can be certain that they really are experts in their subject. Yet at the headquarters of the Royal Society is a library where are to be found reports which not only tell of the work of past Fellows but also include personal details of the sort of people that they were. So even at such an exalted level, it seems that no-one can escape having reports written about them.

All this leads up to what is said about some Old Testament men and women, which is that "these all, having obtained a good report through faith ..." (Hebrews 11:39). This was a report not written by men, who might make mistakes, but by God Himself who is the perfect judge.

I wonder how our reports will read. If we were able to write them ourselves we might find it difficult, if not quite impossible, to be absolutely honest. There would be some things about which we would like to write a lot, but others which we should not want anybody else to know of. God, however, does not hide anything -- He gives a true report. He certainly did in the case of king David, telling of his failures as well as his successes. Nevertheless God's report shows that He said that David was a man "who followed me with all his heart" (1 Kings 14:8). This was because when he failed, he confessed it, asked for forgiveness and was able to walk on with God 'by faith'.

This was not only true of David but of all those who are said to have received a good report by faith. Mistakes they made, yes; sins they committed, yes. But by faith they proved God's power to forgive and deliver. If they obtained a good report through faith, so can we if we trust in the Lord with all our hearts. This is the only way to be sure of having God's 'good report'.

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