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THE OPENING YEAR

Christians cannot remain oblivious to the very real and dangerous problems that exist in the world today both locally and worldwide, our news media inform us daily of the crises and hardships which so many suffer and we cannot but feel for those involved, even though there may be little we each can do. Only God's Kingdom holds the final and complete solution. In the meantime, we have the assurance of God's word given long ago that all those "will be kept in perfect peace whose hearts are stayed upon Jehovah", those whose lives have been firmly established thereon for support. (Isa 26:3)

The promise of peace within a world of turmoil was reiterated by our Saviour, through whom we have come to know God as our Heavenly Father – "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto thee; let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid". "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good courage, I have overcome the world. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace". (John 14:27, 16:33) Peace is His will for His followers!

Such peace is the treasure and privilege of all the Lord's people and we do well to draw deeply upon this source of inner peace and rest in the Lord. Such peace will strengthen us and enable us to go forward in trust and assurance into the new year, whatever 2003 may hold for us as individuals, as assemblies of God's people, as part of that one Church "which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all". "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His". (2 Tim 2:19) He who knows and loves each one of His children will surely be their peace, as they trust Him.

As we look back over 2002, can we say with Samuel "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us!" (1 Sam 7:12) Surely He has indeed done so for us each as we think carefully back over the experiences of the way. God's promises do not fail as we are reminded in Lam 3:22,23 – "His compassions fail not, they are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness", also in 1 Thess 5:24 – "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it". So in times of special stress when it seems that "help delays to come", we need to trust Him even more, knowing "He will send the answer, though in wisdom oft delayed". In such times, we can help one another, by prayer, by the word of encouragement, by practical support.

Yes, even in a troubled world, Christians may still know real joy, in the abiding presence of our dear Master, in present enjoyment of the great and precious promises of God, in the rich and satisfying truths of His Word as they have been opened up for us in these last days, in the glorious prospects for all mankind, when the dark night of sin gives way to the light of a new and glorious day. Such inner peace and hope and joy will help to sustain us each one whatever our experiences may be in the coming year.

At this turning point, then, when one year closes and another opens before us, let us take stock. What progress has been made "in the school of Christ" in faith and understanding, in character and daily living, in love for the brethren, in appreciation of the so great love of our Heavenly Father, in zeal for His service even in what may seem the smallest way, in the joy of our Lord? All these things are His will for us, let us resolve then to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith". (Heb 12:1) May we each prove "more than conqueror" through Him who loved us. Amen.

THOU SHALT REMEMBER (Deut 8:2)

'Tis good to remember the way He hath lead us,
To view once again both the track and the road;
To muse on the fact that unfailing He fed us,
Our faithful and loving, compassionate God.

'Tis good to review how He surely was leading,
Though we saw Him not, nor knew all He planned.
'Tis good to recall that whate'er we were needing
Was wondrously met by His bountiful hand.

'Tis good to remember, to pause, and to ponder,
It stirs us to worship, and tunes us to praise;
Such retrospect helps us of Him to grow fonder,
Whose goodness and mercy have followed our days.

JOY OF HEAVEN

I propose to share some thoughts on the nature and extent of God's indwelling of our Lord Jesus. It seems natural to turn then to the indwelling of God and our Lord Jesus in the believer and our response. The book of Titus highlights the very special importance of God's indwelling of the Son of His love - indwelling to a degree far greater than any other. God did indwell our Lord Jesus to the extent that it was almost as if the two beings were one. Perhaps this caused the error where early scholars thought the Two were in fact One.

They should have realised that God could never die. Yet our Lord Jesus was always a person in His own right, not a robot operated by His Father. *"Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart."* (Psalm 40:7,8 KJV) To Titus, Paul stated that God's grace appeared. One does not expect that an abstract like grace, that is favour, could appear or be seen in any way, but *"the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,"* (Titus 2:11 NIV)

But wait. In 1 John 4:12, John tells us *"No man hath seen God at any time."* John's Gospel chapter one, verse 18 repeats these words and then explains that Jesus Christ revealed God's nature, which must include God's grace: *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."* Clearly God's grace appeared in the person of Jesus Christ Whom God had sent. When the Word of God Who had been with God in the beginning, became a man, God's favour was seen. God's nature was so much part of His Son that he that saw the Son saw the Father's nature.

Other modern renderings explain that God's grace did not 'appear' to all. We did not see Him, ourselves. The word 'all' does not refer to those who saw but to *all* those who will benefit from God's grace or undeserved favour. *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all,"* (Titus 2:11 NRSV) Word for word renderings by Marshall and Wilson support the NRSV. God was in Christ. It reminds us of 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, reading from the NASB.: *"Now all these things are from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."*

In This Issue	
The Opening Year	1
Joy of Heaven	2
God's Habitation	5
Your Calling and Election Sure	7
Mountains of the Lord	10

Verses in Titus add to our understanding of 'indwelling'. When spirit beings dwell in, guide, lead, even push humans to action they also disclose their own nature. Other spirit beings can indwell. We need to know God's nature to ensure that we only follow God and His Son. Paul's letter to Titus went on to distinguish between the appearing at Christ's first advent, which revealed God's grace, and His glorious appearing. Paul said they were to look for this as a blessed hope still future. *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;"* (Titus 2:13 KJV)

This time it is The Moffatt Translation which makes the meaning more clear. *"Awaiting the blessed hope of the appearance of the Glory of the great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ,"* RSV, NRSV, NASB, Wilson, and Marshall all support that it is the Glory which shall appear in Christ. This certainly reminds us of our Lord's great prophecy: *"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the land lament, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."* (Matt 24:30 Darby)

Paul brings us back to God's indwelling of our Lord Jesus at the first advent in the third chapter of Titus. He refers to former weaknesses and continues *"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,"* (Titus 3:4 KJV) Clearly, this is not referring to the future blessed hope. It has happened. After mankind was in an undone state and in need of a saviour, God's kindness and love appeared. Again this was in the person of His only begotten Son. Our Lord Jesus Christ showed the kindness and love of His Father, Who was indwelling His Anointed and motivating Him.

We should not be confused by the reference to God as our Saviour. The plan of salvation was designed by God and implemented by His Son. Accordingly the word 'Saviour' is applicable to both He Who planned and He Who carried out the plan and is the centre of every aspect of the plan. It was the pre-human existence of Christ, which enabled Him so well to portray God's nature. Paul called *"Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."* (1 Cor 1:24 KJV)

The passage in Proverbs chapter eight tells much of the beginning. There, Christ declares God's wisdom just as He shows forth God's grace and loving kindness in the New Testament. Selecting some verses from NASB:

v23 *"From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.*
v28 *"When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed,*
v30 *"Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him,*
v31 *"Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And having My delight in the sons of men."*

We can only imagine the love and closeness that bonded Father and Son as they planned the universe and then cre-

ated all that exists. God's daily delight can well be described as the Joy of Heaven. This master workman of the almighty God had to become a man before he could show mankind God's nature. Remember the effect the partial revelation had on Moses' person.

For many the revelation of the nature of God in Jesus Christ is but a witness. In this regard it is a little like the preaching of the Gospel. Those who really see Christ and in Christ, God's true nature, His love and His kindness, are constrained to give themselves to such a wonderful God. To those who do give themselves to God in this age, Christ is indeed the Joy of Heaven. He said *"These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."* (John 15:11 KJV)

In the third chapter of Titus, Paul continued, telling more about the effect God's love and kindness has on those who come to Him. Again it was only by becoming a man, that the Joy of Heaven could make it possible for human beings to come to God. He had to be a corresponding price to Adam. *"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, Which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour,"* (Titus 3:4-6 RSV)

God's Spirit poured out so richly on the Christian can lead, give wisdom, sustain in difficulties, and convert trials to joy. It is the only real source of comfort. God can work out most needs for good in this life. Ultimate comfort may have to look ahead to the resurrection. The justified have but a measure of God's Holy Spirit and it comes through Christ. They will always depend on Christ. He was without sin and remained without sin even while He was a man. Only such a being would be able to receive and manifest God's Holy Spirit, without measure. *"For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell."* (Col. 1:19 KJV)

God's workmanship in the Christian starts with mere clay. To be useful to the potter the clay needs to be pliable and smooth to the Master's touch. God's goal is very high. He wants His Spirit to lead Christians to do His perfect will in their absolute free choice. Hopefully, the measure of God's Spirit which we receive through Christ will increase more and more as we yield ourselves, making His will our will.

This is what Paul wanted for the Christians at Colosse. He told them of his prayer for them "that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, Which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:" (Col. 1:9-12 KJV)

God is able. But we have to let Him. Beyond the giving of self to God we have to yield ourselves - we have to keep on letting God work in us. Like the driver, we have to keep our eyes on the road, be watchful for instructions and quick

to heed them. Sir Arthur Sullivan's hymn pointed to the need to be observant, to recognise God's Holy Spirit and to obey.

"Oh, give me Samuel's ear –
The open ear, O Lord!
Alive and quick to hear
Each whisper of Thy Word:
Like him to answer at Thy call,
And to obey Thee first of all."

To the Philippians, the apostle Paul drew attention to instinctive reactions from the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. These instincts seem to split the person making one try to go in opposite directions at the same time. *"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."* (Philippians 2:12,13 NIV) On the one hand the believer rejoices, appreciates and maximises the benefit gained. We should draw as close to God as we can. At the same time reality demands awe and reverence at our being in the presence of the Most High. Our insignificance almost makes us want to hide.

But the fear of God is one of awe and reverence not terror (1 John 4:18). We must not let our person be divided. It would mean desolation like the divided kingdom in Matthew 12:25. There is no way one can hide (Hebrews 4:13). The instinct to hide must be overcome through our Lord Jesus Christ. *"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."* (Hebrews 10:22 KJV)

The Amplified Bible seeks to present the full meaning of the earlier language by using multiple English words. It sometimes restates an expression in a different idiom to make it more clear. Philippians 2:12,13 become somewhat larger but the extra words really emphasise our need to work diligently together with God's Holy Spirit – to respond to the call of Christ. *"Therefore, my dear ones, as you have always obeyed [my suggestions], so now, not only [with the enthusiasm you would show] in my presence but much more because I am absent, work out – cultivate, carry out to the goal and fully complete – your own salvation with reverence and awe and trembling [self-distrust, that is, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation; timidly shrinking from whatever might offend God and discredit the name of Christ]. (not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you – energising and creating in you the power and the desire – both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight."*

We should remember that both Father and Son indwell the believer – the true Church. *"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.'" (John 14:23 NASB)* The more we yield, emptying ourselves of self, the more room there is for God's Holy Spirit and the Son of His Love – the more we

can receive the Joy of Heaven.

Ponder for a moment what is the object of that indwelling – of God's will and good pleasure in us. Firstly, it is to reflect His nature – the very nature that the Joy of Heaven revealed for all mankind. To do this, we have to *"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,"* (Phil. 2:5 NRSV) – the mind of love, of humility, the mind too of faith delighting to do God's will. Reflecting His nature will always be an object of the indwelling, of His work in the believer. Other objectives vary somewhat with time periods or dispensations.

In this 'work experience age' the Church is being built up into a spiritual house, into a holy priesthood, into Christ the head stone of all the corners. It is a creative work developing the new creature begotten again from above by God's Holy Spirit through our Lord Jesus Christ. *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* (Eph. 2:10 NIV)

God's plan included developing a little flock in this age to fit it for the next age. The little flock will then have a responsibility of care for the subjects of Christ's Kingdom *"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* (Luke 12:32 KJV) Note that there is a difference between subjects of a kingdom and those into whose care the Kingdom is given.

Preparation is an important part of this 'work experience' age. Letting God's Spirit through Christ develop the Christ-like nature is a big part of building up the spiritual house. For that little flock, being built up in this way, the Joy of Heaven is already here. God is in Christ and Christ is in the believer. We rejoice already in fullness of joy. The next age will be a 'teaching age'. God *"will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."* (1 Tim. 2:4 KJV)

The delight of Christ in the sons of men was a joy set before Christ when He *"endured the cross, despising the shame,"* to save all mankind.. By paying the penalty on Adam's behalf, Christ set aside all the consequences of Adam's sin. This enables the resurrection of all who sin because they were born sinners. All will come to know the truth. Almost all will cling to Christ and eternal life.

That delight of Christ in the sons of men is also a joy set before the Little Flock as God indwells through Christ leading it to help the world of mankind up the Highway of Holiness. How rich will be the Joy of Heaven in the little flock throughout the teaching age!

The teaching millennium will end with the short release of Satan and the overthrow of the revolt that Satan will lead. Moses foretold how Christ ends all opposition to God. *"Moses said, 'the Lord God shall raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you. And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'" (Acts 3:22-23 NASB)*
Death cannot cease until the rebels who in full knowledge

do not want to live under God's laws of paradise are destroyed from among the people. Christ's Kingdom where everybody loves everybody will then be fit for Christ to deliver up to God. *"Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."* (1 Cor. 15:24 KJV)

Thus will be ushered in the 'Ages to Come'. That era will be the achievement of Christ – The Joy of Heaven. Love will have replaced any need for rule, authority or power. *"Then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'" (1 Cor. 15:54 NIV)* Think of the great joy which will follow the learning millennium – the surpassing loveliness of perfect humanity. What will then be the work of God indwelling the little flock? What does the Creator do when the creation is complete?

How easy it will be to love each other when everybody is both worthy and lovable. The prospect puts joy in our hearts. All our loved ones, past, present and future, will rejoice together. But apart from our dear ones, there are a lot of lovable people whom we have not yet met. Even more will become lovable. It will take a long time to come to know them and to love them all. Eternity is a long time.

Ah, that is the ultimate achievement by the only One Who could do it. Not only did He make the restart possible but it will be by the power of Christ's resurrection that everybody will be able to keep the law – the simple but essential law *"Love God; Love thy neighbour"*. All is made possible by God indwelling, without measure, Him Who is God's constant delight – the Joy of Heaven. (FG:)

LOVE divine, all love excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down:
Thou hast made with us Thy dwelling,
Love doth all Thy favors crown.
Father, Thou art all compassion;
Pure unbounded love Thou art;
Thou hast brought to us salvation;
Thee we love with all our heart.

O Almighty to deliver!
Let us more Thy life receive;
Dwell in us, and never, never,
Never more Thy temples leave;
Thee we would be always pleasing,
Love Thee as Thy hosts above,
Serve and praise Thee without ceasing,
Witnessing to Thy great love.

Finish, Lord, Thy New Creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Show us all Thy great salvation--
Thine shall all the glory be.
Changed from glory into glory,
Till we see Thine own dear face;
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise. **BHS 227**

GOD'S HABITATION

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Eph.2:19-22)

The word ‘Habitation’ is sometimes rendered ‘dwelling place’. Perhaps Moses was the first one to suggest that a dwelling place of God could be in a human being. Let us read Ex.15:2: *‘The Lord is my strength and song and he is become my salvation: he is my God and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him’*. Our text tells us that over the course of time the members of God’s true church were to become God’s habitation or dwelling place.

Often when you begin to prepare a sermon on a particular subject you are confronted with related matters that would take other sermons to explain and, because of the time it would take to do so, you have to discard them for the time being. One such instance is right here when the verse says we become a habitation of God **through the Spirit**. Without dealing with that subject now, it must be said that it is the most important feature by which we can become a dwelling place of God.

According to Vine, our text could be translated to give the meaning that the Holy Spirit is the habitation of God in a person, and that would be correct. Remember how it says in another place we, that is Christians, are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit. The impartation and the indwelling of God can only be recognised by the Spirit. No one can really know God any other way. Let us read 1 John 3:24: *‘And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.’* One has said ‘Discovery of the fact that the heart is God’s dwelling place will revolutionise the life of any Christian’. It should and it will.

Some things presented here may be new to some. So in introduction I am going to use some words of Job and leave you to consider them. In Chapter 34:3 Job said *‘for the ear trieth words as the mouth tasteth meat’*. If meat is off, the mouth will tell you immediately and you won’t accept it. He continues, *‘let us choose our judgment, let each know what is good’*. So what thoughts your ears hear now, weigh up whether they are true and good or not. For the most part I will be repeating what others have said and which my ears have decided are good.

Let us read John 14:23: *‘If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.’* He will make his abode with us, we will be his dwelling place. One has said,

‘Has the solemn fact dawned on us that at consecration we will become his dwelling place?’ Let us read Isa.66:1,2: *‘Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.’*

Have you ever thought what you are saying when you sing the third line of the third verse of hymn 121, *‘Make our hearts Thy habitation’*. While our interest now is in God’s people of the present time, we may refer to a future time also. In Rev.21:3 some translations read: *‘Behold the dwelling place of God is with men’* whereas the authorized version reads: *‘Behold the tabernacle of God is with men’* and the passage goes on to say that as a consequence there will be no more tears, sorrow, pain, etc. Of course, that is referring to the Kingdom Age, but we know it will come ...every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess Him as Lord – God will be in their hearts. Oh, the prospect! It is so transporting. ‘On the words ‘Hallowed be thy Name’ in the Lord’s prayer, one commented: “Perhaps no quality of heart is in greater danger of being blotted out today amongst professing Christians than the thought of reverence for God.” If God dwells in the heart, there will always be deep reverence for His Holy name.

The following words were gleaned from an old copy of Bible Students’ Monthly: “The church is the expository of the Word of God and it is no exaggeration to say that God reveals Himself to mankind between the first and second Advents of Christ by means of the church; this is a solemn thought reminding us of solemn responsibility.” God is invisible to the naked eye – no one has ever seen Him in that sense. The only way we have learned anything real about God is by having it revealed or manifested by His son Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer. He lived amongst men and was **seen** by them. But that is a long time ago. We knew Christ after the flesh while he was here but now we know him so no more.

So now, how does man know God? He is known or manifested forth by the disciples of His Son, Jesus Christ. The hearts of all the true children of God have become His dwelling place and from there His character is revealed to others; it is an important way in which anyone can see God now. Two texts well confirm this.

Let us read 1 Cor.3:16: *‘Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?’* and also 2 Cor.6:16: *‘And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people.’* The figure of a temple is variously used in respect to the church. Each Christian is spoken of as being the temple of the Holy Spirit. Each congregation might be considered the temple of God. Prof Barclay translated Eph.2:20-22 thus: “All the building that is going on is being fitted together in Him, and

it will go on growing until it becomes a holy temple in the Lord, a temple in which you too are built as part, that you may become the dwelling place of God **through the work of the Spirit.**"

Do we realise this? Differences of opinion there are sure to be amongst the members of the church. How do we meet them? Does the Holy Spirit of God dwell in us as we reason and declare our thought? What a test!

Perhaps there is some disagreement with the thought that we can reveal God's true character to anyone. We may be overcome with the thought of our imperfection but I am sure that example occurs more often and in ways that we do not realise. We know of ourselves that we meet people who have a tremendous effect upon us. It is so evident that they have some power in their life that makes them different from others. It is so evident that they have something that others have not. Such persons encourage desire to know the God who can do that!

How many times can we see the opposite effect caused by professing Christians who seem to pay little attention as to how they conduct themselves generally. A quote again: "Two different men may utter almost the same words but spiritual power is not merely in what they say but in **who they are.**" Can we take an example of that in two who spoke of divine things? Isaiah spoke faithfully of the things to God's glory. Balaam's message was hindered by thoughts of personal advantage. Let us read 1Tim.4:12: '*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity.*'

Again: "Every Christian should strive to be a pattern worthy of imitation – a pattern of earnest endeavour to copy Christ in his daily life." Note the words 'strive' and 'endeavour'. We can do all things if it is Christ who is strengthening us. And again: "Only loss of confidence in the Lord can separate us from his love and promises." John 15:4 has something to say about **abiding** in Christ: '*Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*' Abiding in Christ leads to God abiding in us. He is the source of life. Fellow members of the body of Christ can help us only by directing us to the source. We can do nothing ourselves. We need to remember this always in our studies and worship and afterwards too.

Everywhere and at all times we should remember that we are ambassadors for Christ who always sought **God's** glory in everything He did. It is a battle. As another has said: "the cares of this life, its necessities, the customs of the world, our fallen tendencies, all would absorb every hour of our life if we let them." Some people who go to church leave something behind in the pew when they go out – their Christianity. Do Bible Students do the same when they leave their room of study? How we all need the wisdom which knows when to speak and when to be silent, and the Christianity which is as careful how we live in our homes as how we act before our brethren.

In Ephesians 1:18 there is a suggestion that the saints are

God's inheritance: '*The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling and what the riches of the glory of **His** inheritance in the saints.*' How indeed can this be? It is by the things we have been discussing. If the hearts of all Christians were a habitation of God, one of His dwelling places, how precious He must regard it! (WS 01)

*Wherever I am, whatever I do,
O God, please help me to live
In a way that makes me credible
As your representative*

PATIENCE

There is one quality that always comes to the aid of a man in times of adversity: it is Patience.

Patience is a virtue of accepting a disagreeable and painful situation without becoming bitter.

An effective method in developing patience is uninterrupted listening and gentleness in response.

If you press a matter too hard or too often, it may become self-defeating.

Patience achieves more than force.

To know how to wait is the great secret of success.

God is not finished with the picture of your life yet; He is still painting.

There is nothing to be gained by answering in haste, but much to be gained by letting a few nights of sleep pass over it.

Life is hard by the yard but a cinch by the inch.

A slow drizzle for a length of time is more effective in watering the soil than a cloud-burst.

Patience is a plaster for all sores.

“YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE”

2 Peter 1:3-11

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” (Verse 10)

This verse is taken from a letter written by Peter, “a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ” and is addressed to “them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” In it he tells us that we have to give Diligence to making our calling and election sure. This key word is translated from the Greek *spoudazo* which signifies “to hasten to do a thing, to exert oneself, to endeavour.” Thoughts that the word convey personally would include –

- (a) we have no time to waste
- (b) we need to hasten in our endeavours to make our calling and election sure
- (c) the time is short, we do not know when our Heavenly Father may call us to account of our lives.

Peter knew from his time spent with Jesus that there was a need for diligence to come to the standard required by our Lord. He learnt that service for Christ is the only way to the highest honour, as we are told in John 12:26 – “If anyone serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant also be; if anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.” (NAS) Christ Himself is King of kings and Lord of lords, and He makes all His faithful servants kings and priests unto God, and as we are told in Rev 1:5,6 – “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth, to Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.” (NAS) How great an honour is it to be servants of this Master!

In Peter’s first epistle, we are given details of the people to whom it is written. They are those elected “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood, may grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.” (1 Peter 1:2 NAS) As we read further into the two epistles, we realize that there is a lot of work that we need to strive toward the standard desired by our Heavenly Father. Let us look at some of the areas that need our attention if we are to make our calling and election sure -

- (a) **Faith**
- (b) **Knowledge**
- (c) **Works**
- (d) **Character**

Faith:

The like precious faith mentioned in verse 1, the faith that we strive for, is vastly different from the false faith of the

heretic, the feigned faith of the hypocrite or the faith of those who put their trust in gold and silver. It is the faith of God’s elect. Titus 1:1,2 reads – “Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God who cannot lie, promised long ages ago.” (NAS)

True faith is a precious grace, and can be scarce even among many professed Christians. There are comparatively only a small number of true believers among the many who profess Jesus Christ, who really have any clear understanding of the plan of God, few who fully comprehend true faith, as we are told in Matt 22:14 – “for many are called, but few are chosen.” (NAS) True faith is of the greatest blessing and advantage to those who have it. Indeed, Paul speaking to the Galatians states – “the just shall live by faith.” (Gal 3:11 NAS)

It is through our Faith that we are able to procure all the necessary supports and comforts for our earthly life. Faith brings us to Christ, the only source of the proper nourishment required by the new creature. Through faith, we can become as tried gold, the heavenly treasure that enriches our lives. Job gives a great example (Job 23:10) – “But He knows the way I take, when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (NAS) It is only through faith that we can take and put on the white raiment, the royal robes that clothe and adorn and cover our inadequacy. (Rev 3:17,18) Faith is just as precious to Christians today as it was to the apostle; it produces the same precious effect in all.

Faith unites the weaker believer to Christ in the same way it does the stronger believer. Faith purifies the heart of one believer as truly as the heart of another. “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom 5:1 NAS) Faith allows us to take hold of our precious Saviour, and allows us access to the many precious promises of our Heavenly Father. This precious faith is obtained from our Father; it is the gift from Him that we cannot earn, as it can only be obtained through the righteousness of Christ. Paul speaking to the Ephesians says – “For by grace you have been saved by faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Eph 2:8 NAS)

Knowledge:

Knowledge of our Heavenly Father and faith in Him are the ways whereby all spiritual support and comfort are conveyed to us, as we are told in John 17:3 – “this is life eternal, that they might come to know Thee (come to a knowledge of Thee) the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.” (KJV) we must also accept and acknowledge our Heavenly Father as the author of our calling and that this comes from no other source. The apostle Peter in verse 3 states – “according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” (KJV)

The last part of this verse “called us to glory and virtue” is

better translated in the NAS as “called us by His own glory and excellence.” This seems more in keeping with the passage of scripture, as we have no glory or virtue of our own, as we are told in Eph 1:17-19 - “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.”

It is only through our Heavenly Father’s power that we can be brought out from the darkness of the world to stand before Him, as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:9 - “but ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (KJV) Peter goes on to give encouragement through the promises of our Heavenly Father as we are told in 2 Peter 1:4 - “for by these (His own glory and power) He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” (NAS)

Some of these promises of our Heavenly Father include -

- For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:26 KJV)
- Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. (Gal 4:28 KJV)
- In whom ye also trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. (Eph 1:13 KJV)
- Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (2 Peter 3:13 KJV)
- This is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life. (1 John 2:25 KJV)
- And of course the greatest promise of the verse just read - That you might become partakers of the divine nature.

The apostle Peter uses the promises of our Heavenly Father to excite and engage us to make advances in grace and holiness. By His grace, we have been able to obtain this precious faith through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is so much needed to assist us on our journey along the narrow way. This is a very good beginning, but we are not to rest as if we were already perfect. Rather, the apostle exhorts us to press forward. We should also exhort our brethren and excite them to the use of all proper means to obtain what we desire of God to bestow His rich gifts upon them. To make any progress in our Christian walk we must be diligent and industrious in our endeavours. Without our giving all diligence, there is no gaining of any ground in the work of holiness; those who are slothful in the business of religion will make nothing of it. “Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” (Luke 13:24 KJV)

This striving requires that we have come to a knowledge and love for our Heavenly Father’s plans, not only for us, but also for all of mankind. We have to learn what He wants from us. We have to comprehend the great sacrifice of Christ and what this means for all of us. To gain this knowledge or understanding of God’s plan, we have to be diligent in studying the Bible. It soon becomes clear to us that just the reading of the Bible does not bring or deepen this understanding or knowledge. We find that studying together gives us an opportunity to learn from one another and as we are told in Heb 10:24,25 - “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as we see the day approaching.” (KJV)

We soon realize, however, that there is more to knowledge than just studying or meeting together; there are many who do this, yet seem to have little knowledge of God’s plan and often greatly limit His goodness and mercy. We soon realize that fuller knowledge comes only from our Heavenly Father. “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” (Eph 1:17,18 KJV)

We further realize that without the gift of the Holy Spirit we cannot understand the deeper things of God as Paul tells us in 1 Cor 2:13,14 - “which things we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” (NAS) We have to change from thinking as the world does, because the knowledge of God is foolishness to them, His ways do not give them the rewards they are looking for. We need the sanctified, spiritual mind that is centred on our Heavenly Father and His Son, so that we are ready to glean from the Scriptures the knowledge that we require to make our calling and election sure.

Works:

The faith and knowledge that we have the privilege of receiving from our Heavenly Father should be able to be seen by others around us. “Keep your behaviour excellent among the gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12 NAS) Paul tells us in Rom 3:28 - “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” (KJV) So we realise that our works do not save us any more than the law was able to save the Jews, but they do give a way to demonstrate to those around us the love and reverence we have towards Christ and our Heavenly Father.

James gives a very good demonstration of works showing forth our faith when speaking to the brethren (James 2:14-26 KJV) - “What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

and....ye give them not those things which are needful, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone....Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? ...Ye see then that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James shows that our Heavenly Father expects us to demonstrate our faith to Him. Abraham’s faith was tested by God and so at times we can expect our faith to be tested

Character:

As we develop our faith, demonstrating its growth, through the opportunities that are given to us by our Heavenly Father, by works that give the honour to Him,, we also need to study diligently how we can better serve our Lord and help our brethren and mankind. In addition, we see from Peter’s words (2 Peter 1:5) we should at the same time be developing our character to be more like our Lord. The word add (to your faith) has the meaning of to fully supply, so we can see that he is stressing the importance of character development if we are to make our calling and election sure. Areas for development as listed by Peter are –

- **Virtue:** Fortitude or strength of character. Our Lord told the apostles in John 14:1 – “Let not your heart be troubled...believe in God, believe also in me” and later in the chapter (V 27) – “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” (NAS)
- **Temperance:** Self-control or moderation. We must be moderate in desiring and using the good things of natural life; an inordinate desire after these is inconsistent with an earnest desire after God and Christ. “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand,” (Phil 4:5 KJV)
- **Patience:** The Greek word has the meaning of Cheerful Endurance. We have to learn to bear calamities and crosses that we may be called to bear with silence and submission, without murmuring against God. James tells us “let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:4) All the trials that we go through are to complete our character development.
- **Godliness:** “To be devout”, denotes goodness, characterized by a God-ward attitude, i.e. our behaviour should be such as is well pleasing to our Heavenly Father.
- **Brotherly Kindness:** Tender affection to all our fellow Christians, who are children of the same Father, servants of the same Master, members of the same family, travelers on the same narrow way and heirs of the same inheritance. We have to love them with a “pure heart fervently”, in the same way that we unreservedly love those of our natural family. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you,

that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34.35 NAS)

- **Charity:** A love of goodwill to all mankind. This must be added to the love of delight which we have for those who are the children of God. We are to sympathise with mankind in their calamities, and as we are able relieve their necessities. We must remember that if we make our calling and election sure, these are the ones that we will be working to restore to harmony with God in the next age. “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men. And especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” (Gal 6:9,10)

It is worth noting what the apostle Peter tells us in verse 8 – ‘For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:8 KJV) Note that we not only have to have these qualities of faith, knowledge, works and the different character traits, but we have to be continually working on them to improve all aspects of our journey along the narrow way. The word translated barren in the text is given in the margin as idle, a more accurate rendering of the Greek. We cannot be idle but must add one grace to another, remembering that all Christian graces come from the heart, so we have to thrive and grow. If we abound in grace, then we will aspire to good works.

Peter, however, sounds a warning in the next verse (V 9) – “But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” (KJV) The blindness here is that of a new-born babe who is unable to focus. So the Christian who is blind in this sense does not focus on the word of God. This is further brought with the thought of “cannot see afar off” which is used by Peter. This does not contradict the preceding word “blind”, it qualifies it; he of whom it is true that he is blind in that he cannot discern spiritual things, is near-sighted in that he is occupied in regarding worldly affairs. (Vine) He has forgotten his obligation to his Master and his Heavenly Father as one saved by the blood of the Lamb.

Conclusion:

It is the duty and privilege of all believers to strive to make their calling and election sure, remembering that they were called of God. This requires diligence and labour,. There must also be close self-examination - Are our minds enlightened? Are our endeavours renewed? Are our whole minds fixed on heavenly things? Have we personally examined ourselves to identify those areas of our lives that could do with improvement or need to be worked upon?

Above all, we have to remember that it is God who does the calling and election and it is only through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit that we can, by His grace, make our calling and election sure. (RC)



MOUNTAINS OF THE LORD

There is something about a mountain that is always fascinating. It has captured the imagination of many a poet and writer. Many hymns have a mountain as a background of the message intended for us. If we climb to the top of a mountain we are generally rewarded by a very pleasant view of the surrounding country. The air is fresh and crisp and it gives one the feeling of being lifted above the busy chores and things that engage us each day. One can look down on the busy cities and realise that it is man that made the cities but God who made the country and the mountains and the beauty that goes with it. It is no wonder then that there are occasions in the Bible when mountains are mentioned as places where one can go to for quietness and meditation.

This is what Jesus did. We can read of it in Matthew 14:13-23 (v.13) *"When Jesus heard of it (John the Baptist's death), he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. (v.14) And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. (v.15) And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. (v.16) But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. (v.17) And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves and two fishes. (v.18) He said, Bring them hither to me. (v.19) And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. (v.20) And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. (v.21) And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children. (v.22) And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. (v.23) And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when evening was come, he was there alone."*

Here it is evident that Jesus and his disciples needed rest after the arduous task of feeding all these people. He sent the disciples away in a boat to allow them to get away from the crowd of people. But he himself went into a mountain to pray: *"And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when evening was come, he was there alone."* There are two points here to remember. It is possible in verse 15 that the idea of the disciples was, in asking Jesus to send the multitude away, so that they could have a time with Jesus without the interruption of the people around them. In verse 23 Jesus desired to have a period of quietness with His Father in heaven, to shut out the world and commune with his Father. This occasion was probably what prompted the words of Hymn 59 (BSH).

*"Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile
Weary, I know it, of the press and throng;
Wipe from your brow the sweat and dust of toil,*

And in my quiet strength again be strong"

*"Come ye aside from all the world holds dear,
For converse which the world has never known;
Alone with Me and My Father here,
With Me and with my Father, not alone."*

*"Come, tell Me all that ye have said and done,
Your victories and failures, hopes and fears;
I know how hardly souls are wooed and won;
My choicest wreaths are always wet with tears."*

*"Come ye and rest! the journey is too great,
And ye will faint beside the way, and sink!
The bread of Life is here for you to eat,
And here for you the wine of love to drink."*

*"Then fresh from converse with the Lord return,
And work till daylight softens into even,
The brief hours are not lost in which ye learn,
More of your Master and His rest in Heaven."*

For us, the lesson could be that while we are engaged in our daily round and common task, it is our privilege always to realise that the task is done 'as unto the Lord' and our efforts should be applied with patience and cheerfulness. But when the opportunity arises, we can then seek quietness with the Lord. This is what Jesus did. After the busy times that engage our attention for the larger part of a day, we can depart into a mountain and have communion with God. *"Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee" (Psalm 116:7)*

"While engaged in the active duties of life we must of necessity bend our mental energies to the work in hand, for if we do anything merely mechanically and without concentrating thought upon it, we cannot do it well; yet even here Christian principle, well established in the character, will unconsciously guide. But when the strain of labour and care are lifted for a time, the established habit of thought, like the needle to the pole, should quickly return to its rest in God." (Manna comment, February 9)

MT SINAI



To climb to the top of a mountain requires some effort. This reminds us of the time when God gave Moses the Law. This is recorded in Exodus Ch.19. The whole chapter is interesting but let us read verses 17-20: *"And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God and*

they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. And the Lord came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up."

Mount Sinai is 7,400 feet high and 3,000 feet above the surrounding country, yet Moses was called upon to go to the top of the mount. This would not be an easy journey. It would take some time and effort to climb 3,000 or 4,000 feet, but Moses was compensated for it. He received a great blessing - the blessing of receiving the Law and the Commandments. He also experienced a blessing by actually hearing God speak to him.

Even when Jesus went up into the mountain to pray, it would be an upward path. This could well be a lesson for us. If we are to receive a blessing from a mountaintop experience, it requires effort on our part. We all gather together on occasions to receive a blessing from fellowship together but it requires an effort to get there, to prepare for the occasion, especially for our elderly ones. It would perhaps be easier to stay home, but then there would not be the same blessing at the end of the day. "Lord, lift me up and let me stand" - again the words of a hymn (Alexander 165) come to mind and express the sentiments of all the Lord's people.

*"I'm pressing on my upward way,
New heights I'm gaining day by day,
Still praying as I onward bound.
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.*

*"My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay.
Though some may dwell where these abound,
My constant aim is higher ground.*

*"I long to scale the utmost height.
Tho' rough the way and hard the fight,
My song while climbing shall resound
Lord, lead me on to higher ground.*

*"Lord lead me up the mountainside,
I dare not climb without my guide,
And heaven gained I'll gaze around
With grateful heart from higher ground.*

*"Lord, lift me up and let me stand
By faith on Zion's tableland
Where love and joy and light abound.
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."*

MT PISGAH

There is another hymn which is written for us intending to

give us a vision of the blessings of the millennial kingdom, (BSH 47):

*"Come all ye saints to Pisgah's mountain,
Come see the view beyond the tide;
Millennial Canaan is before us,
Soon we'll sing on the other side."*

This hymn was based on the experience of Moses when he was taken by God to the top of Mt. Pisgah to view the promised land. The story is in Deut.34:1-4: "And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan. And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the uttermost sea, And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither."

At this time the Israelites were in the land of Moab at the northern end of the Dead Sea, opposite Jericho. They awaited the Lord's direction by the pillar of cloud before crossing Jordan to take possession of Canaan. Moses' work was accomplished by then, and the Lord led him up to the top of Mount Pisgah. The mountain is 3,586 feet above sea level. From this point a beautiful panoramic view is possible. From here Moses saw all the rich land promised to Israel. No doubt, also, by faith Moses would recall the promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that 'in thy seed' all the families of the earth would be blessed.

There is an antitypical picture in this incident. The antitypical Moses, Christ the head and the Church His body, have been raised up and are heading up to the millennial kingdom. Today we are at the close of a great epoch and the journey is almost completed, so to speak. We are now like Moses on Mt. Pisgah and looking across to the promised land - to the glories of the age to come, looking forward to the blessings that will come to the world of mankind during the millennial reign of Christ. With the eye of faith we see the blessing of all the families of the earth through the faithful ones of spiritual Israel and the Ancient Worthies, who will be the earthly representation of the Kingdom. We perceive the blessing of the light of the knowledge of the Lord as it will fill the whole earth. As we read in Isa.11:9: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain for the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth as the water covers the sea" and in Jer.31:34 that "All shall know him from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord."

From this elevated position on Mt. Pisgah we can even look so far as to see by faith when even death will be done away with, as we are told in Rev.21:4 "there shall be no more death." Verse 3 of hymn 47 says:

*"Faith now beholds salvation's river
Gliding from underneath the throne,
Bearing its life to whomsoever
Will return to the Father's home.
They will walk mid the trees by the rivers*

*With the friends they have loved by their sides
They will sing the glad songs of salvation
And be ready to follow their guide."*

Moses was not allowed by God to enter the promised land. His work was completed at this stage of his life. So we read in Deut.34:5 that "*Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord.*" There could be a picture here of the Church during this present time. The Millennial blessings are not for us. We have been called to a higher calling. But the vision of the Kingdom and a knowledge of God's plan of salvation that will in due time come to all mankind through Jesus, and his love for the human race, fills us with a deep appreciation of God's justice, wisdom, love and power and His plan of salvation which we treasure so much.

MT ZION

There is another mountain which figures prominently throughout the Bible, and that is Mount Zion. Mt. Zion is the highest mountain in Jerusalem. In Psa.48:2 the literal Mt. Zion is spoken of as a beautiful place. "*Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mt. Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.*" Let us read also Psalm 132:13,14: "*For the Lord Jehovah hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*" There is a special reason for the reference to Zion as being a place of beauty and a place that Jehovah desired for his habitation. This mountain is also used as a symbol, and is used in this way in Micah 4:1,2:

"But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord (the mountain here represents God's Kingdom) and to the house of the God of Jacob (the natural Israel in God's Kingdom) and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion (the spiritual phase of the Kingdom, which will be Christ and His Church) and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (the seat of the earthly phase of the Kingdom).

In Rev.14:1 we see how the Apostle John saw in vision the Lamb on Mount Zion. We read: "*And I looked and lo, a lamb stood on mount Zion and with him a hundred forty and four thousand having his Father's name written in their foreheads.*" There is no doubt that this has reference to our Lord Jesus with those called-out ones during the Gospel Age who will be with him during His Kingdom reign. This picture of the Lord Jesus and his 144,000 faithful ones on Mount Zion seems to speak to us of the ultimate joy when the bridegroom united with His bride will rejoice because the time has come for earth's new government to be set up.

This is shown in verses 2 and 3: "*And I heard a voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. And they sung as it were a new song be-*

fore the throne.... and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." The song they sing could be the glad tidings that restitution is about to begin. Remember, this is what Moses saw from Mt. Pisgah – a picture of the new age.

There is another Psalm which uses Mount Zion as a symbol of the new Kingdom, Ps.50:1-5: "*The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself.*" Yes, after the Lord has gathered His saints together to Him and the trouble in the world is over, the perfected saints will be with their Lord to bring peace to all mankind. (JH)

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined!"

THIS YEAR

I know not whether dark or bright
This year shall be.
I only know he giveth light,
And I can trust his love and might
Who leadeth me.

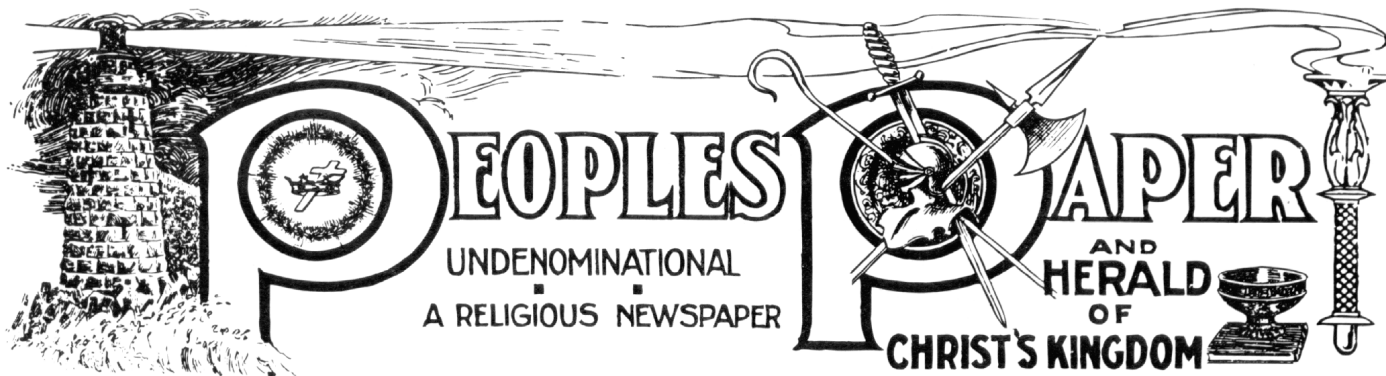
I know not what may be the way
That I must take.
But I can humbly trust and pray
That I may never from him stray,
Nor him forsake.

I know not what the year may bring
To those I love.
But we can sweetly rest and sing
Beneath the shadow of his wing
Here and above.

I know not whether short or long
Our lives may be;
But naught he chooseth can be wrong,
And he shall be our strength and song,
Now and eternally.

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MEMORIAL REFLECTIONS

Once again we will shortly gather for this years Memorial as instituted by our Lord on the night he was betrayed. At this season it is always useful to refresh our minds concerning the basic and salient points related to the memorial.

Firstly, what is the Memorial?

The memorial is a participation in the dual emblems of the cup and the bread, as instituted by our Lord shortly before he died and in accordance with his commandment "do this in remembrance of me" This occasion has not only been enjoined upon us by Jesus but it has also been instituted by him. This doubly emphasizes its importance and significance for us.

We note that the memorial was instituted by our Lord on the day the Passover lamb was sacrificed; the same day that he was crucified. Thus fulfilling his role as the anti-typical Passover lamb which was killed on the 14th Nisan. The Passover was celebrated by the Jewish Nation to this day. This commemorated the passing over of the Firstborn of each Jewish household by the angel of death during the last plague in Egypt. Our Lord's death as the anti-typical Passover lamb makes it fitting that the memorial is celebrated once yearly. We also note that it was only the first born that were under the threat of death during that plague, typifying the household of faith, the church of the firstborns who are on trial for life now. We therefore need to take great care in not neglecting so great a salvation.

And what was the aim of this last plague? It was to liberate the nation of Israel as a whole, from the slavery they were in during their stay in Egypt. This of course had the desired effect. In the anti-type the aim of the plan of God is the liberation of humanity from the power of Satan which is death. The morning after the Passover the nation was liberated, prefiguring the morning of the long promised kingdom of God.

We note that everything depended on the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Without that there was no passing over of the firstborn and no liberation of the nation. We see therefore how central to the outworking of the plan of God the sacrifice of the anti-typical lamb of God is.

Secondly, why partake of the Memorial?

The reason for participating is straightforward. Our Lord

asked us to carry it out and therefore we do. This is enough reason.

However, having had imparted to us a measure of the Holy Spirit we carry it out with understanding and in the appropriate way. Our faith is spiritual and we therefore expect that approached and carried out appropriately, we will derive spiritual blessings. We therefore have another reason for participating, viz we expect to gain spiritual nourishment and strength.

If the lessons are spiritual, why do we need a physical ceremony or ritual? Possibly because we are in the flesh and hence in need of a reason to focus our minds on important spiritual truths and to help keep them in the forefront of our minds.

There are a number of levels of understanding to the spiritual lessons inherent in participating in the memorial.

Firstly, we do it in remembrance of Jesus. That is, the emblems represent and bring to mind his death and suffering. This is why we refresh our minds during this time of the year with the circumstances leading up to his death. This way we appreciate what he went through.

We remind ourselves of his frequent prayers to the Father showing his particular need for strength during the final days. We remind ourselves of his devotion to the carrying out of the Father's will and not his own: Jesus prayed "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" We remind ourselves that in the final hours his followers could not stay awake to provide him with support. And we see his strength in being mindful of their welfare despite his own hour of need.

In this way we remember his human suffering and experience. This provides some of the emotional power to appreciate his sacrifice.

Secondly, by participating in the emblems we appreciate that his suffering, anguish and death occurred for us. We read. "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me."

This makes it very personal. He died for our personal sins;

the just for the unjust. The sinless for the sinful. *He who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* We derive a clear conscience thereby ... and are able to die to the old fallen nature and rise to the new nature. We also note that his sacrifice is not exclusive in efficacy. He died and provided propitiation not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world.

And lastly, we are reminded that we have a participation or common union in the body of Christ and that we have a participation or common union in the blood of Christ which is the blood of the new covenant. This indicates our privilege in suffering and dying with him. Therefore, the emblems are a reminder of our consecration, our covenant of sacrifice, our baptism into his death and the mystery of 'Christ in you'. The memorial reminds us to renew our efforts to continue to sacrifice earthly rights and privileges for we are no longer our own, for we have been bought with a price: "*But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" Like Jesus, our will is no longer ours but God's; therefore, "**not my (our) will, but thy will be done**"

We are also reminded that by participating in the memorial we witness to one another that we have continued in our commitment during the last year and that with resolve we commit ourselves to continuing therein in the year ahead, despite what it may bring. We are therefore reminded of this commitment to one another. This in itself gives us encouragement.

Of course how could we not continue therein. We have heard his words of life and to whom else should we go. So we feed on him and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

This leads us to a personal examination of our walk over the past year; how well have we done in the last year, what have we sacrificed, and what have we held back. How much zeal has been expended and how much has been suppressed. How much have we developed in Christlikeness? Do we continue to make the same mistakes? And most importantly have we developed more love for our God, our brethren and the groaning creation?

We are reminded that beyond our obligations to our families, our time and energy is the Lord's.

Even though we partake of the emblems once yearly, we of course remember Jesus daily and die daily. We remember Jesus daily and feed off his sacrifice to gain strength for every spiritual battle. The present time appears short and we can see the increasing pace of the gathering of the clouds of trouble almost daily. We rejoice for our redemption draweth nigh. At the same time as we rejoice we are also more mindful of the fact that the time is short in making our calling and election sure.

We are therefore especially privileged to be able to take part in another memorial for there may not be that many more. This gives impetus to our resolve to continue to feed on the life of Jesus and press on to the mark and once there to stand firm, according to the will of God. We are humbled by what God has achieved in us so far. May we be strengthened in the spirit and go forward with greater zeal and commitment to what lies ahead. Praise and glory be to our heavenly father.

Phil 1:29 "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;" (KJV)



In This Issue

Memorial Reflections	1
The Unity of the Spirit	3
Praise and Worship	5
Faith that enable	7
Covenant of Sacrifice	9
Fruits of the Spirit Part One	12

In praise of my Redeemer

'WHEN first I heard of Jesus so marred upon the tree,
I felt no glad emotion as though He died for me!
I saw no kingly beauty, majestic, grand or brave,
I turned away despising His proffered aid to save.

'BUT when I came to know Him, His precious name grew sweet,
And like the tinted rainbow, love arched the Mercy seat;
And when--O wondrous glory--light shone from His dear face,
All other objects faded before His matchless grace.

"AND when the joyful tidings, how God's Beloved Son
Will raise the dead in Adam, bless each and every one,
What could I do but praise Him, make vault of heaven ring!
And own Him as my choicest--Redeemer, Lord and King.

'O Rose of rarest odor! O Lily, white and pure!
O Chiefest of ten thousand whose glory must endure!
The more I see Thy beauty, the more I know Thy grace,
The more I long, unhindered, to gaze upon Thy face!"

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians urges the brethren to continue 'endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph 4:3) The unity of the Spirit is then a very important subject for all the Lord's people. The well known Psalm 133 reads (Living Bible version) :- *'How wonderful it is and how pleasant when brothers live in harmony, for harmony is as precious as the fragrant anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, and ran down onto his beard and onto the border of his robe. Harmony is as refreshing as the dew of Mount Hermon on the mountains of Israel, and God has pronounced His eternal blessings on Jerusalem, even life for evermore.'* This same Psalm from the Modern English version of Ferrar Fenton: reads *'See how good and how sweet it is when brothers rest as friends. It is like the sweet oil from his head that flowed down to the beard and from the beard of Aaron ran down the garments of his hem. Like Hermon's dew that falls upon the heights of Zion's hill, for there the Lord His blessings gives – life for evermore.'*

One of the presidents of the United States, Lyndon Johnson, gave a speech in 1964 in which he said: 'Man's greatest hope for peace lies in understanding his fellow man.' (If only those in Israel today could understand this). 'Nations, like individuals, fear that which is strange and unfamiliar. The more we see and hear of those things which are common to all people, the less likely we are to fight over the issues which set us apart. So the challenge is to communicate.' (For 37 years I had the opportunity to do just that because I worked in the telephone system and communication was a great part of my life.) This ex-president of the United States' words are worthy of note when he says 'understanding his fellow man'. However, as we look around the world today and, as we ourselves as Bible Students have found, the unity of the spirit is at times far from what it should be.

Today all of us live in a very complex society, one in which it takes a great deal of togetherness to survive, and as our population increases so do the problems. It then becomes 'how do we solve these problems?' Solving the problem is what makes communication so important. No problem was ever solved by any party sitting back and hoping that that problem would simply vanish. We find that sometimes even talking about a problem doesn't solve it. For illustration, as mentioned, take the Palestinians and Israel. Peace initiatives have been made, but one side or the other refuses to honour those initiatives. Peace initiatives are made and cannot be refused if one is to come together, if one is 'to get along'. What has to happen is that one must work side by side to enjoy the peace as found in Psalm 133. Now this Psalm 133 is not referring to anyone in the world – it could, it should, but its principles are sure and as we read, how good and how pleasant it is for **brethren** to dwell together in unity. So the question might be asked, and needs to be asked always of ourselves, are we really dwelling together as one? We try, and sometimes we do.

In Webster's Dictionary, it says of this word 'communicate' that it means 'to share in or to partake of'. One of the defini-

tions is 'the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions and information', while another has the idea of 'to give a share or to go shares with'. The word is used in this latter way in the New Testament in Gal 6:6 – 'let him that is taught in the word communicate with him that teacheth in all good things' (KJV) Other versions read 'share in all temporal blessings'. (Does this verse really refer to sharing 'temporal blessings' as in material worldly goods or rather to 'good things' pertaining to spiritual understanding or growth, or to both?)

We find that actually the unity of the spirit has within it, what we might call a 'family of words', so let us seek to find the value in our assembling of ourselves together, of sharing with one another our questions and our thoughts that we may finally come to that unity, that oneness, in the bonds of Christian love that we find in Psalm 133. It is not a very big psalm, is it?, a refrain, but within it the words of love. As we progress from one point to another, let us ask ourselves: (1) Has there ever been a lack of communication in our Christian walk? Brethren, we could all say, Of course. (2) What value is there in the mutual sharing of thoughts, ideas and duties? (3) How can we as prospective members of the body of Christ bring ourselves to that position of oneness that degree of unity, that we seek and (this is more important) that will be pleasing to the Lord, to the Heavenly Father?

How can we attain to what the Apostle Paul admonishes us to do? He says in 1 Cor 1:10, (Weymouth) - *'I entreat you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus, to cultivate the spirit of harmony, all of you, and that there be no division among you but rather a perfect (not the usual thought of 'perfect' but rather 'complete, whole') union through your having one mind and one judgment.'* Now did the Apostle Paul himself always have unity of the spirit? Was he able to communicate perfectly? The answer is No. There was strife. Even in the Apostle Paul's case there were factions, there was confusion, even division, unfortunately, as can happen with us. Brothers took sides. Remember those scriptures. One says I am of Paul, another I am of Apollos or Peter. And Paul's question to them was notable, wasn't it? He asked, Is Christ divided? That was his question. Unfortunately it is a question that every one of us as Christians today have to ask our own selves. Instead of falling apart because of misunderstanding, the Apostle says we have to come together. That was his message. Be united, be one. What divided those brethren back in Paul's day? Was it a lack of communication? Or was it a lack of commitment? Or was it pride?

In Abraham's day we have a really good example of a proper spirit of unity. Remember Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen were together and they began to fight over the land. And Abraham said This is not right! So what did he do? He used rejection and sometimes we all have to, and that is the point, isn't it? He said, "You go your way. Take your choice, Lot. You can choose whatever you want. When you're done, I will choose what I want." And he did that. We find no problem with that. We find that that was probably the best thing that could have happened, (not that sepa-

ration is here being advocated). Abraham used his judgment in allowing his nephew to choose what he wanted. We, as brethren, have to make the same decision at times. Which way will we go? If it is right for us to go that way, go. If it is not right, the Lord will make it clear.

But what part did the spirit play here? What Abraham could have said was, 'Lot, you are travelling with me. Quit making trouble.' That's what he could have said because Lot was travelling with him. He could have said, I'll make all the decisions. Abraham considered the situation and he decided that they could not stay together. We should stay together, we should have the unity of the spirit, but we should use good judgment in the decision rather than continue to have a problem. He said, You go your way and I'll go mine, rather than have a problem. Rather than have strife, Abraham realised that they were sharing the land at the time with Canaanites and Perezites and he said, We are brothers, Lot, we are brothers. Let there be no strife between us. You choose the land you want for grazing land and I will take the other. This is a real, true, unity of the spirit, and it brings us to the first of our 'family of words' that are involved in communication.

When mature, the first one is called 'sharing'. The word has within it the thought of kinship. Kinship is the family relationship. Brethren, you and I are of one family. The Lord's people are one big family, and we should be close-knit. Are we always? Not always. But we should be able, through proper communication with one another, we should in Christ be one. In his letter to the Romans, again the Apostle Paul says in the Weymouth translation of Romans 12:5: '*Collectively we form one body in Christ while individually we are linked to one another as its members.*' Notice here that we are individual and yet we are together, we are linked like a chain. Break the chain and we aren't linked any longer. If we have the true unity of the spirit we will speak often with one another, for remember in Malachi 3:16 they 'often spoke with one another' and a book of remembrance was written of them. Yes, they revered the Lord and spoke to one another of the Lord, and the Lord hearkened to it, and heard it, and He wrote it down. It was written down for their reverence of His name.

There has to be a common bond within our unity. But what is this bond? We suggest the wonderful four-letter word is called *Love*. This starts with our class studies, it continues with our prayers, with our praise, with our testimony meetings, with our special meetings as with convention time, witness activities together, even our business meetings. The common bond in all of our meetings together and along all the lines of the truth should be, emphasising the word 'should', be bringing us closer in kinship one to another and, if so, this will bring glory to our loving and kind Heavenly Father. Because we are different in our mannerisms and our expressions, we find it difficult at times to achieve this unity with one another as we should.

There is a lesson to learn and hopefully it will be a good lesson for all of us. It is in the story of Cain and Abel. It was jealousy that caused Cain to kill his brother. Very little unity of the spirit! How well they got along before the incident of the sacrifices that were to be made to the Lord is

unknown. However, there is a lesson of kinship that we all need to learn. After Cain killed his brother, what did God do? He asked him a simple question. He said, '*Where is your brother? His blood crieth out to me from the ground.*' What did Cain say? '*Am I my brother's keeper?*' I believe that in the true sense Cain realised that God was drawing a lesson that for the type of acceptable sacrifice he might have communicated with his brother and purchased an animal that God wanted. We are our brother's keeper in the sense of helping each other in all of the affairs of this life. Our labour is a labour of faith, a faith based on love and patience with one another. (See 1 Thes 1:3, Col 1:4, 1 Thes 1:15 and 1 John 3:14)

We all have a responsibility to carefully and prayerfully watch for the opportunities of edifying, that is, to build up a brother or sister. Spiritually we could be like Cain; we can slay others not with a carnal weapon but with our lips. Anger begets wrath, wrath begets spiritual murder. The more we come together, the more we will rub and polish one another, and people often do not like that. It is not normal for us to rub and polish one another, but we do this, and the polishing causes friction, does it not? Friction makes heat, too much heat makes fire. The answer: Let us bestow thought on one another to arousing one another to brotherly love and right conduct, not neglecting as some habitually do, to meet together to encourage one another. This scripture is found in Hebrews 10:24-25 (Weymouth)

The next word in this family of communication is the word 'Contribution'. Contribution has the thought of giving or putting in together something of value into a common portion or lot, being of one mind, united by mutual love and harmony. It is really the giving of our minds to the same object, '*to do nothing*' in the spirit of factiousness or of vainglory, but with true humility let everyone regard the other as being of more account than himself and each fixing his attention, not simply on his own interests, but on the interest of others' - (Phil.2:2-4 Weymouth) So the question arises, How can we go about 'being of one mind, united in mutual love, with harmony of feeling' towards one another? The next verse (V5) gives the answer - 'Let the very spirit which was in Christ Jesus be in you also'. Then follows the perfect example of humility, of selflessness and of sacrifice of our Lord.

There always has been and always will be this side of the veil the rough edges of life. We could talk about these, but we are happy that we have so much of God's witness to relate to one another - a ready smile, a friendly handshake - these can go a long way to cut off the rough edges of everyday experiences. No one can say, I have nothing to contribute. To repeat that - No one can say, I have nothing to contribute. It is true that some do not have the privilege of meeting regularly for study or fellowship, others are physically not able to meet regularly. For these, there are still things they can do for the Lord and His cause. They can pray. If they had nothing more, were not able to do one thing, were bedridden, for instance, they do not have to get out of bed - they still can contribute. Paul thanked his Heavenly Father for **all** his co-labourers He felt a kindred spirit in their working together with him in proclaiming the gospel. He said, '*I thank my God upon every remembrance*

of you, always making remembrance of you in prayer and for your fellowship in the gospel' (Phil.1:3,5).

The Apostle John says in 1 John 1:6,7: 'We will have fellowship with God if we walk in the light and we will have then fellowship one with another.' Do we feel that the presence of the gospel in our fellowship one with another is our goal? We must ask ourselves that question. Do we have a love for the truth and the desire to work together in the spreading of God's great plan of the Ages? Our God is seeking a class who will have the same aspirations and goal to work and reign with Him and with His Son in the blessing of all the families of the earth. God is looking for a family who love Him, who love His Son, and who love each other. The Apostle Paul in writing to Philemon in verse 6 of his letter says, 'I pray that the sharing of your faith may promote the knowledge of all the good that is in Christ'. The Diaglott, Rotherham and the Greek interlinear say: 'the fellowship of your faith', and the Weymouth translation says

'participation in your faith' Writing to Titus the Apostle Paul in Titus 3:8 says, '*This is a faithful saying and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.*' (KJV)

How well are we doing in our quest to attain to the unity of the spirit? Are we growing into oneness? Are we working together as one family in disseminating God's truth? Are we collectively linked as the body of Christ? Is love that common bond? Are we contributing to the good of all? Do we have the true fellowship with one another that the Apostle Paul had for his brethren? Soon the call to the joint heirship with Christ will close. God is calling a harmonious family to be associated with His beloved Son. Let us strive, dear brethren, to have that true unity of the Spirit without which none will be of God's family. May God bless us each one as we so strive. (CC: adapted))

PRAISE AND WORSHIP

We are all familiar with the words *Praise* and *Worship*. Various definitions explain that praise is 'to magnify, glorify and celebrate in words and song', while to worship is 'to show honour and respect, reverence and devotion and adoration to God'. An act of praise and worship will possess a power far greater and deeper than any definition can convey, and it is better experienced than explained, which is why we are assembled here tonight and at this Convention. The commentators Vine and Haley do however suggest that the Hebrews referred to the praises they offered God as 'hallel', hence hallelujah, which means 'praise to Jehovah'. Praise and worship assemblies will vary with traditions and cultures. The outward show of numbers and noise is not important to God. He desires the worship to be in sincerity and truth, so let us look closer at this subject.

The words of Psalm 146 are fitting for a praise and worship service. It is a sacred song, and it exhorts us all to praise our Creator because of His love for each one of us. To praise someone is to express the approval of them. With our heavenly Father, we seek His approval and we commend Him because of His character and Plan. Our approval or acceptance to praise and worship Him is only possible by the glory of His grace revealed through Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:5,6: '*To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.*' Let us praise God for His undeserved kindness toward us. To worship God is to act out homage and reverence to Him in many forms and instances. Romans 12:1 from the New American Standard Version instructs us: '*Therefore I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*' Let us worship God by yielding ourselves to His will by living holy lives.

The first two verses of the psalm introduce the theme of praise and worship of God. From the NASV: '*Praise the*

Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.' Our whole being, our very existence, is supplied by the great God of the Universe, the Creator of each one of us; man and woman formed and given the breath of life, each one fearfully and wonderfully made, with an individual character and appearance. Human life is a grand gift we possess. The psalmist explains that as long as he lives and has breath he will glorify and sing praises to God. Can we also echo this that the psalmist says? We have to have this zeal and faithful endeavour to serve God. Our praises to God are from our heart, meaningful, and with the intent to please God and not man. The 148th Psalm encourages the whole creation to praise the Lord, from the earth to the heavens, and all creatures within show His glory. For this reason His name alone is exalted.

When we understand that God requires reverence, honour and exaltation, the words of Philippians 4:8 mean so much: '*Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are reputable, if there be any virtue and if any praise – attentively consider these things.*' 'Attentively consider these things' – what meaning these words have! To our daily actions, thoughts and words, pay close attention to the things that are true, honest, pure, just and of good report – not in the eyes of man or by his standards, but by the standard of God given in His Word and reflected by Christ.

Let's now focus on verses 3 to 5 of the 146th Psalm. '*Do not trust in princes, nor mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; in that day his thoughts perish. How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.*' How wonderful! We can trust in an omnipotent God, the Almighty, who is clothed with power. Many people worship strange things today, just as the heathen in Jacob's day bowed down to gods of fire and wood and gold, people's

lives now confess service to religious leaders, political leaders, parties, organisations, wealthy and famous people. Many idols have arisen in sportsmen and women, movie and TV stars, the desire for wealth and beauty, yet all this is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

This fourth verse of our psalm gives meaning to the state of the dead. We were formed from the dust and to the dust man returns. Our lifespan is but a fleeting moment in comparison with God's salvation in eternity. We are offered three score and ten years. Should not this energise us in serving our Creator as He has numbered our days. Seventy years is 840 months, or 3,920 weeks. It represents a lifetime as we know it. This fact may humble us all during moments of our lives, and yet while we lay our hope and trust in God we should know, as the hymn describes it, All is well with my soul. Psalm 39, verse 4, pleads: *'Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the extent of my days. Let me know how transient I am.'*

Psalm 146, verse 6: *'Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever.'* We praise and worship the Creator of the Universe. What a plan of architecture! It did not just happen by chance. We smell the perfume of a flower, we see the beauty of it; the tranquility of the rainforest and the sight of a frisky new-born calf. At a recent meeting which he was attending, a young brother was asked to select a hymn, and we sang what I am sure has been one of his favourites from childhood. It was the hymn 'All Creatures Great and Small', and it was most beautiful to sing that after so long not doing so - a song of praise and meditation that is due to God as we enjoy this beautiful earth we are planted in.

*All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.
He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell,
How great is God Almighty,
Who hath made all things well.*

Faith is kept forever. Today it is difficult for faith to prosper. We live in a world of faithlessness. We see the moral and ethical elements in society dissolving and the heaven and earth being shaken. God's kingdom will fill the earth when the symbolic heavens and earth are finally removed. God's faithfulness is enduring and unchangeable. We need to trust His leadings and possess the patience He owns.

Verse 7 of the Psalm reads: *'Who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free.'* This verse could be summed up in one word, Salvation. God's plan of salvation for man is centred in the ransom sacrifice of the man, Christ Jesus. We know that all shall be set free from the prison house of death - everyone, great and small - to receive a resurrection. The Lord will execute a justice that will exalt the humble and

oppressed and He will provide for those hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Moving on, verse 8 is a description of restitution. *'The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.'* Again, we praise God for the knowledge of His purpose in regard to the blind. *'The healing balm of the Lord will open the eyes of the blind and unstop the ears of the deaf; the dumb will sing and shout for joy, and the lame man will leap like a deer'* (Isaiah 35:5,6). Restoring and lifting up the rejected and broken hearted is a promise of consolation to mankind.

Those who are bowed down are those who are overburdened with the burdens of care. They represent a state of feebleness and will beg and plead their case before the Lord. With fatherly care and compassion, the Lord lifts up each one. Have we not all personally felt the hand of the Lord in moments of trials and difficulties? We know some of our brethren have been imprisoned. We may go through experiences of surgery, just the trials where we know the Lord will be with us in each one. Psalm 37: 23 & 24 from the NIV read: *'If the Lord delight in a man's way, He makes his steps firm. Though he stumble, he will not fall; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.'* Yes, we do stumble. We are all learning to walk with our Father. He knows our pathway and He knows our every step. We should never forget how close and how powerful the hand of the Lord is.

The ninth verse of Psalm 146 reads: *'The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked.'* The Lord provides every need and support necessary for the afflicted, and in Psalm 147:6 *'The Lord brings down the wicked to the ground.'* We may ask, Is the way of the wicked thwarted? The wicked seem to thrive in this Age. It should not, however, be our concern for we know God's appointed times and seasons are not according to man's ways. We are to concentrate on our own standing with God. Are we right and blameless before God? To let our light shine as Christians is to do good unto all people, and especially to our brethren. There is no doubt that in due time divine justice will fill the earth. The Lord says so! Psalm 145:20: *'The Lord keeps all who love Him but all the wicked He will destroy.'*

The final verse of the psalm says: *'The Lord will reign forever - your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!'* What an awesome God we serve! - a God that loves us and cares for each of us every moment of every day of our life. We do not deserve such favour. So many generations of man are yet to appreciate such favour. However, they will have this opportunity to praise God. So may we praise the Lord with our lives. Let us speak of His kingdom and the righteousness of His character. Our desire should be that all honour and glory may be to His name.

To close, Psalm 145:14,15: reads *'The Lord sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.'* Amen. (DG)

FAITH THAT ENABLES

Most of us rejoice in a hope for all mankind. How blessed we are who believe that we will be with our loved ones forever in the perfect world just as it was before man contaminated it. This is a tremendous source of comfort to us. It is particularly so when we think of deceased loved ones who were not interested in religious matters. The thought that loved ones might be separated from God and from us forever would be a pain difficult to bear.

Important to our understanding is a learning time in the resurrection. All will know that they have been dead and have been brought back to life. This very fact will open their minds to receive the truth. All will come to know that God is, that God has planned a society free from sin, that Jesus the Son of God has made it possible for all mankind to start again. History as well as memory will drive home the lesson that obedience to God is essential for life. By becoming a man, remaining sinless and paying the penalty of sin on Adam's behalf, our Lord Jesus caused all the consequences of Adam's sin to be set aside. Foremost of these was the fact that all Adam's progeny were born sinners, and being sinners they did what sinners do. They sinned! Resulting from Adam's sin, these sins also were set aside by the ransom price.

Our expectation of a learning time for mankind in the resurrection is strengthened by the Scripture in 1 Timothy 2:4-6. It refers to the will of God: ⁴*'Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.'* ⁵*'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;'* ⁶*'who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.'* (KJV) This will of God did not come to pass in Old Testament days. It has not happened in the Gospel Age. But God's will WILL be done. It must happen in the resurrection. When it does, all will know that God is good, that His Son Jesus Christ has secured their resurrection and cleansing. The goodness of God will lead almost everyone to repentance and clinging to Christ.

BELIEVING FAITH

It was a surprise to me to encounter an argument that there could be no salvation in the resurrection because salvation requires faith. The argument did not deny that all would come to know the truth as a certainty in the resurrection. However, it asserted that knowing the truth means that faith was no longer possible because believing that which is seen is not faith. Knowing faith to be necessary for salvation, the argument concludes that no one can receive eternal life through Jesus Christ once God's Truth is known as certain. The argument was based in Scriptures like Acts 16:31: *'And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.'* That message seems to pose the question: How much believing is believing? Perhaps the question should be: Which type of believing is believing?

The answer to the argument is that there is a lot more to faith than believing facts we cannot see. Only that type of faith is excluded by knowledge of facts. To explain, let me divide matters of faith into two major groups. For discussion it is necessary to give the groups names, so let us call them *'Faith that believes facts unseen'* and *'Faith that enables.'*

'Faith that believes facts unseen' includes beliefs like:

- * God exists
- * Jesus is the Son of God
- * Jesus was sinless
- * He did give up His humanity as a ransom for Adam's sin

ENABLING FAITH

Developing the faith of trust, *'the faith that enables'* takes much longer now and will still take a long time when all the circumstances are favourable and the adversary is bound. I am suggesting that *'faith that believes facts unseen'* is only a means to an end. The faith that God seeks – the faith that believes ON or INTO the Lord Jesus Christ, is the faith I am describing as *'faith that enables'*. It includes:

- * The faith to let God work in us to will and to do His good pleasure
- * The faith to deny oneself and follow Christ
- * The faith to yield our hearts to be obedient to God
- * The faith to exercise our wills on His behalf

Before proceeding, we ought to reconcile my dividing faith into the two types with the passage of Scripture in Hebrews chapter eleven. Verse one is a description of faith. Many see it as a definition: *'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'* (KJV) My division for the purpose of explanation divides both the things hoped for and things not seen into the following groups –

- * Facts or realities not seen on the one hand, contrasted with
- * The powers, abilities or attributes of God which are also unseen.

Those powers belong to God but God uses them through the believer when according to His design they are enabled by faith. Clearly one cannot trust or yield to a being if one is uncertain whether that being exists. Accordingly, in this Gospel Age, *'faith that believes facts unseen'* is a pre-requisite to *'faith that enables'*. That is because in this Age things relating to God are not a matter of certain knowledge: *'How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?'* (Romans 10:14 KJV).

Both faith that God exists or knowledge that God exists merely set the background for *'the faith that enables'*: *'Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.'* (James 2:19 KJV) Faith is not confined to *'faith that believes facts unseen'*. The additional aspect of faith – *'faith that enables'* – dispels the argument that there is no salvation in the resurrection. More importantly, it draws attention to the type of faith which God wants.

GOD'S INDWELLING

The facts or realities requiring faith in this age can become knowledge of the truth by revelation in the circumstances of the resurrection. The powers of *'faith that enables'* can only

exist by the deliberate exercise of trust by the believer. Quite simply, it is up to us. It enables God to indwell and to will and to do His good pleasure. It alone will enable mankind to live in sinless perfection.

Thinking about the different types of faith, we can see other distinctions. *'Faith that believes facts unseen'* is passive or neutral. *'Faith that enables'* is deliberate and positive. *'Faith that believes facts unseen'* is external, be it a gift or merely the effect that experiences have upon our hearts and minds. The results of those experiences may or may not be logical. Similar experiences have different effects on different people. On the other hand *'faith that enables'* is internal and under our control. It is determined by our hearts and minds. It is entirely a matter of the extent to which we trust, yielding ourselves to God and His Son.

The degree of faith that enables God to indwell and work in the believer is the same as that degree which leads one wholeheartedly to give oneself to God. *'Faith that enables'* requires faith in God's abundant goodness, His power and His love over and above His existence. But in view of that goodness, love and power, the giving of self is only reasonable service. Yet that trusting faith I am calling *'faith that enables'* is somewhat indirect. The faith enables the relationship with God and His Son – oneness in Christ. The believer has the faith to trust God's love, goodness and power sufficiently to give self to God. God responds by begetting to newness of life – the new creature in Christ.

The 'work enabled' is the work of God by or through our Lord Jesus Christ. He prayed to God (John 17:20,21,23 NASB): ²⁰*'I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe IN Me through their word; ²¹that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. ²³I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.'*

THE RESURRECTION

Let us return to the hope for all mankind in the resurrection. The resurrection for all mankind was achieved by our Lord Jesus Christ paying the ransom price to set aside all guilt from Adam. (1John 2:1,2 RSV): ¹*'My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the expiation of our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.'* There will be an end to the learning time after the first Millennium of the resurrection. That is the time when Satan will lead his revolt. It will be followed by the destruction of all who do not heed the words of Christ, the anti-type of Moses. After that there will be no more death.

God could not permit death to cease until by His foreknowledge He knows that there will be no more sin. This means that from that time mankind will have to live in sinless perfection. We have seen ample evidence that man is quite unable to do so in his own strength. All who live forever will have to obey God's laws (briefly 'Love God, Love thy neighbour – *'On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'*' – Matt.22:40 KJV). Man will need the guidance of God indwelling through our Lord Jesus Christ. In turn that will require *'faith that enables'* continuing from the first Millen-

nium of the resurrection until forever.

Essential when death shall be no more, trusting *'faith that enables'* is available in this Age. There are degrees of that faith far above tempting God by asking for a mountain to be cast into the sea. It is the trusting *'faith that enables'* comfort in bereavement. It is the trusting *'faith that enables'* the building up of the household of faith – *'The perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'* (Eph.4:12 KJV). It was because of the trusting *'faith that enables'* that Paul was able to write: *'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.'* (2Tim.1:7). And again, *'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'* (Phil.4:13 NKJV)

BLESSED ASSURANCE

It is the same *'faith that enables'* trials to be counted as joy, reading from James 1:2-6 NKJV: ²*'My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ²knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ³But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. ⁴If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.'* Other modern renderings replace the word 'patience' with 'steadfastness', 'endurance' or 'perseverance'. The point is that even in this age, God's mighty power is available from Him Who dwells within the believers who have received Christ and then have given their very selves to God through Christ, becoming children of God by faith. It is something to sing about, and we often do:

Blessed assurance – Jesus is mine
Oh, what a foretaste of glory Divine!
Perfect submission, all is at rest,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

The lady who wrote 'Blessed Assurance' gave a wonderful testimony in another hymn, 'All the way my Saviour leads me.' It was Fanny Crosby. To understand how remarkable was her testimony, one needs to know that she became blind due to improper treatment by a country doctor at the age of six weeks. She entered a school for the blind at age twelve. Much later, she taught at that blind school for more than ten years. Other hymns by Fanny Crosby included 'Safe in the Arms of Jesus' and 'Rescue the Perishing'. The testimony which really touched me was that this blind lady, who lived to be 94 years of age, was able to sing:

'Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort,
HERE by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me,
Jesus doeth all things well.'

Could there be a better example of counting trials as joy? Physically blind but enabled to sing 'Heav'nly peace... HERE.' No sight, but enabled to sing, 'Divinest comfort, HERE.' That is trusting faith. That is the *'faith that enables'*. It is the faith in action developing when God indwells the believer. (FG)



A COVENANT BY SACRIFICE

“Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice”.

(Psalm 30:5)

The Psalmist David brings out a beautiful thought in this verse, which we can apply to those who have consecrated their lives to Christ and our Heavenly Father, “those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” Verse one of the Psalm gives us the setting; “The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken” and so these words have to be taken in the context that the Psalmist is referring to Our Heavenly Father and his relationship with his people. There are three words in the text verse that I would like to take time to examine – Saints, Covenant and Sacrifice.

Saints: Vine tells us that the Hebrew word *chacid* has the thought of one who is pious, godly. It is interesting that the Psalms contain 25 of the 32 appearances of this word. The basic Hebrew is, *hasid* which means one who practices *hesed* (“loving-kindness”), so it is translated the “pious” or “godly one.” The word in our verse is also translated “godly ones” (NAS) “consecrated ones”. (NIV) Saints are then those who live their lives, to the best of their ability doing the will of God

Covenant: Vine tells us that word comes from *berit* = “covenant; league; confederacy.” This word is most probably derived from an Akkadian root meaning “to fetter” The great majority of occurrences of *berit* are of God’s “covenants” with men. This according to other commentators can fall into two areas -

- 1) an alliance (used of friendship)
- 2) a covenant (divine ordinance with signs or pledges)

Sacrifice: Strong’ tells us that the word sacrifice comes from *zebach*, properly, a slaughter, i.e. the flesh of an animal; by implication, a sacrifice (the victim or the act): in the KJV it is translated as offer (-ing), sacrifice.

OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS

The word-translated saint in the Old Testament has in Hebrew the root idea of separation and has the sense of those who are separated or dedicated (Holy) unto God. The nation of Israel can therefore be referred to as saints as a whole since they were God’s chosen and separated people. God addresses them in Exod 19:5 saying ‘Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:’ and further in Lev 20:26 “And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.” A last example is from Deut 26:18-19 “And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken”

OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS

The word *Covenant* appears very early in the Old Testament, with the first covenant between God and man appearing in Gen 6:18 ‘But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee’. This was when God made a covenant with Noah and his family, which spared them from the flood, which would destroy all other living things.

Our Heavenly Father’s first Covenant, which affects all mankind, was also made with Noah. We are told in Gen 9:11-13 “And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth”.

There were several Covenants made by God with Abraham, one regarding the land which he would possess is found in Gen 15:18 ‘In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:’ However the most important Covenant which has a promise for all mankind is found in Gen 12:1-3 ‘Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’ s house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. This is the **Abrahamic Covenant**.

There were many other covenants written about in the Old Testament, some between God and man, some between men. However the last one I would like to briefly look at was made with the Nation of Israel after they were delivered from bondage in Egypt. This Covenant often referred to as the Old or **Law Covenant**, set out commandments, which the Nation of Israel was to obey. We read in Exod 34:27-28 “And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”

With this covenant our Heavenly Father demanded obedience from the Nation of Israel in return for being the favoured Nation as we are told earlier in Exod 19:5-6 ‘Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel”.

SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS

Let us expand on the thought of *Sacrificing* as it is set out in the Bible. Sacrificing was a religious act of worship in which offerings were made to God of some material object belonging to the offerer in order to attain, to restore or to celebrate one's relationship with God. (There are also cases in the Bible where offerings were made to idols and false gods.)

From earliest times in the Bible man has brought offerings to God. As we read in Gen 4:3-5 "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell". (NAS) I will return to this later.

Noah used a burnt offering to thank God for saving his family as we read in Gen 8:20-22 "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease". (KJV) In this instance we see Noah giving thanks to the Lord through the burnt offering and the Lord received this as a sweet savour.

We remember the request God made to **Abraham** regarding Isaac, which we read in Gen 22 from verse 2 "And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of...reading on from 6-8 "And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, my father: and he said, here am I, my son. And he said, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, my son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together"... 10-12. And "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me". We remember that God then provided a ram, which was sacrificed in Isaac's place. How beautifully this pictures the sacrifice of God's dearly beloved and only begotten Son as the perfect offering

ANNUAL SACRIFICES

One of the most important sacrifices that the Israelites held each year was that of the Passover, reminding them of the time that God passed over and spared the lives of their first

born as we read in Exod 12:26-27 "And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped." The Passover is still kept today by the Jewish People.

Another important sacrifice was offered on the Day of Atonement, the details of which can be found in Leviticus chapter 16. Firstly the high priest had to "make atonement" for himself and his house by offering a bullock as a sin offering. Then two goats were picked out and lots were cast upon them, as a result of which one was then sent away into the wilderness as scapegoat. Lev 16:10 "But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness"

The other goat was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat as an atonement for the people. We read in Lev 16:15-16 "Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the Vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel" The Day of Atonement was celebrated only once a year. Only on this day could the high priest enter the holy of holies of the tabernacle or temple on behalf of the people of Israel and make atonement for them.

What lessons can we at the end of the Gospel Age learn from the Covenant of Sacrifice that Israel had with our Heavenly Father and how it relates to us as individuals. Firstly we can learn from the fact that Covenants and Sacrifices were to bring the Nation of Israel to Christ as we read in Gal 3:23-25 "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." This not only included the Ten Commandments but also the Passover, the Atonement Day sacrifices and other ordinances and offerings. For example 1 Cor 5:7 "...For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us": and in Rom 5:10-11 "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement". These verse have much more meaning when we have an understanding of the Old Testament accounts. As we are told in Heb 10:1 "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect".

The problem for Israel was that it did not keep the law or the sacrifices with the right heart attitude. The prophets looked with condemnation on Israel's "sacrifices" because of their heart condition. Samuel the prophet rebuked Saul with the familiar words: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the

Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" 1 Sam. 15:22. David knew the proper response to God when he had sinned: "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" Ps. 51:16-17.

LIVING SACRIFICES

Coming over to the New Testament, Paul tells us in Rom 12:1-2 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God". Paul tells us that we have to renew our minds; we have to study so that we can know what is the acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

How are we able to stand before our Heavenly Father and claim that we have any right to a Covenant of Sacrifice? Paul answers this in Heb 10:10 "...we are sanctified (made holy) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all". (KJV) It is only through the shedding of Christ's blood, that we have this privilege of service. And because of this Peter tells us in his epistle that we have to "...come to Him (Christ) as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ". 1 Pet 2:4-5

Paul when writing to the Hebrew Brethren expands on the basis on which we are able to make sacrifices that are acceptable to our Heavenly Father when he told them in Heb 13:12-16 "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased". Our Lord also gave us several clues as to how we can prepare ourselves to make suitable sacrifices, the first when speaking to the rich young man and two more through parables.

COUNTING THE COST

Let us first look to the story of the Rich Young Man found in Matt 19:16-22 And behold, one came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" "...if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother; and you shall love your neighbour as yourself." The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was

one who owned much property". The young man had tried to keep the letter of the law but he did not yet have the right heart condition, he was too reliant on the things of this world. It was not the riches that he had, but the fact that the price asked by Christ was too high for him as we read in verse 23 "And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard (not impossible) for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven". (NAS)

The opposite attitude is found in Matt 13:44-46 "...the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. (KJV). In both cases nothing was considered too much to sacrifice to gain Christ.

Paul when speaking to the Philippians states that all that he had considered important before his conversion he counted as loss. Paul was "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness, which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Phil 3:5-7 Paul counted them but dung, he realised that he could have now righteousness of his own, but that this could only come "through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Vs9): Paul knew from his experiences and sufferings, the power of Christ's resurrection, and the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; (Vs 11) and that all this was necessary if he was to "attain unto the resurrection of the dead".

Paul tells us that we have to have faith in our Heavenly Father and His Son before we will know what sacrifices are acceptable to God. Using the case of Cain and Abel Paul states "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks". Heb 11:4 Cain had come to God with then wrong heart condition, and God did not accept his sacrifice.

Paul when writing to the Corinthians sets out our commitment to our Heavenly Father, what is required of us and what is our reward. Reading from the NIV 2 Cor 4:10-17 "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you...we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence... All this is for your benefit... thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (RC)

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT-LOVE

In Galatians 5:17, the Apostle Paul contrasts the sinful nature of man with a life led by the Spirit of God: *“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”* (NIV).

In verses 19 to 21 Paul lists the works of the flesh, and it requires only a cursory glance at them to realise that what Paul says is true - the works of the flesh as listed in those verses are manifest in the world today.

In verses 22 and 23 Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.”* (KJV) There is a stark contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit, and so the battle lines are drawn for the Christian to *“fight a good fight in order to lay hold on eternal life”*.

In the physical world, the husbandman needs to devote time and effort to his orchard to ensure that it produces a good yield of quality fruit. The same requirements apply to spiritual fruit. Christian's must devote all their time and effort to cultivating the fruits of the Spirit if they are to yield good fruit.

Good fruit is not produced instantaneously; it requires time to grow and mature. This is also true of spiritual fruit. The Christian must *“grow in grace”* (2 Pet. 3:18), that is, continuously strive towards the perfect example. The realisation that growth requires time helps Christians to exercise patience towards each other, and to look not only on their own things but also on the things of others. One of the great blessings of Christian fellowship is to watch others striving to develop the fruits of the Spirit, as they themselves strive to cultivate the same qualities. Awareness that the husbandry is mutual, assists the exercise of patience towards each other as each strives to run the race, themselves realising that they also trip and fall.

A realisation of the need for time for fruit to develop also reduces the likelihood of *“destroying another with meat”*. One should not expect maturity quickly and hence there should not be any criticism of a lack of fruit in those who are striving to cultivate tender plants.

Love as a fruit

The first fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22 is love, translated from the Greek *agape*, which Strong's Concordance translates as *“love, (in the sense of) affection or benevolence”*. This love is described in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 (NIV): *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”*.

Each of these 15 characteristics requires time and effort to develop and mature, and reflection reveals the need for the

Lord to prune the branches that they *“may bear much fruit”* (John 15:1-8). Of particular note are the ‘dead wood’ of envy, boastfulness and pride that must be cut out.

Luke 6:32-36 (NIV) defines another aspect of love – loving one's enemies. Loving enemies is a quality of *agape* that is unique to love that is developed under the Spirit. It is relatively easy to love those that love oneself, but *agape* requires love towards one's enemies: *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them.”*

There is one application of loving one's enemies that deserves special mention. It does not relate to animosity as in the world, but amongst brethren. The temptation to take a ‘dim view’ of those who differ in doctrinal understanding is ever present, and one test which all confront is to love those who hold a different understanding of a particular doctrine. *Agape* is not measured by one's ability to love only those who agree on doctrinal understanding.

1 Peter 4:8 adds yet another dimension to *agape* – to *“cover a multitude of sins.”* This quality of love is different from, and additional to, those listed in 1 Cor 13. It is the quality that enables one to overlook the short-comings of another, even if those short-comings cause hurt. This quality can only be exercised when it is accompanied by unwavering faith that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose, and a realisation that the fruits in all Christians in the flesh are still being developed. Maybe some harsh words were uttered - is our love great enough to cover (overlook) the other's error? Is our patience long enough to give them time to grow and mature? Is our fruit mature enough to enable us to be kind unto them? Was the situation provoked by pride? Is there more pruning to be done?

John 15:13 tells us that the greatest love is that which enables us *“to lay down our lives for our friends”*. That is what our Lord and Head did, not only for those who love Him, but for the whole world of mankind. Truly, every Christian must ask themselves whether they *“are able to be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with”*.

An appreciation of the qualities of love afford a ready understanding of Paul's words in 1 Cor. 13:13:

“now abideth faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.”, and also his exhortation to the Colossians that “above all these things, put on love (agape), which is the bond of perfectness” (G.S + L.R.)

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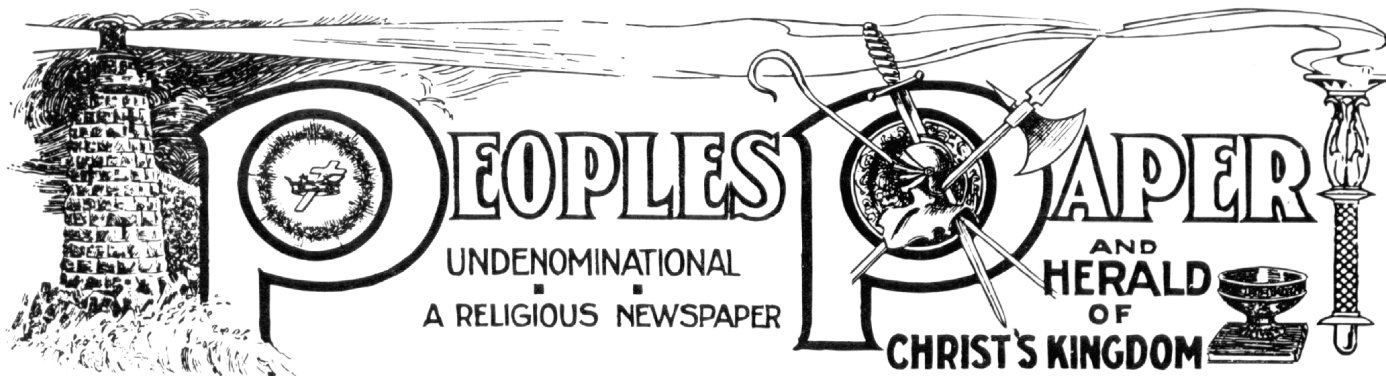
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WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

Even some Bible Students have a difficult time to explain how the witness of the Spirit works in their lives. Turning to the Scriptures, in Romans 8:16 we read, *'The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.'* When we look at the eighth chapter of the Book of Romans we find there a very interesting group of Scriptures that defines the Holy Spirit. The first verse of that particular chapter in Romans reads this way: *'There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.'* That means those who have come into Christ have been released from Adamic condemnation. Do we realise what that really means? Now we have a new life and we walk not after the flesh any longer, but after the Spirit. In verse 14 of Romans 8 we read that *'as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.'* To be a son of God is an awesome thing. To be of the family of Almighty God! Have you ever wondered what it would be like to see the Father face to face, to see the Son face to face? Can we really imagine the magnificence, the glory that we would see.

When we talk about God's Spirit we can talk about it in many ways. It was His power, His magnificent power that created everything. But when we talk about the witness of the Spirit, we are talking about our Spirit begetting, our coming into Christ to become His (God's) sons, and if faithful, to be where He is. We will see Him face to face. The Apostle John tells us this, and we will become heirs with Jesus Christ of everything that the Heavenly Father has. On page 226 of Studies in the Scriptures, Volume V, we read: "Few doctrines are of more importance to God's people than this one (about the Spirit) because on it depends to a considerable extent the possession of *'the peace of God that passes all human understanding'* (Phil.4:7). How can the Christian have *'full assurance of faith'* if he lacks the Spirit, or the witness of the Spirit, testifying to his sonship, to his adoption into the family of God? Yet we find that few have the slightest conception of what is meant by this expression, 'witness of the Spirit' or what kind of experiences should be expected and looked for as constituting the Spirit's witness to our sonship." That was written many, many years ago. Note the emphasis that was placed upon *'full assurance of faith'* signifying sonship, adoption into this magnificent family of God. Consider the thought given that *few* have any conception of what is meant by the 'witness of the Spirit'. Anyone new to the Truth or anyone already in the Truth should be aware of the Spirit's witness. That's why it is worthwhile to examine the subject to find out just what is the Spirit, how it is God's agent to His people, and what the Spirit witnesses.

Born of the Spirit

When we look back to the word 'spirit' in the Scriptures, we find in Genesis 1:2, that *'the world was without form and was void, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.'* We find that the Hebrew word there for Spirit is 'ruach' and is used in the sense of 'wind, breath or blast'. Keeping this in mind, when we go a little further in Genesis 2:7 we read about man, *'and the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed (the Hebrew word 'neshamah' - wind or vital breath) into his nostrils (the breath of life) and man became a living soul'*. This soul was a breathing creature and here we find that it was the combination of both body and breath that constitutes man 'a living soul' - his breath, his spirit, his thoughts - through God's almighty power which creates human life as well as every other form of life. Another illustration of the Spirit as a spirit of power is found in the New Testament in John, chapter 3. Here we find a man by the name of Nicodemus, a Ruler of the Jewish people, coming to Jesus and asking Him about His ability to perform miracles. In John 3:8 Jesus speaks about the wind and He says that one can see its power but does not know where it comes from or where it goes, and He went on to say, *'so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.'* In John 3:8, the Greek word for 'breath or blast of air' is 'pneuma', which is the Greek word for 'spirit' in most New Testament passages, and it has the thought of a current of air, blast or breath, a vital principle or disposition. In the case of Nicodemus it was the Lord's way of showing the capabilities of a spirit being.

Jesus received this breath, this power, this vital principle, when He arose from the water after His baptism by John at Jordan. At this time God showed to John that Jesus had received God's power, His disposition, His mind. A dove came and rested on Jesus' shoulder and a voice was heard saying, *'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'* (Matt.3:17) Then later, at Pentecost, the waiting disciples received the Spirit and cloven tongues of fire sat on each waiting in that upper room. Jesus had spoken of this day saying that the comforter, *'the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, it will teach you all things and bring all things to remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you'* (John 14:26). Then in John 16:13 we read again, *'When the Spirit of truth has come, it will guide you into all truth.'* We see then the importance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people, *'bringing things to remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you'*, as we read, and then *'it will guide you into all truth.... it will show you things to come.'* At Pente-

cost various gifts were given for the edification of those of the early church such as speaking in tongues or speaking in different languages. The gift of prophecy came with the giving of the Holy Spirit and when the Apostles died certain of these special gifts ceased, and the knowledge of the Lord and the various graces of the Spirit took their place.

Now we are to do something. Now we are to *'walk by faith and not by sight'*, as we read in 2 Cor.5:7. Our faith today must be backed by the fruits and the graces of the Holy Spirit. Someone may ask the question, Is the receiving of the Holy Spirit necessary to the new creature? And the answer that we can give is from Scripture. In John 6:63 we read: *'It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak, they are spirit and they are life.'* And then again, *'Now we have received the spirit which is from God'* (1 Cor.2:12). Then verse 14, *'The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, and neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.'* Now, when we consider this it doesn't mean we should put ourselves up on a platform somewhere and say how much better we are than anyone else, but what it does tell us is that with the aid of the Holy Spirit we can come to a knowledge of the plans and the purposes of Almighty God which He is pleased to give to us. His Holy Spirit is such as will guide us and lead us along the path of righteousness.

Going back to Romans 8: ¹⁴*'For as many who are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God'*; we find that ¹⁶*'the Spirit bears witness to us that we are the children of God'*. We are the sons of God, and if we are these children, these sons, ¹⁷*'then we are heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if so we suffer with Him, then together we will be glorified with Him.'* How important it is to have God's Holy Spirit! We want to see and to prove to ourselves that we have God's Spirit and that God is leading us as His children, for it is the Holy Spirit that inducts us into the body of Christ, this vital principle. In 2 Cor.5:5 we read: *'Now He who has wrought for us this self-same thing is God, who has given us the earnest of the Spirit.'* This earnest, or pledge of His power in this life, is the power in advance of that which we will receive in the future. Jesus' words in John 16:13 give us an insight as to what the Spirit's power would do for His people in His absence. It is very easy to follow someone, to hear their words, to sup with them and so forth as the disciples did when Jesus was upon the earth, but what about the guidance that they and we would receive when he left this earth? Yes, this earnest is the pledge of His power in this life and it is that in advance. Howbeit we read that, *'when the power of the Spirit of truth is come, it will guide you into all truth.'* This means, and will mean or should mean the development of the new creature. Yes, the Holy Spirit is a guiding,

an instructing, a converting force for those in Christ.

Evidence of Sonship

The word 'witness' means 'to testify jointly or to corroborate'. This evidence comes to us in seven different ways.

(1) SUBMISSION: This new start is a figurative beheading. We give up any will of our own and take on only the will of our Heavenly Father. One must renounce his old will and ways and take on the will of the Father. Jesus said to His Father, *'I delight to do thy will, O My God; yea, thy law is written within my heart'* (Isaiah 40:8). This new life demands full submission to God in every way. Even our beloved Saviour followed His Father's will. Jesus said, *'I can of myself do nothing. I seek not mine own will but the will of my Father which has sent me'* (John 5:30) This will mean following after the Lord in every step of the way, even through the loss of strength or the giving up of some cherished hopes that we might have. What is God's will for His people? This is His will, even your sanctification. This sanctification demands that we walk daily not according to the flesh but to the Spirit, keeping ourselves as free from the cares of this world as possible. And so, are we willing to fully follow God's will in every respect? Have we fully placed ourselves into the doing of God's will whatever that will may be? If so, we have a witness of the Spirit.

(2) DISCIPLINE: As a father disciplines his children, we will go through a disciplined life, and this is the next witness of the Spirit – this discipline that we need. In Hebrews 12:6 we read: *'Whom the Lord loves, He chastens'*. Now that's hard for us sometimes to understand but it is a fact, and He scourges every son that He receives. God keeps His people in line with His will by cutting away every vestige of pride, self-will and earthlyward vein. Like trees, we need pruning to bring forth an abundance of the good things of this life – righteousness! Let's read another Scripture that is so important along this line. In our discipline, the Lord looks to see whether we fret, whether we complain, and I like the Weymouth translation of Hebrews 12:11: *'Now at the time discipline seems not a matter of joy but of grief, yet afterward yields to those who pass through its training a result of peace, namely righteousness.'*

We don't fret, we don't complain when God has to discipline us. If our children go wrong, they can expect to be disciplined by their parents. Prunings are for the Christian's ultimate good. We must build a good foundation of character as exemplified in 2 Peter 1:5-8, (add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love) Prayer is necessary for our growth in Christ. We are admonished to pray to our Heavenly Father (Matt.6:6). *'Pray with the spirit of understanding'* (1Cor.14:15), *'Always pray'* (Luke 18:1), *By prayer...; let our requests be made known'* (Phil.4:6), *'Pray one for another...The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'* (James 5:16).

(3) ACTIVITY: Then we come to the third witness of the Holy Spirit, what the Spirit witnesses in our lives, and that is activity. Activity is an important witness of the Spirit if we desire to show forth *'the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness'* (1 Peter 2:9). We must have a desire to promote the truth to all the hearing ears and to build up one another in the most holy faith. In Matt.5:16 we are told to *'let*

In This Issue	
Witness of the Spirit	1
Compassion	4
Signs in the Sun, Moon and Stars	6
The Balm of Gilead	9
Fruits of the Spirit-Joy	12

your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. This must be the ultimate goal, to glorify our Heavenly Father. There must be a desire in our activity. We read, *'His word was in my heart as a burning fire that was shut up in my bones and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay'* (Jer.20:9). The prophet realised that there is a cost to preaching God's message. Yes, there is a cost, yet that was his desire. He had this desire as a fire within him and he said, I couldn't keep it back, I couldn't forbear it.

Our question then must be, do we have the same desire to speak God's word as did the prophet Jeremiah? Are we daily doing all we can, every waking hour, to glorify God's name? In what ways can we witness the truth of God's plan? These are questions that all must answer for themselves. If we find that we have no zeal, let us pray to the Heavenly Father for zeal. If we find ways but fail to use them to the utmost, let us pray to the Father that the Father will help us to use each opportunity as soon as it arises.

(4) LOYALTY: Our fourth witness of the Holy Spirit is loyalty to the truth and the brethren. There is a comment on 2 Thess.2:9,10 in the Reprints (page 2793), which reads in part: *'There are peculiar trials today in our lives. This is the time of the hour of temptation which has come upon the whole world (and I think most of us can understand that) but yet the time has still not reached its intensity. Satan is the prime mover today in the evils of this present time and is especially active against the Lord's people. He is using lying wonders, signs and all deceivableness in unrighteousness. This is permitted to test the Lord's people especially to see if they love the truth.'* This is a very good article and worth reading in full. We hear much today about 'standing for the truth'. We believe there are fundamentals that are scripturally given to us in the Bible such as the fall of man, the ransom, restitution, the call of the church. Even the second presence of Christ is important because it is there in the Scriptures. Beyond those fundamentals no one stands at liberty to separate themselves from one another, however we find that we want to be careful how we use the truth. The Apostle Paul held faithfully to the word of truth, especially he found that salvation comes through sanctification of the Spirit. Jude even says *'to contend for, to strive for the faith which was once delivered to the saints'* (Jude 3).

Some more questions we need to ask ourselves are, Are we taking the word of God lightly? In our dealings with the world and with the brethren, are we using our commission to daily, hourly, preach the word of truth, God's word? Are we holding the truth in high esteem? Do we come short of practising reverence for God? We could. For policy sake, do we change our course of action in our studies? We should never do that. What about in our work or leisure time? Again, we shouldn't. We have a great responsibility in holding God's word. With our brethren we must be loving and kind for John 13:34 & 35 tells us of the commandment to love our brethren as Christ loves us, for it is by this that all that will see us will know that we are Christ's disciples - if we have love for one another. This is the highest type of love we find in the Bible, and it is called 'agapeo'. It is a disinterested love, the highest form.

(5) KNOWLEDGE: The fifth witness of God's Spirit is the knowledge of things to come. John 16:13 tells us that the

Spirit will witness to the things to come and it will be a guide to us into all truth. The mark or the seal, the understanding of where we are in the stream of time, a knowledge of the Lord's presence and the privilege we have of working in God's vineyard, giving the message of God's coming kingdom, the privilege of working out our own salvation. And this should not only be a comfort but also it will be a shield in this time of the harvest. *'Search the Scriptures'*, we are told, *'for in them are the ways of eternal life. These are they that testify of Me.'* (John 5:39).

(6) RIGHTEOUSNESS: Then the sixth way of the witness of the Spirit is found in John 5:18: *'We know whoever is begotten of God will not sin'* - that is, willingly sin, for we all know we make mistakes, and in fact we're told that if we say we have no sin we are lying to God because we do sin, but we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. *'He that is begotten of God keepeth himself so that the wicked one touches us not.'* On that subject we need a little clarification for in 1 John 3 we see that whoever is begotten of God cannot sin, and the Greek word for 'commit sin' means 'to practise sin'. This is the proper application of this Scripture because to practise sin after we have been covered by the merit of Christ would be death. Hebrews 6:4 is very explicit: *"It is impossible for those who have been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, the Holy Spirit,...if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance.* We need to examine ourselves along this line that we would not willingly practise sin.

(7) SEPARATENESS: The last witness is to be separate from the world. This was very important for the nation of Israel, to be separate from the world. *'Be ye separate'* (Ezra 10:11). We are in the world like a ship is in the sea. We can be safe if the ocean is not in the ship. 2 Cor.6:17&18 tells us to come away from all those who are unclean that God may receive us. Again in Matt.19:21 we are not to lay up treasures on this earth but in heaven. There are many things on this earth that could absorb our time and our attention. We should be minding the things of the Spirit. We read in James 4:4 that *'friendship with the world is enmity with God'* and in 1 John 2:15 we are told not to love the world.

These witnesses of the Spirit are very important to each of us to know our position in the family of God. These should cause each of us to relate to the Heavenly Father in positive ways, to relate to our Lord Jesus in a positive manner. The witnesses are vital, and each of us should be aware of them in our life. We are living in the harvest time of the Gospel Age and soon the testings will be over and the little flock will be complete. We want to strive to be of the Christ company, so let us take this examination time to know whether we have the Spirit's witness in our lives. (CC 1/03)

***"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, even as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world."* (Eph 1:2-4)**

“COMPASSION”

Today we are living in a world that is ever changing, unpredictable and increasingly insecure. In some nations there are wars and lawlessness; in other nations there is hypocrisy, greed, and moral and family degradation, and in many other nations there is poverty and despair. Here lies a world that needs a saviour. The comforts that we possess cannot make us rejoice in this present evil system. As we follow Jesus, we will see what He saw – the lonely, the sick, the poor, the innocent and every person who needs to be considered, helped and loved; a world in need of healing, a world that needs compassion, a people that need the support of one another, a people that need our mighty, awesome Jehovah God because *‘His compassions fail not’* and *‘great is His faithfulness.’* (Lam.3:22,23)

We ask, is it possible for us to have compassion for our fellow beings? In the Old Testament the word *‘compassion’* is from Strong’s 7355, and the meaning is *‘to have compassion, to have or show mercy’*. In the New Testament it is from Strong’s 4097, *‘to feel sympathy or pity, to have compassion, tender mercy’*. From the dictionary, *‘a deep feeling of pity for the suffering of another, and an inclination to give aid or support, or to show mercy’*. May God show us through His Word and Spirit the examples and lessons He has for us.

In Isaiah 57:15, we read, *‘Thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’* Jehovah is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, before the mountains were brought forth or the hills, before the first-born was created, He is God. To Moses at the burning bush He said: *‘I am who I am’* (Exodus 3:14). Our God is very great, very wise, very high. Nevertheless, the Scriptures show us that He is also very sympathetic. He is a God of mercy and of love. Psalm 86:15 – *‘But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.’* Psalm 145:8,9 – *‘The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love; the Lord is good to all, He has compassion on all He has made.’*

Old Testament Examples

Abraham had great faith but he also showed compassion. When he was told of the destruction of the Sodomites, Abraham did not rejoice at the calamities about to come upon his neighbours. On the contrary, we find him generous, praying for divine compassion, asking: *‘If there be fifty righteous, will you spare the city?’* Abraham must have known the unsavory reputation of the people of Sodom but he was unwilling to think of them as badly as they deserved. We rejoice in Abraham’s mercifulness as well as his faith. When even ten righteous were not found but only three, God’s righteous judgment came on Sodom. But God’s mercy, too, is shown in their promised deliverance for even the wicked Sodomites will hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth in due time. *‘For this is good and acceptable before God, our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to an accurate knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one*

mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all men.’ (1 Tim 2:3-6).

Another grand example of loving sympathy in the Old Testament is that of Joseph. We remember how Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers and was taken to Egypt, where he was given a high position in the king’s realm, the highest authority next to Pharaoh. God used Pharaoh as His instrument to reveal to Pharaoh the meaning of his dream. There were to be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. The result of the years of famine brought Joseph’s brethren to Egypt to buy food. When Joseph learned how changed his brethren were, he sympathised with them. When he saw that their hearts went back to their wrong course in his own case and were sorry, he pitied them. When he saw their interest in his aging father and their unwillingness to hasten his death by an unkind word or act, he was full of pity.

After revealing to them his true identity, Joseph, full of true sympathy and pity, hastened to set them at ease. He did not cruelly threaten them with punishment for their wrongdoing. Instead, realising that sin had already brought punishment, Joseph consoled them, saying: *‘And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. God sent me ahead of you to preserve a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.’* Joseph exemplified the advice in the text in Romans 12:21: *‘Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil by good.’* He did not let the evil course of his brethren overcome him and make him bitter but he overcame their evil tendencies, characters and dispositions by his love, his mercy, his kindness and his generosity.

Then, in contrast, we have Jonah, whom God sent to preach to the people of Ninevah to tell them that in forty days He would destroy their city. But the people, impressed by Jonah’s message, repented of their sinful course and sought divine forgiveness. The king’s proclamation was: *‘Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth; let everyone call urgently on God, let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows, God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.’* (Jonah 3:7-9). The account goes on to say, When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not send them the destruction He had threatened. God was pleased to have the Ninevites turn from their sins and to repentance. He was pleased to grant them an extension of earthly life.

But Jonah was greatly displeased. He prayed: *‘O Lord, is not this what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamities.’* The Lord taught Jonah a lesson by providing a vine to grow and give shade to his discomfort, but then let it wither so that Jonah had no protection from the blazing sun. Jonah became angry about the vine and wanted to die, but our Heavenly Father said: *‘You have been concerned about the vine though you*

did not tend it or make it grow. But Ninevah has more than one hundred and twenty thousand people. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" How much greater is the compassion of the Almighty than that of His imperfect creatures of mankind!

We see a parallel of this in Christendom today, which has this Jonah syndrome, too. When we tell them that our Heavenly Father's gracious purpose for the world in general is to give **all** a resurrection and an opportunity during the Millennium to attain to human perfection, a world-wide Eden and an everlasting life, they, too, are displeased by the good news, calling it a "second chance". But it is the understanding of the ransom that truly manifests God's love to us in that through His only-begotten Son the world can be saved *'because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained; whereof He has given assurance to all men in that He has raised Him from the dead.'* (Acts 17:31)

"He Had Compassion on Them"

When we turn to the New Testament, what greater example of tender mercy towards the groaning creation is there than the ministry of our Redeemer! We read of Jesus' pity for the people in Matthew 9:35,36: *'Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.'* Matthew 14:13,14 reads: *'When Jesus heard about what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed He saw a large crowd; He had compassion on them and healed their sick.'* John 11:32-35 says: *³²When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ³³When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and troubled. ³⁴Where have you laid him? He asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. ³⁵Jesus wept.'*

Jesus' message was one of compassion and mercy, but how different was the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees. They held themselves aloof from the common people; the scribes because they claimed the masses were illiterate, the Pharisees because they claimed the people were sinners, cut off from relationship with God and not proper to be recognised by the 'holy' of humanity which they claimed to be. No wonder that, as it says in Mark 12:37 *'The common people heard Jesus gladly.'* In Luke, Chapter 15, the Pharisees and scribes accused Jesus of receiving sinners and eating with them, and Jesus gave them the parable of the lost sheep. *⁴Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. ⁶Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep. ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one who repents than over ninety nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.'* The scribes and Pharisees were out of harmony with the divine spirit and not pleasing to God because they were proud and haughty. Jesus would

have all of His disciples show mercy.

In Luke 6:35, 36 Jesus said: *³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back; then your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.'* God's mercy sent His Son to be our Redeemer and to help us back into favour. His mercy will pursue the lost sheep until every member of Adam's race shall have been brought to a knowledge of the truth and to a full opportunity of returning to the fold of God. Jesus said: *'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy'*. We who have received divine mercy through Jesus and have Him as our merciful and faithful High Priest as followers of Christ need to have this quality of compassion, to show love and sympathy, generosity and forgiveness to others and especially to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4:32: *'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.'* The divine requirement of all who would have a standing with Jehovah is stated in Micah 6:8: *'What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'*

"Blessed Are the Merciful"

It is true that justice is the foundation of divine government, that God is just; but it is also true that God is loving and kind and that He accepts to Himself the very name of Love, for God is love. To be in the divine likeness, then, is to govern our own course by the rules of justice but to measure the course of others by the rule of love and sympathy, generosity and forgiveness. We show our appreciation of God's mercy to all of us by schooling ourselves in His character and becoming more and more merciful and generous towards all the household of faith. And if merciful towards the brethren, naturally we would be generous also towards all. As we remember and appreciate our own weaknesses and blemishes, it will make us sympathetic with the brethren and with all mankind, for mercy, generosity and sympathy are qualities God delights in. Those who cultivate these gracious qualities of the spirit will be pleasing in the Lord's sight, and they will thereby be fitted and prepared to have a share with Jesus in His throne of glory, for that Messianic Kingdom will be established with the very purpose of showing mercy to those of mankind who will return to divine favour and blessing.

In conclusion, let us read from 1 John 4, verses 7-12:

'Dear friends, love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love This is how God showed His love among us, He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love; not that we love God but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.'

(BL)

SIGNS IN THE SUN, MOON AND STARS

This theme is from Joel's prophecy and was prepared because of a question about 'the Day of the Lord'. However, there are really three 'Days of the Lord' in the prophecy of Joel. We shall begin with some of Peter's words in Acts 2:19-21 – ¹⁹*I will show wonders in the heaven above, and light on the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapour of smoke;* ²⁰*The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day.* ²¹*And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.* 'Day' is sometimes specific and sometimes indefinite as a period of time but there was, as we know, a great and manifest day, the day of Pentecost. Joel wrote some centuries before *'And I will give portents in the heavens, and on the earth blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.'*

Now here is the fuller context of Peter's words in Acts 2 – ¹⁴*'But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words.'* ¹⁵*For these men are not drunk as you suppose since it is only the third hour of the day.* ¹⁶*But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:* ¹⁷*'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.'* ¹⁸*Yea, and on My menservants and My maidservants in those days I will pour out My Spirit and they shall prophesy* ¹⁹*and I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapour of smoke.* ²⁰*The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day.* ²¹*And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*

The Natural Heavens

Let us think about those words of Joel and Peter's application of them with the Holy Spirit guiding him. Let us think about the natural sun, moon and stars first. The natural sun, moon and stars have many functions and exert many influences over the earth and the activities of people on earth. They give light and heat, contribute to the cycles of day and night, the months, the seasons, the years, variation in ocean tides and provide guides to navigation. It is easy to understand really, isn't it, how people began to worship the sun, moon and stars and made idols to represent them and their functions as outlined by the Apostle in Romans One. The children of Israel were, as we know, commanded not to make idols or graven images as we read in Exodus 20 – ⁴*'You shall not make for yourself any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or is in the water under the earth.'* ⁵*You shall not bow down to them or serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those that hate me* ⁶*but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.'*

The Lord, of course, has no cause to be angry or displeased with the physical heavens or the natural sun, moon and stars. We read in Genesis 8:22 – *'While the earth remains seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.'* The physical heavens are the work of God's hands, they function as designed by Him and so should provide reasons for praising Him, as the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 148:3-6 – *'Praise Him sun and moon, praise Him all you shining stars, praise Him you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord for He commanded and they were created; and He established them forever and ever. He fixed their bounds which cannot be passed.'* The natural sun, moon and stars are also spoken of as so affecting the believer at times that he or she should not take liberties with them, and seek the Lord's protection. Psalm 121 – ⁵*'The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand'* ⁶*The sun shall not smite you by day nor the moon by night.'* So if Joel's prophecy and Peter's application of it referred to the literal heavenly bodies, it would be reasonable to expect that the Lord Jesus would have called some attention to them while He was on earth.

Instead, Jesus directed His hearers to observe the events taking place around them. Matt.16 – ¹*'Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test Him they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven.'* ²*He answered them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather for the sky is red';* ³*'And in the morning it will be stormy today for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.* ⁴*An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah."* *So He left them and departed.'* Similar words are found in Luke 12 – ⁵⁴*He also said to the multitudes, "When you see a cloud rising in the west you say at once, 'A shower is coming', and so it happens.* ⁵⁵*And when you see the south wind blowing you say, "There will be scorching heat", and it happens.* ⁵⁶*You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time.* ⁵⁷*And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right.'*

The people of God have been prepared for the use of the sun, moon and stars as symbols. Joseph's dream is an instance. The sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him, as we are told in Genesis 37:9,10. In the dream, Joseph's father, mother and the eleven brothers were represented. The psalmist says also that the Lord is a sun in Psalm 84:11 – *'For the Lord God is the sun and shield. He bestows favour and honour. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.'*

Now, the prophecy of Joel. The children of Israel, as the Scriptures record, were frequently rebellious and idolatrous. God, however, was long-suffering and sent His prophets to them repeatedly. His prophets often warned them and told them of dangers to come if they did not repent and reform. Joel was such a prophet. He prophesied about 800 BC, some 800 years before the words we read were fulfilled. He must

have travelled up and down the land of Judah giving out the word of the Lord as recorded in his book. In the first chapter Joel gives warning after warning of desolation and famine to come upon the disobedient Jews. Further warnings are given in chapter 2, but there are also words of exhortation to repentance and turning again to the Lord. Prophecies of punishment on Judah are recorded in this chapter, punishments which came upon Judah at the hands of the Assyrians and subsequently the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar.

The prophecies of restoration and prosperity are also recorded in this chapter, culminating in the great blessing of God's Holy Spirit to be poured out on all flesh. Chapter 3, the final chapter of Joel's prophecy, contains prophecies of punishments on surrounding heathen nations. The prophecy of the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit on all flesh is an example of a Messianic prophecy to be fulfilled in the Gospel Age, inserted among prophecies relating to the experiences, wars and punishments of Israel and the surrounding nations.

Three 'Days of the Lord'

Now, there are in Joel's prophecy three days mentioned. The first 'Day of the Lord' occurs in Joel 1:15 – *'Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as a destruction from the Almighty it comes.'* And in Joel 2:1 – *'Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on My holy mountain, let the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near.'* Then in verse 11 – *'The Lord utters his voice before His army, for His host is exceedingly great. He that executes His word is powerful: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?'* This day refers to special punishments for Judah and was a great and terrible day for the Jews at that time, some 800 BC.

The second 'Day of the Lord' refers to a time of the Lord's vengeance on the Gentile nations after Judah had been restored in Joel 3:1&14 – *"For behold, in those days and at that time when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem.....Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."* This second day was a great and terrible day for the Gentiles.

But the third 'Day of the Lord' was to be a time of blessing not only to Judah and Israel but to all people. The prophecy was not fulfilled until some eight centuries had passed. Joel's prophecy is in Joel 2:28-32 – *'And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days I will pour out my spirit. And I will give portents (that is, something that is going to happen in the future) in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood before that great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that all that call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.'* No doubt this refers to the time of attack by the Roman armies. Many escaped, and those who were called preached the Gospel message and spread the word of the Gospel.

We know we understand correctly the meaning and signifi-

cance of the prophecy because Peter, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, applies this third 'Day of the Lord' in his address on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:14-21 – *'But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk as you suppose since it is only the third hour of the day.'* Remember, some had said, Oh, these men are full of new wine, but Peter deals with that for they would not have had time to become drunk. *'But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Yea, and on My menservants and My maidservants in those days I will pour out My Spirit and they shall prophesy and I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* Marvellous really, that Peter the fisherman, uneducated, unlearned, standing up, was inspired by the Spirit to speak these very moving words to the multitude – and there must have been a multitude there on the Day of Pentecost. There was the sound of the rushing mighty wind, tongues of fire were seen on the heads of those to whom the Spirit was given, and then these eloquent words were spoken by the humble fisherman to the multitudes present, telling them that this prophecy of Joel was fulfilled before their very eyes.

A Great and Terrible Day

How, looking at some of the details of the prophesy: *'Wonders in the heaven and in the earth'*. The prophecy in Joel 2 is a prophecy of one of God's greatest blessings, but verses 30 and 31 speak of 'blood, fire and pillars of smoke; the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood before that great and terrible Day of the Lord comes'. How do we understand these prophecies? The third Day of the Lord is a time of blessing. Why is it called terrible? Peter interprets the prophecy for us by using the word 'notable'. Peter is quoting from the Septuagint, that is, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in which the word is so translated. The original Hebrew word is 'yareh' (Strong 3372 is the reference) and means 'fearful, in the sense of revered, held in reverence'. Peter uses the Greek word 'epiphanes' (Strong 2016) which means 'conspicuous or memorable'. The day referred to in Joel 2:30 and Acts 19:20 was indeed notable, conspicuous and memorable. In the first place God's Spirit was poured out on all flesh – something that had never happened before in the history of the world. So, in the second place, whoever would call on the name of the Lord would be saved, as Peter declared. Thirdly, the Day is still continuing – that 'Day' that began at Pentecost is still continuing and will continue until the close of the Kingdom Age.

The meaning of these symbols. What about the *'blood, fire and pillars of smoke. The sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood'*? Within the verses in Joel and Acts there occurs an important clue to interpretation. Both passages say *'before the great and notable day of the Lord comes'*, so the notable day comes after certain things have happened. The first Day of the Lord occurred in earlier times. 'The earth' symbolizes the social order which trembled before them, that

is, the invaders of Judah and Jerusalem – firstly the Assyrians and afterwards the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. The heavens which would also tremble would be the governmental and ruling arrangements of Judah and Jerusalem. The sun and the moon are symbolic of the heathen gods which the idolatrous Jews were worshipping in disobedience to God, while the stars symbolized the Jewish priests and Levites who were no help and provided no Godly guidance to the people in their disobedience and sentence of punishment.

The second Day of the Lord had also to precede the great and notable third day in Joel 2 RSV ‘The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining’ and in Joel 3 – ‘The sun and the moon are darkened and the stars withdraw their shining, And the Lord withdraws from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake: but the Lord is a refuge to His people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.’ This prophecy applies to the Gentile nations surrounding Judah and Jerusalem. The symbolism seems to be the same for the first Day of the Lord, the ruling powers and the people would be perplexed and troubled. Their rulers, priests and gods would be powerless when the God of heaven would roar against them out of Jerusalem. The word ‘roar’ means ‘to rumble, as of an earthquake or to moan, as of a strong wind or gale’ (Strong’s definition again). The whole picture is one of various kinds of trouble symbolized by blood, fire, smoke and darkness, first on the apostate and idolatrous Jews, then subsequently on the Gentiles. The blood would, of course, refer to the battles that would be fought and were fought.

The coming of the third Day of the Lord, announced in so powerful and moving a manner by the Apostle Peter as the ‘great and notable day’ was and continues to be a day of blessing, but the blessing, wonderful though it is, occurs in the midst of further trouble. The Apostles and disciples of Jesus were furiously persecuted, the severest Divine punishment fell upon the Jewish leaders and people in the siege of Jerusalem, and the early church had to endure severe persecution and tribulation brought upon its members by the Pagan Roman empire. But blessings will prevail. Above and through all the stress and persecution, there arose a new sun, the Sun of Righteousness and the Light of the World. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only true light of this present and continuing Day of the Lord.

The Sun of Righteousness

We read in Malachi 4:2 – ‘But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in His wings. He shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall.’ And in John 8:12 – ‘Again Jesus spoke to them saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”’ Because of Him, and only because of Him, blessings to all members of the human race will prevail and all troubles will eventually pass away and be no more. There have been throughout history, and there are today, many false lights both Pagan and professedly Christian and these false lights should be seen for what they are by reference to the Scriptures and avoided by the sincere Christian. These false lights will sooner or later be extinguished. In this present and enduring Day of the Lord the same symbols as used in Joel are used again – Matt.24:29 ‘Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun

be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.’ These prophetic words spoken by the Lord Jesus follow His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and His reference in Matt.24:15 and Mark 13:14 to the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet. In the same context, Luke 21:20 speaks of Jerusalem encompassed by armies – a clear prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 70 AD.

The contexts of each of the three chapters, Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, however are too extensive and far reaching to have their sole and complete fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem. The prophecies of Daniel and also Revelation and some passages in Paul’s Second Letter to the Thessalonians inform us that a great religious system would arise that would pervert and even deny the fundamental truth of Christ’s ransom and sacrificial blood, and stand between the believer and the Lord God where only Christ should stand, and thus be a desolating abomination to all the millions of its adherents. The symbolism of Matt.24:29 extends to our day and beyond. The tribulation of those days can be understood as referring to the prophesied period of Papal prominence in world affairs which lasted for 1260 years from 539AD to 1799AD, the sun being the Papacy itself, the moon being Protestantism which has continued to reflect the Papacy in many ways and continued to hold many erroneous Papal doctrines, while the stars fittingly symbolize religious leaders and teachers. The powers of the heavens represent world governmental powers and arrangements.

So, as the Gospel Age progresses toward its appointed end, we should be watching and praying as we see world leaders, political and ecclesiastical, declining in power and prestige. An instance at the moment is the Papacy, the Papal system under siege for abuses of children – a most disgraceful revelation that the organisation which should be preaching Jesus and salvation has been abusing and harming young people for many, many years, perhaps even for centuries. That is all now coming into the open and that great false religious system is being sued and pursued in the courts and judgments against it for millions and billions of dollars have been made. This we should watch as the beginning of the end of this great system prophesied in Daniel and in Revelation. We should be watching and praying.

The present heavens and earth, that is the present political, social, economic and ecclesiastical arrangements, are passing away. If we pin our hopes on them and become caught up or entangled in them, we will in the long term be greatly disappointed for we are children of the light and of the Day, as the Apostle Paul has told us in 1Thess.5 – ⁵*For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness.* ⁶*So then let us not sleep as others do, let us keep awake and be sober.* ⁷*For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those that get drunk are drunk at night.* ⁸*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.* ⁹*For God has not destined us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ* ¹⁰*who died for us, so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with Him.*

With those words of the Apostle, the exhortation for us is ever to be awake and sober, to watch and to pray as the Lord Jesus told us. Amen. (RC)

THE BALM OF GILEAD

The Natural Balm

The source of the genuine Balm of Gilead is a small ever-green tree of the incense-tree family, once called *Opobalsamum*. It stands 10 to 14 feet high with wand like spreading branches. The outer bark is of a rich brown colour, the inner bark is green and very aromatic, and leaves are small and white. The flowers are small and reddish in colour. The seeds are solitary, yellow and grooved down one side. The fruit is reddish grey and the size of a small pea with an agreeable and aromatic taste. The tree grows from seeds. It is both rare and difficult to rear. It is mentioned in the Bible six times.

Josephus states that the Queen of Sheba took trees from Arabia as a present to King Solomon. They were believed to have been planted by him in Judea and Jericho originally. (I Kings 10:10) There, being cultivated for its juice~ the tree acquired its popular name, i.e. Balm of Gilead. Other historians also inform us that the tree was first planted in Judea and that it grew only in the king's garden. This actually comprised two parts and the balsam tree grow in both.

The juice exudes during the heat of the summer, in resinous drops, the process being helped by incisions in the bark. The amount of liquid balm obtained from a tree is about three drops a day. The resin hardens into small nodules. The quantity of oil obtained is roughly one-tenth the amount of juice. The "Balm of Gilead" had long been famous in antiquity for its almost miraculous properties for healing wounds. It was used to cleanse sores, to heal deep wounds, as an eye salve, as an antidote for the bites of poisonous serpents and for breaking down of calcium deposits in the body.

In fact, it was commonly held by Israel to be beneficial in the healing of all manner of disease. The resin or gum of the balsam tree was also used as a scent for oils and perfumes. The product is named "balasan" in Arabic, in Hebrew "baal shemen", meaning "lord" or "chief of oils", and our word balsam. Recent excavation of an ancient city within the Gilead area has unearthed the remains of a fortress like building used for the manufacture of balsam oil. The balsam oil of Gilead was so famous that the conquering Roman emperor Titus 70 AD, after conquering the area of Gilead, displayed branches from it in his triumphal march through Rome.

Is There No Balm? (Jer 8:22)

Let us now concentrate on Jeremiah's reference to the balm of Gilead. We note that he asked three questions - (1) Is there no balm in Gilead? (2) Is there no physician there? (3) Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Jeremiah was a prophet who cried out to God on behalf of the people of Israel. Their's was a proud history, and the people were quick to assume that God's blessings of the past were a guarantee of His future blessing, regardless of their own actions and devotions. Jeremiah's three questions, we know, did not refer to the physical condition of Israel. Nor did he refer to the natural balm that was contained in the balsam tree of Gilead. He was not referring to the physicians of that time but to the moral condition of Israel.

When the people turned away from God and when trouble came, they seemed all too surprised. When sickness and op-

pression came, they discovered they were looking in all the wrong places for relief. They were looking in all the wrong places for healing. They trusted in their own methods instead of God. The result was a coming destruction, sickness and oppression. In the face of this coming devastation, Jeremiah is overwhelmed with sorrow and depression. He sees the sickness to come, the terrible days ahead, and cries out to God.

"Is there a balm to heal this sickness?" Jeremiah asks. In his day, balms and balsams, along with ointments were medicines. Balms and balsams were aromatic. One can imagine the terrible odours from diseased parts of the flesh, sick bodies, as well as odours from work and perspiration. These balms and balsams were made to help in masking the odours, to cover them up. So sores and diseased parts of the flesh were treated with balms and a recovery was made. Many of these applications helped in the healing process. Many of them even soothed the pain - perhaps numbing the nerve endings somewhat. They had medicinal value and became a natural way of speeding the healing process. When one was sick or diseased, balms were applied to cover up the odours, to soothe the pain and to aid healing.

As it was, the balm of Gilead was still there - the balm was the word of God. There were still capable physicians of the Lord's word in Israel. There were still prophets of God in Israel who would have skilfully applied the healing balm. These prophets would have attended to the sickness of the nation. Then why was Israel not recovered? Israel was not recovered because it did not listen to those true physicians who had the necessary healing balm. The nation as a whole was spiritually diseased. Its moral health was deteriorating and God was most displeased with them.

Jeremiah was earnestly asking the nation to turn back to God. The nation of Israel would have no difficulty in understanding the question. They knew the prophet was using a figurative language. They knew he was referring to the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the nation's personal Physician.

The Balsam Tree

But let us go back and examine the balsam tree in a little more detail. The balsam tree of Gilead had great medicinal value and in the seed of the tree, the sap of the tree, in the wood, or the tree itself, we have a most beautiful picture of the Word of God. The balsam tree was a saving or healing tree. Its many medicines and creams at that time would miraculously heal wounds. The Word of God as expressed by Jesus and as presented in the Scriptures offers the only means of salvation, for the church and for the world of mankind. There is no other way.

The balsam tree produces a seed and a new tree grows from this. This could picture the seed of our new nature, a seed that through the operation of the Holy Spirit is generated within us. This is similar to the seed of the balsam tree, which when planted in the ground, germinates and brings forth a new plant. What a beautiful picture it presents of our begetting by the Holy Spirit as new creatures. The seed re-

quires a life- giving fluid, water. Watching the tree grow, it will be found putting forth leaves until a certain age, then it will begin to blossom - a further stage of growth.

With the breaking out in blossom it is pleasing to the eye, gives off a pleasant smell, and we see that a future result will be to bring forth some fruit. So with the Christian, when he or she begins to blossom out, we note the progress. It is pleasing to behold and it is a sweet smelling savour to the householder who anticipates some fruitage. If the tree is well watered it will show healthy looking growth, as well as rapid growth~ it will become sturdy and able to produce more. The lack of the life giving fluid will result in sickly, shrivelling foliage and the tree will gradually wither away or put on a stunted growth. It is similar with the Christian. The Christian needs to be irrigated with the water of life- the truth.

The tree may lose much of its irrigation if the roots do not come in proper contact and absorb it. If the truth is not absorbed by the Christian all the irrigation may be lost. However, where it is taken in we notice the refreshing results. The prophet says Jer 17:7,8 "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Jehovah and whose trust Jehovah is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth out its roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat cometh, but its leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."

It is necessary that Christians plant themselves near the stream of life, where the food is so satisfying - near to that river where the fruits of the spirit grow. They must grow from the leaf stage, develop to the blossom condition and produce fruit. They are to progress in the development of the image and likeness of the great Creator. Time and processes of growth are most important factors in the production of a Christian character.

The sap of the balsam tree could picture the Holy Spirit circulating through God' s Word. As the sap of the Balsam tree circulates through that tree to impart life and vitality to it, similarly the Holy Spirit circulates through the Word of God. It imparts life and vitality and is an energising power to the Christian. As the sap of the balsam tree generates or causes the seed of that tree to form, so does the Holy Spirit operating within our minds and hearts, generating the seeds of the new nature by fertilising, assisting, nourishing and promoting its welfare.

We are told that the leaves of the balsam tree of Gilead were white and were very thickly distributed over its branches, literally covering the tree and giving it a very white appearance. This might possibly picture the covering robe of Christ' s righteousness and the purity and spotlessness of the Word of God. In Psalm 12:6 we read that ' the words of Jehovah are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, purified seven times'; and in Prov 30:5 "Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that take refuge in Him' ~.

The Scriptures give us to understand that at the very beginning of our Christian experience, we figuratively are clothed in white raiment. This white raiment represents justification - we are justified freely from all things. It is a robe without a spot. It is sometimes spoken of as Christ' s robe of righteousness because it comes to us through Christ. Isaiah 61:10 men-

tions it ".... He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness...". This is only to be had through Jesus. He is able to impute His righteousness to us, to grant to us this temporary robe.

The Balm of Gilead had a rather sharp, biting taste, but was most beneficial to the digestion. Similarly the Word of God is indeed sharp and not agreeable to the normal appetite. The Word of God was folly to the Jews and a stumbling block to the Gentiles. But to the chosen ones of both Jew and Gentiles, it was the power of God unto salvation. Often the truth is sour to the taste initially, but afterwards it becomes ever so sweet like the sweetest honey.

The balsam tree of Gilead exudes or weeps a kind of gum very much in the form of tears. It could possibly picture the tears of grief and sympathy shed by Jesus. We see Him as He grieved and wept over Jerusalem, and we hear those sweet words, recorded in Matt 23:37 ~O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

The balsam tree of Gilead was first granted to only one land, the land of Judea. From there it was introduced to others, but the merchants of Judea took it to Israel first. And so it was with the balm of the Word of God; it was first given to Israel. We read in Psalm 147:19, 20 ' He sheweth His word unto Jacob, His statutes and his ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them, Praise ye Jehovah This distinguishes them above all other nations of the earth and gives them special occasion for gratitude.

The Spiritual Balm

Our Lord Jesus expressly commanded his disciples not to go to the Gentiles nor into any city of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The first opportunity for membership in the kingdom, the first chance for the high and holy calling, was granted to the Jewish people. Romans 2:10 illustrates this well ' Buglory and honour and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.' However as a nation they neglected to take this once in a lifetime so special opportunity and when the time came for the spiritual balm of Gilead to go to other nations and to other peoples, it was the Jewish "spiritual merchants" - the Apostles - who spread the goods news. Acts 13:46 reads as follows: "And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. "

Historians inform us that when first the balsam tree grew in Judea, it was permitted to grow in the King's garden only. Subjects of the king had full access to the balm for their needs and sicknesses~ but they were not permitted to control the output of the balsam tree. The same can be said of the spiritual balm~ the Word of God. It did not originate from man but it came from heaven itself. It was first given to man by God through the prophets~ then through our Lord Jesus and later by the apostles.

As already noted the balsam tree was permitted to grow only

in The King' s garden consisted of two parts or two orchards. One of these orchards was much larger and grander than the other. What a beautiful picture this presents of that day to come shortly when there will be two phases of God' s Kingdom in operation.

The resurrection day is the time when the long planned for completion of the Church; the Body of Christ will take place. The resurrection has a spiritual component for the Church as well as a natural component for the rest of mankind. These are referred to by John as - (1) a resurrection of life for Gospel Age overcomers (a spiritual reward) and (2) a resurrection of judgement for the remainder of mankind. The final judgement for life for mankind in general will await the end of their next age trial time, but for those blessed in the resurrection of life, described as "the first resurrection", the assurance is (Rev 20:6) - "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection over these the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Theirs is the reward of immortality, on the spiritual plane.

The heavenly phase of the kingdom will be grand and most spectacular, beyond the dimensions of our minds. It will be the larger or greater phase of the kingdom. The lesser or earthly phase of that kingdom will also be glorious. From both phases the healing balm of the even-balanced, even-tempered Word of God shall flow. Speaking of that time, Isaiah in Ch 29:24 says " They also that err in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmur shall receive instruction." Here we see a day is coming when the spirit of love and the truths of the Bible will go hand in hand, it will be a rightly tempered, perfectly balanced Gospel, not "untempered mortar".

It has been written of the balm of Gilead that it was recommended for the breaking up or dissolving of stones or calcium formations in the body. This could picture the spiritual balm of Gods word and its power to break up and dissolve the hardest formation of all, a stony heart. Jeremiah in Ch 23: 29 says; "Is not my word like fire? saith Jehovah; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Again we read in Ezek 36:21-30 addressed to the nation of Israel ~ God will sanctify his name among the heathen. How comforting are the words to the nation of Israel in Ezek 36:26 - ~' a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit that will cause you to walk in my statutes. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave your fathers, my people indeed and I will be your God". What a beautiful promise is given to the nation of Israel!

Today a distressed world is searching about for healing balm. One by one, her concoctions fail to bring peace to this world, they also fail to bring healing to the sickness of the people on earth. So many of the earth' s leaders seek for balm, but refuse to seek it in Gilead. They seek for a physician, but refuse to seek him in Gilead. The leaders of the nations refuse the only Physician who can heal all their problems and diseases.

Over the years the world has had fascism, communism and other isms. The United Nations and NATO are being tried by a despairing, dying world, but are failing to bring about healing. Their solutions are only temporary and they end up creating more problems to this world by their so-called attempts at making peace. Mankind cannot and will not bring peace

into this world of ours. With all our modern medicines, with all our modern medical equipment, some reach 100 years, but eventually all must die.

Soon, however, the Great Physician will be seen pointing the way to the healing balm, to those who shall have been delivered from the "besieged city". To those who shall have been delivered from the power of Satan, He will be seen pointing towards literal Gilead, the Gilead of old, for from the nation of Israel shall the word of the Lord go forth, the healing balm for every ill, as foretold by the prophets:

"For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Out-cast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after." Jer 30:17

"Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up". Hosea 6:1

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD' s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion (the Heavenly phase of the Kingdom) shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (The earthly phase of the Kingdom). Isa 2:2-3. The spiritual seed will instruct and support the earthly seed. What a strong and irresistible government will be established!

The Balm for Today

From another standpoint, we may sometimes wonder if there are those who, coming among the Lords people, ever have occasion to ask the question, which Jeremiah did, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Possibly this question may come from some lonely heart, it may come from some seeker after truth and righteousness. Has someone ever come to us in search of the true balm of Gilead and gone away without receiving it? This is a question to which each one of us should give serious thought.

Further, in those moments of self-examination, does that question come to each one of us? Let us examine our hearts and minds. Is the balm of Gilead to be found there? Is the true and great Physician reigning within our hearts? Let us hold fast those spiritual blessings that have been given to us, ever remembering that we wrestle not with flesh and blood, for our great Adversary is watching spiritual Israel at this time as never before, and if we let down our guard, he will be sure to reach some vulnerable spot.

Let us shine then as lights in a dark place. Let us fight the good fight of faith, so that we may lay hold on eternal life, and be caught up to that heavenly phase of the Kings garden, from where we shall be used in assisting the world, helping mankind from sickness to health, from death to life, and from destruction to restitution. May we hear those most beautiful words at the end of our earthly journey "Well done thou good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. " Amen..

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT-JOY

In Galatians 5:22 the Apostle Paul lists nine fruits of the Spirit. The second fruit listed is joy.

In John 15 Jesus explains the relationship between love, the first fruit of the Spirit listed by Paul in Galatians 5, and joy. Jesus' joy stemmed from keeping His father's commandments – *'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full'* (John 15:10-11). For us to have fullness of joy we must keep His commandments, and John 13:34 tells us that His commandment is that we love one another. Love for our brethren is a great source of joy for us, just as the Apostle Paul derived great joy and consolation from the love of Philemon (Philemon 7, 20), and the love which the Philippians had for each other. (Phil. 2:2)

The joy which we derive from the love of our brethren arises from our common understanding and belief that the Word of God is truth and is not from men: *'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God ... For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? For ye are our glory and joy.'* (1 Thess. 2:13 – 20).

One truth we share that brings joy is that Jesus was with the Father, and was manifested to His disciples in the flesh, as 1 John 1:1-4 states: *'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; ... That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy be full.'* We who remain in the flesh in this 21st century have this same *'fellowship of the Spirit'* (Phil. 2:1-2), and therefore may have this same fullness of joy.

Romans 15:13 tells us that our joy requires belief, and not just understanding: *'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.'* The Apostle Peter confirms the need for belief: *'whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory'* (1 Peter 1:8).

A second common understanding that provides us with great joy is our knowledge of God's plan of the ages. It was His knowledge of that Plan that gave Jesus His joy during His earthly ministry: *'for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.'* (Heb. 12:2). It was His knowledge of God's plan for the redemption of all mankind that enabled Him to despise the shame, to *'resist unto blood'* (verse 4) and to joyfully give His flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). An understanding of, and belief in, God's Plan that *'the good news of great joy shall be to all people'* (Luke 2:10) is necessary for us to have joy in the present time while *'the whole creation groaneth and tra-*

vailleth in pain together'. (Romans 8:23). Faith that Jesus' sacrifice has paid the price for the redemption of all mankind, that God will bring about the resurrection of all who are in the graves (John 5:28) and restore them to life and happiness in *'the times of restitution of all things'* (Acts 3:21) is necessary for us to experience joy.

In spite of this hope, we *'groan within ourselves'*. One antidote for our grief is the realisation that God *'hath given this sore travail'* for man's ultimate benefit, and while *'weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning.'* (Eccl. 1:13; Psalms 30:5)

In order to experience joy in the face of the personal reprimands we receive in the world, we need to appreciate that *'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'*; and that *'the Spirit itself bears witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God.'* (Ephesians 1:3, Romans 8:16) It was this understanding and belief that enabled Paul and Silas to sing praises to God when they were in prison (Acts 16:19-25) and, on another occasion to *'rejoice that they were worthy to suffer shame for His name.'* (Acts 5:41).

The challenge for us is to also *'count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience.'* *'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.'* (James 1:2-3; Matthew 5:10-12). We may assuredly *'rejoice in hope of the glory of God'*, realising that we are *'partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.'* (Romans 5:2; 1 Peter 4:13)

An understanding of these things does not come instantly, but as the prophet has said *'Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little.'* (Isaiah 28:9-10). In this sense joy is a fruit of the Spirit – a fruit because it is developed over a period of time and *'of the Spirit'* because *'God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea the deep things of God.'* (1 Corinthians 2:10).

PEOPLES PAPER

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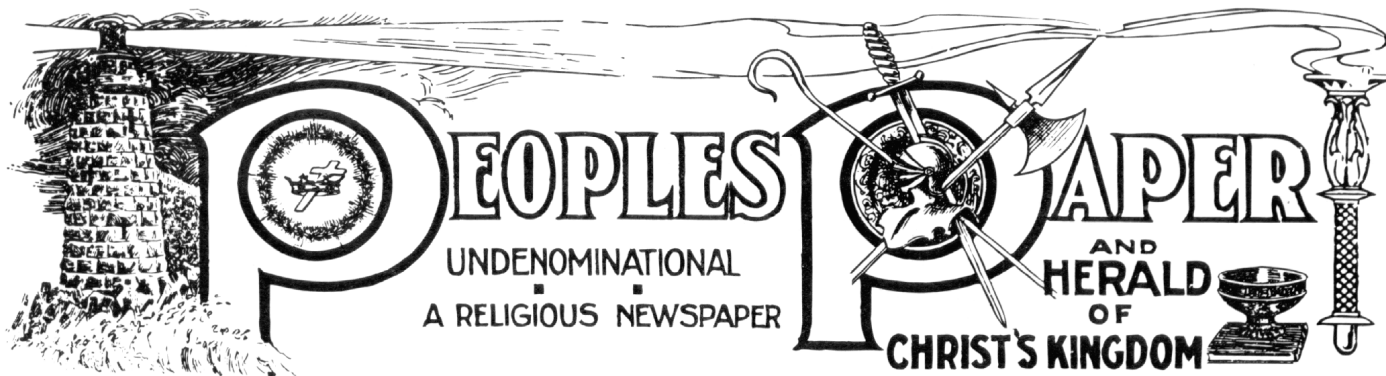
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“VISION”

The eye is so important to us in every day life that we take it so much for granted. Close your eyes for a moment and darkness will surround you, you have no focus point and you have no definition of colour. You can hear but you cannot see the people, the trees, the birds or the surroundings. Now open your eyes. You can see the light, the people, the colours and your surroundings. How blessed are we that we can see.

No one can reach a higher level than the ideal or vision set before one's mind. No life can attain to greater things than the objective around which a man's life centres. He who is of the earth earthly will mind earthly things, and conclude that “*a man's life consists in the abundance of things he possesses.*” *Luke 12:15.* But the one whose eyes have been opened by the “*heavenly vision*”, discovers that life on earth is really just a training ground for us.

“The Heavenly Vision”

One who lays up treasures on earth where moth and rust can eat away and destroy, will be left poor indeed. The other, with a vision of the short life here on earth, and with a future heavenly outlook, will devote his effort to laying up treasures in heaven – *Math 6:19,20.* He finds the words of our Lord Jesus “*where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*”, (*Matt 6:21*). There is a daily drawing of the whole character in the direction of the heavenly treasure house. The Wise Man said “*As a man thinketh in his heart so is he*” (*Prov 23:7*) - so he will become through his power of thought, his habit of thought being determined by the aim and the pursuits of his life.

The apostle Paul was able to testify that his whole life and outlook were changed by the vision that was granted to him. He wanted it clearly understood that it was a vision of Jesus Christ that revolutionised his whole life. It was the heavenly vision by which the persecuting Saul was halted and humbled. He was transformed into a servant of the church, with a heart of compassion for the Master whose servant he became. It was that vision that henceforth made him see that what he had previously counted as gain, was now but refuse, loss and dross. (*Phil 3:8*). It was because of that vision that his ministry became ever so stable, ever so Christ centred and focused on a heavenly walk.

Christ crucified and Christ developed within the hearts of believers became the supreme objective of his life and of his unsurpassed devotion to Christ and his church. He himself

tells us, “*I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision*”, *Acts 26:19.* Nor did persecution or trials deter him - *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.* *Acts 20:24.* In ordaining him for service the Lord had said, “*I have appeared unto thee, to make thee a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen Me, and of the things wherein I will yet appear unto thee.*” *Acts 26:16.*

Thus it was that Paul was qualified and so energetically fitted for the ministry committed to him. He had seen the Lord, he had felt his power, and what he had seen energised him to make the mystery known to all. Paul was a man of vision, a man with experiences, “*whether in the body or out of the body*” (*2 Cor 12:2,3*), he could not tell. These experiences gave him such a long view of the purposes of God that are so wide and so deep, so grand and so wonderful. He rebukes all lukewarmness in service then and now. He rebukes all narrowness in concept, all unloving selfishness within the circle of the family of God.

Paul's personal vision of the Lord was so important to him in his appointed sphere of service. It continues to be the divine rule for each servant, “*according to the measure of the spirit given to every man*” (*1 Cor 12: 7*), to each commissioned by the Lord to be a “*witness of the things wherein thou hast seen Me*”. We are all called also to be ambassadors for Christ. (*2 Cor 5:20*)

“Where There Is No Vision....”

In *Prov 29:18* we find an inspired emphasis on the vital importance of having a true vision of the will of God. There we are told, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*” The original meaning of this word “*perish*”, has the significance of becoming “*naked*”, or to be uncovered, or to be exposed, or still another meaning is to “*cast off a restraint*”. A paraphrase of this text would then be, “*Where there is no vision at which the eyes gaze intently, the people cast off all restraint, they are made naked and exposed.*” A good illustration of this is found in the words of our Lord Jesus addressed to the church at Laodicea, and to all “*Laodiceans*” ever since. (*Rev 3:17,18.*) Let it be noted that Jesus has but one remedy to offer for this sad state of affairs in Laodicea, “*Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see*”.

Can there be any more unfortunate state of the mind in the

professing Christian than self deception? Laodicean lukewarmness was caused by the effect of boasting of being rich and increased with goods, and needing nothing.” That church’s vision was limited now to *‘the abundance of the things’* it possessed. It looked at self, was well satisfied, and grew lukewarm. Paul looked at our Lord Jesus and saw that which swept him off his feet and moved him to lay hold on all that for which the Lord Jesus laid hold on him. So Paul became more energised, more focused, and full of zeal. He wanted to have the mind of Christ. Is this then our goal for we also are to be conformed to His image?

The solemn lesson is that the Laodicean boasting and self-deception may be reproduced in us also. It can be reproduced unless our eyes are kept widely opened to our own worthlessness by the eye-salve the Lord applies. We need our eyes to be fixed intently on our Lord’s work for us, and opened to the riches of His grace – *‘In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.’* (Eph 1:7-9)

Paul’s vision was one that focused on the fact that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom he considered himself chief, and in fact that the simple Gospel of Christ was *the power of God unto salvation* “*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.*” (Rom 1:16) Paul visualised a *‘high calling of God in Christ Jesus’* (Phil 3:14) open to as many as the Lord shall call from Jew and Gentile, whose hearts have been touched as his own had been. So that there is a willingness to *‘count all things but loss and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.* (Phil 3:8)

He saw a church purchased by the blood of Jesus, a precious treasure to Him who loved her and bought her, for whom He died, for whom He stands in the presence of God, and for whom he comes again in the end of the age to receive her unto Himself, *“a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.”* (Eph 5:27) He visualised a church enthroned in power with Christ, fully qualified by present life experiences to judge the world in righteousness, in patience, in long-suffering, in tender mercy and in love, when present days of probationary training are over, and the world comes forth from the prison-house of death. This was Paul’s vision, this was the impelling force behind his years of suffering and devotion. This is the vision that made him a man of determination, of warm heart, of mature discernment, and an apostle of Christ *‘in word, in conversation, in charity, in*

spirit, in faith, in purity. (1 Tim 4:12)

Would we be so moulded in our own Christian life? Would we be able to leave behind a similar record to Paul’s? Then surely we may look constantly to him and grow like him. While we may be followers of him even as he also was of Christ, yet we too must have our eyes fixed on the same focus point that filled Paul’s vision. We must have our eyes fixed on Jesus. Heb 12:2 shows where our focus should be *‘looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith’*. Out of this vision will come a growth in grace and knowledge, in outlook and character, in service and fruitage, such as will glorify God, bless his people and enable us to finish our course with joy.

“True Consecration Depends on a Vision”

It is a precious blessing to have the eyes of our understanding opened to see the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Is it possible to have but a partial vision of this grace? We do not have a full vision until we have seen ourselves as Paul did, he declared himself as the chief of sinners. Not until we have seen that all our own righteousness is as merely filthy rags, and all our own works as unprofitable service, will we reach the place where all boasting is excluded. Not until the well known words of the hymn *‘nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling’*, become a fixed conviction in our hearts, can we enter into the realities of true consecration. Love must be the power that draws us to Christ, *‘who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,’* (1 Cor 1:30) – made everything so *‘that no flesh should glory in His presence.’*

Nothing short of this vision showing our own real poverty will keep us always humble in heart. No other viewpoint will save us from thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, thereby falling into that sad state of spiritual blindness where one’s own standing in divine favour is judged by comparison with the sayings and doings of others. We remember Paul tells us of *“some that commend themselves; but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise .(2 Cor 10:12).* Such a course clearly shows a rather clouded and distorted vision and tells only too plainly that the eye has been taken off the Lord Jesus. Before the apostles’ examples of self sacrifice, devotion, obedience, love, and sympathy, our own is seen to fall so very far short of perfection, and we are made to see that *‘ by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.’* (Eph 2:8.)

True consecration must spring from and continue to have roots in a real heart’s desire and affection for the Lord Jesus, and we should carefully consider the Lord’s message to the church at Ephesus in Rev 2:1-6. In as much as our deep affection has its start in the sacrificial love of Jesus for us, it follows that the vision of Christ crucified must never be dimmed before our eyes. It must be with us as with Paul, always a *‘heavenly vision’*, constantly leading us to say, *“All for Jesus, all for Jesus, all my being’s ransomed powers.”* They were surely *‘consecrated’*, and in the *‘truth,’* in that assembly at Ephesus, and had much to their credit. In Rev 2:2 their *“works”* proved that they had not grown weary in well-doing. They had *‘patience’*, a virtue of outstanding merit. They were commended for having a *“Hatred of them*

In This Issue	
Vision	1
Healing the Lame Man	4
David– A man after God’s own heart	6
We cease not– to pray for you	10
Fruits of the Spirit-Peace	12

that are evil". They were well versed in true doctrine, so much so that they were alert to detect the false position of any "who say they are apostles and are not". It could be said that they had suffered much for Christ's sake, which we know is a very important feature of true consecration.

But despite all these, which to most of us are the real basics of Christian life, these Ephesian brethren were plainly told that they had lost the very thing that alone makes dedication to the Lord of any merit whatsoever - *"Because thou hast lost thy first love."* (Rev 2:4) Evidently it was not a loss of love for the truth they had received, or any loss of zeal for its defence and promulgation, but they had let slip a personal devotion to Christ himself. This loss in the eyes of Jesus was far too vital a matter to simply overlook. In this connection it is well that we now remember that this Ephesus message is directed to us as well, for thus it is written, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches."* (Rev 2:7)

"Open Thou Mine Eyes"

Thus we see that the true centre of the dedicated life is Christ himself. It becomes the centre of those two all-important features of Christian life, namely, the unity of the spirit as pertaining to our fellowship, and the service of the Lord and His people. This is the reason why each one of us must have a personal vision of Christ. If Paul had not been able to say, *"last of all he was seen of me"* (1 Cor 15:8), not only would the proof of his apostleship have been greatly affected, but how absent would have been the impelling power which greatly influenced his daily life and ministry.

It was out of that vision and its never-to-be-forgotten revelation of the love of Jesus that opened his eyes to the fact that in his mistaken zeal he was proving himself disloyal both to the Lord and the saints. And so the beloved "brother Paul" became an outstanding example of brotherly love, and of Christian living. It was the secret of his Spirit directed ministry, and his burning desire to see Christ formed in the heart of every believer. It was because he had this personal vision so deeply etched in his mind and heart that he left the church that gem of love's supreme importance, beauty and operation- the so well known chapter 13 of 1st Corinthians.

It was because of that permanently etched vision in his mind, that above all other things he longed to see the church cleansed and purified, a "chaste virgin" for Christ, *"without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."* (Eph 5:27). O that we too may see as clearly as he saw. May we too have our eyes fixed on the eternal realities, those vital facts of faith and practice. Like Paul, let us endeavour to obediently follow the heavenly vision, and inspire in others the same determined purpose, that we and they might understand and come to *"know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."* (Phil 3:10)

"What Seest Thou?"

The epistles of Paul are full of illustrations of varying degrees of sight possessed by brethren in his day, and thus reveal the possible degrees of spiritual vision. How few there were who seemed to get beyond that first stage of sight! How few saw things in true proportions, in true colour and in full clarity! We recall the experience of the blind man,

who received the healing touch of our Saviour's hand, and then on being asked *"What seest thou?"* said he saw *"men as trees walking"*. (Mark 8:24) He had sight but things were all out of proportion - rather blurry - out of focus - rather like one who has become badly short or long sighted. But with a second touch from the Lord Jesus he was able to see *"every man clearly"*, as if the proper glasses were now on to enable him to see clearly.

This incident teaches us that we initially may see a lot, maybe a lot more than we had seen before, but maybe we see only very partially - we see *"men like trees walking"*. It is quite reasonable to suppose that if there had been no second touch given to this man's eyes, he would have gone his way thinking himself seeing just like other men. It required that second touch to convince him that previously his sight had been but partial - out of focus. So it is with us. It is only when mature sight is really possessed in spiritual things that a former partial sight is fully realised.

This explains why Paul felt so grieved over the immature sight of so many of the brethren of his day. Paul had so clearly seen the lengths and breadths and depths, the many dimensions of the love of Christ. He had so visualised the power of the gospel to elevate men and women into maturity of mind and transformation of character. It constituted his most trying experience to see the Corinthian church at best still babes in Christ, for all the length of time they had professed to be following Christ. They should have been not only ready but eager for the strong meat in due season of the word. Up to that time their sight was like that of a partly blind man, only partial, but doubtless to themselves it seemed a full vision.

The church at Corinth evidently had seen so much. It is rather interesting how Paul opens up his first letter to them. He thanks God on their behalf because of the grace they had received, he compliments them on being *"enriched by him, in all utterance, and all knowledge,"* (1 Cor 1:5) and he is encouraged by their coming *"behind in no gift."* (2 Cor 9:11). Yet this epistle reveals that in this church there were contentions over a number of things, including the relative value of the ministry of Paul, Apollos and Peter. They disputed over ordinances of one kind or another, no doubt contending vigorously for personal rights and opinions, inevitably reaching the sure result of such contentions - being puffed up one against another. Further, an outrage against common decency was going on unchecked and unjudged in their assembly. They were sticklers for opinions, but how sadly lacking in that deeper sight which sees that righteousness, purity, godliness is the prime requirement of the saints.

"Blessed are the Pure in Heart"

This then is another reason why we need to have the "heavenly vision" set before us. "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are, (1 Cor 3:17). A deep underlying principle is emphasised in our Lord's words, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt 5:8.)

Only the pure in heart see God, therefore from our Lord's words only the pure in heart have spiritual vision. How could the Lord impart any heavenly vision, or impress his

revelations on a heart not thoroughly cleansed from the worldly contaminations? It is also too easy to sit under God's deep truths, yes, and rehearse them over and over, and not really see this law of God which requires first of all a clear eye, then clean hands and a pure heart. *'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of His salvation.'* (Psa 24:3-5))

With how much greater care we need to see that no "root of bitterness" (Heb 12:15) obscures our vision of God and His Spirit. How necessary it is to remember *'Greater than the fault you condemn and criticise is the sin of criticism and condemnation.'* What, then, do we see today? Are our eyes fixed on 'heavenly things', 'beholdin g a land that is very far off' - far off from all earthly standpoints, a land that is our ultimate desire and destination and our real home?. Do we deeply desire to be with the Lord and our brethren in assisting and uplifting mankind in the future? Can we say with Job (Ch 42:5) that we have heard much by the hearing of the ear, but now, due to the providences of God, and His Spirit's leading, *"my eye seeth thee"*. Can we say that 'I am today in love with the truth'?

Have we been led to that high vantage ground where men no more seem as large trees, where things of little eternal importance no longer cloud up the vision of his face? Do we see that the most important thing today is to so walk with the Lord as to receive the imprint of his character on our own?

Has the metamorphosis process taken place as described in Romans 12:1,2? (Do we see that above all other things this is a day in which; *"to be purified is to have sin burned out, to be made white is to have the glory of Christ burned in - the one as cleansing, the other as illumination and glorification."*) When difficult situations arise do we ask the question of ourselves 'How would Jesus have reacted'. These are questions for us each to answer, as also Peter's words - *'Seeing th en that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?'* (2 Peter 3:11).

In no better way can we be prepared for the change we so fervently desire than to do as Paul did and to commit ourselves wholly to Christ. Let him have full dominion in our hearts and lives. Then his influence will be a power to control our thoughts, actions and hearts, *"bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Cor 10:5). We so much need to strive for that mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:16) *'For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that He may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.'* His example will then become the directing force in our daily walk, and his character likeness the ultimate goal of all our aspirations, as it is the objective in God's predestined purpose for his church.

Let us not be disobedient to the heavenly vision of His love and grace, but faithful to that vision, until the good work He has begun in us has, by his own love and power, been completed and we see Him face to face. (AK)

" HEALING THE LAME MAN "

The subject of healing from sickness always was and still is very popular with man. Every day people talk about unhappiness. Even today, all human creation under present imperfect conditions are looking for a new way of life, which would give them a chance for a better and longer life. Everybody needs some kind of healing. Let us all try to refresh our memories, memories about the healing performed by the Apostles in the time immediately after Pentecost.

In the book of Acts, Chapter 2, vs 42-47, we are told about the activities and fellowship of believers in the early church: 'Everybody was filled with awe, and many wonders and ~~in~~ raculous signs were done by the Apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as they had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts, they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved.' Many wonders and miracles were performed by the Apostles to gather those in the proper heart condition into the church.

The Scriptures do not always specify what these miracles were but we can surmise that they were similar to what our Lord performed during His first presence on earth. The persecution and prejudice against the early church made it necessary for them to cease their efforts. All believers sold their

possessions, giving to anybody as they had need. They understood the counsel of divine love for one another and demonstrated love in very tangible ways. We are told in the Bible that the brethren remained united in heart and mind and shared a oneness in the understanding of spiritual things. They met daily in the Temple, preaching the word of truth there, and in their homes by night. They were active not only in the witnessing and proclaiming the truth but also in meeting together to edify each other spiritually.

Eventually, the Heavenly Father permitted the brethren to be scattered so that the gospel message could be spread to all nations, but the zeal and spirit of these brethren from the early church are such a great example for us to follow today. Apostles Peter and John went up to the Temple at the hour of prayer, full of zeal for service. They were hoping and expecting to find some opportunity for testifying to the truth, Our responsibility to preach the gospel at every opportunity is brought to our attention by Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:2: 'Preach the word: be prepared in season and out of season' In our everyday contact with people, there are conversations, which we can turn into witnessing opportunities. These opportunities often occur out of season for us, at a time when we are trying to get something else accomplished. We might even say, 'This is not really a good time', but if the Lord chooses that particular time, let us do our very best to take advantage of it. The Lord arranges these particular opportunities to see how much we love to

tell the truth and if we are ready to drop our own plans and serve only Him.

As Apostles Peter and John were about to enter the Temple they met a man who had been crippled from birth. This man was carried to the Temple gates every day, where he would sit and beg from those going into the Temple courts. This Scripture does not tell us if the beggar had heard of the Pentecostal wonders. We also do not know if he knew that Apostles Peter and John were associated with them. However, when they first met the crippled man he was not expecting to be healed. He looked to Peter and John for a few coins or some money to sustain his poor existence. Instead, what he received was so much more.

Who does this crippled man picture? He pictures the human family who are crippled and unable to walk in God's path because of inherited sin and death. Apostle Paul expresses this in the following words in Romans 3:10-12: "There is none righteous, not even one: There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." The crippled man was hoping for an improvement in life, and so does the whole world. For us, Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:19-22: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. Yes, indeed! The whole creation, the entire world of mankind, is waiting for liberation from the effects of sin and death.

People are blind and crippled because they do not have any lasting hope. They are without God; they are unhappy, dissatisfied, searching for happiness and peace but unable to find it. They want it, but they don't find it. It is not the time for it yet. We can see around us people who are dissatisfied with their churches, with their political movements, and with their social organisations - and the longer things go on, the more unhappy and dissatisfied people are becoming. Our Lord Jesus Christ prophetically described our days and this growing unhappiness and fear in the gospel of Luke 21:25, 26 saying: "On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity, as the running and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror apprehensive of what is coming on the world. For the heavenly bodies will be shaken."

When the crippled man asked Apostles Peter and John for money, they responded to his request in a very different way, different to his expectation. "Look at us.... silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6). Taking him by his right hand, the Apostles helped the beggar stand up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk, then he went with them into the Temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God. This is recorded in the book of Acts 3:4-8. What a beautiful record! Once on his feet, the crippled man followed the Apostles to the Temple, walking, jumping and praising the Lord. This experience points to the healing that will take place in Christ's Kingdom, in the Millennial Age.

The entire human family is crippled, waiting near the courts of Jehovah for the manifestation of the sons of God. The one hundred and forty four thousand members of the body

of Christ as represented by Peter and John shall appear not with material wealth, not with gold and silver, but with the power of God, secured by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. This removal of the curse and the opening of the path for mankind back into harmony with God is described by the prophet Isaiah. We all remember the prophetic verses from Isaiah 35:5-10, which are good to read again privately. Isaiah's prophecy tells us of both the physical and the spiritual healing of the human family that will take place in Christ's Kingdom. All physical disabilities and infirmities of the flesh will be cured just as Peter healed the crippled man and as our Lord Jesus healed the man born blind. This is recorded in the gospel of John, chapter 9, verse 7. These physical afflictions are all part of the curse. When the blood of atonement will be applied on behalf of the human family and the curse will be lifted, these vestiges of the curse will also be lifted, demonstrating Jehovah's power, wisdom and love. It will be this demonstration that will soften man's stony hearts so that God's law can be written in their hearts.

Mankind is also spiritually blind and deaf to the words of Jehovah. They are unable to speak of Jehovah's truth to one another. Their shame and sin prevents them following Jehovah's instruction and walking in His path. Isaiah's prophesy tells us about the future kingdom arrangements and about the new condition of life that shall be initiated under Christ's Millennial reign with the church. In Isaiah 65:21-23 we read that the oppression of the weak will come to an end in Christ's kingdom. No one will be ashamed any more. Israel will no longer be trodden down by her enemies, no man will build and another inhabit, no man will plant and another eat. Selfishness will come to an end. There is a spiritual fulfillment to this statement: those who harvest the word of the Lord will partake of it and praise the Lord.

In the kingdom, human beings who will be partakers of the truth, who will be obedient to the instructions received from the church class who represent Zion, and the Ancient Worthies who represent Jerusalem, will be blessed and come closer to the courts, the courts of Jehovah, Jehovah's Sanctuary. They will pass through the gates into the Holy City, into the New Jerusalem and into harmony with God. The responsibility of the church class will be to prepare the way for the people, for the whole human race. This way will lead them out of the prison house of death and sin and out of the degradation and darkness of the present world back into the truth and to the perfection of human life and sonship with Jehovah. The stumbling stones will be removed. The mountains will be levelled; the valleys shall be filled up. Many Scriptures in the Old Testament describe the healing process of the Kingdom and the relationship between the church class and the world of mankind. The church, as part of the Christ, will be used to mediate the future New Covenant. Under the New Covenant, the completed body of Christ, that is, the one hundred and forty four thousand faithful overcomers of this royal priesthood, the church class, will be provided with food and water for the human family. Not literal food but spiritual food, as well as the water of Jehovah's truth that will quench the thirst for understanding of God's divine truth.

Let us read about this future event in Isaiah 11:9: "The knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters

cover the great deep.' At the moment, it is not time yet. They are not living under the New Covenant yet. The New Covenant will be in the future. In our picture of the crippled man we are given an indication of how positively and how joyfully the people will respond to their healing in Christ's Kingdom, as written by Isaiah in chapter 25, vs 9: 'Surely this is our God,- we trusted in Him and He saved us,- this is the Lord: we trust in Him,- let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.' When the people's sickness will be removed and they see Jehovah's goodness, it will stimulate their hearts to love Him and become obedient to His laws. People's hearts will be changed by writing in them God's law.

When the people in the Temple saw the crippled man walking, they were surprised and amazed. They asked what had happened to him. Nobody believed why the crippled man held onto Apostles Peter and John. The people ran up to them at the people's place called Solomon's Porch and gave Peter the witnessing opportunity he was waiting for. It is recorded in Acts 3:12-16. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, Apostle Peter stood up before the men of Israel. He gave the glory to God, he praised God our Lord and His Son, Jesus Christ, for the miracle that had happened and then spoke about the resurrection. Apostle Peter reminded the Jews of their forefathers and the promises of God they had inherited through their forefathers. He reminded them of their rejection of their Messiah, which they did, and his crucifixion. He told them how Jehovah by His almighty power raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him above every name that is named. (This we can read about it in the book of Ephesians 1:20-22.) Apostle Peter pointed out that only by faith in Jesus, in His sacrifice, and His resurrection and by the power of the Holy Spirit the crippled man had been cured.

Speaking about the time of restitution, Apostle Peter ex-

plained that the death of Christ fulfilled what God had foretold through the prophets, namely, that Christ would be rejected, suffer and die~ but through His death we may all gain life. Peter offered them the invitation to sonship on the condition of obedience to God's laws, so God gave them opportunity with conditions. He invited them to repent and turn towards Jehovah. The same invitation has been extended to us, to all human beings actually. We have repented, we have turned towards Jehovah, and we now walk in Jesus' footsteps. If we will be faithful until death. We will receive the crown of life? In a large sense, seasons of refreshment refer to the blessings that will be poured upon the human family in Christ's Kingdom.

The Greek word translated 'refreshment' means 'the recovery of breath' or 'life'. Mankind, if obedient, will recover their breath, the breath of life. Apostle Peter pointed down the stream of time to when our Lord would return to set up His Kingdom and restore all things, which had been promised through the mouth of God's holy prophets. Our Lord has returned. He has begun the tearing down process and He will accomplish the restoration process in due time together with the church class. His objective is to wipe out all sin and death and return the human race to its original perfection, domination, sonship and everlasting life. What a great privilege will be ours if faithful to participate in this healing work!

Dearly beloved brethren and friends may this wonderful promise of restitution and the opportunity to help in its fulfillment, stimulate our zeal and faithfulness in serving the Lord and His people, that we may make our calling and election sure. May Jehovah keep us all, faithful till our race for heavenly bliss is won. God bless you all. Amen. (TZ)

DAVID – A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

(Acts 13:22)

The Apostle Paul and his company on their travels attended the Synagogue at Antioch on the Sabbath day and were invited by the one in charge to address the congregation. Paul stood up and gave a brief history of the nation of Israel from the time that God brought them out of the land of Egypt. He spoke of their wilderness journey followed by possession of the Promised Land, then they were given Judges for 450 years: *'And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul, the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.'* (Acts 13:21-23)

Our Heavenly Father can read the very thoughts and intents of the heart and mind. He would have known exactly David's heart condition. We read in 2 Sam. 11 and 12 of David's great sin in his adultery with Bathsheba after having her husband, Uriah, killed by assigning him the most dangerous position in the army front line and we might think that his heart was far from that of the Lord. But with each of us, our Heavenly Father knows our frame. He knows all our

weaknesses and failings. He takes this into consideration when making His judgments. As with David, He is gracious to forgive us the sins we commit through weakness of the flesh if we show a repentant heart, as the Scripture says in Isaiah 1:18: *'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'*

When biographies are written about great men, sometimes the darker side of their lives is kept hidden, but with God it is different. He tells it as it is. This episode with David shows the mercy and loving kindness of our Heavenly Father, as 2 Sam. 12:13 says: *'And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.'* While David was forgiven, he was still punished for his sin. He could receive forgiveness because his basic heart condition was right. When rebuked by Nathan, it brought him to a full realisation of his actions, which he seems not to have been able to appreciate before. There was complete and unqualified repentance on his part, as we see by his prayer to the Lord in the 51st Psalm. The heading to the Psalm reads, 'A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto

him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba'. Verses 1-3 read: *'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.'*

We see by this Psalm how complete David's repentance and remorse was. This is something the Lord always requires before there can be forgiveness. The realization of his sin would have had a humbling effect and taken away any pride or arrogance that he might have been developing. David was rightly exercised by this episode. No doubt we do not always appreciate our transgressions at the time. We often find that in some way the Lord will rebuke us and bring them to our attention. If we are rightly exercised by the Lord's chastening, it will have a beneficial effect upon us also. Some have made the comment, 'When I read the account of David I realised that there was a chance for me also'. That was perhaps one of the purposes why the full account is given, to show that we have a God of love, and no matter how bad the sins, there is forgiveness on His part if our heart condition is right and there is true repentance.

David a Type of Christ

In the theme text God said that David was a man that would fulfil all His Will. David was a type of Christ, who we are told *'delighted to do God's Will'*. With each of us, we have a strong desire to be pleasing to our Heavenly Father and to carry out His Will to the best of our ability. We find the true character of David confirmed in God's words to the evil King Jeroboam who sat on David's throne. We find the account in 1 Kings 14:7,8: *'Go tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and (yet) thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes.'*

Then again we have a description of David's character in 1 Kings:15 speaking of King Abijam, reading part of verse 3 and then verse 5 *"and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father...Because David did (that which was) right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any (thing) that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."* David was a fitting type of Christ in that they both delighted to do the Heavenly Father's Will. In this regard the name David is also significant; it means *'Beloved'*. We think of the Heavenly Father's statement in Matt.3:17: *'And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'*. The Diaglott gives an even better rendering: *'And, behold! A Voice from the heavens, saying: This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I delight'*. It is interesting that David is mentioned more times in the Scriptures than any of the other faithful ones of the pre-Christian period.

Let us look at some of the great privileges and honours that the Heavenly Father bestowed upon David, some of which are unique to him. Surely it was a great privilege that he was to typify the Messiah and also that the Messiah was to come of his line. There were, of course, of necessity many

others along the line who were ancestors of our Master, but Jesus is not referred to as a son of any of these but He is specifically referred to as 'Son of David'. That honour is shared with Abraham. Jesus, as we know, is referred to as 'the Seed of Abraham'. Jesus is to sit upon the Throne of David. This is an honour that is unique to David, as Acts 2:29-30 reads: *'Men (and) brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.'*

The Throne of David

David's kingdom was a typical kingdom ruling over the nation of Israel, picturing Christ's Kingdom ruling over the whole world. David was divinely appointed; therefore his throne is referred to as God's throne, as we see in 1 Chron. 29:23:- *'Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him.'* This is confirmed again in 2 Chron.9:8: That Jesus is God's divinely appointed King and sits on His Throne is shown in the second Psalm, verses 6 and 7: *'Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will, declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou (art) my Son; this day have I begotten thee.'* The Scriptures make a distinction between God's Great Throne over the whole Universe and Christ's Millennial Age Throne, as Jesus said in Rev.3:21: *'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.'*

Nevertheless, Christ's Throne is still God's Throne. The coming Kingdom is referred to many times in the Scriptures as the Kingdom of God. All the kings that followed after David were said to sit on his throne. The last king to sit on David's typical throne was King Zedekiah whom God removed. We find the account in Ezekiel 21:25-27: *'And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus said the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.'* This throne was to be no more until He comes whose right it is. Since that time there has never been a king reigning over Israel. Their next king will be God's appointed King, He whose right it is, the Lord Jesus.

The second Psalm quoted earlier shows that Jesus received this position of authority upon His resurrection. The phrase: *'this day have I begotten thee'* would be better rendered as: *'this day have I brought thee forth'*, as it applies to our Lord's resurrection. Acts 13:33 shows this was the time when He received the appointment as He said in Matt.28:18: *'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.'* From that time on Jesus was God's appointed King, David's anti-type, sitting in prospect as it were on Mount Zion awaiting God's due time before He could exercise the great power and authority that the Heavenly Father had given Him.

We find some very beautiful passages in Ezekiel regarding the future blessings to flow to natural Israel in the Millen-

nium. Firstly Ezekiel 34:22-26: - "Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing: and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing."

Again in Ezekiel 37:21-28 we read - "And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever."

David mentioned in these passages is generally taken as referring to David's great anti-type, the Lord Jesus. In the next age He will be the Chief Shepherd and King over Israel and all the earth; but the literal David will also receive a special position of favour. Along with the other Ancient Worthies he will be one of the princes in all the earth. In the days of old he was Israel's king, thus it seems quite possible that he will be their leader once again in the New Age. These passages in Ezekiel could possibly have a dual fulfillment. They do seem to also convey the thought of David himself. All these lovely blessings that our Heavenly Father has promised to the re-gathered nation of Israel are merely the start of the great Restitution work of the next age. They will flow on to all the nations of the earth during the thousand year Reign.

The Sure Mercies of David

The statement that the Heavenly Father is to give His Son the sure mercies of David is found in Isaiah 55:3: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David". It is quoted in Acts 13:34: "And as concerning that he raised him (Jesus) up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David." What exactly does it mean that our Saviour is to be given 'the sure mercies of David'? It is put this way in the Bible Students' Manual: 'The dominion power and glory of the Kingdom of God on earth promised to David's heir, the Messiah'. Another says:

"The word here refers to the promise made to David, the mercy or favour shown to him by promising to him a successor, who should not fail to sit on his throne". That gives us the basic meaning. The marginal rendering says: 'holy or just things'. Young's Concordance gives the meaning as 'kindness or judgments'. This is just what will happen under the millennial reign of the Greater David; there will be judgment. (See Acts 17:31 and Isaiah 26:9)

In 2 Samuel 7:16 we have the words of the Lord to David: "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever". And 2 Samuel 7:11 reads in part: "...also the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house". Again the reference to David's house and kingdom is speaking of the Millennial Kingdom ruled over by Christ and His glorified Bride. In this chapter David was suggesting that he build a house for the Lord, but the Lord says in verse 11 that He will build a house for David. This would be the same House mentioned in verse 16 and Christ will be the ruler of David's House. The promise that God will build a House for David is repeated in 1 Chron. 17:9-10: "Also I will ordain a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, and they shall dwell in their place, and shall be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the beginning, And since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel. Moreover I will subdue all thine enemies. Furthermore I tell thee that the Lord will build thee an house."

The Tabernacle of David

Acts 15:12-18 refers to the tabernacle of David - "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: 'Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.'"

This is an interesting and important passage, and there is some difference of thought on certain aspects of it. 'What exactly is the tabernacle of David and what exactly was the original tabernacle that fell down? The Bible Students' Manual commenting on the tabernacle of David says that: 'It is the house, royalty, dominion of David's posterity, Christ'. In other words, the tabernacle that fell down was the tabernacle of the literal David. The Tabernacle that was to be built again is the Tabernacle of the anti-typical David, Jesus Christ. So what is the Tabernacle? Our thought is that it is the Church, if the Tabernacle is Christ's House as has been suggested. We have clear scriptural evidence that it is the Church, for example, in Hebrews 3:6: "But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." So the original tabernacle that fell down was the kingdom and dominion of David, the ruling house of David. It finally

fell down when the last king of Israel, Zedekiah, was taken off the throne, as quoted before in Ezekiel 21:25-27.

As with any study it is very important with the passage in Acts that we keep in mind the context. Someone had been troubling the Churches by insisting that the newly converted Gentiles should be observing the Jewish Law. In verse 14, James is quoting Simon Peter who had previously explained the change in God's method of selecting the Church, The calling out of a people for His Name had now for the first time been extended to the Gentiles, no longer reserved exclusively for the nation of Israel. James wished to show that the work of selecting a people for His Name out of the Gentiles was, in fact, supported from the Scriptures. It was not an afterthought on God's part; it had always been His intention.

So James quotes the passage in Amos as evidence from the inspired Scriptures on this point; hence the building of the Tabernacle of David again would be a reference to the Gospel Age work of selecting a people for His Name, firstly exclusively out of the nation of Israel, then extending to the Gentiles. It would have to be so, otherwise James could not have said in verse 15: 'to this agree the words of the Prophets, as it is written' then in verse 16 he proceeds to quote what was written. The Phillips Modern English Translation puts it: "This is in full agreement with what the prophets wrote, as in this scripture", then the Amos passage is quoted. We find the expression 'as it is written' quite frequently in the Scriptures, and as a general rule what follows is the quotation, the text written. We are suggesting that it is the same in this case, realising that this passage has not generally been understood this way.

The Millennial Kingdom

When anything is being built the work of building is not an end in itself; the structure is built for a purpose. Not until the building is complete can it become operational, and serve its purpose. Just so with the Tabernacle of David, it is basically the Millennial Age Kingdom that will bring to fulfillment all of our Heavenly Father's beautiful promises of Restitution for this planet, bringing it up to the perfection that once existed in Eden, bringing all its people up to perfection to His own character-likeness as possessed by Adam before he sinned. Isaiah 16:5 seems to show the completed Tabernacle of David in operation, reading verses 4 and 5: 'Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness.' Verse 4 shows that the setting must be in the next age, for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler has ceased, the oppressors are consumed; these things will not be achieved until the Kingdom is in operation.

Throughout the Gospel Age God has been selecting the people for His Name to be Kings and Priests to reign with Christ Jesus for a thousand years. These make up the Tabernacle or House of the anti-typical David, which is now almost complete and ready to go into operation. As we saw the Throne of David is the Throne of God, just so the Tabernacle of David is really the Tabernacle of God. Is this not the same

Tabernacle mentioned in Rev.21:2-3, which reads: "And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them (and be) their God." In verse 2, John sees in symbol a Bride, the newly married Wife of the Lamb, which is the Church coming down to earth. Verse 3 says: 'the Tabernacle of God is with men', a reference back to verse 2, the Church coming down to earth, in other words, their reign commencing over the earth. God is said to be with men. He is with them through His representatives, Christ and the glorified Church.

Verse 17 tells us the purpose in building the Tabernacle of David: "That the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles upon whom My Name is called." The word 'residue' perhaps tends to give the thought of just a small amount, but it just means 'those that are left'. Other translations render it 'the rest of mankind'. The expression 'the rest of mankind' simply means the Gentiles, those that were not Jews. So this verse shows the Lord God's great purpose that in the age to come all the rest of mankind will be given an opportunity to seek the Lord, those that have not been called during the Gospel Age to be part of the Church. Those called ones will reign with Christ in bringing the blessing to all the remainder of Adam's posterity. They will be part of David's anti-typical Kingdom, therefore part of the Tabernacle of David to share in the rulership under their Head, Jesus Christ.

How aptly, David the "man after God's own heart" prefigures our Lord, the Greater David, who delighted to do the Father's will and whose household we are, if we hold fast the confidence of our faith to the end. May our Gracious Heavenly Father continue to walk with us all along the narrow way during our pilgrim journey to assist us to become worthy of a small part in the great Restitution work of helping the rest of mankind along the Highway of Holiness in the coming age. (GT)

**Hosannah to King David' s Son,
Who reigns on a superior throne
We bless the Prince of heavenly birth,
Who brings salvation down to earth.
Let every nation, every age,
In this delightful work engage;
Old men and babes in Zion sing
The growing glories of her King.**

**'Glory to God in the highest, and on
earth peace, good-will towards men'**

“WE CEASE NOT TO PRAY FOR YOU”

(Col. 1:9-14)

The loving care of the apostle Paul for all the churches which he or his co-workers had planted is well known, not least through his epistles or letters to them. In these he usually includes a prayer on behalf of the particular congregation concerned, expressing his desire and prayer to God for the very best in Christian understanding and grace for them. These prayers are indeed some of the richest of his writings so let us consider his earnest prayer for the brothers and sisters at Colosse, as recorded in Colossians 1:9-14.

‘For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.’

At the time of writing, the apostle had evidently not been to Colosse himself, but had received news through Epaphras of the welfare and progress of the brethren there. There were apparently some troublesome elements in their midst, as there were in some other churches, including the destructive influence of the Gnostics and the legalistic contentions of the Judaizers. Nevertheless, Paul was still able to commend those in Colosse for their faith in Christ Jesus, their love for the saints and their love in the Spirit. It was on this account that his keen desire and prayer was that they might grow and be strengthened in their faith and in their daily lives.

The issues which affect the Christian today may well outwardly appear different but the apostle’s petitions for the Colossian brethren are really just as appropriate for us today. We live in a day of materialism, an outlook quite at variance with the concept of the true riches set before the Christian. The world is still full of philosophies but, without the love and power of God, these have no life-giving or life-sustaining value. The Christian life calls for growth and development in the knowledge and understanding of God’s will but it is still intensely practical. We are not called to shut ourselves away, but to let our lights shine. There are still legalists about also, but we are counselled to stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free.

One commentator says of this prayer of the apostle that “there is something very precious and exceedingly instructive in being thus permitted to share the thoughts of, and notice the petitions offered up by the apostle Paul for the Lord’s people in various circumstances. His deep concern for their growth in grace, their development in divine things, their apprehension of the purposes of God, and the manifestation of spiritual power in the life.....all these come out very strikingly as he bows his knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.....It is questionable if any merely human writer has ever been able to give as helpful suggestions for our own prayer life as will come to us in our meditation upon these various petitions.” (Ironsides)

From the portion quoted above, we note that verses 9 to 11, and possibly the opening clause of verse 12 concerning thankfulness, list the apostle’s petitions for the brethren; the remaining portion to the end of verse 14 list blessings and privileges which were already theirs, and on which the apostle desired that they build. The giving of thanks in verse 12 may refer to Paul’s doing so for their present standing in the Lord, but in other prayers and exhortations the importance of the grateful heart and the open expression of thankfulness is strongly commended. It is part indeed of his cure for anxiety - ‘in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.’ (Phil 4:6)

Knowledge of His Will

Let us then look briefly at the features of Paul’s prayer and how they come down to us today. They are probably five in number and all have extensive implications. The **first** petition is that the Colossians (and we also) may be *filled* with the knowledge of God’s will. There are a number of things which the apostle wished his hearers in the various churches to be filled with - in Rom 15:14 ‘all knowledge’, in Eph 3:18 ‘the fulness of God’, in Eph 5:18 ‘the Spirit’, in Phil 1:11 ‘the fruits of righteousness’. These are closely related and probably encompassed in his prayer for their filling with the knowledge of His will.

There are two words commonly used in the New Testament for ‘knowledge’ and it is interesting that the stronger of the two is here used. The more general word GNOSIS is used frequently and favourably in the New Testament, but it was evidently the boast word of the Gnostics. Something better is what the apostle here sought for the Colossian brethren and the word EPIGNOSIS is used. This is defined as ‘exact or full knowledge, discernment, recognition..... expressing a fuller or full knowledge, a greater participation in the object ‘known’, thus more powerfully influencing (those concerned)’ This is an element in Paul’s prayers for the Philippians, Ephesians and for Philemon also.

In another of his epistles, Paul had to take some to task for still relying on the milk of the word, when they should have progressed to the strong meat stage. So with each Christian, the simple basic elements of the faith do not change but the vision of our Heavenly Father’s ways and will should be expanding and growing more radiant as ‘still new beauties may we see and still increasing light’. Such discernment is not the product of human wisdom, but of the influence of God’s Holy Spirit on each believer’s heart. As it is written - ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.’ (1 Cor 2:9)

The apostle’s hope and expectation for the Colossians and for us is for a broadening and deepening perception of the Divine character and greater comprehension of His love as outlined in His Word, including the blessing of all mankind after the call and preparation of those who are to share with their Lord in that grand program of blessing. Elsewhere, the apostle prays that the Lord’s people ‘*may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ, which passeth (human) knowledge.*’ This is not like earthly knowledge, which puffs up, but, blessed

by wisdom and spiritual understanding, leads on to Christian maturity. How important it is that our Bible classes be geared towards this end, that our minds and hearts be open to beauties that we may not have noted before and that we listen to what others have appreciated!

Wisdom is the key to the proper application of knowledge. Furthermore, in 1 Cor 13 Paul goes so far as to say that all knowledge, and even all faith, without love are vain. But here the Christian is blessed by the inner working of the Spirit of God to provide the "spiritual understanding" for which Paul prays. In his corresponding prayer for the Ephesians, Paul seeks for them *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened."* (Eph 1:17) Understanding enables us to see what the will of God is for us, in our own lives and in our relations with others, to recognise their needs and their virtues and so to act appropriately.

Walking Worthy of the Lord

The subsequent features of Paul's prayer follow on from the infilling with a clear knowledge of the Divine will. The **second** petition is "that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing". The daily practicality of faith is here again brought to our attention. Surely it is the desire of each heart to please God. The profession of our faith is good but it needs daily expression if we are to please Him. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God" - we read this in Heb 11:6, but the examples of faith whom the writer goes on to tell us about all showed their faith by lives and acts of faith and obedience. The worthy walk is the daily expression of our thankfulness and of our love for Him who has called out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Fruitfulness and Increase

The **third** petition of the apostle's prayer is for "fruitfulness in every good work". The primary fruitage desired in every Christian is the development of the fruits of the Spirit. These in turn will lead to lives of fruitfulness in service to the Lord, to His people and in witness to those around us. In parallel with this petition, the apostle seeks for his hearers a **fourth** blessing - increase in the knowledge of God. The daily walk and work will surely lead to closer communion with our Father and our Saviour, who promised to come and abide with each child of God. This takes our thoughts back to the opening petition but here the emphasis may be more on a personal knowledge built on experience of the love and mercy of our Heavenly Father in all His dealings with us.

Paul's own testimony near the end of the way, based on his experience, was - "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." This is the knowledge that has been learnt and tempered in the fire of experience and this can sustain us. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." (John 17:3) "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." (Phil 3:10)

Strength to Overcome

A **fifth** petition is for the strength to carry on the good fight of faith in reliance on His glorious power. As Christians, we are not currently subject to physical threat in this land, but the Christian faith in which we rejoice is being more and more reviled. Often now, we hear reference to 'Bible myths' and the alleged refutation of the Bible by science, the concept of freedom for each one to choose his or her own way to God, in whatever guise they envisage Him. We can appreciate earnest seekers after truth, however misguided, but our stand can only be that there is no other name, no other way, no other Lamb than our dear Lord and Saviour, and we may well especially need the Divine strength to be true to our Lord.

We must never forget however that our Father's power is not a meagre power like ours, but a glorious power. Paul was assured, as we may be, that His grace is sufficient in every situation. This Divine power, exercised in the resurrection of our Lord, is now, through Him, effective for His followers. So strengthened, the Christian will be enabled to endure patiently, to suffer long and in all things to rejoice. Such staying power comes only through faith in Him whose power is infinite. It is said of the faith heroes of old that they 'but of weakness were made strong', by faith. So, Paul's desire and prayer for the brethren at Colosse and for all God's people was for their growth in discernment of God's plans and purposes, a closer walk of faith, fruitfulness in character and every good work, increase in personal acquaintance with God and finally Divine strength to endure steadfast to the end.

Over it all, we have our Saviour's own assurance given not long before He was to leave the disciples - "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." Right down the age, He has been caring for His church and in these last days of impending transition we can be sure that His promise is still sure. May the prayer of Paul for the Colossians and our Lord's promise of His abiding presence be fulfilled in each of our lives as we press on in the narrow way. Amen

Lamb of the Father's Love

**What is the gift, so rare, so pure laid in a manger there?
God's only Son, begotten one, given for us to share.
Given so we might live in peace, soon on the earth we'll see,
An end to strife for this one's life offers eternity.
Child of our Father came to bear good tidings unto all.
His life was shed to death was led, yearly we sweet recall.
How can we comprehend this gift from God's own arms above?
He sent him here, our sins to bear, Lamb of the Father's love.
Lamb of the Father's love.**

(In the Dawning No 52)

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT-PEACE

War and conflict have plagued mankind ever since Cain slew Abel. In latter times, world regimes have utilised every strategy imaginable in their efforts to establish peace. There have been conferences, summits, organisations (including the United Nations), international agreements and even ‘peace-keeping forces’ (even though the concept of a ‘peace keeping force’ is paradoxical; the concept of force being contrary to the concept of peace).

Despite all of their efforts, war and conflict still prevail. Nevertheless the prophecies of the Old Testament declare that peace will be established in the world; *‘nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’*; and *‘of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end’*. (Isa. 2:4; 9:7)

In spite of the conflicts between the nations of the world, Jesus promised His disciples that they would have peace in their present life: *‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you’* (John 14:27). As with all promises of the Gospel, that promise was not confined to His immediate disciples; all Christians can claim it for themselves. *‘That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ (that is, the apostles). In whom ye also, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise’*. (Eph 1:12-13) Just as we can claim our sealing with the holy Spirit, so we can claim the promise that we can have peace in our present life.

A Christian’s peace surmounts not only the conflicts between nations, but also the personal tribulations that come upon them because of their faith. *‘Beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.’* (1 Peter 4:12-14) Truly did Jesus say *‘in the world ye shall have tribulation.’* (John 16:33)

To be at peace in such circumstances is incomprehensible to natural man, just as the Scriptures assert – *‘the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.’* (Phil. 4:7)

The peace that is enjoyed by the Christian now, the peace that surpasses all human understanding, is referred to by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22 as a *‘fruit of the spirit.’*

Fruit grows on trees. The tree provides the nutrients that are essential for the fruit to develop. Likewise the development of the fruits of the spirit is dependent on the nutrients provided by a parent source. Chaps. 13 – 16 of John’s Gospel record Jesus teaching his disciples at the feast of the pass-over. He concludes with the statement *‘These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.’* (John 16:33) The truths He had explained to them were to provide them with the nutriment necessary for them to develop the fruit of peace. Those truths included the distinction between Himself and *‘Him that sent me’* (John 13:20); that He was the only way to His father (John 14:6); that *‘it is expedient*

for you that I go away’ (John 16:7); that He was going to His father *‘to prepare a place for them’* and that He would *‘come again and receive them unto Himself’* (John 14:2-3). Meanwhile He would pray to His father that His father would give them a Comforter, the Spirit of truth, *‘whom the world cannot receive’* (John 14:17). Jesus told His disciples that an understanding of these truths was necessary for them to have the peace that is a fruit of the spirit.

His sermon to them centred on the metaphor of a vine and its branches, His father being the ‘husbandman’. *‘As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.’* (John 15:4) In order to develop the fruit of peace that comes from the spirit, each one of us must abide in Him. Such an attitude should continually remind us to *‘let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves’*. That was the mind that was in Him (Phil. 2:3-5). The Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesian brethren to *‘walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’* (Eph 4:1-3) Lowliness of mind and meekness of spirit are essential for us to keep the unity of the spirit, and the unity of the spirit is essential for us to live in peace with our brethren. *‘Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another.’* (Rom. 14:19)

The effects of our spiritual fruit of peace should extend beyond our brethren to our dealings with the world – *‘recompense to no man evil for evil, ... as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. ... Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.’* (Rom 12:17-19) Such a disposition is only possible if the spirit has produced the fruitage of peace within ourselves, *‘But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.’* (Jas. 3:14-18) If there is envying and strife in our hearts, that is, jealousy or contentions about what others are doing, it is not possible for us to have peace in our heart. On the other hand, if the fruit of peace permeates our heart, we will be sowing the seeds of peace and righteousness in others also.

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