



“PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN”

The Christmas message of peace on earth and goodwill toward men will one day be universally and completely fulfilled. So why is it that people everywhere experience a lack of contentment and a wish for something more satisfying? This discontent some acknowledge and some do not.

Apart from Adam when first created, and Jesus Christ who came in His perfect humanity, there has not been one member of the human family born into contentment – indeed, all have been born in sin and shaped in iniquity. From our earliest years when our minds began to reason, we became aware that we lacked something essential to our complete wellbeing. The older we grew, the more conscious we became of that fact, though we all have been slow to acknowledge it, and some still do not.

The false theory of evolution found ready entry with its claim that “of course one day we will grow out of all uncertainty and become entirely self-sufficient for all our needs”. However, in reality, no-one has ever reached or attained to such character; there is no increasing light, rather the grave has been ever before us.

It was only by particular circumstances that any of us were lead to see eventually that “the light of the world is Jesus”, and all who saw that began to experience what is termed salvation. What we lacked, He began to supply and a remarkable change of character began to develop and continue in our lives. Little by little, day by day, year by year, we learnt what constitutes real life, and instead of bemoaning our lot, we began to count our blessings.

Also we began to understand that Christians are a “peculiar” people. It has been well put by one writer – “your motives and aspirations can only be understood by those who are striving to attain the same spiritual level. Do not foolishly expect everyone to see the same as you do.....remember it is like a foreign language to them”. Only those who receive the Holy Spirit of God can share what Christians come to understand – the revelation of God’s plans and purposes relevant both to the present and the future.

Further, all who do learn these things have a responsibility to declare them. Isaiah wrote – “in quietness and

confidence shall be your strength”. We all need to remember this; a true Christian should be always calm, never agitated. The world, especially today, prompts us to learn speed, everything must be done as quickly as possible, but the Christian is to learn calm. Most people like to observe a calm person, one who does not get “all stirred up” when things go wrong.

The Kingdom of God, when things on earth will be as fully controlled as in heaven, is still future, and we look forward to it. But it is also true that the kingdom of God can be within us. When it is, others become apprised of it. Example is a powerful sermon, someone has said - “I would rather see one than read one!” To quote the words of a man called Hess – “I want my life to shine for Jesus, so that everywhere I go, the watching world will see and learn that He loves them, and His saving grace to know”.

When the time comes that the Christmas message is truly operating, the whole world will know that God loves them, everyone!” That will be the time when what is referred to as “the groaning creation”, under the present rule of Satan, will come under the rulership of Christ and when every knee will gladly bow to Him and every tongue will confess that He is Lord of that Kingdom, where nothing will ever hurt or destroy anymore. (W A Smith)

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you, Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”. (Luke 2:10-14)

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JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Every side of Joseph's character as presented to us in the Genesis account is beautiful. Wherever we see him, he conducts himself most nobly. Through all the various life experiences, he kept his love for his father at all times. Through faith in the Most High and perseverance in trials, he moulded a lovely character and became a type of the Saviour himself.

Joseph provides a valuable lesson for us, firstly on **pride**. We read in Genesis 39:21 that 'the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and gave him favour.' This fact is expressed several times in the Scriptures; even under adverse conditions he was favoured in so many ways. Joseph could have quite easily permitted these experiences to develop a great deal of personal pride. Perhaps it was his personal brilliance that caused him to rise to eminence in Potifar's house. He could have thought it was his superior abilities and intellect that gave him the authority in prison and enabled him to interpret dreams. Joseph could have quite easily reasoned this way, after all it would be quite human to do so, but he reflected the attitude of Jesus whom he pre-figured. We remember our Lord Jesus gave all the credit to God, saying in John 5:30 'I can of myself do nothing.' Had Joseph adopted another attitude, he would not have been exalted but would have fallen instead. We read in Proverbs 16:18: 'Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.' So let us ascribe to the Lord every good thing we receive, remembering well James 1:17: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.' This is illustrated in Psalm 75:6, 7: 'For promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one and setteth up another.'

Next we have a lesson of **patient endurance**. Sometimes when we are seeking to serve the Lord and the brethren to the very best of our abilities, sudden trouble may arise on the horizon and adversities may come upon us. The powers of darkness seem to triumph, the Lord seems to have abandoned us. These were Joseph's experiences. Jesus also had such an experience when he cried as recalled in Matthew 27:46: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Anyone can have such experiences, and when this happens let us react just like Joseph did – doing the very best that we can from day to day, remembering that Joseph did his very best to effect his own deliverance from prison by asking the butler to mention him to the pharaoh when he interpreted his dream. It is interesting to note that Joseph did not try to explain the misdeeds of those who were responsible for his experiences. So we take

a lesson from this and refrain from indulging in evil small talk against those who may be responsible for some of our unhappy experiences.

If God permits things to happen over which we have no control, then we are to accept them with good grace and not indulge in running others down for their misdeeds. There are times when it is proper and necessary to explain certain facts, but we as Christians are to refrain from all unnecessary evil accounts, even in our own defence. This is by no means an easy assignment to take on, but Joseph performed it well and we are to do likewise. We recall that the Lord saw fit to keep Joseph in prison for another two years after he interpreted the dreams as the butler forgot about Joseph and said nothing of him to Pharaoh. Not a word of complaint is recorded on the part of Joseph having to wait another two years in prison. What a man of faith! What a man of righteousness! Could we behave as Joseph did? He set us a fine example of complete trust and reliance on God.

There is one incident which initially on face value seems to suggest that Joseph may have forgotten his old home. This took place when his first son was born in Egypt and he named him Manasseh, as recorded in Genesis 41:51: 'For God hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house.' But Joseph did not mean that the coming of this child into his home blotted out all memory of his father. The words reveal the warm heart of Joseph burning for his old home and his domestic ties. Joseph never forgot his father in Egypt. All through the story of the brothers' visits to Egypt we have snippets of Joseph's love for his father. Little did those men from Canaan know how eagerly the great governor listened to their words about any news of his father. When Joseph pressed them with the charge that they were spies, they just casually dropped the words recorded in Genesis 42:13: 'Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.' They spoke carelessly but the words told Joseph that his father was still alive. These few words would have sent a thrill of gladness into his heart.

We recall the brothers went home and came again, and when they stood before the governor his first words were, in Genesis 43:27: 'Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?' The brothers saw nothing in these short direct questions but only the genuine enquiry of a nobleman, however deep underneath there throbbed a tender warm heart. When Judah presented his plea for Benjamin, referring again

and again to his father at home, his old age, his loneliness, his bereavement, and that his love for Benjamin was so deep and so tender that he would die if the lad was not returned to him, little did he know the chords he was touching in the heart of the great man to whom he was speaking. It was this picture of the aged, sorrowing father which most of all moved Joseph as he listened to Judah's words, and when Judah ended his speech Joseph broke down. He could not refrain himself any longer, and said amid sobs in Genesis 45:4 'I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.'

Another lesson of this story is the **graciousness** with which Joseph forgave his brethren. Seeing his brethren ill at ease when he revealed himself to them, his first and instant reaction was that of pity and mercy. He was truly gracious in his forgiveness. He almost convinced them that they had done him a real favour by selling him as a slave to Egypt. Listen to his loving words in Gen 45:5 – ⁵Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life...⁷to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.' Such gracious words! His brethren knew that they were guilty of a great sin, a sin equivalent to murder; Joseph well knew it, too, but he also knew that the Lord had overruled it for the very best. As he talked, the guilt left their hearts and for the first time in 23 years their minds were at ease concerning Joseph. Let us, like Joseph, be merciful towards those who may sin against us. Let us endeavour to give the gracious answer using loving words. The Lord was with Joseph supervising all his affairs, making everything come out just right. So was our Heavenly Father with His Son, Jesus, throughout His earthly ministry and finally glorified Him. So, we have the assurance in Romans 8:28 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.'

After Joseph had given assurance of his forgiveness, he asked them to hasten to their father. Note the wording here. He addresses him now as 'My father', and paraphrasing Genesis 45, verses 9-13: 'Say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt, come down unto me and tarry not. Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt and all ye have seen, and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.' He sent also wagons to bring his father over the rough roads as gently as possible. He even sent presents – 20 asses carrying provisions and comforts for their father's return journey. Finally, word came to Joseph that his father was approaching and he made ready his chariot and rode out to meet him. Who can picture the tender meeting? The Bible seldom indulges much in sentimental narration and yet the picture it

presents here is most vivid to us all. In Genesis 46:29 we read Joseph 'presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.' It had been some 22 years since Joseph, a lad of only seventeen, had gone away from home to carry the messages and tokens to his brothers, expecting to return in a few days. He had never seen his father's face since that morning, and the bottled up love of all those years found expression in the warmest of greetings. We go away for a week, a month or a year and the greeting is ever so warm and tender from our dear ones. Try to imagine 22 years with no news.

Let us go back and try to imagine Pharaoh's court of splendour and the scene there. Egypt was at the time the leading world of civilization and culture. The court of the pharaoh was a great place of splendour as we have recorded in various history books. Picture the scene: Jacob was a plain shepherd without worldly rank or honour, withered, limping and famine-driven. What a contrast was presented by these two men, the governor of Egypt and the patriarch of Canaan. Joseph led the old shepherd into the presence of the greatest king with pride. He told pharaoh of the coming of his father. Amid the splendours of rank and power, Joseph never forgot his father. When his father came to him bent, withered and limping, he honoured him as if he had been a king. During the remaining years of his life, he nourished him in almost a royal estate. When Jacob was dying, Joseph stood watching by the bedside - the Prime Minister of Egypt by the shepherd of old. Through all the years, his love continued in a warm and tender manner. When his father was dead, he honoured him with the burial of a prince.

All this illustrates the nobility of Joseph's character. The lesson is clear – children should honour their parents. Nothing more sadly mars the beauty of life than anything that shows lack of family love and respect. The beautiful example of Joseph should inspire in all children whose parents are alive a deep desire to give them comfort, gladness, tenderness and tender care as long as they shall live. In the Old Testament it is stated in the commandments as we read in Exodus 20:12 'Honour thy father and mother that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah, thy God, giveth thee.' We all remember our Lord Jesus' words in Matthew 19:19: 'Honour thy father and mother.' If we are blessed with wealth or plenty, they should share in it with us. Perhaps they have gone short themselves along the way so that we might not want, or that we may be fitted for a better life. If we have risen to a higher position than our parents had, we should bring to them the sunshine that is ours so that we may brighten and sweeten their old age as well.

There is another part of the story of Joseph and his fa-

ther that gives us some valuable lessons. Let's go back to the Hebron scene, to the time when his brothers came home from Egypt after Joseph had made himself known to them. They told their father that Joseph was alive and that he was governor of Egypt, but Jacob could not believe such news. His heart was overwhelmed. For more than 22 years he had mourned Joseph as dead; now to hear that he was alive and in Egypt was just too much for the old father. In Genesis 45:26 we have: 'And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not.' His sons, however, were determined to make him believe, repeating the words of Joseph, and while he still listened he was somewhat bewildered and doubting. The wagons Joseph had sent to carry him to Egypt were driven to the door, and the asses bearing the good things of Egypt also. These somehow convinced Jacob, and note how his spirit was revived in Genesis 45:28: 'And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.'

Why did the sight of the wagons help jolt his memory and make Jacob believe that Joseph was alive? Wagons were not known in Canaan at that time, at least not wagons such as those from Egypt. The number of spokes per wheel specifically made them Egyptian at that time. Egyptian wagons had six spokes per wheel and it was a bit of a trade mark in the 18th dynasty as they were the ones who invented the slim 6-spoke chariot wheel. In addition, the chariots and wagons were very heavily built. Joseph must have indeed sent them. Also, the fruits and other goods sent to Jacob's door were unmistakably from the land of Egypt. They could have only grown beside the Nile.

Some of the experiences of Joseph in Egypt seem to point us forward to those of our Saviour and remind us that we have a risen Lord in heaven. We know that our Lord Jesus died on the cross, slain by wicked hands. We know that he was laid in a grave and that a stone was rolled before the door. The gospel assures us however that He is alive forevermore. To Jacob, Joseph was dead; Joseph, though, was alive in Egypt. That was what the sons told Jacob. Jesus Christ is alive in heaven, as the Word of God tells us. Not only was Joseph alive, he was ruler over all of Egypt. Jesus is alive forever more beyond death, is ruler of all things and King of Kings, Lord of Lords. Note our Lord's words in Matthew 28:18: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' And in Revelation 1:18 'I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of death and hades.' Jacob was convinced Joseph was still alive in Egypt when he saw the tokens he had sent. Our Lord Jesus sends us blessings out of heaven which prove to us that He really is alive there. He answers our prayers when we place our petitions before

our heavenly Father. Do they not bring comforts for our sorrows when our heart is burdened?

This world, dear brethren, is famine stricken. There is really no bread here for our spiritual nourishment. Our Lord Jesus said in John 6:35: 'I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall not hunger and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.' Heaven has its storehouses. Daily there come to us from these reserves blessings just right for you and me. They meet our daily needs exactly, they seem to come at just the right time. The forgiveness of our sins, the peace that fills our hearts, the joy that comes in sorrow, the answers to our prayers, and the blessings of providence – who else but Jesus could send all these heavenly good things to us? These are the best proofs to us that Jesus lives and rules in heavenly blessedness and glory. To know that Christ, though unseen in heaven, ever lives to make intercession for us, that He sends blessings down to us on earth, heaven's good things, is a very precious truth.

This is a joy that fills our heart but there is something more, something better. Go back to the scene. Joseph's wagons came and took Jacob from the land of hunger with its mere handfuls of good things from the land of plenty and bore him right into the land of plenty itself, where his son ruled. He was met on the border of the country by the son who had died to him but was yet alive. He welcomed him with the warmest welcome; he presented him to the king who bade him dwell in the best land, and there he stayed, close to his son, nourished by him with an abundance of all that he could ever wish for. We see how beautifully true all this is in application to Christ-believing ones in this world. Here our joy is very sweet but we only have a little foretaste of the heavenly good things to come if we are faithful to the end. By and by the wagons will come for us and take us into the presence of Christ if we are faithful. How comforting are the words of our Lord in John 14:3: 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there you may be also.'

When Jacob got into the carriage and drove away from his old home, he was not sad. He was leaving his old walks and place of sorrows, he was leaving famine and want to go into a land of plenty, and that is what is in prospect for us. We shall leave the land of tears and separations and go into the presence of the Lord and the loved ones. Our Saviour will meet us on the edge of that blessed country. He will welcome us with the tenderest of love. He will present us to His Father, not ashamed to own us as His friends, His brothers, His sisters, before heaven's angels. If we are faithful to the end, He will give us a place near to Himself. Let us well remember the words of our Lord, 'I go to prepare

a place for you...that where I am, there you may be also.' Our Joseph has gone before us to prepare a place for us, and when we are prepared for the place He will come again and take us to Himself so that where He is there we may be also.

Word was sent to Joseph one day that his father wished to see him. Jacob knew he must die in Egypt. However, he did not wish to be buried in that strange land. He wanted to lie in the land of promise, so he asked Joseph to swear to him that he would not bury him in Egypt. Jacob wanted to be buried beside his father and mother in the cave of Machpelah. Jacob's was a strong faith in God's promise to give Canaan to his descendants. He believed that the promise would be fulfilled and he wanted his grave to be where the home of his future children would be. He wanted his family, though still abiding in Egypt, to have a constant reminder that Egypt was not their home. Quickly, no doubt, Joseph set out to do all he could to honour the name and memory of his father. His body was embalmed and then probably followed the seventy days of mourning as was the custom in Egypt. After this the patriarch's dying command was obeyed, and the twelve sons with many Egyptian friends, among them men of rank, bore the body away to Canaan and laid it to rest beside the bodies of his loved ones at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah.

After the burial of his father, only one incident in the story of Joseph is recorded. When Jacob was gone the brothers grew very uneasy, we are told. They thought that their father's influence was the restraining force on Joseph from seeking revenge upon them. In Genesis 50:17 we have the words recorded: 'And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him.' It pained him to learn that they doubted his love and forgiveness after all those years. Seventeen years of such generous love as Joseph had shown to his brothers in Egypt should have made it impossible for them to even suspect his forgiveness. Do we ever treat our friends so? Do we ever treat Christ so? Do we ever doubt His forgiveness or question His love for us whatever our experiences may be? Joseph was pained when he learned of the fears and distrust of his brothers, but his patience did not fail. Note his words in Genesis 50: '19Fear not: for am I in the place of God? 20But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.21Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you and your little ones. And he comforted them and spake kindly unto them.' This was the answer to their distrust. His generous love never failed. His answer to them was an assurance of affection. After this incident Joseph lived 54 years but nothing is told of these years. We can picture a ripe and beautiful old age full of honour and usefulness.

At last the time came for Joseph to die, as it must come to us all. Genesis 50 records the scene: 24And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. 25And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.26So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.' Joseph was embalmed but not entombed in Egypt. Egypt had long been his home; it had been the scene of all his honours and triumphs. His wife was an Egyptian, his friends were Egyptians, but he was still a loyal Israelite and he would not lie in an Egyptian grave. In the epistle to the Hebrews 11:22 we are told: 'By faith Joseph, when his end was nigh, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.' This truly showed his faith in God's promises concerning his people. His faith was so strong that he refused to be buried at all in Egypt despite his rulership there. His burial must wait until his people went up out of Egypt to their very own land, the land of promise. Doubtless, Joseph felt that his body left among them unburied, waiting to be carried away to Canaan and buried there, would do more to keep their hope alive than if it lay at rest in yonder Hebron with the patriarchs. Every time the Israelites saw it they would remember why it was unburied and their thoughts would turn towards their Promised Land.

By and by things grew dark in Egypt. The dynasty of the pharaohs and Joseph's friends gave way to a new dynasty who cared not for his memory and who became jealous of the Israelites. Bitter oppression followed and in those days of gloom, who knows how much the unburied body of Joseph with its unspoken words of hope helped to keep the Israelites focussed on the future land. Then one night there was great excitement in Goshan; the hour of departure under Moses had come. Note the record in Exodus 13:19: 'And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn to the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.' Then followed forty years of marching and wandering, and during all this time the body of Joseph was in the column or in the camp. For 40 years, It really was a constant reminder that it was to be buried in the Promised Land, as it finally was. Joshua 24:32 reads 'And the bones of Joseph...buried they in Shechem in the parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor.' It was here that God promised Abraham that the land would be given to his descendants. (Gen 12:6,7)

We may take two lessons from Joseph's dying words.

One is a lesson of faith, 'I die, and God will surely visit you.' He would die, but the fulfilling of God's purposes would go on. Someone has said, 'God buries His workmen but carries on His work.' We each have our little part to fulfil in the divine purposes and then we shall die, but the work will go on. God ever lives, and His promises and His plans halt not. The lesson would be that we should so live that the memory of our life and its influence when we are gone shall inspire all others who stay behind. The memory of the just is blessed. Joseph's faith as expressed in his last words manifests the future hope. In effect he was declaring, 'This is not your home. You are but tarrying here as strangers and pilgrims. By and by you will go to your Promised Land.' Such should ever be the impression our lives make and that our memory keeps alive in other hearts. We should so live that when we are gone the recollection of us will make others think of heaven as home. Let us then seek to be so filled with Christ that every influence of our life should incite others upwards towards God and onward towards

imperishable and everlasting things.

Perhaps most endearing of all, Joseph is renowned for his forgiving spirit so that even his brethren could not quite believe it. But Joseph convinced them that the circumstances were all overruled by God for the preservation of life. What an excellent picture of Christ, who suffered unjustly surely more than we could possibly conceive of at the hands of a hateful generation, but who accepted it all without a complaining spirit and offers to the wondering world and to His Jewish brethren, as they will see in due time, full forgiveness of sins secured by His own sacrifice. What an example to us to have a patient, forgiving spirit, ready to relax personal grievances, to acknowledge them as known and overruled by God for a higher good. We can embrace this attitude in our hearts now, even in otherwise bitter circumstances. May the spirit of faith and forgiveness so beautifully exemplified in Joseph so long ago be developed more and more each day in all our lives. (AK 12/03)

"WALK WITH GOD"

"They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen 3:8)

Let us cast our minds back to the time of Creation and the Garden of Eden. Stop for a moment and imagine our Heavenly Father walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening taking in the sights and the fragrances as the evening descended. We can only imagine that this was a daily occurrence. We can imagine that He often spoke with Adam and Eve and we can imagine his disappointment and sorrow when they transgressed his words and He had to banish them from the Garden.

The thought of walking with the Heavenly Father is a theme brought out in many books of the Bible, but David the Psalmist brings out some of the most beautiful thoughts such as:

- Ps 23:4 "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me". (NAS)
- Ps 56:13 "For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, indeed my feet from stumbling, so that I may walk before God in the light of the living". (NAS)
- Ps 119:35 "Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, for I delight in it". (NAS)
- Ps 86:11 "Teach me Thy way, O LORD; I will walk in Thy truth; Unite my heart to fear Thy

name." (NAS)

"Teach Me the Way"

However, the one that is good to concentrate on is found in Ps 143:8 "Let me hear Thy loving kindness in the morning; for I trust in Thee; *teach me the way in which I should walk*; for to Thee I lift up my soul". (NAS) Should not this be the heartfelt prayer of each of us - "*teach me the way in which I should walk*". What a great privilege we have in being able to come close to our Heavenly Father. Paul told the Ephesians in Eph 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (NAS)

At the time that our Heavenly Father called us and accepted us in Christ, He had the power to give us perfect human bodies and minds for our walk ahead. However in his infinite wisdom He saw it was better for us, and for the outworking of His purpose, that we have to contend with the sinful tendencies and imperfections of our fleshly mind and body. We are told in Romans 12:2 "... 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". (KJV) This renewing of the mind should also result in the transforming of our character. These changes however are not instant, but gradual and are accomplished in proportion to the faith we manifest and the effort we put forth in the doing of

the will of God.

If we are to be faithful disciples of Christ we need to take time to consider the significance of the office as a minister of Christ and as a steward of the mysteries of God. We recall again the words of Paul already quoted and which stand out boldly, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, that we should walk in them." We are pointedly reminded that the main feature of God's purpose during this Gospel Age, is the calling and development of the new creation, the Church. The Church members are destined in the counsels of God to be His instruments in the deliverance of the whole groaning creation in the coming Age. Meantime, we are told in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 "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. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us;" (NAS)

The divine foreknowledge and prior marking-out of the Christian path is also well brought out in Ephesians 2:10: The Christian's first *conscious* approach to God is, as the Bible teaches, through faith, and even this is a divine gift bestowed by our Heavenly Father. This coming to God is plainly expressed in Hebrews 11:6: "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." How encouraging are these words. They are not words of warning but of hope as long as we come in the right heart condition as we read in Hebrews 10:22 "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".

Paul sets a good example of drawing near with a true heart; he had realized his great error in persecuting the Church before his conversion and his love since for the brethren set the example for our love for one another. His brotherly love extended to all Brethren but especially for the churches he had been instrumental in bringing to Christ. They were his children, and no self-sacrifice was too much in his care for them. The precepts he had given them were good but his example was far more effective. One of the things for which Jesus found fault with the Pharisees was that they told others what to do but did not practice what they preached. As we read in Matt 23:1-3 "Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them". (NAS)

To Follow in His Steps

Jesus himself left us an example that we should follow in his footsteps. This example was the most effective, the most lasting lesson our Lord could give, for he shows us how to follow the precepts of His Father's Word. Peter tells us in his first epistle 1 Pet 2:21 "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps", (NAS) "Following in Christ's footsteps" is the true secret of Scriptural living for those who have consecrated their lives to Christ and wish to please their Heavenly Father. He shows us the degree to which we must yield our wills unto God. We must devote our whole heart and life to Him, and in so doing we please and give honor to Him. All that is of worth in our Christian life comes to us as the result of a union with Christ by faith and as a gift from God.

Let us return to the thought in Ps 143:8 "*teach me the way in which I should walk*; (NAS) How are we to know how we are to walk in the ways of our Heavenly Father. The thought of "Walking with God" is that our life as a New Creature is one where we are constantly dependent upon Him. We cannot take a step alone without the fear that we would stumble. The figure of "walking" used in the text suggests something very practical. It presents to our minds the thought of "plodding along the pathways of our daily life." Our Christian walk means that we must be close to our Heavenly Father and in so doing we will have His help in our every-day duties- family, work, or in the schoolroom. It is in these places that we are called to be His witnesses. We especially need our Heavenly Father at our side in the hard and difficult times when we are faced with trials, or fierce temptation.

Again, the thought of "walking with God," suggests that we have been reconciled to Him, by the operation of His grace, without which, no one could live in His presence. It suggests the thought of friendship and of close acquaintance. One of the interesting examples of walking with God was the case of Enoch as we read "Enoch walked with God" (Gen 5.22). We are not informed just how God made known to Enoch His way. We may be assured, however, that sufficient knowledge was given him to enable him to lay hold by faith of the fact that God was pleased with him and that he had the privilege of His fellowship. We may be sure that he must have desired the friendship and companionship of God, and therefore his desire was towards God as told in Amos 3:3 "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (KJV)

The Christian's Walk

What do we mean by the Christian's "walk?" It is our Journey on the Narrow Way, and how our thoughts, words, and actions on the journey, as others look on, reflect our Heavenly Father. The Apostle Paul indicates very clearly what this work or "course" of the

Christian should be. He provides us with a sevenfold description in his letter to the church at Ephesus:

The New Creature should:

- **Not walk according to the course of this world. (2:2)**
- **Walk in good works. (2:10)**
- **Walk worthy of his/her calling. (4:1)**
- **Not walk like other gentiles. (4:17)**
- **Walk in love. (5:2)**
- **Walk as children of light. (5:8)**
- **Walk circumspectly. (5:15)**

(1) The new creature should not walk according to the course of this world. “And you who were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience”. Eph 2:1-2 (NAS) We see here that one of the first things required of us to walk with God is to change our direction, that is, we are not to walk “according to” or “under the direction of” the prince of the power of the air.

(2) The new creature should walk in good works – As already seen, this is God’s specific purpose for His people. (Eph 2:10) Although we are not saved by good works, they are a necessary part of our Christian development and our Lord tells us in Matt 5:16, that they do have a purpose “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (NAS) The purpose of the works is not to bring glory or benefit to us but to our Heavenly Father.

(3) “The new creation should walk worthy of the vocation with which they are called”. This vocation or calling is the highest of all, for we are called to represent the Lord and Master who redeemed us. We should seek to glorify and honor him in all of our activities and try never to dishonor Him. We are told in 2 Tim 1:9 ...“(God) has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity”, (NAS) Our vocation (or calling) is to be as servants of God and our earthly vocation should not hinder our service to him. If we are sincere in our desire to be joint-heirs with Christ and to be prospective members of His Bride, then we need to study to improve our vocational skills.

(4) The new creature should walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, We are not to be satisfied with mere avoidance of gross sin and immorality. We are to nurture the spirit of the Lord and of a sound mind to direct our joys and

sorrows. Whether we are attending a wedding or a funeral or social occasions we should always act to the glory of God and put aside the influences of the world. The world teaches nothing of gentleness, kindness, patience, and faithfulness to the Lord, which is our duty. We are told in Matt 7:13-14 “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it”. (NAS) We have to have our minds set on thing above, not on futile earthly matters.

(5) The new creature is to walk in love. “Walk in love, just as Christ also loved us, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma”. (NAS) Love must become the controlling influence in our lives: our words, our actions, i.e. in everything that we do or think. Paul tells us “*Love is the fulfilling of the law*” (Rom. 13:10). Our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us “*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you*” (John 13:34). It is the Apostle's point that we so love one another, in obedience to the Master's command and example, that we would be willing to surrender everything, even our lives, for one another. We should be ready to sacrifice choices, assets, or our preferences for a few days or a few months, or for a few years if this is what is needed to help our brethren on the narrow way. Although these sacrifices should be mainly along the lines of their spiritual interests, in some cases it may also be their material needs.

This spirit of love controlling us should extend our love also to our neighbours. To love them means to seek ways to serve them. “*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour*” (Rom. 13:10). Love means not taking advantage of a neighbour, love will not cheat him; love will not injure him in any manner. Love would not prompt us to tell stories about our neighbor showing him in an unpleasant light. Love reminds us to “*speak evil of no man.*”

(6) The new creature is to walk as a child of light. In Eph 5:8 we are told “*you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light*” (NAS) We become children of light when we take into account all that is just, pure, noble, kind, that is all that is in harmony with our Heavenly Father’s character and Word. These are the things that will be the greatest benefit to the neighbours and friends of the new creature. As children of the light, we should see development in our character, this light will shine more and more clearly upon the paths of those we associate with, our neighbours, and our friends as well as the Brethren. As children of the light we should not hide our light, but rather allow it to be displayed: enlightening and enriching all those with whom we come in contact.

(7) The new creature should walk circumspectly "Circumspectly" has the meaning "looking carefully all around at every step." As Christians we cannot live carelessly, we have to look around and recognize the various pitfalls that may be put on our pathway to catch us unawares. We have to seek God's wisdom and counsel so as to make firm and sure progress on our walk. Phil 1:27 "...conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; (NAS)

This circumspect life is essential because of the unceasing activity of Satan against the followers of the Master. His snares are both gross and subtle as suits his purposes, but they are permitted by God to come upon the new creation to test and bring about growth. As one nears the goal of Christ-likeness in his character, the tests seem to become more constant and the more vigorous as the Adversary grows more diligent in his efforts to discourage and stumble the true wheat of this Gospel Age. Our circumspection is demanded because we claim to be the offspring of God, new creatures, begotten of the Holy Spirit, and as a result our lives should shine as a reproof to the evil in this world.

We can see clearly that much effort, planning and prayer has to go into our walk with God each waking hour if we are to achieve our goal of following in our Master's footsteps. It will be well worth the effort if

at the end of our earthly walk we hear our Master's voice. 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' (NAS) Matt 25:23 May this be the experience of us all. Amen. (RC:01/04)

A Closer Walk with Thee

I am weak, but thou art strong;
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to thee.

Refrain:

Just a closer walk with thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee:
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Through this world of toil and snares,
If I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burden shares?
None but thee, dear Lord, none but thee.

When my feeble life is o'er,
Time for me will be no more;
Guide me gently, safely o'er
To thy shore, dear Lord, to thy shore

“THE PROPHET JONAH”

The word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because its wickedness has come up before me" ³But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.' (Jonah 1:1-3, NIV)

If you have ever had to do something that you desperately did not want to do, you will understand the state in which Jonah found himself when God called him to go and preach against the city of Nineveh, and why he set off in another direction to Tarshish.. Joppa, Jonah's port of departure is on the east coast of the Mediterranean and is approximately level with the Jordan valley and Jerusalem. We are not told where Jonah was at the time of God's calling, but we know that Joppa was within a long day's walk of his hometown, which, as 2 Kings 14:25 tells us, was Gath-hepher, in north-eastern Zebulun, about half way between the Dead Sea and the coast, and approximately 10kms from Bethlehem. Tarshish was a port some 2500 miles away in the

Western Mediterranean area. So why was Jonah so fearful of carrying out God's clear instructions? What prompted him to deliberately disobey the Lord and head in the opposite direction? To understand Jonah's reaction, it may be helpful to look briefly at some of the historical details of this time

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire which, according to Halley, endured as a world empire for about 300 years, roughly between 900 and 607 BC. Its rise to power began at about the time of the division of the Hebrew Kingdom at the end of Solomon's reign, whereafter it continued to grow stronger until it gradually absorbed and destroyed the Northern Kingdom (Halley, p.363). Archeological evidence for the might of ancient Assyria has been gradually revealed since the mid-1800s with enormous palaces being discovered by the English explorer and adventurer, Austen Henry Layard, who started to work on some of the great city-mounds of northern Mesopotamia, Furthermore, the reputation of the Assyrian kings as fierce warriors and uncompromising rulers is borne out by an examination of the art from the ruins of their rediscov-

ered cities. The palaces were covered with sculptures and reliefs to awe any visitors into a “sense of helpless submission” (Potts, p.36).

We can now begin to feel some of the sense of awe and trepidation which Jonah must have felt at the mention of Nineveh. Not only was he being asked to travel a huge distance away from his home to the heartland of Assyria into the midst of a land of cruel, powerful and sadistic tyrant kings, but he was also commanded to go into the “lion’s den” and instruct them to mend their ways or face destruction. We are not specifically told in the Scriptures why Jonah chose to ‘flee from the Lord’, although Jonah hints at an excuse in Jonah 4:2, stating that he knew that God would relent from sending calamity on the city. Elsewhere in 2Kings 14:23-29 Jonah was recorded in a positive light as a servant and prophet of God when he prophesied that Jeroboam would increase Israel’s territory at the expense of Syria. Speaking of Jeroboam, the Scripture reads in 2 Kings 14:25: ‘He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher’.

The year of Jonah’s calling is difficult to establish but was probably around 800 BC. Having received God’s instruction, Jonah being human and fallible was evidently terrified at the prospect of having to berate the most powerful nation of his age at a time when the northern kingdom of Israel was being destroyed by that very nation. As we know though, God had a number of lessons in store: for Jonah, for Nineveh, for the Jews, and for the whole world. We are very familiar with the rest of Jonah’s story, so let us paraphrase the events recorded in Jonah chapters 1 to 4. Having boarded the ship at Joppa, so the Scriptures tell us, a great storm arose which threatened to scuttle the vessel (1:4). The sailors, having discovered Jonah asleep, cast lots to determine who was responsible for the calamity, and the lot fell on Jonah (1:7). Jonah was then forced to tell his story and to admit that he was the reason for their danger (1:9-11). Despite concerns about causing Jonah’s death, the sailors threw him into the sea, as he had requested. The raging waters became calm and the sailors, in fear, offered a sacrifice to the God of Jonah (1:12-16). God provided a fish to swallow Jonah, in which he stayed for three days and three nights (1:17). Inside the fish Jonah expressed his remorse, and in a psalm-like prayer praising God for His might, he vowed that he would fulfill the task which the Lord had set (2:1-9).

God commanded the fish to spit Jonah out onto dry land and again the prophet was exhorted to go to Nineveh (3:1,2). This second time, Jonah was obedient and

proceeded to the city with the message “forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” (3:3,4). The series of events which followed seem somewhat extraordinary. Firstly, the Ninevites believed God’s message and repented, with the whole population from the lowest slave to the king himself putting on sackcloth and ashes (3:5-7). Secondly, the king put out a decree commanding the whole population to give up their evil ways in the hope that God would show them compassion (3:7-9). Chapter 3:10 tells us the outcome of this action: ‘When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened’ (3:10). Now, strangely, instead of rejoicing at the people’s newfound attitude, Jonah becomes angry with God, saying “Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (4:3) Apparently thinking that God was still going to destroy the city, Jonah sat down under a shelter a little east of the city to see what would happen (4:5).

God caused a vine (KJV “gourd”) to grow, to shade the prophet and ease his discomfort, but the following morning the vine, being chewed by a worm from God, withered and Jonah was left to suffer in the blazing sun under the influence of a scorching east wind, and once again he expressed his wish to die (4:6-8). For a second time, God asked Jonah whether he was right to be angry about the events that had occurred, with Jonah indicating that he did think that he had this right. Finally, God demonstrated that His mercy is available to all people by comparing the vine with the city, saying, ‘You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?’ (4:10,11)

It is very interesting, in the context of Jonah’s mission and what was happening in the two Israelite kingdoms at the time, to look at the contrasts which are recorded in Jonah’s story: God’s chosen prophet was the one resistant to God’s will, while those whom we would expect to have no reverence for God such as the captain of the ship and the people of Nineveh were genuinely concerned for themselves and their fellow men. Jonah did not wish to do the right thing and warn Nineveh, yet the sailors showed the right attitude when they tried to avoid throwing him into the sea. Jonah’s attitude also changes from one extreme to another; for example, he was willing to die to save the sailors by being thrown into the sea, yet he later sat outside Nineveh hoping to witness its destruction.

It seems plausible, however, that Jonah’s mission also

served as a sign to Israel that God is interested in all people and that the Jews should not have become conceited in their position as His chosen people. If we accept this understanding, knowing that the Israelites would have continued to read the message of the book of Jonah after the accomplishment of its events, we could understand that Nineveh could represent Gentiles in general; those who do not know God yet may be willing to listen. Jonah could be a figure for the Jewish nation who, despite its favoured standing with God, often refused or questioned its Heavenly Father, failing to recognise that its position was not necessarily set in stone, unchangeable for all time, and that God was interested in the ultimate salvation of all nations. We, too, need to heed this message and not hold too high an opinion of ourselves, as Paul points out through his analogy of the ingrafted branches in Romans 11:21.

New Testament Connection

We can now examine the few New Testament verses which mention Jonah, and consider why he was referred to as a sign. The references are in Matthew 12 and Luke 9. Matthew 12: ³⁸Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. ³⁹But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas: ⁴⁰For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.' Here is a somewhat fearful comparison for us to ponder. We know that Nineveh was very wicked and that, as Nahum and history record, it was eventually judged and destroyed by God. Yet Jesus used the example of Nineveh's original repentance to demonstrate that its people were capable of considering the words of the minor prophet.

The comparison then is with the Jewish people of Jesus' day, who were not able or not willing to consider the words of their Messiah, although His words and mission were far greater than those of Jonah. Earlier, in verse 40, Jesus spoke of the only sign that they would be given. Surely the greatest sign ever to all mankind was Jesus' resurrection from the dead after three days in the tomb (see 1 Cor.15:4) and this, from His explanation, is the way in which Jesus meant us to understand the 'sign'. Once cast into the sea, Jonah was as good as dead except for the gracious intervention of God; likewise, Christ was totally dependent upon His Heavenly Father once He had committed Himself to the crucifixion. The key point is that both came out by the power of God.

Further in the Luke account we see Jonah used as an historical warning and a sign Luke 11:29-30: ²⁹And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it but the sign of Jonas the prophet. ³⁰For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.' As with all signs, prophecies, parables and allegories in the Bible, we need to use caution when assigning interpretations to the different elements and especially to ensure that we observe the explanations given. Jesus clearly identifies Jonah as being a 'sign unto the Ninevites' and calls the Son of Man a sign 'to this generation'. The obvious parallel which comes to mind is the three days and nights figure – Jonah in the fish, Jesus in the grave, with the result each time being life restored. Having looked at the Old Testament account, It is important that we do not try to press the whole of the Jonah story into this 'sign'. The basic message for us is that, in due time, God will provide the opportunity for salvation for all through the resurrection of His Son. (LR:12/03)

A NEW YEAR

A New Year dawns to mark for us
The measured beat of time,
An opportunity is thus
Extended thee and thine.

What will we do, what will we be
In the new year ahead?
What growth and progress shall we see
As upward we do tread?

God grant that as the sands of time
Run low within our glass,
Our faith and hope and love sublime
Shall bring His will to pass.

Martin C. Mitchell

THE NEW YEAR

Into the silent past the year has fled,
With all its hope and fear, its joy and pain;
And now, like an interminable plain
On which our eager feet have yet to tread,
The New Year lies before our gaze, o'erspread
With golden prospects; hopes that once in vain
Were entertained now spring to life again,

And heaven's bright sunshine gleams above our head.
Oh, glad New Year, unsullied yet and free
From taint of sin are thy propitious hours;
Thy cloudless countenance, serene and mild,
Assures us of our God's fidelity,
And bids us in His service use our powers,
That all thy moments may be undefiled.

W.H. Pepworth

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT-MEEKNESS

The word “meekness” is rarely used in our society today, and when used it is often thought of as meaning “weak”. However in Christian circles meekness does not mean weakness, but strength.

Strong’s Concordance defines *meekness* (#4236) as “gentleness, by implication humility”. Humility describes a condition of the mind and heart and does not mean weakness. It is the fruit of inward power, a disposition that is gentle, mild and tempered. Whereas gentleness relates to actions, meekness describes the inner willingness for one to serve and accept God’s dealings with us.

We see the disposition of meekness in Christ. Our Lord was meek because He was not occupied with self, but came to serve His Father: “*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me*”. (John 6:38)

There were several instances in our Lord’s earthly ministry where His meekness was manifested. One instance was when He “*went into the temple of God and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, ‘It is written, my house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.’*” (Matt. 21:12-13) This instance was one where His meekness required Him to take physical action.

On the other hand Matthew 27:13-14 records an instance when His meekness was manifested by restraint: “*Then said Pilate unto him, ‘Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?’ And He answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly*”. Also the instance recorded in Matthew 26:62-63: “*And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, ‘Answerest Thou nothing? What is it which these witness against Thee?’ But Jesus held His peace*”.

Our Lord was truly meek, strengthened by His inner conviction and desire to serve His father. He was as a lamb when He was led to the slaughter, when He was scourged, when a crown of thorns was placed on His head, when He was spat upon, and when He was physically beaten. All this tested our Lord, and especially since He knew that at any time He could appeal to His Father who would at once give Him more than twelve legions of angels. However He knew that the time had come for Him to complete His Father’s work on earth, and so He opened not his mouth. They led him to Golgotha, gave Him wine and gall, and crucified Him.

These instances are true evidence of the meek and humble character of our Saviour. Do we have meekness to that degree? Our Lord’s invitation in Matthew 11:29 is to “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls.*”

Meekness has to be sought, it is a fruit and not a gift: “*Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.*” (Zephaniah 2:3)

The fruit of meekness is directly contrary to the inclinations of the flesh: “*Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, ... that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh ...*” (2 Cor. 10:1-3) Those in the flesh might regard our meekness as pride or self sufficiency; we need to be careful that, at all times, our boldness comes from our meekness: “*in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves*” (2 Tim. 2:25)

“*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, ... even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.*” (Colossians 3:12-14) “*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom*” (James 3:13)

A Prayer

My Lord, in the midst of life’s discords, make me an influence for the promotion of thy spirit of peace. And in all the relations that go to make up the round of life’s experience, let me be an example of thy gentleness, that it may be seen that I have been with thee, learning the perfect ways of God.

Amen

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“LOOKING UNTO JESUS”

At one time, people used to think in terms of lasting values, but in the fast changing world of today, it would be difficult to say just what is a lasting value. Wherever we look, everything is in a state of flux and change.

In such conditions, each Christian can be grateful to our Heavenly Father for His wonderful love and unmerited favour. A scripture verse which we all might apply to ourselves, to our own previous condition and to our own development, is Eph. 2:12. There the apostle says “At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”

How thankful each of us can be to our Heavenly Father, how we can praise Him in the presence of His people with all sincerity, confessing that while we in no way deserved His favour toward us yet we greatly treasure it and praise the Lord for His wonderful love and mercy in that "now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Eph. 2:19.

How true are the apostle's words in Eph. 5:14 "wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." For many years, as His people, we have enjoyed the Lord's marvellous light, His leading and His care, and His wonderful provisions for us. Even His great sacrifice on Calvary is the precious provision of our Heavenly Father, for there is no other way of salvation. No wonder the apostle could say: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." 1 Cor. 2:2.

All the Lord's people are seeking to walk in the light of our Lord; we are looking to Him in all circumstances of our lives, happy or unhappy. In times of gladness, we thank Him, even though we realise that earthly joy is of a transient nature — it is here today and gone tomorrow. In times of sadness, we look to Him for consolation, for His over-ruling and his strength to overcome such experiences. Indeed, whatever we do,

we look to our Lord Jesus.

For every Christian, the purpose of the knowledge and acknowledgment of the Lord is to look to Him and to grow in His likeness. "Speaking the truth in love (we) may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ" Eph. 4:15. Our looking unto Christ in all situations of life does not depend on our own wisdom our education or ability, for as Jesus said to His disciples while He was with them during His earthly ministry: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house of Beelzebub, how much more them of his household." Mat. 10:24,25.

Every disciple of Christ has gone through practical experiences of privation, difficulties and persecutions; this has been so from the beginning even till now. But we realise that the Divine wisdom and the Divine mercy are revealed to babes, not to the wise of this world, nor to the powerful who can manage and change many things. Our Lord said: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him." Mat. 11:25-27.

Then come our Lord's words of invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of

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me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Mat. 11:28-30. How often we think of these words of our Lord and apply them to ourselves in the many problems and difficulties of this life, realising how much we need the attitude of meekness of our Lord, to come and take His yoke upon ourselves, to be meek and lowly of heart ourselves, and so to find His rest to our souls. We know that Christians throughout the Gospel Age have experienced persecution and troubles, to greater or less extent, but that this is part of normal Christian development.

When we consider our Lord, did He live His life and was His earthly ministry peaceful and restful, with everything plain sailing? No, He continued to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself and had to carry on His work in the face of persecution and difficulty. But our Lord revealed that wonderful truth of Divine love when He declared: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. His preceding words tell how this was to be accomplished: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:14,15.

We are all familiar with the experiences of Israel during the forty years of wanderings in the wilderness after they left Egypt. Very often theirs was quite a difficult situation and we read in Num. 21:5-9: "the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread (the manna). And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses and said. We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."

What an amazing story! It was as if a look at that serpent of brass (or copper) in itself contained some kind of anti-venin, to counter the venom of those serpents; these it seems were Egyptian cobras, very deadly snakes. It was just a look at that serpent on the pole, which was sufficient for the person to recover and feel no ill effects. In itself, this was a miracle, but

again consider how it happened. A man or a woman was suddenly bitten by a snake; unless they believed Moses' words, they would just lie down and die. But on the other hand, whoever believed Moses and the instructions of the Lord, lifted their heads in faith and looked to that snake on the pole — these did not suffer any ill effects and recovered.

And so our Lord compared Himself to that brazen serpent, saying: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." With the brazen serpent, it was a Divine ordinance. God ruled it that way. And so it is with our Lord — if we have faith enough, we look to the Lord. We look to Him for forgiveness of our sins, for that covering robe of His righteousness. By virtue of His blood shed on Calvary for us, He is our wisdom, He is our justification, for we know that it is only through acceptance of our Lord as our personal Saviour that we have a right to life. So we look to Jesus in all the affairs of our lives, for encouragement, for strength, for everything. For us, He has become our "all in all."

It is the Divine ordinance that only through faith in Christ as our Saviour can we have life. Similarly, those Jewish people of old, those Israelites, had to lift up their heads and look toward that pole where the serpent of brass was glistening in the sun and that alone saved their lives. Speaking of God's provision for us, the apostle John writes: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:9,10.

At thirty years of age, our Lord at His baptism became the Messiah in His full authority and began His ministry, culminating at his death at Calvary, which we especially remember at memorial season. His message reached out first to those that heard and believed in Him.

That was the time when Divine mercy and Divine forgiveness were turned to the people. Before that, there was no way out, the Jews were under the Law of Moses but were in bondage to the law, because none could keep it perfectly; even if 99 per cent of it were kept, failure in one point resulted in the law condemning that one to death.

So the apostle John writes: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." John 1:17. That is the grace extended to and accepted by us, when we first looked towards our Lord. He is our Saviour, in due time we accepted Him and we became reconciled to God, who is now able to overlook all our imperfections because He looks to us through the merit

of the sacrifice of Jesus. Nothing of this is of ourselves, though we are trying to do our best, are trying to look to our Lord and grow into His likeness, and surely enough are being transformed by the Spirit of God dwelling within us. But still we are imperfect and it is only through the merit of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary that we are acceptable to God and have right to life.

The same apostle puts the situation simply and positively "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John 5:12. In other words, the person who does not accept Jesus is still under condemnation. The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian brethren points to the Divine grace revealed to us as part of His plan of salvation. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." 2 Cor. 5:18. This ministry is first for the believers of this gospel age; we are reconciled to God by faith in our Lord and in His great sacrifice.

The ministry of reconciliation has only a small beginning however in this gospel age; during the millennium when the kingdom of God is established, uncounted billions of people will come back from the grave and will be restored. To them too will that gospel be preached — that ministry of reconciliation will reach them too and they will have the possibility of being saved and living forever. But it will still need to be by faith, for that is what God desires. For as the apostle writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Heb. 11:6.

In the same chapter, the apostle goes on to describe, as it were, a gallery of the great victors of faith, beginning with the first martyr, Abel, then going on to Enoch, Noah, and so on. Finally he says that time would fail him to tell of everyone who pleased God, not through keeping of the Mosaic law but by faith. Then to conclude the chapter he writes: "these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Heb. 11:32,39,40.

Then as if to show supreme faith and the pinnacle of faithfulness and loyalty, he exhorts us to be "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Heb. 12:2,3.

What an encouragement we have — to look to our Lord, to look to Him for everything. We look to Him for wisdom, for our salvation, for redemption and for the great reward He promised when he said: "I go to prepare a place for you and... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:2,3. Where the Master is, there will be His servants!

So let us look unto Jesus, our confidence and trust in Him will bring great reward in our own lives here and now and in the work of restoration of all mankind in the age to come. Especially in these insecure times, when there is no such thing as a lasting value or a secure tenure, our Lord is the best and indeed only security. He is our Leader, He is our elder Brother and we can depend on Him for all things.

(S Szwaluk 28 Dec 1991)

**"There is life in a look at the crucified One.
Look, look, look and live!"**

Bro Simon Szwaluk 10/4/23 - 2/3/05

Follow Me

The morning was dawning on that fateful day
Stunned silence, no words could they find to say
For was rolled aside, the heavy gray stone
An empty tomb they were now being shown

The first rays of sun that fell on the cave
Revealed not the One to the world come to save
They entered the place where the Savior was laid
Two days before, a great debt He had paid

Amidst blood stained linens, their sorrow was great
His body was gone, and they knew not His fate
Sadness and mourning now turned into fright
For standing among them two men clothed in white

They bowed down in fear then one of them said
Why do you look for the living among the dead?
Into the hands of sinful men the Son of Man was given
He was crucified, dead, but now He is risen!

Joy replaced fear as they ran from that place
Knowing that soon they would see His face
The good news was spread by His followers then
The birth of the church was soon to begin

From the depths of that tomb so dark and so cold
Came the good news of life for which we are told
Christ Jesus did come here to show us the way
"Follow me" is what He tells us today.

- Steven Walls -

“THE PROPHET AMOS”

The prophecy of Amos was written during the time of King Jereboam II and King Hosea, the two kings reigning at the time of a few of the prophets. They provide a geographic glimpse of how the nations were at the time and what was happening then. Generally speaking, prophecies are the litmus of the judgments of the Lord Almighty God. He uses prophets as His messengers, as the carriers of His message, basically for the nation of Israel. Taking a cross section of all the prophecies from Isaiah right up to Malachi, there is a set pattern in what all the prophecies tell. We see that God's favour was bestowed upon the nation of Israel, upon the people. We see the way God brought them out of Egypt, how He groomed them as His children, and then how Jehovah God was displeased with the nation of Israel. In referring to Israel, we think of the whole nation including Judah and Israel.

So why was God displeased with them, and how did He chastise and correct His own people? A correction factor was involved. The people were corrected a bit; here and there some of them were good, but as a nation they varied up and down, and that is when we see the scorn of Jehovah God poured out on the nation of Israel, for we believe God was totally displeased with the fleshly Israelites at that particular time. What eventuated from all the evil inflicted on them is that a good thing came out of it, a final blessing, the favour of restoration. They were plucked out but then put back, but we see here in these prophecies that they were to be cut off in that particular day. In our studies a great deal of importance is given to chronology and we have to look at prophecies from that viewpoint, noting times and seasons, as Jesus Christ mentioned. Associated with 'times and seasons' are 'signs'.

Driving along the highway, we need both a map and signposts to help us find our destination. Likewise, we have to see the prophecies from the signs given to us. In the midst of Egypt, the Lord God tells us, He will provide a witness, and that is one of the signs. There are many such signs, and as we review the prophecy of Amos we will be blessed to have understanding of it. It is time very well spent to study the prophecies of the Minor Prophets. We often look at the well-known prophecies of Daniel and Jeremiah, but sometimes we forget the Minor Prophets.

Amos, the Prophet

In reviewing the book of Amos, we want to know much about the prophet and the context of his book. What is he trying to tell us in this day? According to one of the commentaries, James Smith's Dictionary, the book of Amos is unbound by time; there is no time limit. It had an application for Jews at that particular

time and an application for the present. There are many prophecies that are coming to a better light now as students try to learn more about them with the help of the Lord's spirit. Amos was one of the first prophets to write down the prophecies given to him. Prior to that, if you go into the books of First and Second Kings, there were a lot of prophets from Elijah to Elisha and some lesser prophets, but their prophecies were verbal. Amos, during his time, prophesied verbally but also wrote down his prophecies.

The meaning of Amos' name is obscure. Probably there is a meaning of 'bearing a load, part of a burden' and that seems to be associated with the name Amos. To those whom he prophesied, he seemed to be placing a burden upon the nation. People disliked Amos because of the burden he put on them. He was a bold prophet, and that is an example to us. How should we tell the Word of God to the people of this world? We have to be bold in expressing the true knowledge of God. If we are weak and deviate from the truth, we ourselves risk being corrupted. Amos' prophecy emphasizes the injustices between the rich and poor. It tells about the structure of the whole nation of Israel; its social, religious and political structure, how the kings abused their power. Amos was not from an advantaged background, he was not the son of a prophet, as he tells us in Chapter 7, nor was he of a royal background. God sends His messengers not to please the flesh but to please Himself. God is not a respecter of any person, so the message from Amos was not to please Israel but to send the messages of God directly, whether they were liked or not.

Amos was a shepherd from the kingdom of Judah and his home in Tekoa was about 25-30 miles from Jerusalem or 10 miles to the south of Bethlehem. He was from the Kingdom of Judah but the Lord sent him to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. So he went all the way there without questioning the Lord like Jonah did. He took up the burden of the Lord and went to the Northern Kingdom. The meaning of Tekoa is 'a trumpeting sound', so we can nominate Amos as a trumpeting shepherd who blew his trumpet with a certain message that we see in Chapter 3 onwards. In Chapter 7, verse 14, Amos boldly replies to the false prophet Amaziah, affirming ¹⁴'I am no prophet, neither am I a prophet's son; but I was an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. ¹⁵And the Lord took me as I followed the flock.' That means from then on, he primarily took care of the Lord's flock. His message was for the sheep, the flock of God; primarily the 10 tribe Kingdom of Israel, although many of his warnings are applied to Judah as well. He prophesied at Bethel, the centre of the worship of the golden calf.

That worship was instituted during the time of Jeroboam I, when there was a split. That was the centre of these evil practices. We see in Leviticus 26 how the scorn of Jehovah God came on them and how the Levites, who were part of these 10 tribes, left the 10-tribe Northern Kingdom and went to Judah, one of the historical occurrences during that particular time.

His Style of Writing

With that background, we look at what the writing is about, the nature of the writing. The book of Amos may be seen as a form of satire. Satire is a form of language, a literary work using sarcasm, irony or wit in ridiculing or denouncing abuses, follies, customs, etc. As James Smith explains in his dictionary, it is one of the beautiful literary works; poetic artistry is there in this book. As you look into the Scriptures, it is a beautiful explanation and, not exaggeration, but the way the poet puts the context into reference. The writer openly scorns the religious, social and political practices of Israel. The style of writing includes the following elements: Some of his verses are the old way of saying something, some are narrated, including some predictive elements and of course prophecy, vision, dialogue and a dramatic monologue expressing the conversation of Jehovah God with the prophet himself, (Chapter 6). It is lyrical poetry on the pronouncement of God and scorn of His people. The writer proves himself to be a master of ancient poetry, and we have to understand this was written about 2800 years ago so the Hebrew language he uses is clear and simple but at the same time he uses some of the purest and most classical Hebrew in the entire Old Testament. He uses metaphor, simile, epithet, titles, parallelism, rhetorical questions, sarcasm, conflict, and other methods in his book.

Contemporaries of Amos

Now we look at the contemporaries of this prophet, Amos. He was there during the time of King Jeroboam who ruled the Northern Kingdom of Israel and who greatly expanded his territory. He captured the greater part of Upper Syria and added to and greatly expanded the Northern Kingdom. Jeroboam reigned from 825-784BC. Second Kings 14:24-27 tells of him, but mostly about his evils. He was an able king, capturing many of the Provinces, but there was a lot of evil in him. He worshiped gods that the Almighty God never liked. Another contemporary was King Uzziah of Judah, who tried to burn incense before the Lord, and the Lord consequently made him a leper. He reigned between 810-758BC. These were the two kings who were reigning during the time of this prophet. The prophet Hosea was also a contemporary during the years 784-725BC together with Joel, probably during the last few years of Joel's prophecy in about 810BC, very close to Jonah's time. We also see in Chapter 7 that there was a false prophet, Amaziah, who told Amos to go back to do his work in Judah and not to

prophecy in Israel. But Amos, being a good prophet, continued to prophecy in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. With this background, we go into the book of Amos.

The content of the book of Amos

Chapters 1 & 2

The first two chapters basically tell of the judgment upon the nations around Israel and also the nation of Israel itself. The nations adjoining Israel were Assyria, Gaza (that is the Philistines), Tyrus (which is Phoenicia, present-day Lebanon) and to the southern part all the Trans-Jordan nations which are Edom, Ammon and Moab. These are the six nations upon which God sent His judgments. Why should God chastise these nations along with the Israelites? A suggestion would be because these nations were included in the greater Kingdom of Solomon and David. During the time of Solomon, Solomon included a practice of mixing these races with Jews, He also inculcated the heathen habits of these nations, so there was all the more reason for the Lord God to chasten these nations too. All these nations are mentioned in Jeremiah 25, with similar judgments. Of these, Edom was a more emphasized nation in Jehovah's judgment. Edom is another name for Esau who was a special enemy of Jacob, and God changed the name of Jacob in those days when the blessings came upon Jacob.

In Chapter 2 verse 6 onwards, Jehovah God reproves the nation of Israel. Why? Because they sold the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes, they corrupted the Nazarites, and they also commanded the prophets not to prophesy. So these were the sins of Israel. Isaiah 8:9,10 tells: 'Associate yourselves O ye people' and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces.' So there is a destruction process upon all the nations. That was the context, the scorn, the rebuke of Jehovah God in Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 3

In this chapter Jehovah tells of a controversy about the nation of Israel itself. Beginning with verse 1, it says: ¹'Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, ²You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.' It is quite logical. I can punish my own son; I have no authority to punish anybody else's son. The nation of Israel had that special bonding relationship with Jehovah God, so God chastised them as His own son. If you go to verse 6, it tells us about the trumpet: 'Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?' So when we hear the trumpeting sound we must, as the children of God, think that there is a message coming

down to us. Down the ages we see there are seven trumpets blown, and I believe we are in the times of the seventh trumpet, which is still in progress. Verse 8 reads: 'The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?' The roaring of the lion is also mentioned in Chapter 1 in the mountains of Samaria and the mountains of Jerusalem. That was a controversy. Also in verse 3, there is another aspect: 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' 'Can you walk together if you don't agree? How can we join together? So Jehovah's argument is, how can He walk with the nation of Israel if there is disobedience from His own people.

Chapter 4

Here is a very idiomatic expression of the scorn by Jehovah upon His people. Verse 1 begins: 'Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan'. In some versions it says 'the cow of Bashan', as in Psalm 22:12: 'the bulls of Bashan are all around me'. They were all around Christ Jesus attacking the Anointed One when He was offering up His sacrifice. Bashan is the northern part of Israel, very near the Sea of Chinneret. It is a very fertile land where a lot of livestock was processed and there were good cows and sheep, and it is also famous for oak trees. The oaks of Bashan are part of the Old Testament prophecies. Basically, the cows of Bashan were so physically fat that they discarded the words of God and wanted their own food, never willing or inclined to hear the Lord's words or the prophecies given by His holy prophets.

Verse 2 says: 'The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.' Usually when cows are slaughtered, hooks are put on their feet, and that is how they are hung for meat. So, the Assyrian king came and took them by the hoofs, and no one survived, everyone perished. And in verse 4: 'Come to Bethel, and transgress: at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years.' Gilgal and Bethel were the religious institutions of Samaria, so people used to do this as a tradition but their hearts were very far from the Lord. The Lord says in Isaiah 29:13: 'this people draw near me with their mouth and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me.' Going down to verse 6 it talks about the fire in the house of Joseph. In 1 Peter 4:17 it says: 'Judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?' So, judgment begins at the house of God.

Chapter 5

This chapter refers to Bethel and Gilgal. The Lord God tells them in verse 15: 'Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that

the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.' And this grace was given to the remnant of Joseph in the Jewish harvest which was at the time of Christ. The most important aspect of Chapter 5 is from verse 16 onwards where it explains the Day of the Lord. In the Day of the Lord shall be ¹⁶wailing in all the streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! Alas! And they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing.... ¹⁸Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light.' It is very clear in this prophecy that the Day of the Lord wherein the Lord begins to set up His kingdom, the kings of the earth do not want the Anointed King of Jehovah sitting upon the house of David. They don't want to respect Him, so they all want to rail against this king, hence the gross darkness.

In verse 19 we are told it is 'as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.' Commentaries on this verse are meager, so a suggestion is that it is about past times we know well. These are two emblems. The British lion is the symbol of the British Empire and the Russian bear. The British ruled with such a strong hand. They believed the sun would never set on the British Empire, which they ruled from Canada and all the richest nations even up to Japan. Of course, some good things were done by the British but they had some unwelcome practices, such as, divide and rule, displacement of people, apartheid, huge amounts of looted wealth were taken to Britain, and they named Singapore 'the City of the Lion'. So this is just a suggestion. Man escaped the evils of the British Empire, and then came Russian Communism. He went into the house, and we see all the countries are fully concerned with nationalism. India is filled with Hindu nationalism, China is filled with Chinese supremacy, and now is the time the serpent is to bite. That would be the time of trouble, and we see this happening around the world. The French, German and Russian confederacy want to join together and that is one of the prophecies.

But finally, what Jehovah God tells here is the total destruction of these evil systems, the breaking of the structures. We also have to realise that during the harvest work, it is not just breaking the structures but the binding of the tares. One such tare would be the binding of the European Union. These prophecies give an idea of how these things will happen. The things happening in Iraq and Indonesia today give a glimpse of the start of anarchy, when people are upset and the weak shall say, I am strong! In North Korea there is not enough food to eat but it abounds in the West. These are problems we are going to face.

Chapter 6

Here the prophet says: 'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria.' These are the people who trust in nominal Christendom wherein there is no truth. They are very relaxed and do not know the word of God that they should be prepared. Amos tells to his people in one of his previous verses, Prepare to meet thy God.

Chapter 7

In verses 7 and 8 God holds a plumb line. Jehovah God is not inclined to give favours to Israel and He tells them, My judgment shall surely come.

Chapter 8

This chapter speaks of the basket of summer fruit which shall be no more, it is finished. In verse 11 there is an interesting thought: 'Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord' and we see this prophecy being fulfilled during the 1260 years of gross darkness upon the face of the earth. The youngsters were yearning for the truth but never got it.

Chapter 9

The final blessings come in this chapter, verse 11: 'In that day I will raise up the Tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof and I will raise up his ruins and I will build it as in the days of old.' So that is the final blessing upon the nation of Israel. This pertains to the fleshly Israel; it is going to be blessed but the blessing comes from Jerusalem that is above. The king of the heavenly Jerusalem, Christ Jesus, the Anointed One, He is going to come and bless the nation of Israel. As we are part of the heavenly nation, let us consider the earthly Jerusalem because they are our mistaken brethren. In due time they will be blessed and we will all be in the house of God. We will all enter into the peace of the Tabernacle and dwell in the restful pastures of the Lord God, wherein the Great Shepherd Himself will feed us with much better food.

What we are not able to understand today, we will understand in the days to come. The hope of Christ, the hope of glory, Christ in you.

"GETHSEMANE AND CALVARY"



Olive Trees in the Garden of Gethsemane

In far-off Palestine there is
A place whose history,
In Time or in Eternity,
Shall ne'er be forgotten be--
The Garden of Gethsemane,
Where we in memory tread
The soil that Jesus' feet oft pressed;
And his tears hallowed;
For when his work on earth was done,
And he would soon depart,
And leave in this unfriendly world
Those dearest to his heart,
He sought with them the solitude
Of that familiar place,
And there "exceeding sorrowful,"
Bowed down with tear-stained face.
In spirit gladly he had done
His Father's righteous will;
But had the oft-times weary flesh,
Failed some jot to fulfill?
"By one man's disobedience,
Death passed upon all men."
Nor could the blood of many beasts
Cleanse them from inbred sin.
God had, through Moses' Law, decreed
A "Corresponding Price,"

Therefore the Offerer must bring
A perfect sacrifice
And fear of death--eternal Death--
Encompassed him that night,
Oh, would the Cross thus banish him
Forever from God's sight,
And leave the lost and dying world,
Which he had come to save,
With nevermore a ray of hope
Of life beyond the grave?
And in that dark and lonely hour,
Without one pitying eye,
Thrice from his troubled heart there came
The same despairing cry,
"O Father, if 'tis possible,
Remove this cup from me,
If not, except I drink of it,
Shall I, not bow to Thee?"
Not Calvary's bitter pain or shame,
The "cup" he prayed to shun;
But endless Death--yet even so,
"Thy will, not mine, be done."
And oh, how worthless our lives seem,
As we behold him there--
The Son of God, that speechless Lamb,
In agonizing prayer.

“GOD WILL HAVE ALL MEN TO BE SAVED”

God will have all men to be saved! Could there be anything more vital than salvation for us, the called-out church of the Gospel Age, and for all the human family in the coming Kingdom Age? Any other promises we might receive would have but little value without eternal life with which to enjoy them - they could give pleasure for but a brief moment. Compared to eternity, this lifetime is but a brief moment. This address is really a reminder of the old, old story which we love to think and speak about, (BSH 161), but it is always good to have clearly in mind the Scripture evidence from God's Word of the wideness and comprehensiveness of our Heavenly Father's wonderful plan of salvation.

The theme text is taken from 1 Timothy 2:4. To get the context, let us read verses 1-6 of that chapter - "I exhort,, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the 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, to be testified in due time.' We rejoice that in the fullness of time the opportunity will be given to all the descendants of father Adam to receive everlasting life.

During the Gospel Age it is those that our Heavenly Father is calling with a heavenly calling to be members of His special divine family, the Bride for His only-begotten Son, all those that are to receive a heavenly reward. During the coming Kingdom Age it will be all the multitudes of mankind. What a blessing it is that by the grace of God we have been enlightened to understand this precious truth! What a joy and comfort it is to know that all our friends and relations that die unsaved will be restored to life again in that future day and be given the opportunity to live forever in the earthly paradise, the kingdom that God has prepared for them from the foundation of the world. (Matt.25:34)

If we have the true love of God in our hearts we rejoice, not only because our friends have been given this opportunity but also we are even glad that our enemies are also to receive the same opportunity. Our heavenly Father is to open wide the doors of the great prison house of death and release all those imprisoned therein, both His friends and His enemies. His enemies will be figuratively slain by the sword coming out of the mouth of His Son, that is, by the truth, like the picture given us in Revelations 19:21. God will destroy His enemies by making them His friends. We see by the Scriptures that unfortunately there will be some who will be incorrigible and will not avail themselves of the gracious provisions God has made for them. Only these will

receive a literal slaying. We would hope that this class would be few in number.

Going back again to 1 Tim 2: 4 'God will have all men to be saved', what exactly is this verse saying? What is the meaning of "saved" here? Is it speaking of eternal salvation? No, we would understand this verse to be speaking of what we might call "initial salvation", saved from the Adamic death sentence and, additionally for those of mankind that have fallen asleep in death, saved from the grave. We ourselves have already been saved from the Adamic death sentence and in God's due time all men will be saved in this same way.

This is the first step towards eternal salvation. Different thoughts have been expressed on this verse. Some believe that it teaches universal salvation. We would all be only too pleased if this could be achieved within the framework of God's plan, but such an understanding would be contrary to the Scriptures and we must fully accept God's Word and not be influenced by our own thoughts, desires and emotions. God will not take over the mind of anyone and save them against their own will. God's Word must be the final arbiter in our understanding of His divine plan.

When we correctly understand this verse, it really teaches not universal salvation but universal opportunity for salvation. It is like with the nation of Israel of old, God said in Deuteronomy 30: "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.' This is just the way it will be in the coming Kingdom Age. God does not force eternal life on any one. It is a priceless and special gift. Those wishing to obtain it must desire it strongly enough that they are prepared to accept the great Creator's conditions. He is the life-give so He is entitled to make the rules and these rules have not changed. They are still the same as they were for our first parents - absolute obedience, leading with practice to doing and even delighting to do God's Will, just as it was with our blessed Saviour, as it is written in Psalm 40:8 "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." He is the pattern to follow. This applies to ourselves now and to all mankind in the next Age. We can easily see how essential obedience is. We need only to look at the terrible conditions in our world today to see the results of disobedience. If all would obey our Creator's righteous laws the world's troubles would just vanish away. Right near the end of the Bible in the Book of Revelation we see that the same requirements still apply, Rev. 22:14 "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they might have the right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city."

Only those who have learned this lesson well will have the right to the tree of life. Of course, they must also

develop a loving, righteous character. The first step for us and for the entire world is the acceptance of our Heavenly Father's gracious gift freely given for all mankind, namely the life of His only-begotten Son. During the Gospel Age this is a matter of faith. In the next Age it will be more a case of walking by sight. When the dead are coming back to life, none can then have doubts that there is a God and they will readily believe on the only name given for Salvation, as we read in Acts 4:12. A brother once told of a man he knew that could not accept that there could be a resurrection. He said, I will not believe unless I see someone come back from the dead. The brother commented: The first person he will see back from the dead will be himself!

We note that they are first saved. This is by the context of verse 4. It is only then that they come to a knowledge of the truth, whereas it is only after they receive this knowledge of the truth that they can make progress towards final and complete salvation. Until they come to a knowledge of the truth, they cannot even take the first step of accepting Jesus as their Saviour. So if final and eternal salvation was meant, the verse would have to read in the reverse, namely, God will have all men to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. The Greek word translated "knowledge" is a stronger word than our English translation. It means "accurate knowledge" as some of the more literal translations render it. Many today have a very inaccurate knowledge of the truth. By our heavenly Father's grace, we have been greatly blessed in that we have been given a clear understanding of the basic truth of His glorious plan for us and all the human family, ie "meat in due season".

A Ransom for All

The verses in our passage all link together with the one theme, that is, the hope for all mankind.. Verse 1 exhorts us to make supplication and prayer for all mankind. That is because God has an interest in all and will have all to be saved. Then verses 5 and 6 read: 'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.' Here we have the same truth - Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all. As we know, the Greek for ransom means "a corresponding price", a corresponding price for father Adam. This is the only place in the Scriptures where this word occurs. We have the word "ransom" in other places where it is from a slightly different Greek word simply meaning "price". We note that this precious truth of the ransom is to be testified in due time. For some the Gospel Age is the due time, for others the next Age will be the due time.

Now let us turn to 1 Cor.15: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Verse 22 commences with the word "for" linking it in with the previous verse, and shows what is meant by "all made alive", namely, all resurrected. Our Lord also confirms this Himself in John 5:28 & 29

where He says that the resurrection is for both the good and the bad. Like our theme verse in 1 Timothy 2:4, these verses again confirm the hope for all mankind, all of Adam's progeny, but there is a subtle difference between 1 Tim.2:4 and this passage. 1 Tim.2:4 is speaking primarily of "being saved" which, as we saw, means saved from the Adamic death sentence. This would include the work of the Gospel Age, the saving of the called-out church as well as the saving of the whole world of mankind during the next Age. This verse in Timothy is not really speaking of the resurrection but, of course, it is implied. Those that have died "unsaved" must of course receive a resurrection in order to be "saved" from the Adamic death sentence, whereas 1 Cor.15: 21 & 22 is speaking solely of the resurrection, those that are literally made alive. It does not include the work of the Gospel Age those that are made alive figuratively, such as the church has been. These, of course, are all included in those literally made alive in Christ. So then, these verses in 1 Corinthians only have their fulfillment when resurrections take place.

A Resurrection for All

Some of our Christian friends who do not understand the wideness in our Heavenly Father's mercy and love cannot accept that this verse teaches a resurrection for all. They say that it is only those that are in Christ at the present time that are to be made alive. It is true that where the term "in Christ" is used it normally applies to the called-out church, but the term is used in quite a different sense here. To get a clear understanding of the verse we need to carefully analyze the passage, taking in the full context. The "in" is translated correctly here but sometimes the same word is translated "through" or "by". Perhaps if we use these terms we will find it helpful. If we say that it was "through" or "by" Adam's transgression that death passed upon all men and that it is "through" or "by" Christ that the resurrection of all will take place, that is, through His ransom sacrifice, this helps to clarify the statement. The context of this passage shows that Paul is combating the erroneous understanding of some that there was to be no resurrection of the dead. It was probably the Sadducees that were preaching this false doctrine.

The following from 1 Cor.15: 12-26, reads in part: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming or presence, as it should be! Paul's argument here is very clear; he is simply saying that there is to be a resurrection of the dead, all the dead. He is not separating the different classes in the resurrection. We know that there is to be a first resurrection which comprises Christ's body members, a resurrection of the great multitude and the Ancient Worthies, but in Paul's argument here he is simply confirming that all who have ever lived are to be brought back to life. 1 Cor.15: 23 reads: 'But every man in his own order: Christ the

firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming.' Presence is the correct rendering here, from the Greek word "parousia" meaning "presence". Rotherham and Young's Literal Translation both render it "in His presence". This makes it clearer. It is "in" or "during" the time of His presence, which includes His 1000 year reign, that all the resurrections take place, not just at the moment of His coming/arrival as the word suggests. "Every man in his own order".

The word "order" here (Greek *tagma*) is very interesting; this is the only place where it is found in the Bible. The Expanded Biblical Comments say that the word means "in his own band or company". Vine's Greek Dictionary explains it as "signifying that which has been arranged in order especially a military term denoting a company. It is used metaphorically in 1 Cor.15: 23 of the various classes of those who have part in the first resurrection." We would agree with this statement except for the words "first resurrection". Rather we would say it applies to the various classes coming back in the resurrection

God's Word shows that there will be only one class in the first resurrection, namely, the firstfruits the priestly class as we see by Rev.20:6 'Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.' These are Christ's body members. No other classes are shown as coming back in this resurrection. It is generally thought that the next in order will be the great multitude, then the Ancient Worthies, followed by all the world of mankind. So this verse 23 is saying that each one brought back in the resurrection will be brought back in his own particular class. This would mean in different time sequences.

Further on in chapter 15 Paul is still on the subject of the resurrection. Let us read in part from 1 Cor.15:35-44: 'But some men will say, How are the dead raised? And with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain; it may chance of wheat or of some other grain.....There are celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.' Here Paul is bringing out again that there are to be different orders or classes in the resurrection, each having their own particular honour and glory, each glorious in their own way. Just as there is one glory of the sun and a different glory of the moon and a different glory again of the stars. He is saying, This is how it will be in the resurrection of the dead. He says that even individual stars differ in glory, showing that each individual will differ one from another, each shining in their own

particular place or setting where the great Creator has seen that they are best suited. Each will be happy and content in their own particular sphere.

Christ's in His Presence

What exactly does it mean 'they that are Christ's in His presence'? Who are these that are Christ's? This is generally understood to refer to those who become Christ's during the Millennial reign, but it does not really say that. It says 'those that are Christ's...' suggesting that they are already Christ's. It seems that this is referring to the "all in Adam" that are to be made alive in Christ, namely, all mankind, both the spiritual and fleshly classes. We must bear in mind that this verse is still speaking of the resurrection. It is not speaking only of those that have proved worthy of everlasting life, but it includes also those that are made alive and receive a resurrection to judgment. All mankind that died in Adam are already Christ's at the start of the Millennium. They will become Christ's later in a different sense when they accept Him as their king and Saviour, but they are already His at the start of the Millennium in that He purchased them all with His own blood.

Let us look at Acts 20:28 - 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.' This is, of course, speaking of the church but the same principle applies to all mankind. He purchased them all. Now to Ephesians 1:14- "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.' The comment is made in the Reprints on this verse that the whole earth is part of the purchased possession and will be filled with the glory of God.

Now let us look at Psalm 2: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.⁷ "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. ⁸Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.' Verse 7 is better rendered "This day have I brought thee forth". It applies to the resurrection of our Lord. This is confirmed in Acts 13:33. We note particularly Psalm 2:8 where the heavenly Father is speaking to His beloved only-begotten Son: "Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance." The term "heathen" means all the non-Christian world of mankind. All the world and its inhabitants belong to the heavenly Father, but Jesus purchased them with His own precious blood, so His Father hands them over to Him. This is a purchase that lasts only until the end of the 1000-year reign and the little season. Then our Lord hands them back to the One who originally gave them to Him, namely, His heavenly Father.

They were given to Jesus in order that He might carry out the great restitution work and bring all the willing

and obedient up the highway of holiness to develop a righteous and loving character, worthy to receive everlasting life. He does this on behalf of the Lord God, who has appointed Him king for this very purpose, as we saw in Psalm 2:6 "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Psalm 98 is a very interesting and beautiful passage: "O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory. The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shown in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God...for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.' We note especially "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God". How beautifully this links in with our theme text, which, as we saw, says that all men will come to an accurate knowledge of the truth. Comparatively few at the present time have seen the full scope of God's wonderful salvation for all the human family. This passage we have just been looking at shows the time when 1 Tim. 2:4 has its fulfillment.

Passed from Death unto Life

People sometimes ask, Are you saved? How should we answer this question? Should we say, I am being saved, or I hope eventually to be saved one day? No, our answer should be, Yes I am saved.' That is the Scriptural answer. God takes a very positive view. We are right now saved from the Adamic death sentence that fell upon Adam's progeny. We have life! Do we really have life? As we look around we see the signs of aging on many faces; we see grey hair and wrinkles developing, memories are not as keen as they used to be, and energy is waning. In these respects we see no difference between ourselves and the whole world of mankind, but God sees a great difference. What do the Scriptures say? Jesus gives us a very definite answer in John 5:24 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Again, in 1 John 3:14 "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." Now let us look at Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit". We are not under the Adamic condemnation, we have life!

At the present time all mankind apart from the church are dead. They are still under the Adamic death sentence. They must wait until the next age to be released from this condemnation. The life that we have will never be taken away from us again unless we sin deliberately and wilfully. So long as we prove faithful unto death our life is secure for us. So then, just as we have been saved from the death sentence, so God will have all men to be saved in the same way and to be

given a full and complete opportunity to go on to eternal salvation. When speaking to others who have a hearing ear about God's wonderful provisions for all to be saved, it is good if we present as much scriptural evidence as possible. Many believe that only the "called out church" is to be saved, so it is helpful to present scriptures, which contrast the two salvations.

Let us just quote a few of these, firstly, John 5:28-29 already alluded to - "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment.' Those that receive a resurrection to life are those that die already "saved", having life. Therefore they obtain a resurrection to life. Their testing and trials are over. With mankind in general these are still ahead of them. Paul in Acts 24:15 is saying the same thing as Jesus, only using different words. The verse reads: "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" Paul is saying that this is the hope that he has. It is not just a hope for the just but for both the just and the unjust. We have a very lovely passage in Romans 8:19-23: "For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for (our) adoption (to wit), the redemption of our body." (ASV)

At the present time the whole creation is unknowingly waiting for the revealing of the sons of God, that is, God's chief Son, Jesus Christ, together with His other sons (Heb 2:10), the church in glory! Romans 8:21 would be the key verse here, showing that it is not only the children of God but the whole creation that will be delivered from the bondage of corruption. 1 John 2:2 reads - "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Finally, 1 Timothy 4:10 "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." At the present time God's special interest is in His called out ones, those that believe now, but He is not only the Saviour of these but of all mankind, as in the words of hymn 98 (BSH) - "Salvation full at highest cost He offers free to all".

Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

(JGT 4/04)

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT-TEMPERANCE

Temperance is the last of the fruits of the Spirit listed by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5.22-23.

While it is the last fruit listed it is by no means the least important. Strong's Concordance gives the meaning of "temperance" as (#1466) "*from #1468, self control (especially continence)*". The parent word (#1468 - *egkrates*) is defined as "*strong in a thing (masterful), i.e. self controlled*". The 'middle voice' between #1466 and #1468 is #1467 which is defined as "*to exercise self restraint*".

The need for self control (restraint) is with us every moment of every day. In Galatians 5:17 the Apostle declares "*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other ...*". In order to restrain or control the lusts of the flesh we need to "*bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*" (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

The Apostle Peter also exhorts Christians to exercise self control (or restraint): "*Dearly beloved, I beseech you (appeal to you) ... abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul ...*" (1 Peter 2:11). Abstinence infers self restraint.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24 - 27 the need for temperance is likened to the discipline required of athletes: "*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things ... I keep under my body and bring it into subjection...*". The comparison of the self control required by an athlete with that required by a Christian is very apt. An athlete must be temperate (exercise self control), in all things, not just in the physical movement of their bodies. Some aspects that require self control are nutrition, rest, life style, and mental attitude. Likewise a Christian who is diligently striving to be an overcomer must exercise self control in all aspects of their life, both material and spiritual. The scope is much broader than just Bible study.

One particular member of our bodies that requires constant restraint is our tongue: "*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*" (James 1:26) The task of bridling our tongue requires continuous vigilance: "*If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in horses mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body ... For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is*

tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison". (James 3:2-8). Restraining or controlling our tongue requires continuous diligence.

The development of temperance (self control) cannot be achieved in isolation, but is dependent on the development of other fruits. The Apostle Peter gives the sequence: "*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity (love)*" (2 Peter 1:5-7) Faith, virtue and knowledge are prerequisites for the development of temperance, and temperance is necessary for the development of patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

Self control requires faith; faith that there is a future reward for the obedient; a faith that is strong enough to enable us to withstand the feeling of deprivation that stems from denying ourselves "*the lust of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life*". (1 John 2:16)

However faith alone is not sufficient to enable us to exercise the self control (restraint) that is necessary to be an overcomer. Our faith must be strong enough to cause us to focus only on virtuous things (Phil. 4:8). Such a focus will result in us growing in knowledge - knowledge of God's plan and the nature of the Christian walk.

When our faith, our desire for virtuous things, and our knowledge are all strong enough to enable us to exercise the level of self-control that constitutes temperance, we will develop patience, our fleshly instincts being sufficiently restrained to enable us to endure adverse circumstances or experiences.

Temperance is one of the crowning glories of a Christian; it requires us to be consciously aware of, and to restrain (exercise self control over), the desires of the flesh every moment of our lives.

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“WHAT IS GOD’S WILL FOR MAN?”

The question “What is God’s will for man?” is the most fundamental question that anyone can ask. The answer to the question embraces the answer to many other lesser questions which are frequently asked, questions like “Why am I here on earth? Where am I going? How do I get there? and What happens when I die?” Indeed, people who try to answer those questions are searching for meaning. What is God’s will for man? As Bible Students we know the Bible gives us some very clear answers to that question. The answer is a little complicated by the fact that we live in the Christian era. A comprehensive answer to the question must include not only God’s will for the men who live in the Christian era but also for those who lived before the Christian era. So what is God’s will for man?

The Scriptures tell us that there are four aspects of God’s will for man. The first one is that man is to have dominion over the earth. The second is that he was to experience the consequences of disobedience. Those two aspects of God’s will for man apply to all men from the very first day of Creation. A third aspect of God’s will for man is that He was going to call out a special church class, but that aspect of God’s will for man only applies to those who live in the Christian era. The fourth aspect of God’s will for man is that God preplanned that He would graft in the Gentiles. Now that’s a very large subject and we aren’t going to have time to consider all those four aspects in this session, so we will just concentrate on the first two - the fact that God’s intended Will for man is that he will have dominion over the earth and also it is God’s will for man that he will experience the consequences of disobedience. (The third and fourth aspect will be covered in a later session.)

MAN’S DOMINION

Let us now take the first aspect of God’s will for man, the fact that God’s will for man is that he will have dominion over the earth. In all of our considerations I believe it is necessary to keep in mind that when we are talking about God’s will for man we are talking about what God wishes, what God wills, God’s intention, God’s objectives beforehand. In Genesis 1:26 we read: ‘And God said, “Let us make man in our image...” ‘Let us’ is a statement of intent, expressing His purpose,

expressing His Will. This is something God was setting out to do. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” That was God’s will for man – to have dominion over the earth. God is almighty and therefore it follows that His will would be accomplished. And so it was, as we read in Gen.1:27 and 28 – “So God created man in His own image” He did just what He had planned. “In the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.” Have dominion, you are in control!

The next verse tells us that God in fact provided for all of man’s needs on earth. In Genesis 1:29-30 we read: ‘And God said, “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.” ‘ So God provided for man’s needs on the earth. “And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth wherein is life, I have given every green herb for meat.” And it was so.’ So God provided for man’s needs on the earth. What God said to man was, Let him have dominion over the earth – not over the moon, and not over Mars. If many of our politicians and eminent scientists understood that simple truth and believed it, we might not have wasted so much

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money trying to investigate whether man should be on Mars. God's will for man was that he would have dominion over the earth. In the next verse, verse 31, we see that God's will was accomplished. It says: 'And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.' Now, when do we say something we have made is very good? We say it's very good if, when it comes to fruition, it is just as we had planned it. Yes, that worked out perfectly; it is very good! And so we have God's Creation, and God saying it is very good, that it had worked out just as He had planned.

Of course, that was way back at the beginning of time, and with our great learning and scientific development people will scoff at such an elementary truth. Even before our time the concept of man being confined to earth and that being his dominion suffered some derision. So I find it very comforting to note that the Apostle Paul also held to the same fundamental truth. I would like to read just a few verses of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill. He makes some very important points in that sermon. We don't have time to go through them all, but in Acts 17:22 we read: 'Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions I found an altar with this inscription: To the Unknown God, whom therefore ye ignorantly worship Him I declare unto you." Him declare I unto you. Whom did Paul declare? 'God that made the world and all things therein, seeing He is Lord of heaven and earth....' (for this Creator is not just the one who made the earth, He is not restricting man to earth just because He made the earth. No, God made heaven **and** earth.) ... He 'dwells not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with man's hands as though He needed anything, seeing He gives to all life, and breath, and all things...' He is the instigator of life 'and hath made of one all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth.' That's exactly what we were told in Genesis. That is God's will for man – to dwell on the face of the earth. 'And hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation.' The NIV there says He has determined where man would live or the places where man would live.

We could discuss that at some length, whether we are to live at the North Pole or the South Pole, but nevertheless the point is, either way, that God made man to dwell on the face of the earth. Yes, on the face of the earth. How high can you go and still exist? Can you live under the ground without atmosphere? How long can you live under water? God made man to live on the face of the earth. So simple, isn't it? And what a grand appointment that was! Even just living on the face of the earth. In Psalm 8 the Psalmist expresses it so beautifully, if only we could capture the grandeur of man's original appointment. The Psalmist says: 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hath set thy glory above the heavens!' Then

in verse 3: 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him.' What am I? What are you? Not even mere specks almost in the Universe. 'And the son of man, that thou visitest him; For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour. And madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.' Yes, we are not even mere specks in terms of God's overall creation, yet He gave to man dominion over the whole earth. And He put all things under his feet. 'All sheep and oxen; yea, and the beasts of the field. The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea and whatsoever things pass through the paths of the seas.' All of these were put under man, man's dominion. What a glorious position man had on the earth! 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!' Yes, man's appointment was indeed grand.

We can see even more of just how grand an appointment was given to man if we just think about the dominion given to Adam before his transgression. We read in Genesis 2:19 and 20 'And out of the ground the Lord formed every beast of the field' (that is, lions, tigers, elephants, cattle and sheep, etc.) 'and every fowl of the air and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. ' And Adam gave names to 'all the cattle and the birds of the air and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helpmate for him.' What a grand position Adam had - all the beasts of the field coming to him, and Adam allocating them their name. What grandeur! But of course, that is not the case today. If any of you have tried to earn your living from farming you will well know that many of the beasts of the field and fowls of the air and creeping things destroy man's effort to eke out a living from the land. Kangaroos can destroy a crop overnight. Emus, rabbits, foxes, snakes, kookaburras, mosquitoes today really are at odds with man on the earth. In other words, man has lost the dominion that he originally had.

LOST DOMINION

And so we come to the second aspect of God's will for man. We have to ask ourselves the question, Was this really God's will for man that he should experience the current environment, or is it something that man has brought upon himself, or was it an after-thought? Was the fact that man was going to experience the loss of dominion really part of God's will for man? As I have just mentioned, from observation there is no doubt that man has lost the dominion that he had in the Garden of Eden in the early days. Solomon, of course, also stated very clearly that man had lost that dominion. In Ecclesiastes 1:1-4 we read: 'The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

What profit hath a man of all his labour that he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever.' Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! That's what life is all about, the search for meaning. Solomon goes on to give us a first glimpse of the fact that the present loss of dominion was also God's intention. In Eccl.1:13 and 14 he says: 'And I gave my heart to search and seek out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven.' Solomon sought wisdom. He sought meaning. This is what he concluded (in the KJV) – 'This sore travail has God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under heaven, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.'

Solomon makes a very important point in verse 13: 'This sore travail has God given to the sons of men.' So it is God's purpose, God's will. He did this, He gave it to the sons of men, to be exercised thereby. Now the NIV says 'what a heavy burden God has laid on the sons of men'. Now those two thoughts are quite different, aren't they, because in the KJV it says 'This sore travail has God given to the sons of men to be exercised thereby' but in the NIV it says 'What a heavy burden God has laid on the sons of men'. In both cases, though, we realise both translations endorse the fact that it is God's action, the initiative comes from God. God has given it to man for man to be exercised thereby, or God has laid the heavy burden, but in both cases God did the work. However, the concept of God laying a heavy burden could well be interpreted that this was a punishment - you have done the wrong thing, my friend; this is the burden you must bear as a punishment. On the other hand, giving it to them to be exercised thereby, we exercise for profit, for benefit. So, if the KJV is correct, God gave this sore travail to man for their ultimate benefit, not just for their punishment. But is that going too far? What really does it mean when he says 'to be exercised thereby'?

The word 'exercise' comes from Strong's Concordance, No. 6031, which means 'To look down, to browbeat, to depress or to humble'. I just now want to fasten on that meaning of 'humble'. This sore travail has God given to the sons of men to be **humbled** thereby. Let us look at three places where this word, No.6031, is translated 'humble'. The first one is in Exodus when God was dealing with Pharaoh to release His people, Israel. Exodus 10:1-3: 'And the Lord told to Moses, "Go in unto Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart' (for I have hardened his heart – God's will) 'and the heart of his servants, that I might show thee my signs before him; And that thou mayest tell thy son and thy son's son what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the Lord. And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?' 'Humble' is the same word as

'exercise'. In Deut.8:1-2: 'All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness.' Why did He do that? 'to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or no.' And so He led them forty years in the wilderness to humble them. God gave His sore travail unto man to humble him, and if you have ever been in a situation where you have been subject to the elements, it is a very humbling experience. Don't we see this now? This nation is gripped in dire drought. There was dust blowing in northern Victoria yesterday. I have been in a place where you are so dependent upon the elements that you realise there is Someone up there who really is Almighty! The sore travail that man is experiencing today has been given to humble him.

We see a stark contrast, as I see it, with the temptation that was given to Eve, because the nature of Eve's temptation was to aspire to a position above her God-given appointment. That was the temptation which Satan put before her. Let's just go through that in Genesis 3: 'Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field (and I would love to talk to you about subtleness, but there isn't time today) which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.' But not just that, for he said: 'For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods' - not just a man or a woman confined to the face of the earth to have dominion over the earth, but the temptation was that when you eat of this fruit you will become as gods. The temptation was to a position above the God-given appointment, and of course mankind has suffered the consequences of Adam and Eve's transgression. At the end of the day the sore travail is going to humble man again. The sore travail is given to the sons of men to humble them, to realise that at the end of the day, while there might be a way that seems right unto a man, the end of the way is death.

That's a very gloomy picture, isn't it? The bright part of it is that God also planned for man's salvation, and he pre-planned man's salvation. We see this in Hebrews 2:5-8: 'For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set

him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.' Man lost his dominion. 'But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.'

Now the question is, When did God provide Jesus as our Saviour? Was it pre-planned before He created man? Was it added after He created man but before He gave him the experience with disobedience? Or has it been added later? We know the answer is that God planned for Jesus to come to earth as man's Redeemer before He even created the world. Let's look at 1Peter 1:18-20: 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.' How precise is that term! The Greek meaning is 'to know beforehand'. So God knew beforehand that He was going to send Jesus as man's Redeemer. I have heard it said so many times that God provided Jesus as man's Redeemer **at** the foundation of the world, that is, after man fell, but Peter's words already quoted also references such as Acts 2:23 and 2 Timothy 1:9 show that this was foreknown. God had planned for man's redemption before the foundation of the world, but it was only manifest in this last time.

GOD'S WILL IN THE CHRISTIAN ERA

That leads on, of course, to the third aspect of God's will for man, that as well as Him having predetermined that Christ would be man's Redeemer, before He even made the world, He had also predetermined that He would call out a church class. (That, and the matter of the grafting in of the Gentiles will be the subject of a later article.) But we see, don't we, the grandeur of God's will for man. He created man, gave him dominion over the earth, and there was nothing on the earth which was not under man's dominion. What a glorious position he had! Man lost that dominion. God pre-arranged that our experience with death will humble all men and God has also pre-arranged for man to be lifted out of that condition up to the original dominion that he enjoyed.

I would like to close by reading two verses in Revelation 21 which embrace so much truth. Rev.21: '24 And the nations shall walk in the light of it and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. 26 And they shall bring the glory of the nations into it.' I think there is a tremendously lovely picture there of the kings of the earth bringing their glory into it. They won't be aspiring for a position above their appointment. They will be delighted to bring their glory into God's completed creation. God certainly has a wonderful plan, and we are privileged to understand something of that plan, His will for mankind.

GS:4/04)

“DOING THE WILL OF GOD FROM THE HEART”

Paul wrote the letter to the church at Ephesus from his prison cell in Rome. He had spent more than 2 years in Ephesus preaching Christ and the word **of** God to both the Jews and the Greeks. "And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:8-10NAS)

Paul had a very close relationship with the Ephesus Church and although later in his journey to Jerusalem he did not have time to visit, he summoned the Elders as we read in Acts 20:16-17 "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to

spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church". (NAS) Paul had great concern for the future of the Church in Ephesus and admonished the Elders as we read in Acts 20:28-32 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" .. (NAS)

The Epistle to the Ephesians is acknowledged to be one of the richest and most profound of the Epistles. The

concepts of doctrines are expressed with grandeur and depth, there is richness and fullness in its message, plus practical exhortations on Christian living which are both profound and vivid, making it very precious to all believers. The first three chapters are Doctrinal setting out the Believers standing in Christ, thanksgiving for their redemption, prayers for spiritual enlightenment, the power of God as illustrated in their salvation, and the unity of Jew and Gentile in one body under Christ their head.

The second three chapters are Practical looking at the believers lives in Christ, their walk as Children of the Heavenly Father, both inward and outward, with the aim to imitate the example of Christ in their lives. Paul also looks at the duties of God's family in different aspects of every day life and how their behaviour affects how people conceive our Heavenly Father to be. The subject – "Doing the will of God from the heart" – is taken from this second section (Eph 6:5,6) and reads – "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. (NAS) Here Paul looks at the attitude and relationship of a consecrated believer and his/her employer, or of those whom we serve through our dealings in business. Paul refers to the believers as slaves or servants in verse 5.

Thayer's definition of the Greek word gives us an insight into what Paul was explaining to the Ephesians. The word slaves is from Strong's number 1401 *doulos* – which had the meaning of:

- 1) a slave, a bondman, a man of servile condition
 - a) a slave
 - b) Metaphorically, one who gives himself up to an other's will, those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing His cause among men
 - c) Devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests
- 2) a servant, an attendant

In the theme verse the word slave denotes one who is bound to render service to another, whether that service is free or voluntary. In the words "Be Obedient to those who are your masters" Paul was telling them that their behaviour should show forth the qualities of the religion that they professed. They were to be kind, gentle, and obedient, as becomes their Christian walk. Paul instructed the Ephesians that in their relations with their Masters they were to obey with fear and trembling. So we too should give due respect to those who are over us, fearing to displease them, and aware of our actions so as not to justly incur their anger or indignation. The Ephesians were to be sincere in their obedience: This meant with singleness of heart, not just pretence of obedience and respect, but serving them

with faithfulness as if their master was Christ.

With Sincerity of Heart in verse 5 has the thought of singleness of heart, that is with a simple, sincere desire to do what ought to be done. Our Lord speaking to his disciples brings out this thought in Luke 16:13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (NAS) If we take the attitude that we are serving God through our work, then we will have singleness of heart. With a heart full of love for the Lord and of devotion to his purposes we can sometimes make it hard to give our full energies to our employer during the hours for which we are paid. In the Epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians Paul speaks of this problem. We are told, (Col. 3:23.) "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men." Here Paul tells us that our attitude should be that whatever we do should be carried out as if we are doing it for our Heavenly Father.

How can we show such diligence without getting so involved that we cannot put work out of our minds in our free time? The Apostle does not suggest that we should become devoted to our daily work for its own sake. Only the Lord's service calls for our devotion. We are to work for our employers "heartily as unto the Lord," (Colossians 3:23) as an example to those around us and as evidence to our Heavenly Father of the honesty with which we discharge earthly responsibilities. Our spiritual "work" for him is on a different plane. It is this work into which we should "throw our heart and soul," in a spirit of loving devotion to him. Surely, we have to bring our lives into balance. If our earthly responsibilities appear to be intruding into our thoughts at times when they have no business to be there, we need to ask ourselves whether they are drawing our heart away from the Lord. We must remember our Master's warning that "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:21 In its early stages it may seem absurd to think that a small overflow into sanctified time constitutes any sort of "treasure" to us, but most things have small beginnings, and "how great a matter a little fire kindleth." - James 3:5.

As unto Christ:

By rendering proper service to our masters we are in fact serving the Lord, and that will be well pleasing to him. Fidelity, in whatever situation we find ourselves in life, is acceptable service to the Lord. We can acceptably serve our Lord Jesus in the condition of a servant, just as well as we can in a position of authority. Besides, it will greatly lighten the burdens of such a situation, and make the toils of a humble condition much easier, if we remember that we are serving the Lord.

Change of Heart: The attitude of our hearts marks the change from the old creature to the new creature – from children of darkness to children of light. We are called to entirely consecrate ourselves to do the will of God. We need to have Christ in our heart and Christ in our life. By the grace of our Heavenly Father we have found Christ, and through the help of the Holy Spirit we have come to an understanding of God's word. This should bring about the first steps in our journey of consecrating our lives to God. We have to start the process of yielding of our will, then surrendering our will, to the will of God. This will not be easy, it will be a struggle between the old creature and the new developing creature; but we must submit to God's will before we can be renewed. We have to make a conscious decision whether or not we will be set free from the bondage of sin, and share in the glorious liberty of the sons of God; offered by our Heavenly Father, and so allow his will to work in us.

Consecration means not only doing the will of God, but it also includes separation in all the fullness of the word. Separation in the Scriptures is twofold: firstly, separation from whatever is contrary to the mind of God, and secondly, set apart unto God, as revealed in 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18: "...we are the temple of the living God...Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. (NAS) As followers of Christ we have not only to be aware of the truths contained in God's Word but also to be faithful in applying them in our own experience. Our personality has to be permeated by our comprehension of God's character. We have to be careful to heed the instruction of God's Word to be " a good servant of Christ Jesus, {constantly} nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine"...1 Tim 4:6 and "holding forth the Word of life." (Phil 2:16) We not only have to hear the word, we have to be nourished by it and we have to expound it to others

Our Service should therefore be;

Not with eye service That is, not with service rendered only under the eye of the master, or when his eye is fixed on us but this service should be preformed regardless of whether the master is present or not. As followers of Christ we are bound to perform our duty with as much fidelity as though the eye of the employer was always upon us, remembering that though the eye of man may be turned away, that of our Heavenly Father never is.

Not as men-pleasers: Vines expands on this thought to mean "not simply one who is pleasing to men... but one who endeavors to please men and not God" We have to remember that man looks on the outside but God looks at the heart, He looks not only on our actions but also the spirit that we have in our heart

Doing the will of God from the heart:

To be able to do the will of God from the heart we must be fully acquainted and in harmony with our Heavenly Father's will. Complete harmony with our Heavenly Father's law can only be secured by entire harmony with the perfect law of love—supreme love to God and love to the neighbor as to one's self. This law is the full expression of God's will and purpose concerning us. His will is to be our happiness and peace and joy, and is essential to our fitness to live forever in the possession of his favors. The proper attitude, therefore, of every loyal child of God is not only that of submission to the fullest extent of ability, but also of grateful and joyful harmony with it, and delight in obedience to it and in reflection of His will.

This law of love, has as its foundation, justice, the only law which seeks the highest good of and for its subjects, and it is the only law which will ultimately be permitted to rule anywhere in God's kingdom. Now, however, the case is different: Satan is permitted to interfere in the affairs of this world, and for a time the world is permitted to take its own course unhindered by divine intervention, within the bounds of God's plan of the Ages. And in the midst of this state of affairs are the Lord's children, growing and developing.. They find themselves under human laws sometimes approximating the perfect law of God, and sometimes opposed to God's law.

What should we do about these laws when they fall short of the perfect law of God? —Do we resist or do we submit to them? To resist all such laws would place one's self in maybe violent and fruitless opposition to the whole present order of things, and we must remember that even this present order of things is ordained of God as we are told in Rom 13:1 "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God". (NAS) Our Heavenly Father decreed that the time of Gentile rule should continue until the appointed time for Christ to reign in righteousness. Consequently the children of God are counseled to be subject to the powers that be, because the powers that be, although imperfect, are ordained of God to continue for a time. Therefore His will for his children is rather that we suffer injustice than to spend our strength and time in a fruitless effort to interrupt the present order of things.

While this is the case for the Church in its relationship to the world, this should not be the case between Church members. In the Church every member should be a careful student of the perfect law of love, and his/her society should be, so far as possible, a model example of this glorious law. No member of the body of Christ should lord it over another; for, "All ye are brethren, and one is your master, even Christ." (Matt 23.8) Of necessity the present order of things often

places one member of the body of Christ in a measure of subjection to another member of the same body. Examples of this could be in the relationship of master and servant, of parent and child, of husband and wife; however in all these relationships the graces of the spirit of love should be foremost in our minds. Our daily walk and conversation in all the little things of life, should be aimed at letting our "light shine before men", as the Lord commanded.--Matt. 5:16.

The Apostle Paul counsels those in authority to remember that they have a Master in heaven, and that there is no respect of person with him; that he regards no distinctions of Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, because we are all one in Christ. He counsels us to be generous in our dealings, saying, "Give unto your servants that which is just and equal, refrain from threatening", remembering they are children of God. Eph. 6:9; Gal. 3:28; Col. 4:1. Paul has a special message for those of us that have believing masters. In 1 Tim 6:2 we are told - "And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved". With singleness of heart we should render our service as unto the Lord, not as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart, knowing that it will be accepted of the Lord and rewarded by Him.

Formation of Character

There is no disgrace in service, however humble the task may be. Service rendered in the proper spirit is always dignified and noble; and recognition of such service on the part of the master is also a beautiful example of the spirit of Christ., Service however humble is part of the formation of our character to be like our Master, Christ. The supreme example set by our Lord was in the last hours of his human life when at the last supper we are told in John 13:12-17 "And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His

garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (NAS)

Let us endeavor to have more and more of the mind, the Spirit of God -- to have His Word abide in us richly (John 15:7; Col. 3:16) --- to have and to keep His commandments, that the abiding presence of the Father and the Son may be with us; and that, realizing that the Christ-character and life are definitely being formed in us, the hope of glory may be ours; for our Lord said, Matt 7:21 "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (KJV) How careful then should we be in seeking both to know and to do the will of God? Many indeed will come forth with the plea of their wonderful works, hoping to be admitted into the Kingdom, but only those will be recognized who have done the will of the Lord, and who have no theories or works of their own whereof to boast.

Paul continues on in the chapter giving more insight into the reason for his lesson for all Brethren as we read in Eph 6:7-10 'With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. And, masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him **"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might."** (NAS) (RC4/04)

MY LORD AND I

I have a friend so precious, so very dear to me,
He loves me with such tender love, He loves so faithfully.
I could not live apart from Him; I love to feel Him nigh,
And so we dwell together - my Lord and I.

He knows how much I love Him, He knows I love Him well,
But with what love He loveth me my tongue can never tell.
It is an everlasting love, an ever-rich supply,
And so we love each other - my Lord and I

Sometimes I'm faint and weary, He knows that I am weak,
And so He bids me lean on Him, His help to quickly seek.
He leads me in the path of light beneath a heavenly sky,
And so we walk together - my Lord and I.

“THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS”

The Old Testament records the messages of four “major” prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, and of the twelve “minor” prophets, the last of whom was Malachi. These prophets were not philosophers; they did not indulge in abstract discussions about God. They were sent by God. And were ‘spokespersons of God’ delivering messages to the people. They acted as a conscience of both the people and their rulers. The messages they gave were often predictive. In each message there was usually an urgent call to change or redirect the quality or nature of the civil behaviour or practice of the people or the king. In most cases the messages were to make them return to God and His laws. Lofty promises were often included, giving a hope of a brighter future. Interesting to note is that God delivered His messages through specially selected individuals rather than the established priesthood. The priests were comfortable with the status quo created by the monarchs. They may even have helped in creating the acceptable status quo, but it was this that God wanted changed. Obviously the change preached by the prophets developed a resistance or reluctance by the priests to co-operate with the prophets. Many times prophets were persecuted or killed at the instigation of the priests, but prophets were highly respected by the people.

The message given, whether written or oral, is called a prophecy. One type of prophecy foretells a future event. For example, Daniel interpreted the vision of the four beasts; a future predicting extending governments that would create civilizations in the world long before they occurred. Prophecies can also involve morality if moral behaviour has been judged and condemned with disastrous punishment about to occur. Noah preached to the people about their immoral behaviour. This made Noah a prophet. He implored them to change and they had refused. The great flood was the consequence. Prophecies can be motivated = Jeremiah was the priest who went up to Jerusalem to seal the covenant with Nehemiah for the dedication of the rebuilding of the Temple. This was the beginning of the change and restoration from a laid waste condition. Prophecies can be Divine judgments - Elijah fought the Baal prophets and was responsible for the massacre on mount Carmel. Here God intervened. Then in turn, Elijah was persecuted and forced to flee and hide. Because prophecies are messages from God, the prophets become intermediaries between God and His people. Messages were given to nations, rulers, tribes, families and individuals. Unfortunately the messages were often in the form of a judgment rebuking wicked ways. Prophecies can be literal, figurative, poetic, symbolic, or typical, depending on the time and period of the message and through whom it was directed.

The office of the prophet was not through the general

priestly descent, although many were from the tribe of Levi. None of the prophets were developed through formal education and training. Prophets were selected by God to deliver and to announce a message to an intended recipient. In Elisha’s case, his appointment as a prophet came through his predecessor, Elijah. From the Biblical records we know many prophets were appointed, often within the same time period. This did not mean that God spoke to them continuously, rather God’s spirit came upon them to reveal the message and steer them to take up the mission to its completion. Seldom were they steered to take on several missions. This steering by God’s spirit was strong; strong enough to create a condition of mind to deliver the message even under the threat of persecution or death.

God used several methods of inspiring and steering the prophets. For one, He used verbal communication through the angels. It was an angel that spoke to Moses in a burning bush to commission Moses to deliver the Hebrews from captivity in Egypt. For another, God used dreams to the prophet or to another person while they slept, and the prophet was given the meaning to interpret the dream. There was a dream of the pharaoh where he saw seven starving and lean cows, and seven well-fed cows grazing in the meadows. A second dream by the same pharaoh saw seven thin ears of grain and seven fat and full ears. The spirit of God steered Joseph to the meaning of the dream, who conveyed it to the pharaoh. In still another method, God used visions to prophets for rulers. Daniel had a vision in a dream of four great beasts that came up from the sea. In the dream, Daniel enquired what these beasts meant and one who stood by in the dream explained that they are the four kings who shall arise out of the earth. Finally, on occasion God used music to give the Divine communication.

The prophets in the Old Testament of the Bible in the Judean stage saw their role and duty to preserve the moral and spiritual values of the people they lived with, whether free or in captivity. They also related the message to the coming biblical civilization which gave them hope. Sometimes they sought to console the people for the predicament they were in. An example is the vision of Ezekiel during the captivity period in Babylon. The vision of the dry bones of Ezekiel was to give the Jews a bright future for those in captivity. Like dry bones which became covered with skin and flesh, Israel exiles would rise up again to restoration and rebirth. When we look at it the first human spokesman for God was obviously Adam, who initially conveyed God’s instructions to his wife, Eve, and to that extent fulfilled the role of a prophet. The first faithful human prophet mentioned was Enoch and the last of these Hebrew prophets was Malachi, previous to John the Baptist, the fore-runner of our Lord. (ZC:1/04)

“JESUS HIMSELF DREW NEAR”

One of the fascinating stories of Jesus in the New Testament is that of the two rather bewildered friends of His who were trudging along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, on the third day after His crucifixion and later after they were joined by the unrecognized stranger. A record of all that was said on that occasion would be indeed a rich one but we may be able to piece together in our minds what some of these things were.



The distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus, according to Luke was 60 stadia, about 7 miles or 11 kilometres. The present location of Emmaus is uncertain, as far as records go, but the distance given would take 2 hours or so at a steady walking pace. We might conjecture that the return journey later in the evening may have been quicker, any tiredness being forgotten in their anxiety to report their experience to the eleven in Jerusalem. Mark in his gospel alludes to this appearance of our Lord after His resurrection but it is left to Luke to provide details.

The full account is in Luke 24, verses 13 to 35, concluding with the return of the two to Jerusalem to tell the eleven and others with them. The timing of this account is the first day of the week, i.e. the day of Jesus' resurrection, and these two friends, as they must have been, like the other disciples and friends of Jesus were still shocked, bewildered, by the events of recent days. How they had come to love Him, what great hopes He had planted in their hearts! Now all appeared lost, their hopes were dashed. We are told the name of one of the two walkers (Cleopas) but the other remains unidentified. Their conversation centred, not surprisingly, on the sad events of the past days. Luke says they talked together and "reasoned", that is, they sought to fathom why things had turned out as they had.

At this point, Luke records the lovely words of the text - "Jesus Himself drew near"! As yet, of course, in the story. He was still the unknown stranger but we note that it was at the time of their deepest need that He joined the two disconsolate friends. Is there a lesson, a reassurance here for us as the Lord's people? Perhaps like the two, we also may not immediately recognize His presence and His aid in our time of need, though later we realize how He has safely

guarded and protected us. How short our memories can be!

We recall how often Israel needed to be reminded of all Jehovah's care and Psalm 78 for example rehearses all His manifold mercies to them. Our blessings and keepings would no doubt also make a goodly list if we stopped to count them.

The stranger evidently kept silent at first, but finally He asked them "What manner of communication are these you have one to another, as you walk, and are sad?" Our Lord knows the feelings and desires of our hearts, as He did of these two, long before we come to Him but He waits for us to see our need, to own up to it, and then if we can to articulate it. At such times, the simplest prayer, even the prayer of desperation and what faith remains, can be eloquent. Two such prayers are recorded in the New Testament - "God be merciful to me a sinner", and "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief."

In the case of the two walkers, the Lord still unknown to them was drawing them out. How strange, they thought, that He does not know what all Jerusalem is all agog about and they asked Him whether He was a complete stranger and unaware of all the things that had been happening over recent days. Our Lord still wanted to draw them out further and asked - "What things?" So this time they recounted to Him how much they had come to appreciate the character and power of this Jesus of Nazareth in whom they had developed such high hopes - a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. Further, they said, we trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel.

Their words would indicate some familiarity with the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, as we would expect. In this they were not alone, for Luke tells us elsewhere that at the time of Jesus' birth "the people were in expectation, and mused in their hearts whether he (John) were the Christ (Messiah) or not."

The two friends were likely among these expectant ones, so we can imagine their disappointment after finding that He whom they thought was the promised One had been put to death ending all their hopes, or so they thought. But it was now the third day since these events and they had received strange reports that this Jesus of Nazareth was alive and the tomb had been found empty.

What were they to think? Who or what could console them? As yet, they knew not that "Jesus Himself had

drawn near", but now the stranger began to gently chide them for slowness of belief. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" How we would love to have the full text of what Luke has embraced in the one verse (27) "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets. He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." The reference to Moses would include all the five books of the Pentateuch.

Would our Lord have started with the very first hint of God's redemptive purposes centred in the "seed of the woman" (Gen 3:15)? Would He have opened up to them the significance of the offering up of Isaac by his loving faithful father, an account no doubt well known to them and fulfilled in the Lord's own words in John 3:16? Would He have gone on to show how the various offerings and sacrifices of the Law Covenant foreshadowed Messiah, the perfect Lamb of God?

Would the wonderful words of Isaiah 53 have been opened up for these two friends, or the prophetic words of the Psalmist? There is so much more in the Old Testament not only of His first advent but also of His second and the setting up of His kingdom of righteousness and restitution though His focus would no doubt be on the more immediate events and the call to discipleship. Would He have reminded them of His own loving words in the pre-crucifixion discourses recorded by John?

Though we do not have our Lord's words from what must have been a wonderful and intimate discourse, we are blessed particularly at this end of the age to have the inspired apostles and evangelists' words and records to illuminate both the Old and New Testament scriptures, and the Holy Spirit to guide our understanding.

On arrival at Emmaus, the two pressed Jesus to stay and sup with them and here they recognized Him when He took bread and blessed it as was His custom. "Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him and He vanished from their sight. "And they said one to another. Did not our hearts bum within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures." When we first came to an understanding of the love of God and later of the call to discipleship, did our hearts "burn within us"!

Does His word still touch our hearts? Some portions, particularly words of our Lord, including His parables, still move us each time we read them and again realize the breadth and length and height of the love of God and the wideness of His mercy in Christ Jesus.

In recent times we have heard much of the requirements of the Christian walk, that is the Christian way of daily life. But how important is the company we keep. The 'Master promised all His followers - "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age."

These are often thought of in group terms, and correctly so, but like so many of His promises, they may be taken personally and individually, for He is the Friend indeed, the good companion of each and every one of the lonely or the troubled. The promise still stands - "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you. (James 4:8) and for us is fulfilled in Christ. Especially in time of trouble, in times of perplexity or loneliness, let us remember these of His promises and that inherent in the account of the two walkers to Emmaus. "Jesus Himself drew near" is the experience and testimony of so many of the Lord's people; it can and will be ours also as we trust Him.

SO VERY NEAR

"JESUS Himself drew near," I saw Him not--
Because my eyes were dim, my heart was sad,
When He through faith revealed Himself to me.
My heart o'erflowed with love, it made me glad.

"Jesus Himself drew near," just at the time--
I needed most His presence and His aid;
He came to strengthen me, my soul to cheer;
He came to tell me not to be afraid.

"Jesus Himself drew near"; He came Himself--
To heal my broken heart, my sin-sick soul,
I heard Him say, "Come unto Me, find rest,
For I have heal'd thee, cleans'd thee, made thee whole."

"Jesus Himself drew near," when sorrow came;
He brought such love, and sympathy divine,
The trial seemed to lose its keenest sting,
Into the wound He pour'd His "oil and wine."

"Jesus Himself drew near"; so very near,
So close, that He is always within call;
Dear Lord abide, on earth my portion be,
In Heaven my Everlasting "All in all."

BSH 184

IN BRIEF

LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

When one enrolls in a school of secular learning, he or she is required to study, and a Bible Student must do the same. We all need to become good "Bereans" (Acts 17:11). Our entry and work in the "school of Christ" may be seen in Romans 12:1-3. Verse 1 is our enrolment, verse 2 shows how we must apply ourselves – not allowing distracting influences to affect us. Verse 3 emphasises the need of humility, teachableness; we must not think we know more than our teacher.

We must keep our minds set on the lessons before us, anxious to know what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God for us. We must learn to make mistakes "stepping stones" to better things; some instructors have expressed the belief that for a student to make a mistake and be corrected is the best way of having the point impressed. Some one has said, Peter did not become the great man of God he was through sterling character, but through denial of his Master. Not until anyone has failed once can he or she learn true humility.

We all have to see ourselves for what we really are before we can become good scholars in the school of Christ. We may think of John Mark who deserted Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey. To his credit he still continued in the Christian way, but when Paul and Barnabas were ready again to begin a missionary journey, and Mark wanted to go, Paul did not trust him and refused his service. It was left to Barnabas to give Mark another chance to prove himself. Some 15 years later when Paul was about to finish his earthly course he sent for Mark stating that he considered him profitable for carrying on his ministry.

It is a nice story to encourage us to continue on when we make a mistake, as well as to show the value of giving one who has failed another chance. In this day of rush and bustle we need to "study to be quiet". Glittering TV's, blaring radios, and rowdy behaviour are no accompaniment for the Bible Student. A mature Christian is never rowdy; the more of the Holy Spirit that flows in, the quieter the demeanour. The more mature a Christian grows, the more restful his ministry. We have a wise Instructor, and He is very patient. He does not look for too much too soon, but He corrects judiciously.

In music, the better trained the ear, the quicker discordant notes are detected. As we progress in the School of Christ, we will learn the things the Lord loves, and detect the things He hates. Remember our training – "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." We will never reach perfection in the flesh, but nothing less than perfection will ever satisfy us. That is why so often we "groan within ourselves" waiting for the full redemption of our body in the resurrection. (Rom 8:23)

OUR MOMENTS AND OUR DAYS

God bestows many blessings on all mankind; the five senses - touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing are wonderful provisions. We have also been given something else that is vitally important - the element of time. It does not register on any of the senses; we cannot feel, taste, touch, see or hear it, but it is something that blesses us if we use it wisely, and acts against us if we waste it. It is good, like the Psalmist, to ask God to teach us to number our days wisely, to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

The mad rush of our days, with the desire to get rich quick, and nearly everyone trying to do more than one thing at a time, is very nerve-racking, with the result that we have numbers of people in hospitals and institutions with mental disorders. In the home, there can be the problem of some listening to radio or watching TV, and trying to hold conversation at the same time; certainly nothing is gained in this way. Solomon told us that there is a time for everything; timing our speaking is important, there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

Christians should seek to REDEEM time for the important ministry in God's service; some interests can be sacrificed so that we may serve Him better. We must continue to recognize the obligations to wives, husbands, children, etc, for they that do not provide for their own households are "worse than infidels"; but some of OUR OWN earthly comforts and pleasures should be given up for more important things. Today it seems hard to get enough time, and Christians need to learn to apply their hearts unto wisdom. But in whatever way we redeem time, it must be OUR OWN, we are not to deprive others of their just right to our time.

Paul in his day wrote that "the time is short" - today time is really short, so "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation... ..I will pay my vows unto the Lord NOW". Procrastination is the thief of time; yesterday will never return, so let us do it TODAY, let us look ahead and plan so that we do not waste our time.

**Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone--
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.**

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While it is our intension that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord's Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported

LOVE IS ...THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

1 Corinthians Chapter 13 is one of the most widely read chapters in the Bible. It has been read at marriage ceremonies (including the marriage ceremony of at least one member of the British royal family), child dedication services, baptism services, and funerals.

Even when taken in isolation the words are lovely and comforting and most appropriate for each of the ceremonies listed above. However their meaning is enhanced when considered in the overall context of Paul's letter.

It is apparent that the church at Corinth had written to Paul asking for guidance regarding four issues - Chapter 7:1 reads "*Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me ...*". The four issues were:

- marriage (Chapter 7)
- "*Now as touching things offered unto idols ...*" (Chapter 8:1).
- "*Now concerning spiritual (gifts) ...*" (Chapter 12:1)
- "*Now concerning the collection for the saints...*" (Chapter 16:1)

This overview of Paul's letter shows that Chapter 13 is part of Paul's reply regarding the role of spiritual gifts. The fact that his exposition occupies four chapters of our Bible indicates that a correct understanding of the role of the gifts was very important in the early church.

The miracles that were performed in early times were very influential. We read of Jesus "*...when he was in Jerusalem ... many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did*". (John 2:23)

Likewise on the day of Pentecost - "*And they ... began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven ... and (they) were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language...and they were all amazed and marvelled*". (Acts 2 : 4 - 7)

The healing of a man who had been lame from birth was equally spectacular - to see him immediately receive strength such that he was able to "*leap and walk and praise God*" filled the people "*with wonder and amazement*" (Acts 3 : 1 - 11). Later the people "*...gave heed unto the things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did, ...*". (Acts 8:5 - 7).

Notwithstanding the power and spectacle of the gifts that enabled the apostles to perform miracles, Paul declares that he would show unto them "*a more excellent way*" (Chap. 12:31) which is the development of love.

How excellent then must be the quality of love!

The fact that the development of love is "*more*

excellent" than the miraculous gifts does not mean that the gifts were not necessary. On the contrary, the gifts were essential to establish the church, especially amongst the "*Gentiles*" (1 Cor. 12:2). As he also explained to the Ephesians. "*And he gave some apostles, and some prophets ...some evangelists and some... pastors and teachers, For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ*". (Eph. 4 : 11 - 12). Not all of these roles required spectacular and publicly visible gifts, but nevertheless they required "special talents" that were equivalent to gifts - "*For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?*" (1Cor. 4:7)

Coveting the best gifts

In the King James Version, 1 Cor 12 : 31 reads "*but covet earnestly the best gifts and yet I show unto you a more excellent way*". As written, this verse exhorts the brethren to "*covet earnestly the best gifts*", the inference being that some gifts were better than others ("best" being the Greek "kreitton" which Dr Strong says means "stronger, that is figuratively better, ..."). However this exhortation is inconsistent with Paul's explanation in verses 23 - 25 where he says that "*those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour ...*". The lesson in those verses is that all members are necessary and are to be given the same honour.

The Diaglott translates verse 31 "*but you earnestly desire the more eminent gifts; and yet a much more excellent way I point out to you*". That translation is harmonious with verses 23 - 25, and shows that the quality of love that Paul is about to expound in the next chapter is superior to all miraculous gifts. The New International Version contains a footnote that supports the Diaglott translation. While the translations give different inflections, the overall message of verse 31 is clear - there is "*a more excellent way*" than the gifts and Chapter 13 goes on to describe that more excellent way.

A more excellent way

It is also profitable to reflect on why the apostle calls it "*a more excellent way*". Strong's Concordance confirms that these English words accurately convey the meaning of the Greek; a 'way' (path or road) that is superior to all others.

A path or road is a means of going somewhere; in the figurative sense we use the expression today to refer to "achieving an objective" - that objective was the ministry of the Gospel and the edifying of the body of Christ. The gifts were powerful and many were spectacular, but the apostle tells the Corinthians that the development and manifestation of the fruit of love is an even more powerful means of achieving that objective.

God willing, subsequent articles will examine each of the qualities of this "*more excellent way*".



“A BROKEN AND A CONTRITE HEART?”

Psalm 51

David led a very eventful life, and Psalm 51 has to do with one of the more important events in his life and lessons that he learned. Prosperity did not work to King David’s personal advantage. After years of phenomenal success under the Lord’s blessing, his kingdom was mighty and his name was honourable and renowned. The necessity for him to personally participate in wars was past and his heart had begun to gravitate toward earthly pleasures, and he was less zealous for the Lord and the Law than he was at first. David fell into very grievous sin, which appears even worse when contrasted with the high moral character he showed earlier in his life when he was ‘a man after God’s own heart’. The story of his sins is told in scripture and is most straightforward. 2 Samuel 11 describes how he became captivated by Bathsheba’s beauty and he committed adultery with her. In order to shield himself he caused her husband, Uriah, to be placed at the front of the battle that he might be killed by the enemy, which also involved the loss of several other lives as well.

David’s Sin

There is not the slightest effort to condone David’s wrongdoing. No excuses are offered in connection with the account. The full weight of these awful crimes is laid directly on David’s head. If any excuse could be offered it would be from our fallen sinful human perspective. One such excuse might be that the kings of that time exercised total authority and it was commonly accepted among the people that the king could do no wrong; that whatever he pleased to do was proper to him because of his high position as the head and ruler of that nation. Now we can in no way agree with such a thought, but we can nevertheless reasonably suppose that such a generally accepted sentiment would have had some influence on David’s thinking. For two years after these crimes were committed David sought to stifle his conscience and to consider that he had only used kingly liberties in what he had done. Nevertheless, his conscience pricked him and he felt alienation from God and a condemnation under His Law such as he would not have felt if he had been a man of lesser

character. God was not hasty in reproofing him either. He allowed him to have a full taste of this heart bitterness, allowed him to feel the darkness of soul and the absence of joy resulting from the cloud that had come between him and his Lord.

It was at the appropriate time after David had passed through a secret anguish of the soul that the Lord sent him a reproof through Nathan, the prophet, to bring the whole matter clearly before his mind. Nathan, under the figure of a parable, stirred up David’s sympathies and his declaration of a severe judgment – the death sentence even - against the offender. Then the prophet brought home to him the lesson, saying You are the man. It was now constantly in his thoughts. The memory of his guilt followed him. It pressed on him, it haunted him. And no wonder! The only ground for wonder is that it did not occur to him before Nathan made that solemn appeal to him or that he could have been for a moment unconscious of the greatness of his crimes. This whole scenario, however, shows that people may be guilty of enormous sins and for a long time have no sense of their criminality, but when the consciousness of guilt is realised nothing will calm it down. Everything reminds the soul of it, nothing will drive away its recollection. In such a state the sinner has no refuge, no hope of permanent peace except in the mercy of God.

We must remember that David did not belong to the spiritual house of sons and hence had a far less clear

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view of such matters than that which belong to those begotten of the spirit and taught of God. We are not therefore to expect to draw exactly the same lesson for ourselves. Rather we of the spiritual house under a clear understanding of the divine will are to remember the higher interpretations of adultery and murder set forth in the New Testament - that whoever desires adultery and is merely restrained from it by outward circumstances or fears is really an adulterer at heart, as we read in Matthew 5:28. Also he that is angry with his brother, who hates his brother, is a murderer because the spirit of anger is that which, uncontrolled, would lead to murder (Matt.5:22). And that the person who covets the things of another and is merely restrained from taking them for lack of opportunity or fear of consequence is a thief at heart.

If these principles are applied by the new creation in their examination of their hearts, it is entirely probable that some of the household of faith today will find themselves very near the pain of King David as respect sin. So, viewing the matter in this light, they will exercise proportionately greater compassion in their judgment of David. Such, too, will find great consolation in the Lord's compassion provided they are exercised in respect of their own offences as was David concerning his. 'But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared' is the prophet's expression in Psalm 130:4. If God were lacking in compassion as many of our fellow humans are there would be nothing to hope for under such circumstances. It is when we realise that there is forgiveness with the Lord for all who are penitent in heart, for all who show evidence that their sins are not willful but rather from the weakness of heredity and under the pressure of temptations that we are moved to repentance by the hope of better things.

David's Contrition

Psalm 51 is generally recognised as being the one in which David expresses to God contrition for his sins, and the fact that it is dedicated to the chief musician/implies that it was the King's intention that it in common with other songs should be sung in the Tabernacle services. We can thus understand that if the sin itself was flagrant and gross the atonement which David endeavoured to make was a very public one. Probably many in the nation had felt some of the King's condemnation and its influence must have been very detrimental. Now in his public view of it as sin and his prayer for divine forgiveness, the King would undo as far as possible not only the injury which he had inflicted upon his own conscience which hung as a cloud between the Lord and him, but also he would undo the evil influences as respect the conscience of the nation on the subjects of adultery and murder. Here again we see why David was described as a man after God's own heart. His sins were not pleasing to God, quite the opposite. But the belated appreciation of the

enormity of his sins, the hearty repentance, and the desire to be cleansed from every evil way were pleasing to the Lord.

Here we have an illustration of how all things may work together to those who love God. By reason of his heart loyalty to the Lord and the principles of righteousness, even these terrible sins resulted in bringing a great blessing to David, humbling him, giving him an appreciation of his weakness and of his need to abide close to the Lord. This allowed him to continue to have the Lord's fellowship and compassion and be safe from the temptations of his fallen flesh. And so it is with the new creation. How many of them have realised profitable lessons and blessings out of some of their stumblings? Not that the stumblings were good nor of the Lord, but the Lord was able to overrule such circumstances for the good of those who are of the proper mind, rightly exercised by them to repentance.

The **first three verses** of the Psalm express David's appreciation of his sin and his trust in the Lord without any attempt to apologise for his shortcomings. He trusted the Lord to make whatever allowances could be made and merely appealed to His great loving-kindness. In calling to mind the multitude of God's tender mercies in the past, he expressed faith and trust that in some way the Lord could blot out these grievous transgressions and forgive them. The Lord had not yet clearly defined the way in which He could be just and yet be the justifier of sins. Only vaguely through the shadows of the Day of Atonement sacrifices had He intimated that He had some way of His own by which in due time the guilty but repentant ones might be cleansed. David grasped the thought of mercy as understood in the types and shadows of the Law. Much more may we of the house of sons grasp the thought of our Father's forgiveness when we see that it is exercised towards us by the Lord Jesus Christ. By Jesus Christ who has already given Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time and whose sacrifices have been accepted by the Father. This acceptance was evidenced by our Lord's resurrection from the dead and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. If therefore David could trust the Lord for His loving-kindness and tender mercy and forgiveness of sins, the members of the household of faith should be able to exercise full faith in the divine character and the plan of salvation from sin.

The **fourth verse** would appear to ignore the fact that the wrongdoing had been done to fellow humans, but we may prefer to understand it to mean that while this wrong was against his fellow man, David recognised a still higher responsibility to God whose Laws he had broken and whose kingly office he had dishonoured. Hence the contrast between what man might think of his crime against man, in his still higher consciousness of sins against the Lord the latter seemed so much

greater as to practically obscure the former. The greater sin against the Almighty quite overshadows the wrong to humanity. David declares his recognition of the fact that God is the great Judge and whatever His judgment would be he knew in advance that it would be right.

In the **fifth verse** he introduces an extenuating thought as though reminding the Lord that he was born in sin and therefore perfection was not possible for him. But he does not use this fact as a screen behind which to hide his own responsibilities. Though born a sinner, David had freewill and so was responsible for yielding as he did to temptation, but he was confident that the Lord would give him the benefit of every mitigating circumstance. It will be noted that David expected punishment from the Lord for his sins and was here expressing his confidence that the Lord would send no punishment which would not be reasonable and within the limits of justice. What he was praying for in this Psalm was not a remission from proper punishment but rather for the cleansing of his heart in the sight of the Lord and for his restoration to the divine favour. As a matter of fact, we find that the Lord did send a severe punishment upon the King and that He restored the sinner to His favour, granting him to experience the joys of His salvation. In comparison with other kings of his time David had taken an extremely moderate course in sin in that he had not directly taken the life of Uriah but merely arranged his certain death in battle. But David appreciated the fact that God was looking deeper than this and desired truth, righteousness in the inward parts, in his heart. Outward crime and a crime allowed in the mind are both sins in God's sight.

His experience had taught David wisdom and now he wished to be thoroughly cleansed and prophetically says, 'Purify me with hyssop that I may be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow' as we read in **verse 7**. Hyssop was used in the sprinkling of the unclean under the Law. David, grasping to some extent the significance of the symbol, desired the anti-typical cleansing of his heart. His appreciation of the Lord's thoroughness in dealing with sin and His compassion for forgiveness are good lessons. The members of the household of faith, having seen with the eye of faith the great atonement for sins made by our Lord Jesus Christ, are able to appreciate the fact that the application of the merit of His sacrifice is quite sufficient to cleanse us from all sin and perfect us that we may be recognised as absolutely pure in the Father's sight and dealt with accordingly; not as sinners but as sons. From the statement of **verse 8** we may reasonably infer that during the year that preceded his repentance King David was in so miserable a state of mind that even the music and the singers and musicians had no joy in them to comfort his heart when he was barred from the Lord's presence and fellowship.

David was longing for the joy and gladness he had

experienced in times past, and figuratively he likens himself to one whose bones had been broken. He knew that his joy and comfort would return if he could again have God's favour. He knew, too, that the Lord could not look upon sin with any allowance, hence his prayer: 'Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities or unrighteousness.'⁹ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.'¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your holy spirit from me.'¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with Thy willing spirit.' No true Christian can read these words without feeling a deep sympathy for the different expressions. As new creatures in Christ Jesus we have had no experience with such terrible sins as those that weighed upon the heart of David. Nevertheless our higher responsibilities and higher conceptions of sin under the new commandment and under the instructions of the Holy Spirit as sons of God cause us to feel with proportionate weight transgressions which in the sight of the world would appear as nothing, such as covetousness, hatred and slander, which are thefts and murders from the higher standpoint of the divine view appropriate to the new creation.

In **verse 13** the prophet proposes to the Lord that his disgrace be used for instruction to others to show transgressors the Lord's way and to turn sinners from the evil of their course. How appropriate is this thought to us. Not until we know experimentally through faith in the blood of Christ that our sins have been put out of the Father's sight, not until we have experienced the joys of His salvation and forgiveness are we in any condition to be servants to the truth or examples to others. Thus we see that it is only those who have been begotten of the Holy Spirit who are anointed to preach the gospel. To others the Lord says, 'What right have you to tell of my statutes and to take my covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline and you cast my words behind you, refusing to submit to divine requirements.' (Psalm 50:16,17).

The **14th verse** repeats the same thought in a slightly different form. If the Lord would deliver him from his guilt in connection with his sins, his tongue shall thereafter sing loudly of the Lord's righteousness, not his own. That is the song that all the blood-washed may sing. 'True and righteous are all thy ways, Lord God Almighty. Thou hast redeemed us from amongst men'. None of us has any right to sing of our own righteousness for, as the Apostle declares in Romans 3:10, 'There is none righteous, No, not one.' The mission of the cleansed ones is to accept and use the Lord's mercy towards them, extol His righteousness, accept their unworthiness, and to call upon others to recognise this fountain of righteousness and forgiveness.

'O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare

Your praise' we read in verse 15. This expression implies that none need to expect to have the proper opening of their mouths to show forth the Lord's praises and give call to His marvellous light unless the Lord has first opened their lips with His mercy and truth. Otherwise how could any expect to tell of the tidings of great joy which shall be to all people? This equally implies that all who have had forgiveness of sins should be in the condition of spirit to make a full consecration of their all to the Lord, and then all should expect an unsealing of their lips that the message of God's truth and grace may flow from them for the instruction and blessings of others. As it is written, 'Grace is poured upon my lips' (Psalm 45:2) and 'He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.' (Psalm 40:3). Although these are appropriate especially to our dear Redeemer, they are appropriate also to every member of the church, which is His body. All claiming to be of the body who have never had their lips unsealed to confess the Lord to the extent of their opportunity have reason to question everything pertaining to their relationship to the Lord.

In **verses 16 and 17** David shows that he had acquired a deep insight into the meaning of some of the typical sacrifices. Probably by inspiration, he wrote more wisely than he understood. As seen in our study of the typical sacrifices, only the Day of Atonement sacrifices are sin offerings. The burnt offerings and the peace offerings of the remainder of the year represent consecration to the Lord and to his service. Grasping this thought prophetically to whatever extent he also grasped it intellectually, David expressed his realization that the Lord is pleased rather with a broken and contrite condition of heart than with burnt offerings, which were but types. Also we learn that nothing that we can give the Lord, even our acceptance in Christ, has any value in His sight until first of all we have given to Him ourselves, our hearts and our wills. Let us always remember that the Lord never despises and will never reject the broken and contrite heart. Therefore in any difficulty the Lord's people of the new creation may stumble into, if they find themselves hungering for the Lord's fellowship and forgiveness, if they find their hearts contrite and broken, they should not despair but remember that God has made provision through the merit of Christ which enables Him to accept and justify freely all who come unto Him through Jesus, and through faith in His blood.

There is a sin unto death, a sin unto second death from which there will be no recovery and no resurrection, but those who have broken and contrite hearts on account of their sins may know that they have not committed the sin unto death, for their condition of heart proves this. As the Apostle declares, 'it is impossible to renew them again to repentance' If anyone has committed the sin unto death, they are willful sinners against full light and knowledge. Let all

therefore rejoice in the grace of our God, who is able through Christ to accept His way to save unto the utmost all that come to Him, laying aside sin and its desires. If anyone of the church stumble into sin through weakness and temptation, not intentionally, 'we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous', as we read in 1 John 2:1. Such therefore may come with faith to the throne of heavenly grace that they may obtain mercy and find help in every future time of need. (Heb.4:16). But, like David, their fears and hopes should be for restoration of divine favour and not for escape from chastisement needful for their correction. God forgave David but He also chastised him, as we read in 2 Samuel 12:11-14.

A Lesson in Mercy

Surely David must have learned a great lesson in mercy from this sad experience. How many times must he have called to mind his response to Nathan's parable - 'As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the land fourfold because he did this thing and had no compassion.' (Samuel 12:5,6). Poor David! His words show that he had a mind and heart that was no stranger to justice and pity in other men's affairs and hence that he was all the more guilty in his much more serious violations of justice and compassion. 'Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves' Paul wrote in Romans 14:22 - who is not condemned by his own declaration in respect to the affairs of others. O how merciful to the failings of others it should make us as we remember our dear Redeemer's words, 'But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.' (Matt.6:15). And when we remember that we may not even pray for forgiveness of our sins unless we from our heart forgive them who have injured us and again desire our fellowship.

This has been a rather fleeting glance at Psalm 51 and we have really only scratched the surface. There is a point we might think a bit more about, and it is this - whenever we stumble (in a figurative sense) God is always there with His outstretched hand to help us up again. But He has given us a free will, so it is up to us to reach out to Him and grasp on to His hand and with faith be lifted back up. Of course, to do this we must first recognise that we have sinned - acknowledge it to ourselves and then acknowledge it to our Father. We must go to Him on bended knee with a truly broken and truly contrite heart. We must have full faith in His justice and His mercy. We must come to Him with full faith in our hearts and remember that God has made that provision through the merit of Christ, which enables Him to accept and justify quite freely from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ and through the faith in His blood. The final condition is our last verse in Matthew 6:15, for how can we be deserving of our Father's forgiveness if we cannot or will not forgive others. (DO 12/04)

“WHAT IS GOD’S WILL FOR MAN IN THE CHRISTIAN ERA”

Previously we refreshed our minds regarding two aspects of God’s will for man - the fact that God created man to have dominion over the earth and also that man would experience the consequences of disobedience. To quickly recap, I would like to read a few verses in Romans 8 from verse 20: “For the creation was made subject to vanity” and that immediately takes us back to the verses we had in Ecclesiastes where Solomon concluded that ‘all is vanity’. So, ‘the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope’. That is God’s will for man. He had a reason for subjecting us to vanity. Verse 21 ‘Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.’ And don’t we know that! Observation tells us that man has lost the dominion that was enjoyed by Adam. Verse 23: ‘And not only they but we ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.’

This second part is titled What is God’s Will for man in the Christian Era, because it addresses the calling out of the church and the grafting in of the Gentiles. Both of these aspects of God’s will for man only apply during what is commonly called the Christian Era.

The Christian Era began in a spectacular way. In Luke 2:8-10 we read: ‘Now there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.’ A momentous experience! ‘And the angel said unto them, “Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people”’. But just as man today has lost the dominion that Adam enjoyed in the Garden of Eden, so also it is evident today that these good tidings of great joy have not yet come to all people. As we read in Romans 8, ‘the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now’. So how do we harmonize these Scriptures? Good tidings of great joy have not yet come. Why the delay? Has the promise of the angels failed? The secret, of course, is that God is calling out the church. We would now like to explore some verses to refresh our minds, first of all about the fact that God is calling out the church, and secondly when He decided to call out the church.

THE CALL OF THE CHURCH

In 1 Corinthians 1 we read (verses 23 and 24): ‘We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness, But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.’ There are two points in those two verses that are very important. Firstly that there are two classes. To one class Christ is insignificant. The class comprises both Jews and Greeks, (unto one He was a stumbling block and unto the other foolishness). To the other class He was the power and wisdom of God. This class comprises those who are

called, again both Jews and Gentiles. So straight away we see that God is not dealing equitably with all of mankind at the present moment. The second point to note from those verses is that He says ‘**unto them that are called**’, so it is the calling of God that enables some to recognise Christ as the ‘power of God’.

What does it really mean to be called and what are the qualifications of those who are called? In 1 Corinthians 1:26 we see the qualifications of those who are called. ‘For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.’ And doesn’t natural observation confirm to us the truth of that verse? ‘Not many wise’, but some. By and large the people whom God has called are not in the higher echelons of the learned. ‘Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty’, but some. Not many people of the Lord are in places of high authority. ‘Not many noble are called’, not many kings and queens, but as we read in verse 27, ‘God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.’ We see here a very important point emphasized by the Apostle Paul – God hath chosen! It is God’s doing, as it says in Ephesians ‘By grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast.’ So we see that God is exercising His will and His purpose amongst mankind. Reading on from 1 Cor.1:28: ‘And base things of the world and things that are despised hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not , to bring to naught the things that are,²⁹That no flesh should glory in His presence.’ And there, of course, is a good lesson for us. We aren’t to boast of our knowledge, even our knowledge of the Scriptures. No person, whether they be Jew, whether they be Greek, whether they be called or uncalled, is to boast. And so we see that at the present time God is exercising His right of choice.

Now we need to establish **when** God made the decision to call out His church. Was it added after the event? In other words, the angels gave the message that there would be great joy to **all** people, which hasn’t eventuated so far. Has God taken some rearguard action and called out His church to recover the situation, or was it God’s decision from day one that He would be calling out His church? So let us now consider **when** the decision was made.

In 1 Corinthians 2:7 we read the words: ‘But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom that God ordained before the world unto our glory.’ Now there are some words there that I think are very important – ‘we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery’. Firstly we see that it is a mystery – ‘not many mighty, not many noble’, not many of high estate. If it were God’s will to convert the world today, wouldn’t you think He would choose just those types of people, the ones with power, influence and intellect? But God hasn’t done that. It’s a mystery that He has chosen the base ones, the lowly ones, and therefore this high calling has gone unnoticed by those who are of some stature politically. In verse 7 we see that this was ‘ordained before

the world unto our glory'. This word 'ordained' is worth taking note of. In the Greek, Strong's 4209, it means to pre-determine. So God pre-determined to have this mystery. 'But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom that God ordained before the world...' Also the little word 'before' is worth taking note of. It was pre-determined before the world. The Greek for 'before' is 'pro', a preposition.

I now want to note three other places where this preposition 'before' is used in the Scriptures. There are plenty of other scriptures but I have picked just these three for the sake of time. I do that because it's easy to say, He decided this **at** the foundation (or slightly after the foundation) of the world, but the Scriptures are specific about the meaning of this word '**before**'.

In Matthew 5:12 we have another case where the word 'pro' is used: 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were **before** you.' This is the same preposition, pro. They persecuted the prophets before the ones Jesus was talking to. The word 'before' there certainly means before them in time; the prophets were before Jesus' Advent, and they were persecuted.

In Matthew 6:8 there is another instance of the use of the word 'pro': 'Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of **before** ye ask Him.' Now what is the purpose of that Scripture? If it said, He knows what things you have need of **when** you ask Him, there would not be anything special about God's knowledge of us. Of course He would know then, but no, He knows **before** we ask Him.

The last occurrence we will consider today is in Matthew 24:38: 'For as in the days that were **before** the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage....' In the days **before** the flood. I therefore suggest that this little preposition, pro, meaning 'before', is a very important word, and it certainly means before in terms of time. So when we see in 1 Cor.2:7 that these things were ordained before the world, it means that they were actually pre-determined before, in terms of time. It was God's will from before day one!

Returning to 1 Corinthians 2:7, and the words 'Before the world unto our glory'. 'World' there is the word 'aion' meaning 'age'. In other words, this hidden wisdom was pre-determined before the ages. Reading on - ⁸Which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But as it is written: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. ¹⁰But God hath revealed them unto us by His spirit, for the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.' As we saw earlier these things are not revealed to the worldly wise, but they are revealed unto us in the Christian era by His spirit.

PAUL'S OTHER LETTERS

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul confirms that God determined, at the beginning, to call out His church. In Ephesians 1 he says: ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Je-

sus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, ⁴According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.' What a powerful verse this is - According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world! The Greek word "before" again is 'pro'. He pre-determined this before the foundation of the world. Just what is 'the foundation of the world'? The Greek for "foundation" there is 'katabole' which means 'foundation or conception, to lay the very foundation' so this will of God to choose us was pre-determined before the foundations of the world were laid. The Greek here for 'world' is 'cosmos' so it means 'before the orderly arrangement'.

What a tremendously powerful statement that is because initially we read in Genesis that the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And what did God do? God then started to modify and order the earth so that man could live upon the face of the earth. God pre-determined, right back there before He laid the foundations of the orderly arrangement, to call out the church. Ephesians 1 again: ⁸Wherein He hath abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of His will.' He has made known unto us, not the high and mighty, not those of great estate, but ⁹He hath made known unto us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.' Could we have a clearer statement that it is God's will? ¹⁰That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him.' And so we see an additional truth that we are not the only ones who are going to benefit from God's great mercy, but in the fullness of time He will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth. So we see that while He is now dealing with the called out class, calling out a special people, eventually His benevolence is going to extend to everyone.

Paul confirmed the same message to Timothy, and we will just take a few moments now to refresh our minds about Paul's exhortation to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1: ²To Timothy, my dearly beloved son...' Wouldn't we love to get a letter like that from Paul? 'Grace mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.' What a lovely introduction to a letter! In verse 8 he says: 'Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but be thou a partaker of Him according to the power of God. ⁹Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.' 'Before' is the same Greek preposition, pro. And 'the world' there is Strong's 166 'aionios' and Strong gives the primary meaning of that as being 'perpetual'. So before the beginning of time, God pre-determined to call out this holy group of people according to His own purpose and grace, called out with the holy calling. Reading on - verse 10: 'But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' All of which is also summed up in Romans 16:25 'Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ,

according to the revelation of the mystery (and aren't we privileged to have that revelation?) which was kept secret since the world began.' How powerful are the next words of the Apostle (verse 26) that it 'has now been made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith. ²⁷To God only wise be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen'

GRAFTING IN OF THE GENTILES'

Let us focus on those last few words for a moment - 'Now made manifest by the scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the everlasting God made known to all nations.' 'Made known to all nations'. What is now happening in God's plan? What is God's will now? As previously mentioned in Part 1, the fourth aspect of God's will for man is the grafting in of the Gentiles. This also was a decision taken right back in the beginning of time. Let's look at a few scriptures. Galatians 3: 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you.? Before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been set forth crucified among you. ²This only would I learn of you: Received ye the spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?... ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham saying, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Combining Romans 16:26 and Galatians 3:8 we have two expressions - 'Now made known to all nations', and 'the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith'. 'Foreseeing' - the Greek word *proheiden*, preposition 'pro' meaning before, 'heiden' to see. So God saw beforehand; that is He predetermined it, this was His will. 'Foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham saying, "In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed."' Let us think about that for a moment. In Old Testament times God dealt with the nation of Israel; they were His chosen people, the rest of the world was the heathen as we shall see in a moment. But when did Israel come into existence? The nation of Israel did not exist in Abraham's day because the line was Abraham to Isaac, then Isaac to Jacob, and Jacob was the one whose name was changed to Israel. So the nation of Israel as such did not exist in Abraham's day and yet the Scriptures say that God preached the gospel unto Abraham saying 'In thee shall all nations be blessed'. So God had predetermined to bless all nations before the nation of Israel even existed!

As mentioned above, the heathen are the Gentiles. We read in Galatians 3:14, 'that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.' We see three things here. Firstly, when combined with Galatians 3:8, the heathen are identified as the Gentiles. Secondly it is confirmed that God foresaw, that is that He pre-determined, that He would justify the heathen, the Gentiles. Thirdly we see that He had predetermined that He would do that through faith. God preached the gospel unto Abraham well before Israel came into existence. So before there were Israelites and Gentiles, God "told" Abraham that He would justify the heathen, the Gentiles, that 'The blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.' In Galatians 3:16 we read - 'Now to Abraham and his seed

were the promises made. He saith not "and to seeds" as of many but as of one, "And to thy seed" which is Christ.' There are two important points here. 'Abraham and his seed', his progeny. God made this promise before Abraham's descendants even existed; it was a pre-determined decision on God's part before the promises were made. What is a promise? A promise is a pledge or a statement made in advance before the event occurs. And so to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, and 'he saith not as of many but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ.' And we have in Galatians 3:29 - 'And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.'

We now move along to see that just as man lost the dominion that he had in the Garden of Eden, so also the exclusive right that was Israel's in Old Testament times was lost. Israel lost its exclusive right and the Gentiles were grafted in. Let us read Romans 9: ¹I say the truth in Christ and lie not, my conscience also bearing witness in the Holy Spirit, ²That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.' Yes, the Apostle Paul had great sorrow in his heart for his kinsmen. He would be prepared to give up the privilege he had if his kinsmen would come and take hold of it. ⁴Who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption (they were adopted by God, they were His chosen people), the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God and the promises...⁷Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children, but: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." ⁸That is, they who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; (they were the children of the flesh, but that did not make them the children of God) but the children of the promise are counted for the seed... ¹⁰And not only this, but when Rebecca had conceived by one, even our father Isaac ¹¹(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth).' Let us ponder that verse for a moment. Two points are confirmed here.

Firstly the children of the flesh were not the children of God, but the children of the promise were counted for the seed - as stated in Galatians 3:29: 'And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.'

Secondly Romans 9:10 and 11 is a very clear statement that God had pre-determined this well before the nation of Israel even came into existence. Rebecca, 'when she had conceived by our father Isaac', had twins but before they were even born and therefore had done neither any good nor evil, that is, one did not suffer disfavour because he had done things which were evil and the other experience favour because he had done things which were good. This was before they were even born and therefore they did not have a chance to do either good or evil so that the purpose of God according to **election** might stand. In other words, it was God's prerogative as to whom He would promote and whom He would demote.

Reading on in Romans 9:12: 'It was said to her, "The elder shall serve the younger."' ¹³As it is written, "Jacob have I

loved, but Esau have I hated.” Esau, of course, was the elder; maybe only marginally, but he was the elder, the firstborn, and yet God chose to bless Jacob and not to bless Esau in the same way. ²³And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared for glory, ²⁴Even us whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.’ Do we see the picture, that the elder serves the younger? Just as Esau was to serve Jacob, so those fleshly Israelites whom God has not called will “serve” (be in a subordinate position) to the Gentiles whom He has called.

We read in Ephesians 2: ¹¹Wherefore remember that ye being in times past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called the uncircumcision by those who are the circumcision in the flesh made by hands, ¹²that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.’ We have this great privilege now of being of the seed class, pre-determined by God away back there before Israel even existed, and we have been grafted in to be part of the commonwealth of Israel, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and the promised seed. In Ephesians 3 we read: ¹For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles, ²if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God given from me to youward, ³how by revelation He made known to me the mystery, as I wrote in a few words. ⁴Whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of God ⁵which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his

holy apostles and prophets by the spirit.’ “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men”. It wasn’t made known to them but that doesn’t mean to say it didn’t exist. God had this wondrous plan right back from before the foundation of the world. ⁶that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of the same promise in Christ Jesus by the gospel. ⁷Wherefore I was made a minister according to the gift of grace given unto me by the effectual working of His power. ⁸Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God who created all things by Jesus Christ;’

To make **all** men see, not just Israel but also the Gentiles, what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God. All those prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which we see and did not see them but God, who created all things through Jesus Christ, has given them to us by His spirit.

Does not Colossians 1 summarize God’s great will for mankind in the Christian era? Col.1: ²⁶The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations but is now made manifest to His saints (**the mystery hid for ages and from generations is now made manifest to His saints**) ²⁷**to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**’ May we all strive to make our calling and election sure. (GS:4/04)

“THE PROPHET HOSEA”

Brief History / Time of writing

The Book of Hosea is not often looked at in depth but the content is of great value and worthy of study. During the time of Hosea Israel was divided into two nations with Judah in the south and the rest of Israel in the north. Hosea was a prophet chiefly to Israel in the Northern Kingdom when that nation was prospering outwardly, but inwardly it was decaying. Hosea is the undisputed author of the Book of Hosea. He identifies himself in the book as the son of Beeri. His name means Salvation and is basically the same as Joshua and its Greek form, Jesus. Aside from his stressful marriage, little is known of the life of the prophet Hosea. His place of birth is not given but his familiarity with and concern for the Northern Kingdom indicates that he lived in Israel and not Judah. He was the husband of Gomer, and his wife had two sons and a daughter.

Living up to his name, Hosea prophesied concerning the salvation of Jehovah, which will come when Christ returns to set up His kingdom. Commentators say that the literary features in Hosea’s book mean that he was probably a member of the upper class. The tone and the content of the book also show that he was a man of deep compassion, strong loyalty and keen awareness of the political events taking place in the world at that time. As a prophet he was also deeply committed to

God and God’s will as it was being revealed to Israel. Hosea was a contemporary of Amos. They both ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel at the same time. Isaiah and Micah ministered in the Southern Kingdom in Judah. Amos was a native of the Southern Kingdom while Hosea was a native of the Northern Kingdom. Hosea was younger than Amos and because their ministries overlapped there is much similarity in the sins that they condemned. In Amos the prophetic discourses are very pronounced while in Hosea, because of his intense personal involvement, they are not distinctly defined from one another. Hosea was the first of the prophets that foretold the destruction of Israel. His ministry pre-dates those of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel by about 150 years.

Hosea dates his prophecy in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. This informs us that Hosea had an extensive ministry of more than half a century, probably from 790BC to 725BC, and he probably ceased his active ministry about five years before Assyria carried the Northern Kingdom into captivity in 722BC. Hosea prophesied during the final years of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which was a time of rapid moral decline. Worship of false gods was mixed with the worship of the One

True God. Ritualism rather than righteousness was the order of the day as even the priests had lost sight of the real meaning of worship. King Jeroboam II was the instigator of many of these idolatrous policies. He brought these policies in during his 40 year reign. He also had a very stable kingdom so part of his rule was good, probably due to God's blessing. This stability came to an end when he died.

The Message of Hosea

The book of Hosea contains 14 chapters. In Chapters 1 to 3, after a brief introduction of himself as God's prophet, Hosea tells of his unusual family situation. God appeared to Hosea and told him in chapter 1, Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry. The reason for this unusual request was to demonstrate that God's covenant children, the nation of Israel, had been unfaithful to God because of their worship of false gods. Hosea did as the Lord commanded. He took a woman named Gomer. The first three chapters of the book report a stormy relationship as husband and wife. Soon after their marriage Gomer bore three children. Hosea gave them symbolic names, Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, to show that God was about to give His judgment upon the nation of Israel because the people had fallen into worship of false gods. Just as the nation rejected God, Gomer eventually left Hosea and the children to a life of prostitution. But Hosea's love for his wife refused to die. He searched until he found her at the slave market, then he brought her back and restored her as his wife. This was quite a few years later after being married. This tender picture clearly shows that God has not given up on Israel, although the people have played the harlot also many times by returning to their pagan worship and enslavement to sin.

The second major division of Hosea's book, chapters 4-14, contains the prophet's message of judgment against the nations of Israel and Judah. The Northern Kingdom of Israel, Hosea's homeland, is singled out for a strong rebuke because of its gross sin and immorality, but the book ends on a positive note. In tender language, the prophet reminds the nation of God's undying love. So let us now dissect some of the details in the book of Hosea as they pertain to Israel, beginning with what seems to us a very strange instruction of God to the prophet, already referred to. "The Lord said to Hosea, Go take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery and departing from the Lord. So he married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim; and she conceived and bore him a son.' Few events in the Bible have been debated as strongly as Hosea's marriage but its purpose in God's dealings through the prophet are made clear.

The book of Hosea is a story of one-sided love and faithfulness that represents the relationship between Israel and God. As Gomer is married to Hosea, so Israel is betrothed to God. Both relationships gradually dis-

tegrate. Gomer runs after other men and Israel runs after other gods. Israel's spiritual idolatry is illustrated by Gomer's physical adultery. Hosea's message reflects a terrible fascination of Israel with Baal idol worship. Baal means 'husband' or 'lord' and his worship involved fertility rites that include ritual prostitution. Baal was the other lover to whom the unfaithful Israel often turned. All commentators seem to agree that Hosea's own experiences in life in some degree picture the Lord's experiences with Israel. Following the Lord's direction, Hosea took back his wife, reclaimed her, and his message to Israel was of God's continuing love for that people.

Gomer's Children

Let us now look at Gomer's children. We do not say Hosea's children, and there is a reason for that. The first is a son named Jezreel, and Jezreel means 'God sowed' or 'God scattered' like scattering seeds to make something grow. Hosea tells of the fall of the royal family by naming his son this way. Jezreel was the name of one of the royal cities of the kings of Israel. It was a beautiful city situated in a pleasant valley and it is with illusion to that city and its king that this child is called Jezreel. So we read in Hosea 1:4,5: 'Then the Lord said to Hosea, Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel.' So we see here a clear prediction of the end of the ten tribes and their ruler. Hosea tells of God's abandonment of the whole nation in the name of his second child. This was a daughter. The first was a son and the second a daughter, and this shows that both sons and daughters of Israel had been corrupted in their ways. Her name was Lo-ruhamah, which means 'not pitied' or 'not beloved' or 'not having obtained mercy'. Our Bible Students' Commentary adds that the meaning is 'she never knew a father's love', that she was an orphan not because of the death of her father but because of the sin of her mother. So in other words, Hosea didn't claim to be the father of this child. We read in Hosea 1:6,7 - 'Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, Call her Lo-ruhamah for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah and I will save them, not by the bow, sword or battle, or by horses or horsemen, but by the Lord their God.'

We read here of the doom of the house of Israel - 'I will no longer show love to the house of Israel'. It intimates that God had shown them great mercy but they had abused His favours and forfeited them and now He would show them no more favours. Next we read in Hosea 1:8,9 - 'After she had weaned Lo-ruhamah Gomer had another son. Then the Lord said, Call him Lo-ammi; for you are not my people and I am not your god.' The meaning of the third child's name is 'not my

people' or 'no kin of mine'. Here we can see that this child is disowned by Hosea in the same way that God was going to disown Israel. Lo-ammi's name indicates to the Israel of that day that they were not Jehovah's people and Jehovah was not their god. So we can see that God rejected the ten tribes of Israel, but Judah still had a part in God's plan. So we can see that this was the main theme of Hosea's message. His unhappy family experience was an object lesson of the sin or harlotry of the nation of Israel in rejecting the One True God and serving pagan gods. Although the people deserved to be rejected because they had turned their backs on God, Hosea emphasized that God would continue to love them and use them as His special people. There are quite a few other details worthy of study in these prophetic utterances of Hosea, how they pertain to Israel, but time does not permit developing that at this time.

Lessons for Christians

Hosea 6:1,2 says: 'Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will heal up our wounds. After two days He will revive us, and on the third day He will restore us that we will live in His presence.' What a wonderful promise we find in these verses! We see the Plan of the Ages in front of us as we read verse 2: two thousand years of revival through the pages of the Gospel and then a restoration of all of mankind to life; all who ever lived will be resurrected. The Plan of God marches on. Hosea 6:6 – 'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice; and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.' Jesus used these words in Matt.12:7. He did so in connection with the question of observance of the Sabbath. Jesus' message was full of hope as contrasted to the Law Covenant which was impossible for any man to keep. Hosea 6:7 mentions that 'like Adam, they have broken the covenant, they have been unfaithful to Me'. This was a little aside and it is interesting to us to show that Adam was under an implied covenant with God, as Hosea said.

Hosea 9:10 – 'When I found Israel it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree'. How often we use the fig tree in connection with prophecies concerning Israel. We can see the fig tree beginning to put forth its leaves and fruit. By this we know that summer is near and that our redemption draweth nigh. Hosea 11:1- 'When Israel was a child I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son.' Nothing about the context had ever let anybody think to apply this to Israel. It seemed to apply to Israel as an infant nation coming out of Egypt, but once our attention is called to it we can see the name Israel, meaning prevailer, applies well to Jesus. And not only so but the coming of Israel out of literal Egypt and the coming of Jesus out of literal Egypt are types of the coming of the entire Israel, the church, out of that anti-

type of Egypt, the world. What beautiful pictures! Hosea 13:14 – 'I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? I will have no compassion'.

In God's Plan there is a time for everything. God sent forth His Son. In due time He paid the price of man's redemption, and when the appointed hour comes round He will claim His purchased property. 'Marvel not at this, the hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done ill unto the resurrection of judgment.' (John 5:28,29). And another beautiful prophesy from Hosea: 'I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called not my loved one; I will say to those called not-my-people you **are** my people, and they will say, You are my God.' We read about this same verse in Romans 9:25,26 where the Apostle Paul quotes it, and after that he says in Chapter 10: 'For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile; the same Lord is Lord of all, and richly blesses all who call on Him.' Hosea 2:18- 'In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beast of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground; bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land so that all may lie down in safety.' This time of peace is just in front of us. We still see wars and weapons of war, but soon this will change. The sword will be beaten into the ploughshare, and as we read in Isaiah 11:6-9 – 'The wolf will lie with the lamb, the cow will feed with the bear, the infant will play near the hole of the cobra; they will neither harm nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.'

So, in summary, we are not to lose the force of this lesson by applying it wholly to the nation of Israel. It is also a warning to those in spiritual Israel who profess to be Christians but who do not heed the warnings of Jesus and who love the things of this earth. James 4:4 says: 'You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God. Any one who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.' Also, to the Laodicean church we read in Rev.3:17 – 'You say, I am rich, I have acquired wealth and I don't need a thing; but you do not realise you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.' We see that the warnings given to Israel, then, are just as applicable to the spiritual Israel of today. In his unquestioning obedience to God, Hosea demonstrated he was a prophet who had followed his Lord's will no matter what the cost. He was a sensitive, compassionate spokesman for righteousness whose own life echoed the message that God is Love. May God help us to be equally as faithful in following the footsteps of our Lord Jesus. (DW 12/04)

IN BRIEF

“THE HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT” (Eph 2:22, 1 Cor 3:9)

The two text passages indicate that there is a similarity between an earthly building and the Church. “*Ye are God’s building.*” (1 Cor 3:9); a building is a dwelling place, generally speaking it is a home. God speaks of dwelling in His people. We are the household of God’ we are growing into a holy temple unto the Lord through the Spirit’s power.

We know well the story of the two men, one building on a rock and the other on sand. The building that Paul speaks about in the text has a foundation that is very concrete – a sure foundation, the only foundation that any could lay down to build upon a habitation for God. None will be confounded who are built thereon. Various structures, however, may be built upon this foundation (1 Cor 3:9-13) but the day will declare the desirable ones. Christ is indeed a tried foundation; He shrank not from the hard experiences; He endured all to enable an imprisoned race to go out to freedom.

For nearly 2000 years many have been building on this foundation; has it proved a crumbling one? No, all other ground has and still is proving sinking sand! The one true foundation alone provides unflinching trust for time and eternity.

There is a contrast between Solomon’s temple and that which is being built for God now, though it was indeed a picture. In Solomon’s temple, only the best materials were to be used; where would the material then be found for the real temple of God? It might seem to us that faithful angels might first be considered, but such was not God’s plan. He sought more humble material – those “quarried” from sin. “*I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*” – not many noble ones, but crooked sticks and crumbling stones, cut from the ranks of the base things of this world.

From these God has chosen, that no flesh should glory in His presence. “*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.*” (Rom 11:33) In a building there are often more small places rather than large, perhaps more weak than strong. There are few pillars in comparison with all other parts of the building; God gave some apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, etc., but just as necessary are the lesser members. We praise God for the pillars which He has used, but we praise Him too for the lesser members. The names of the apostles stand out, as also the names of many others whom God has used down through the age in an outstanding way.

But many obscure persons has He used for His building.

What ministry have such obscure ones rendered; how many travellers have they assisted? All are equally dear and precious. Though the material for God’s building seems initially so poor, its qualities are vastly improved in the quarry; indeed it is changed into the same image of Him who provides the foundation. Its lasting qualities are superb, even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

None will be able in the future to point out one “stone” that has not been perfected by the Master’s chisel – from the least to the greatest, all is wrought only through the blood of Christ; upon this Rock only will God build His Church. How thankful are we that God is willing in His people to build a habitation for Himself through the Spirit. (NM 74)

*Lord. I am thine, entirely Thine,
Purchased and saved by blood of Thine;
Thee, my dear Master, now I call,
And consecrate to Thee my all.*

THE LAND VERY FAR OFF

“Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.” (Isa 33:17)

This is a very rich verse; while originally referring to natural Israel, it has just as true a message for spiritual Israel. The true home for the Christian is still visionary, it often seems very far off, but our CITIZENSHIP is there and we groan, as it were, waiting for the HOME God has appointed for us. (2 Cor 5:1,2) Jesus Himself spoke loving words concerning this home to his disciples (and us) as He was about to leave them – “I go to prepare a place for you.”(John 14:1-3)

All who have the hope of reaching this land very far off, must see the King in His BEAUTY even now; this beauty will be accentuated when we reach that land. We are thankful that we have found Jesus our King, our Saviour, and that we can behold His beauty even here and now, though unseen and unappreciated as yet by mankind in general. How often we think upon the beauty of our King who reveals so many beautiful things to us. Some day, present unbelievers will come to see something of His beauty also, they will come to love His beauty and receive of the wonderful things God has in store for them.

“But Oh the joy when I shall wake
Within the palace of the King!
And I shall see Him face to face
And tell the story – Saved by grace!
(FJC)

LOVE IS ...GREATER THAN LANGUAGE

And so it was that *“the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.... And the Lord said ‘Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; ... Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So ... the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth....”* (Genesis 11 : 1 - 8)

Those verses tell us not only how the different languages originated, but also of the power of language. God could have used other influences (for example, family affiliations) to cause the people to scatter, but He used language. That God’s purpose was achieved by confounding their language is clearly evident. Indeed, in some parts of the world, the people in different regions speak different languages, even though they live in the same country.

It was not until approximately four thousand years later that the miraculous gift to speak and interpret different languages was given to the apostles at Pentecost. It is no wonder then that the *“Jews ... out of every nation under heaven ... were amazed and marvelled ... when they heard them speak in his own language ...”* (Acts 2 : 5 - 7)

Of all the gifts, the gift to speak in other languages was perhaps the most keenly sought (coveted) by the Corinthians, and so Paul devotes what in our Bible is the whole of 1 Cor. 14 to it. None of the other gifts receives such extensive consideration.

The power of language

Oratory is very persuasive. In Jude 16 we read: *“These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage”*. These “great swelling words” were not words from other languages, but the words of the common language. We can imagine how much greater would have been their admiration if they had spoken in more than one language, and hence how appealing to the Corinthians would have been the gift of ‘tongues’.

The record in Jude does not mean that all oratory is “great swelling words”. Acts 18:24-28 says that Apollos was *“an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures ... for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ”*. Apollos was a powerful preacher. However, while his eloquence convinced the Jews publicly, his knowledge was incomplete, such that Aquila and Priscilla *“took him aside and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly”* (verse 26). So eloquence in itself does not mean spiritual maturity.

On the other hand, at times God has used those who were less fluent to achieve His purposes. Moses was aware of his *“uncircumcised lips”* (Exodus 6:12) and felt inadequate to confront Pharaoh. So God used Aaron as Moses’ mouthpiece (Exodus 7:1-2). Nevertheless it is Moses who is regarded as Israel’s deliverer (Acts 7:20, 35-37). The fact that Moses had *“uncircumcised lips”* did not mean that God did not use him to accomplish His purpose.

Paul also did not claim to be an orator - *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God”* (1Cor 2:1). Nor was he regarded by others as an accomplished orator - *“For his letters say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible”* (that is, despised, set at nought - Strong #1848). (2 Cor. 10:10)

Love essential

Although Paul did not claim to have *“excellency of speech”* (oratory), God gave him the gift of speaking in other languages: *“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all”*. (1 Cor. 14:18) However on its own this gift was vain. In 1 Cor. 13:1 Paul tells the Corinthians that *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (love) I am become as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal”*. It was essential for Paul to develop love in order to fulfil his apostleship.

Further, the word *“though”* in 1 Cor. 13:1 is from the Greek *“ean”*, (Strong #1437) and in the majority of occurrences is translated “if”. So Paul is not boasting that he had the gift of languages, but that **if** he spoke in other languages and did not have love he would be as *“sounding brass and tinkling cymbal”*.

The tongue of an angel

As well as possessing the gift of languages, Paul also says that he was able to speak *“with the tongue of an angel”*. Paul was initially received by the Galatians *“as an angel of God”*. (Gal. 4:14) Perhaps his statement in 1 Cor. 13:1 that he could speak *“as an angel”* was an additional way of reminding the Corinthians that, although he was God’s messenger to them, the development of love was superior to even that office (Romans 11:13).

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While it is our intension that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord’s Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used,