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MEMORIAL REFLECTIONS

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

Firstly, what is the Memorial?

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

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

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

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

Secondly, why partake of the Memorial?

The reason for participating is straightforward. Our Lord

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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In praise of my Redeemer

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

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

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

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

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRAISE AND WORSHIP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FAITH THAT ENABLES

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

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

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

BELIEVING FAITH

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

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

'Faith that believes facts unseen' includes beliefs like:

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

ENABLING FAITH

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOD'S INDWELLING

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

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

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

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

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

THE RESURRECTION

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

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

nium of the resurrection until forever.

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

BLESSED ASSURANCE

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

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

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

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

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



A COVENANT BY SACRIFICE

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

(Psalm 30:5)

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

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

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

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

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

OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS

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

OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS

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

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

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

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

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

SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS

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

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

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

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

ANNUAL SACRIFICES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LIVING SACRIFICES

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

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

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

COUNTING THE COST

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT-LOVE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Love as a fruit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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