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“A SAVIOUR – CHRIST THE LORD” (God’s Unspeakable Gift)

Christmas is a special time for exchange of gifts for many people. For the Lord’s people, it is more importantly a reminder of the greatest gift of all, God’s unspeakable gift of His beloved Son to be the Saviour of the world. So it is fitting at this season of the year, along with many around the world, to turn our hearts and thoughts once more to His coming into our world as the Babe of Bethlehem.

How beautifully that careful researcher, Luke, has recorded for us the events leading up to and including that time. In his gospel account, we read of Elizabeth and Zacharias, “righteous before God”, to whom was to be born John, the “prophet of the Highest” and the herald of our Saviour. Here we learn of the wonderful announcement of the angel to Mary, the one “highly favoured of the Lord”, and listen to her exultant song of praise to God. *“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God, and behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest”, and the Lord shall give unto Him the throne of His father David.* (Luke 1:30-32) Mary’s response follows in vv 46-55, beginning with the lovely words *“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour”.*

Following the account of His birth, Luke invites us out into the fields and with the shepherds we hear again the wondrous message, *“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, which is Christ the Lord”.* (Luke 2:10,11) What a message, announced to a few simple shepherds but of importance and ultimate blessing to all mankind. Later, Luke takes us with Mary and Joseph and the newborn child up to the temple with their simple offering and we hear the gracious words of the aged Simeon, *“Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel”.* (Luke 2:30-32) Here too we meet Anna, the prayerful, dutiful prophetess and hear her speak of Jesus and redemption in Jerusalem.

In such circumstances, our dear Saviour came into our world. This, of course, was only the humble beginning and we read of His early life that He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”, until at thirty

years of age, He began His ministry, that ministry which was to culminate in His death on the cross as the pure and spotless Lamb of God, and His triumphant resurrection. With the apostle Paul, we can see the wonderful outworking of the loving plan of God and wholeheartedly exclaim, “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!”

In every sense, the gift of His dear Son is God’s “unspeakable” gift and we find with the apostle Paul no language to convey an adequate description or evaluation of the worth of the gift and the richness of the blessings and benefits that have flowed to His people already and are still to flow out to them and all mankind. Nor can we comprehend fully the length and breadth and height and depth of the love which prompted our Heavenly Father to give His Son to be the Redeemer of the world. The word translated “unspeakable” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and one commentator says that “the idea is that no words can properly express the greatness of the gift thus bestowed on man. It is higher than the mind can conceive, higher than language can express”.

We can come to understand something of the cost to our Heavenly Father when we consider the incident recorded in Genesis 22, where God instructed Abraham to take and sacrifice his son, Isaac, “the child of promise” and “the son thou lovest”. Here, Abraham would be a type of God and Isaac would picture Christ, for *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”*. The remarkable faith of Abraham who was willing in obedience to God to give his own son as a sacrifice still however leaves us unable to comprehend fully the great love of God for His Son. It was a free gift, He was under no obligation to provide a Redeemer, other than the constraint of His own so great love.

Let us then at this season, meditate once more upon “God’s unspeakable gift” and in heartfelt gratitude and responsiveness review and renew our determination to follow ever more closely in the footsteps of His dear Son. Let us also look forward and pray for the coming of that day when the message to the shepherds so long ago will come fully into effect and the “good tidings of great joy” will reach and bless all mankind. Amen.

“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!”

SANCTIFICATION

In 1 Thess.4:3 the Apostle Paul says: '*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.*' The word 'sanctification' here is translated from the Greek word 'hagiasmos' and according to Young's Concordance it means 'separation, putting aside'. In Strong's the word is defined as 'purification, surety, holiness, sanctification'. The corresponding Hebrew word 'qadesh' reveals the identical thought and harmonises with Strong's definition that the very dominant idea of sanctification is separation from the secular and sinful world, setting ourselves apart for a sacred purpose or for divine purposes. By our covenant of consecration, we agree to devote ourselves to do the will of God, and as the truth becomes more meaningful to us and sinks into our minds and hearts through the Holy Spirit, we should be inclined to draw apart from this world and live more devoted lives.

There are really two parts to sanctification: the first is ours, the second belongs to God. '*Sanctify yourselves and I will sanctify you.*' We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we might prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. (Rom.12:2). We know from our Biblical studies that it was a great pleasure and joy for our Master to do His Father's will and so it should be for each one of us. Separation from sin carries the idea of purity and holiness. The setting of ourselves apart is done according to God's special purpose. The calling of the church, a little flock from this world, is accomplished with the intention that if we are associated with Christ and share in His sufferings, in His sacrificial death, then we share in His honour and His glory.

There is so much more to a Christian life than accepting Jesus. Peter says this in 2 Pet.1:5-11: '*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. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*' We know that God has been preparing a little flock to take

part in that wonderful future work of rehabilitating this human race, that it is the purpose of the actual sanctification of the members of the body of Christ.

CONSECRATION

There is a little difference between consecration and sanctification. Consecration is a precise act accomplished at a very specific time. It is a person's commitment to serve God without reservations and it is a total submission of our will, our all, all that we possess, to do God's service. We consecrated ourselves when we decided to serve God without limits. '*Behold, I come to do thy will, O God.*' There is nothing more important than a complete consecration to God. By comparison, sanctification is not accomplished in a single moment. It is a life-long process. It begins at consecration and continues with a constant struggle against the sin of this world, against the world, the flesh and the devil. It is a very gradual work, transforming our characters into the likeness of our Lord. It is a difficult task but how important it is for each one of us. It involves continual self-denial, plus humility, patience, perseverance, sufferings, faith, and love. And it will not end until our Heavenly Father says, That is enough, go higher now.

The Apostle Paul in 1 Cor.1:2 writes to the church that they are sanctified in Christ and called to be saints. The Apostle then shows that there are progressive steps in Christ. 1 Cor.1:30 reads: '*But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*' and it seems that the degree to which we are sanctified might indicate the degree of our reward. If we are partially sanctified, we only have a partial reward. If we are fully sanctified, we are inclined to have a full reward. The Scriptures abound with this thought. We think of the more than overcomers who end up becoming the little flock compared to the overcomers who will probably be in the great company. 2 John 8 reads: '*Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.*'

The Old Testament shows us how sanctification is accomplished in God's dealings back then with the Israelites. The eighth chapter of Leviticus shows the separation of the priests of Levi for the work of the priesthood under the provisions of Moses given by God's direction. In Lev.8: 9-13 we read: '*And he put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, even upon his forefront, did he put the golden plate, the holy crown; as the Lord commanded Moses. And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them. And he sprinkled thereof upon the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all his vessels, both the laver and his foot, to sanctify them. And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron's head, and anointed him, to sanctify him.*' Here we have a picture of God's royal priesthood figured in Aaron as a separate class, separated because of a particular function that God set into motion to sanctify and separate that priesthood.

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THE ANOINTING

Going to Lev.8:30 we read: '*And Moses took of the anointing oil, and of the blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon his sons' garments with him, and sanctified Aaron, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him.*' That anointing oil typified the Holy Spirit of adoption. Our Lord Jesus, the head of the anointed body, received the anointing at baptism. We, His followers, by our consecration, are anointed for a priestly service, a priestly service of sacrifice, now at the present time. We recall how our Lord left that early church with the instruction that they should tarry at Jerusalem for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We who have made a consecration have appropriated the merit of Jesus' blood, His ransom sacrifice, and we have received forgiveness for our sins. We have also received the Holy Spirit. This is part of the sanctification process for us. As Aaron and his sons way back there were separated from the children of Israel for service in the Tabernacle, so we are separated from the world for God's service.

Other Old Testament writings show how sanctification is accomplished in God's dealings with the Israelites. In Lev.20:7 we read: '*Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the Lord your God.*' Those Israelites had to sanctify themselves and be holy. However, in verse 8 it says: '*And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the Lord which sanctify you.*' From this verse we see that it was God who sanctified his typical people. We also find this thought in Ex.31:13 where God declares, talking to the Jews through Moses: '*Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.*' These verses indicate that there are two parts to the sanctification process - the one performed by the people of God, and the other performed by God Himself. The Israelites were to separate themselves from other nations to do God's commandments and to live a holy life. God sanctified them by first telling them to separate themselves from those other nations and then by keeping them well apart as His peculiar people. For this purpose God gave them, and them only, His laws and His commandments. In this way they were the only people on earth who had the privilege to know the only true and living God and to worship, praise and serve Him.

We see today a similar process in the work of sanctification as it applies during this Gospel Age. We are also invited to separate from the world that we may constitute the true people of God, the little flock, the body of Christ, and become new creatures with a heavenly destiny. The invitation given to us is well expressed in Rom.12:1 where it says: '*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.*' Also in Prov.23:26 we have those wonderful words of invitation: '*My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.*' We who have answered the call and who have consecrated ourselves to the Lord must be separate from the world and must continue to stay in God's way.

THE WILL OF GOD

Our opening text is important on this subject. '*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification*' (1 Thess.4:3). Here the Apostle writes concerning the will of God and our work. Paul has in mind the class to whom he addressed his letter, that they were justified in Christ. They had accepted God's high calling and come into the Beloved. He was not ignoring the principle of justification, but now he says, Brethren, having made this initial step, let me tell you what the will of God is concerning you. The objective of your life now is to be fully sanctified. When we consider this thought, we realise that it is a great work in ourselves, subduing, conquering, and ruling self, and it requires heart loyalty all through our course of consecration. The acceptance of us by the Father is really only the beginning of the sanctification work. It is His will that we should continue to work, should continue to progress throughout the full completion of the development of our character until we fully develop. And this work should affect our minds, our eyes, our ears, our tongues – all that we have - that they be fully used of the Lord. It is walking after the Spirit that leads to everlasting life with our great Redeemer.

The apostle goes on in 1Thess.4 to outline some of the things they should not do in relationship to their natural lives that would be contrary to the work of sanctification. He continues in verses 3,4: '*Abstain from fornication* (or 'immorality' as other translations suggest) *that each should learn to master his own body, that no-one is to wrong or defraud his brother.*' Being separated by the anointing oil and the blood that we have received, we become separated from the world, and Paul goes on in verse 7 to say: '*For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*' '*Be ye holy, for I am holy*' (1 Pet.1:16) Paul goes on in verse 8 to say (and this is how other translations put it): '*Therefore he that disregards this warning, disregards not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy spirit.*' In Eze.38:23 we find a statement that relates to holiness and sanctification together: '*I will magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord.*' Here God characterises Himself as being fully sanctified, fully set apart, and is to be made known to those to whom He would reveal Himself.

OBEDIENCE

Now we might consider a Scripture that is very important for our development. This is in 1 Peter 1:2: '*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*' Here our attention is drawn to the elect, the Beloved class, that are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The indwelling of God's spirit in our hearts is one essential function in this process of sanctification, but to have this indwelling of the Holy Spirit requires obedience. We recall that it was a lack of obedience that caused Adam and his posterity to forfeit life. Adam forfeited his life through disobedience. Here the Apostle shows us that through the process of sanctification we may come into relationship whereby we may be obedient to the Lord God and that it is conditional upon three things – full consecration of the believer, implicit obedience to the divine teaching, and full reliance on the pre-

cious blood of Christ. The blood of the sprinkling would refer to the merit of Christ which we must receive by faith in order to cover our blemishes, our condemnation from Adam.

We might picture ourselves as actors on a stage, a stage of life, since consecration. We have a very vast audience. Our light is viewed by the brethren, by friends, relatives, neighbours – they all see the light that we display to them. In our relationship to the Lord, do they see us as having separated ourselves from the world? Do they see us in the actions of our life? This is quite a sobering thought, to consider how our life looks to others, and even more so is the thought that our audience is not confined or limited to this earth. We have heavenly beings as our audience. Those angels might be viewing our lives on this stage of life and observing what kind of sanctification is taking place in us. Above them, we have the Heavenly Father Himself and our dear Lord. These thoughts are suggested by the last part of 1 Cor.4:9: *'For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.'*

We especially appreciate the wonderful words of our Master when He prayed to His Heavenly Father on behalf of His followers as recorded in that beautiful love chapter, John 17:13-19: *'And now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.'* As we view these verses it becomes clear that a good knowledge of truth is vital in the process of sanctification. We especially note the words of verse 17: *'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.'* Other translations say *'consecrate them in the truth'*, *'make them holy by the truth'*, *'thy message is true'*. The only way to possess the full harmony and union of the spirit is by possessing a knowledge of truth. It is the channel of sanctification. Careful study of God's word is necessary together with an honesty of heart that delights to know and to do God's will. God gives us His word, His counsel, His admonition, and as these enter into the heart and impress themselves upon us, we are energized to work out in ourselves the peaceable fruits of righteousness and holiness. The spirit applies to our very reason and the word of God is used as its agent.

THY WORD IS TRUTH

We have been called to be separate, and called to be sanctified. What separates us from the world and its many religions is doctrine, is the truth. The spirit coming from God enables us to understand the things that God has given to us. The Word of God lets us know the plan of God regarding mankind and the church. It reveals the very mind of God and we understand the character of God, His great attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power. It explains the meaning of Jesus' death on the Cross at Golgatha. It reveals special promises reserved for those who walk in the footsteps of Jesus and that wonderful future that is in store for all mankind. It contains all the exhortation, counsel, encouragement and vital knowledge that we need in order to

be faithful to God. We are amazed at how it enlightens us across a vast span of time with prophecy of the past, present and future of mankind.

In the troubled times of our present age, the understanding of present truth keeps us in a condition of peace of mind and trust while those all around us in the world become more afraid of the future. It stimulates our faith, our praise and worship of God and it encourages us to be more holy in our individual walks of consecration. We think of the great concern that our dear Lord had for the development of the church. In Revelation the Apostle John speaks of the seven stars held in the right hand of the one likened to the Son of man, held in that right hand to suggest the importance of those messages by the seven stars – light bearers of the messengers of the Son of man for the purpose of reforming of the work of sanctification. We can be thankful that we have been living during the time, I believe, of our Lord's return that has brought to us what we may call 'meat in due season'. It has had a powerful, sanctifying influence on the church at this end of the age. We contrast our present time with those of the church that lived during those dark ages. We now have much light of truth to enable us to be sanctified and also to be able to assist others in this world.

In 2 Thess.2:13 Paul writes: *'But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.'* We note two points here: sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. The divine spirit is the sanctifier and the truth is the instrument. If we are in love with the truth, then the process of sanctification is working in us. Satan seeks to sidetrack the truth, he tries to generate confusion. About 100 years after Paul wrote those words to the Thessalonians, we find from the account concerning the church in Ephesus in Rev.2:4, which says: *'thou has lost thy first love'*, the beauty of the truth which motivated those brethren at that time and the strength of the Apostle Paul were lost. We believe that it is over a hundred years since the return of our Lord and we have to guard against the same condition prevailing with us. We must see to it that the harvest message, the truth, is not set aside because it is the power of the truth, the divine plan, that satisfies the new creature.

LOVE OF THE TRUTH

We like those words found in John 4:23,24: *'But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.'* This means great reverence for the holy things, which is pleasing to God. It means a life in which, through the begetting of the spirit and the knowledge of the divine plan, the individual becomes so at one that it is the essence of his or her life to do the Father's will. Such delight to serve Him at the cost of their earthly interests. Those to whom God wishes to grant eternal life are those who will gladly obey His laws and, through a knowledge of the truth, it is essential that we worship Him in spirit and in truth. We must guard the truth and defend it because it is a sustaining spiritual food that

we vitally need to progress along this narrow way.

A statement made by Br. Russell is recorded in reference to John 4. He states: 'Worship in spirit and truth does not apply simply to prayer and praise, supplication and thanksgiving. It goes deeper than all these and takes hold upon the affections of the heart and signifies not an act of worship but rather a life of worship, a life in which, through the begetting of the spirit and a knowledge of the divine plan, the individual becomes so at one with God, so in union with the law of God and all the features of the plan of God that it is, in the words of our Lord, his meat and drink to do the Father's will. This is worship in spirit and in truth.'

When the Heavenly Father gave His summation of His son's life after three and a half years of His ministry, His sacrifice and His ascension, He seems to describe the most valuable objective His Son had reached with these words that are recorded in Psa.45 and repeated by Paul in Heb.1:9: '*Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*' It was the love of the truth, the love of righteousness, its principles, that motivated our Lord's life. It was also an abhorrence of error and evil, and unless our objectives are directed likewise, we simply will not be fully sanctified. By the Holy Spirit which works through the truth we have been begotten to a new nature, a spirit nature. We have become new creatures in Christ.

The Apostle Paul explains in 2 Cor.5:17: '*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.*' As new creatures, we are in Christ, and to be in Christ means to be a part of the body, the church, the little flock. We no longer have a head of our own, no longer have a will of our own, but we hold our Lord as head. We seek to do the will of God as shown by Christ's behaviour, by His words and His deeds. So as God's will exhorts us let us look to Jesus, '*the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*' (Heb.12:2,3).

As we try to follow His example in our lives, we will gradually grow towards His likeness. It is appropriate that we do so for God predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His son. We will grow and develop and increase the measure of our spirit, a spirit we have received, until we are filled with the Spirit as was our Lord, the Apostles and the disciples. Like Stephen, of whom it is said '*He was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*' (Acts 6:5). We will be gradually spiritually strengthened by divine power working and growing in us. This Spirit will help us face the various difficulties and trials along this narrow way. It will help us to overcome, to quench, the spirit of this world and the Adversary. The Holy Spirit is a comforting factor in all of our trials and difficulties. Indeed, it is called the Comforter by our Lord who declared before He left His disciples, in John 14:16: '*And I will pray the Father and He*

shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you forever.' The growing of the Holy Spirit in us will be accomplished by the development of the fruits and the grace of the Spirit. Paul in Gal.5:22-24 said: '*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*'

SUMMARY

In summary, the Spirit of God enables us to understand the things God has given us. It leads us in the truth, in the whole truth. It is truth that sanctifies us. Once again, we think of that wonderful Scripture: '*Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth*' (John 17:17). The truth contained in the Bible enables us to know the plan of God for mankind in general and the church in particular. It enables us to understand the mind and character of God, His great wisdom, justice, love and power. It explains the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross. It has revealed to us the special promises reserved only for those that walk in the footsteps of Jesus and the wonderful future that is in store for all mankind. It also contains all the exhortations, counsels, encouragement and knowledge that each one of us needs in order to be faithful to God. It is remarkable how the Bible enlightens us through the prophecies of the past, present and future. It gives us so many wonderful lessons and experiences in order to motivate us in this present fast-moving society. It is the understanding of God's plan that gives us peace in a very troubled world while all those around us become more afraid of the future. It stimulates our faith, our praise, our worship of God, and it encourages each one of us to purify ourselves. Through all this work, it sanctifies us and keeps us apart from the world, and it urges us on to greater holiness.

(E L)

HAVING DONE ALL

Having done all O then let us stand.

"Quit you like men and be strong."

The prayer of your faith shall be mighty to save
When the watching and waiting seems long.

Our Master is here, O let us rejoice
When we see all the tumult and strife.

He walks on the waves anti will quiet the storm,
Bringing peace to those weary of life.

We can't be fainthearted with victory so near.
God has called us to herald the day.

Together let's stand in the faith that's of old,
Trusting Him to the end of the way

WATER OF LIFE

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb” (Rev.22:1)



Have you ever walked through the bush country and come across a stream of water running over a rocky bed and in looking down on the deep water you can see the bottom of the stream. The water is clear as crystal. If you are thirsty a drink of this cool clear water is indeed refreshing. Such is the beautiful picture of the water of life.

The term ‘living waters’ is used in the Scriptures as descriptive of the word of God. This is a very apt description because everywhere we can see that the value of pure water is appreciated. While life is capable of being sustained without food for weeks, this is not possible without water. A few days at the most without water and death will result. Water, living water, pure water is then a wonderful symbol. Thirst is another symbol indicating a desire, a longing, a craving. Physical thirst is said to be much more painful than physical hunger. Hunger gradually loses its powers in weakness. Thirst continues and intensifies.

Water is that which quenches or satisfies the demand of nature and so there is soul-thirst and a water of life which alone can quench it. Every ambition and desire is a thirst. A man’s greatness, his individuality, is measured by the amount of desire he may have, but it must be directed in the right way. The lesson to us as Christians then is not that we should be without desire but those desires (or ambitions) should be transformed from earthly carnal desires to righteous heavenly desires. Thus the followers of the Lord are to hunger and thirst after righteousness and are to be filled or satisfied not by losing their desires but by realising them. This can come only by partaking of the Word of God which these living waters symbolise.

By ‘the word of God’ we do not understand the paper and ink with which the Bible is printed, but the thoughts and purposes of God conveyed to our minds by these means. Take for instance the possibility that we had no Bible of our own. At our Lord’s first advent there were many who could not read but heard the gospel preached by word of mouth only; it was nonetheless the power of God unto salvation to believers. It was just as much the water of life to thirsty souls as the word of God later on in this gospel age when it came to be expressed in printed form. God’s word still has

the power to satisfy our longings as nothing else can do. His thoughts will not perish nor his purposes fail, as we read in Isaiah 55:11: *“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”*

When we speak of the Word of God and say that the term ‘living water’ aptly describes it, we have in mind the wonderful message of the gospel of God wherein is revealed His plans and purposes for our salvation. This message is based on the redemption work accomplished by Jesus, our Saviour. When this plan of God is understood and received into the heart of the Christian, the Holy Spirit of God reveals to us the character of God, and it is then that our desire to serve God and to lay hold on the promise of eternal life energises us. The expression ‘living waters’ or words of similar meaning occur in several places in the Scriptures. Let us read some of them.

LIVING WATER

The first one is found in John 4:10-14. Here Jesus is speaking to the woman of Samaria: *“Jesus said to her, If thou knewst the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep, from whence then hast thou that living water. Art thou greater than our father Jacob which gave us this well, and drank thereof himself and his children and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”*

How wonderful this statement must have appeared to the woman; and how wonderful it appears to us, even more after we have learned its real depth and meaning. We are continually learning more and more from this water of life, appreciating it more and more each day we live, and finding still greater refreshment in it as we continue to partake of it. The whole world is seeking peace and happiness. The few who have truly found Jesus and have made a full consecration of their hearts to him have received this water of life. These have found the happiness which the world is seeking in other directions in vain. They have found satisfaction in their hearts which is able to offset trials, sorrows, difficulties and disappointments, and to rejoice in the realisation that their experiences are working to their eternal advantage, proving and preparing them for still greater riches by and by.

The Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:8: *“That godliness is profitable unto all things having promise of this life and of that which is to come.”* In John 17:3 Jesus said: *“This is life eternal that they may know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent”*. What is meant here is

that eternal life will be given to those who, having heard the gracious message brought to them concerning God's character and purposes, embrace its teachings and decide to follow the life of Jesus. We remember what Jesus said in John 6:68-69 when he asked the twelve disciples if they would leave him and cease to follow him any more, Peter replied: "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." The 'words of eternal life' and the 'living water' have the same meaning.

Let us read Philippians 2:14-16 "Do all things without murmurings and disputings, That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom ye shine as lights in the world holding forth the word of life." The indication is again that the Word of God, the "word of life" is 'living water' and In Peter 1:23-25 the Apostle speaks of the Lord's people as being begotten again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible by the 'Word of God' which liveth and abideth forever. Then he goes on to say: "For all flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof passeth away, but the Word of the Lord endureth forever. This is the Word which by the gospel was preached unto you."

Again in Hebrews 4:12 we read that: "The word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The Diaglott translates the first line as 'The word of God is living and energetic'. This is because eternal life cannot come to any without the Word of God. In this passage also we are told that 'the Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart'. This is a remarkable statement yet many have realised and felt the searching power of the Word of God in their lives..

We go to books to find what is in the mind of the author. We go to the Word of God to find what is in the mind of its Author and what is God's will for us. To anyone who reads it with only a little spiritual understanding, there comes the realisation that this book is God's Word and its author understands and knows all about us..It is like a mirror which reflects us exactly as we are. It detects our motives, discerns our needs and having truthfully revealed to us our real selves, it counsels, reproves, exhorts, guides and refreshes.

Like water to the parched lips, the Word of God is always refreshing to His people. It is not the purpose of the Word of God to expose and discourage by revealing to us our imperfections but its purpose is to refresh and encourage us to overcome them. No matter how many times we turn to the water of life, it is always the same. It does not lose its refreshing taste. How often we can turn to passages such as Psalm 23 and get refreshment: "He leadeth me beside the still waters". Psalm 119:105: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path". And so we can always turn to appropriate scriptures to suit the occasion of our needs.

PURE WATER

There is one thing we always have to be on guard against and that is water that is not pure. Instead of being clear as

crystal as one can see in mountain streams, water can be polluted with all sorts of foreign matter and so instead of being life giving it can be very detrimental to health. There is the danger of becoming sectarian. Nearly every church has created or accepted some false doctrine which has polluted the word of God. The Apostle Paul in 2 Thess.2:8 said in his day that the mystery of iniquity doth already work: "For this cause God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie" and in verse 15 says: "Therefore brethren stand fast in and hold the traditions which you have been taught whether by word or our epistle."

The Word of God then is indeed 'living water' to the Christian just as much today as it ever was. Remember again our Lord's words to the woman at the well: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life". So we can drink in all the beautiful truths that have been given to us in these last days. We understand God's purpose for his people during this gospel age as never before, and through His Word we can continually be refreshed. Whatever our needs be, we can go to the Word of God, the source of our new life, and receive our requirements. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17- "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness,: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

In the great Millennial Age the living water will flow to all mankind; all will have the opportunity to drink of it. All may not accept the pure water but all will have access to it, as we read in our opening text. Listen also to Isaiah 55:1: "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters". Rev.22:17 is another prophecy of the Millennial Age: "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely". So whether it is now or in the age to come, salvation can only come through partaking of the living water of whom Jehovah himself is the fountain. (JH)

A LITTLE WORD

If any little word of ours
Can make one life the brighter,
If any little song of ours
Can make one heart the lighter;
God help us speak that little word,
And take our bit of singing,
And drop it in some lonely vale
To set the echoes ringing

The Restoration of the Fallen Heavenly Host

When we talk about restitution we usually talk about God's plan of restoration for the earthly creation. It is not often that we talk about God's wider plan to unite and bring into harmony not only his earthly creation but also his heavenly creation. God's plan of restoration as revealed in scripture is primarily concerned with the earthly creation. There are, however, scriptural references to a restorative process for certain spiritual beings. Some of these scriptural references are fairly oblique and this probably reflects God's aim in giving us an understanding of the restorative process as it relates to the earthly creation in the first instance.

This presentation is primarily concerned with this heavenly restorative process and there is a reasonably large body of scripture that relates to the fallen heavenly host and an opportunity for their restoration to divine favour in the future. There are a number of aims of this presentation. The first is to look at and explore these scriptures and thereby gain some understanding concerning the role the "called out" of God will play in regard to this opportunity. Another aim of this presentation is to look at and explore the possibility that the "restitution of all things" includes the restoration of the willing previously disobedient heavenly host. Another aim is to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of God's wider plan, viz as it relates to other sentient beings apart from mankind.

It is a subject that can be prone to speculation. This will be avoided as far as possible but where it is clear that speculation is occurring, the thoughts presented are put forward merely for consideration rather than as scriptural truth. The question can be asked, "why address this seemingly obscure and possibly unimportant subject?" The reasons for doing so are:

1. Scripture refers to this subject and therefore we were meant to have some understanding of it
2. Having some understanding of this part of God's plan, to some extent gives a greater understanding and appreciation of God character
3. We come to have a greater understanding of humanity's position in God's greater plan
4. We gain a greater understanding of the role of the body of Christ in the ages to come. This is particularly relevant to us since we are all aspiring to be members of the body of Christ.

The Heavenly Host

We know and it is clear that our earth is only a part of the universe of God. When we survey the heavens we are in awe of the total creation of God. And in fact it is this heavenly creation which is an evidence of the existence and glory of our creator. We are told in the psalms: . "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork." (Psa 19:1) And also in Isaiah 40:26 "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth."

We also know that the universe is not empty and that God has many dwelling places or places of abode in this universe. John 14:1,2 "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are

many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" *One must ask for whom or for what are these dwelling places. These dwelling places, we are told, were already in existence prior to Jesus leaving the earthly realm, since Jesus promised that he would prepare a place for his faithful followers; which was still future at the time that Jesus promised this. So it cannot be just the church for which they were created.*

We know that God is surrounded by the heavenly host. In 1 Kings 22:19 we read: "And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left." Since God dwells in the heavens these heavenly host must also be spiritual creatures. These make up the heavenly host. Usually when we think of the heavenly host, we recall the multitude of the heavenly host praising God at the time of the birth of Jesus. (Luke 2:11-14) So in this presentation, the **heavenly host is taken to mean the multitude of heavenly or spiritual beings.**

The Nature of the Heavenly Host

We need to have some understanding of the nature of this heavenly host. Firstly what do we mean by nature? I will be using nature according to the meaning of phusis SG5449 meaning a genus or sort. The following verses illustrate the point:- 2 Peter 1:4 "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature (phusis) having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." James 3:7 NIV "All kinds (phusis) of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man."

This sense of nature, as phusis conveys does not refer to character but to the inherent sort or genus. Hence 2 Peter 1:4 does not refer to a divine character in the sense of the mind or character of God but to the actual spiritual genus or plane of existence. This is intimately related to the type of body corresponding to that nature. For example man, beast, fish and birds are all flesh but have different natures. We are all familiar with these earthly natures; they are of the earth, constituted of the same elements as the earth. They are material and tangible.

Spiritual beings can be divided into two groups. "The angel of the Lord," "the angels of heaven" or "the angels of God" are phrases that distinguish the holy angels from the fallen angels, otherwise known as demons. Presumably, originally all of these spirit beings were in harmony with God. Those in harmony with the creator are frequently referred to as angels since they usually have a purpose or mission. The Greek word (*aggelos = angelos*) from which angel is translated simply means a messenger or envoy, suggesting a purpose or mission. The following verses bear this out – "The angel of the Lord encampeth round them that fear him and delivereth them." (Psa 34:7) "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb 1:14)

The scriptures also refer to different types of angels such as the seraphim and cherubim, which possibly have different functions. The scriptures talk further about at least two planes of spiritual beings, firstly the heavenly host which

are generally referred to as angels; these may be divided into those that are and are not in harmony with the creator at present, and secondly those possessing the divine nature which God and now Jesus have and which is promised to the Israel of God. (2 Peter 1:4)

The heavenly host or angels have spiritual bodies allowing them (if not constrained) to materialise, eat, and walk through material objects and so on. They are also able to inhabit and possess a human being as well as an animal. Their primary role and position imply a service role to the creator, which of course requires strict obedience to the creator.

The Fall and Punishment of the Heavenly Host

Jude 6 makes clear that there are angelic beings out of harmony with the creator which are being kept in a subdued state until a time of judgement. These are the angelic beings, which kept not their former estate. "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting (age lasting) chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

Jude tells us that these angels (whose implicit function was to serve God) left their designated habitation. Because of this they have been constrained and await judgment on the great day. From the temporal standpoint that Jude wrote this passage, the great day was still future. Peter tells us. " For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (tartaros), and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." (2 Peter 2:4,5)

Peter uses the Greek tartaros to describe this imprisoned state, a word used in Greek mythology as the name for a dark abyss or prison." By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

Peter tells us explicitly that in leaving their habitation they disobeyed God and therefore are imprisoned (in a constrained state). In this way they are reserved unto the judgment of the great day (as Jude puts it) Genesis fills in the details of what happened, viz. that these angelic beings materialized and commingled with the daughters of men leading to a hybrid race that filled the earth with violence. It was on this account that the world that existed prior to the flood was destroyed.

Judgment of the Fallen Heavenly Host

We note that in these days of Noah the earth was filled with violence as a result of the disobedient actions of these wicked angelic beings. Interestingly, Jesus tells us that a sign of his presence will be a time similar to the days of Noah. "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be, for as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark." (Matt 24:37,38) Paul also tells us that the last days will be similar in terms of violence amongst other characteristics. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholly, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, in-

continent, fierce, despisers of those that are good." (2 Tim 3:1-3)

We understand that we are now living in these last days, these days of violence. These days, as the days of Noah will be ended by God displaying his displeasure and wrath. Zephaniah calls this "the great day of the Lord's wrath. (Zeph 1:14-18) This "great day" marks the time that this age will end. Like the world or earthly order prior to the flood was destroyed, so will the present order prior to the establishment of God's kingdom, but this time by symbolic fire. "Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: **But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire** against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (2 Peter 3:6,7)

Turning again to Jude's words - "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto **the judgment of the great day.**" Could this be the same time? Jude suggests that their judgment would be associated with the removal of these chains of constraint, otherwise he would not have told us that the chains are age lasting. The violence in the world and the rise of spiritism suggests that this may already be occurring.

Since the Church is to take part in the judgment, it would of course require the completion of the church and their resurrection. This gathering together of the saints is another important during the presence of our Lord. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we, which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thes 4:15-17).

We read in Rev 20:2,3 - "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season From this perspective, the judgment of the angelic host may occur during this last destructive phase of the Gospel age. Certainly, any evil influence will not be allowed during the millennial judgment day of the world. Satan will be bound for a thousand years so that the nations are deceived no more. Since this major evil influence will be stopped it seems reasonable to assume that no other adverse external influence will be allowed including that of the once disobedient heavenly host

It has been suggested that the judging of the angels will occur during the so-called great judgment day of the world. If this did occur it would have to occur after the time of restraint of Satan; possibly during the little season when Satan is allowed to test those upon the earth culminating in his destruction when thrown into the lake of fire. Another possible time for the pre-judging or trial of these angels is the present Gospel age. Or in other words that the angels are being judged by the experiences of Jesus and the Church. There is some scriptural evidence to support this. We know that Jesus preached to the imprisoned spirits. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that

he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:18,19)

One might ask how did Jesus preach to these spirits? It seems very unlikely that Jesus literally went and spoke to these spirits in their imprisoned state. It seems more logical to suggest that by his example of obedience, even unto death a better way was shown unto these once disobedient spirits. Paul puts this proper course in sharp focus for us in Philippians 2:7-9 when speaking of Jesus The lesson would not be lost on these spirits since this example of Jesus would be seen as a sharp contrast to their disobedient actions. We know also that the apostles and the Church are made a "spectacle" unto angels. "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made **a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.**"

The word spectacle in the Greek means something to look at and inspect. This would fit with this learning phase of their trial or judgment. The above scripture also says that we are a spectacle not just to angels but also the world; and we know that the world is not on trial or judgment now. We know that the judgment of the world will occur in the next age. This means that the fact that angels are watching and learning now does not necessarily mean that they are on trial now (i.e. the entire Gospel age). Another scripture also tends to suggest that the time for the judging of the disobedient angels is also future to the Gospel age.

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we **shall** judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Cor 6:2,3) *The tense in the Greek for verse 3 is future. Since Paul wrote at the beginning of the Gospel age it would suggest that it would not occur during it. Also the same tense is used for verse 2 in reference to the judging of the world which we definitely know is future to the Gospel age. So it seems we have at least 3 reasonable candidates in terms of the timing of the judgment of these angels.*

The Restitution of The Heavenly Host

The word *restitution* is used only once in the New Testament of the Authorized Version. It is a translation of the Greek word *apokatastasis*. This Greek word is also only used once in the New Testament in Acts 3:21 and derives from apo, "back, again," kathistemi, "to set in order," translated RV, "restoration", KJV, "restitution" and these therefore appear to be good translations, the words *restitution* and *restoration* are very similar in meaning in this context.

This link is further emphasized in Matthew 17:11 He answering, said, "Elijah indeed comes, and will **restore all things**" (Diaglott). John the Baptist was the minor fulfillment of this spirit of Elijah as Jesus makes clear in the following verses. This thought is made even clearer in Luke 1:16,17 (speaking of John the Baptist) "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." The major fulfillment of the picture of Elijah is of course the glorified church, the completed Abrahamic seed of blessing; which shall indeed "restore all things"; in its ultimate and fullest sense.

The word translated *restore* in Matthew 17:11 is the Greek word *apokathistemi*; it is used 8 times in the Authorized Version and according to Strong's Dictionary means to "***restore to its former state***" Matthew 12:10-13 "And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, *Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?* that they might accuse him... Then saith he to the man, *Stretch forth thine hand.* And he stretched it forth; and it was **restored** whole, like as the other." Here it is well illustrated that *apokathistemi* (translated *restored*) means ***a return to an original state***. In regards to the heavenly host the original state was of coarse obedient harmony with the creator.

From 1 Cor 6:2,3, already quoted, it appears that Jesus and his body will be involved in their judgment as with the judgment of the world. Since this judgment of the world is a corrective period with a trial at the end, it stands to reason that some such corrective period and trial will occur in regards to these fallen heavenly host also. We have seen that the heavenly host learns from the struggles of the people of God, who are a spectacle to them (1 Cor 4:9) and that Jesus by his example "*preached*" to the imprisoned spirits (1 Peter 3:19,20)

There would be no need or purpose for any sort of spectacle or preaching for these imprisoned spirits if there was no hope for them. It therefore seems the heavens; the realm of these wayward spirits, will be put in order and that the fallen heavenly host is gaining valuable knowledge during their time of imprisonment during the Gospel age.

The world will have a period of opportunity to show its loyalty to God by demonstrating the lessons learned under the guidance of the seed of blessing. This will occur during the little season of testing at the end of the millennium when Satan will be loosed for a while. Analogously, the heavenly host would be expected to have an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty and obedience to God also. Whether this will occur during the great day of God's wrath or the little season or another time is not clear. We can be assured however, that as God has shown his love to us by sending his only begotten Son, so will he deal with the heavenly host.

Again Jesus, along with his helpers, will be the instrument for unifying all things in heaven, as in the earth." (Jesus Christ) whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (acts 3:21) According to the meaning of the process of restitution outlined, this hope for the imprisoned spirits would qualify as being part of the restitution of all things. Paul may have also referred to this in Ephesians 1:10 – "That in the dispensation of the fulness 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:**"

In conclusion, we can see that God has a very wide plan indeed. This plan will lead not only to the restitution of the earth but also to the unification under Jesus of all things in heaven, including the fallen heavenly host. God again demonstrates to us his consistent mercy and loving kindness. This gives us great confidence to continue in our calling with greater zeal, unto the end. To know something of this wide plan is wonderful enough, let alone to potentially have a helping role in it.

May all glory be to our mighty God. Amen.

“GOD WORKETH IN YOU”

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you both to will and do of His good pleasure.” (Phil 2:12,13)

The Scriptures clearly teach us that our Lord has paid the ransom price for all mankind, that He is the propitiation for our sins and those of the whole world and that there is salvation in no other. (1 Tim 2:6, 1 John 2:2 and Acts 4:12). We rejoice in the wideness of God’s mercy to be shown to all people in due time, but it is the present offer of salvation and its terms and prospects that we are immediately concerned with. Concerning this, the writer to the Hebrews says= “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip, for....how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them who heard Him.” (Heb 2:1-3)

This warning against neglect of what he terms “**so great salvation**” does not refer to failing to hear and obey the gospel call, which we realize from John 6:44 is not sent out to all people, “No one can come to me (Jesus), except the Father who hath sent me draw him.” From the counsel given later in Hebrews against falling away after once embracing the call, it is clear that it is the salvation that has already been received that is intended. So this is a stern warning, God’s gift is not to be downgraded or neglected but, under the mighty hand of God, is to be valued, nurtured and developed. In our text verse, Paul describes this as “working out our salvation with fear and trembling”.

But how is this salvation received or entered into? The Philippian gaoler asked this question long ago and Paul’s reply was direct and explicit, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (Acts 16:31) Elsewhere he assures us that “if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Rom 10:9,13) By the grace of God, salvation is the means by which the believer in Jesus Christ passes or is transferred from death unto life. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.” (Rom 8:1) Such he later urges to present their bodies living sacrifices in gratitude to God.

Salvation then begins with acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, but the scriptures do not make this a finishing point, rather the starting point of an experience of salvation. Paul in Romans 13 counsels the brethren in fitting Christlike behaviour, adding, “and that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” (Verse 11) Here he appears to speak of our salvation as still future but getting closer. Does this mean that we are not as yet saved, or is it referring to the final consummation of what we might term an experience of salvation, lasting a lifetime? Of one thing we can be sure, our Heavenly Father does not want His children to be in a constant state of uncertainty.

Peter also speaks prospectively, as it were, of our salvation, in the context of testings which the Christian may undergo along the way. “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now ye see Him not, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” (1 Pet 1:7-9) Vine tells us that the word “end” here points to the final issue or result of a state or process. This well represents the process of salvation in each Christian – first the call, then the outworking and finally the reward. What a privilege is ours, how important that we do nothing to hinder the outworking in our own lives.

THE DAY OF SALVATION

Wise counsel is given also by Paul in writing to Corinth, “We then as workers together with Him (God), beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee; behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation.”) (2 Cor 6:1,2) For those who have heard the call of God, and are co-workers with Him, Paul stresses that now is the accepted time for their salvation. It is not yet the accepted time for the remainder of mankind, as yet He is not calling them. The message and instruction not to nullify His grace is for His children here and now, rather we need constantly to seek to grow in His grace.

For this task, our text verses – Phil 2:12,13 - provide the key. In verse 12, Paul urges the brethren and that includes you and me to “work out” our salvation, that gift of God already received, and that we do so with fear and trembling. At the outset, we note that there is no suggestion of working for our salvation but it needs to be worked **at** and worked out in our lives. It is of interest to note that different words are used for, firstly, the Christian’s out-working of his or her salvation and, secondly God’s in-working in the Christian. In the first case, Vine tells us that the word carries the thought of “working out, achieving, effecting by toil” and a firm and consistent approach is clearly called for. Would-be achievers in any enterprise know just how important is practice and still more practice, not just sporadically but consistently.

We note the qualification “with fear and trembling” and here again this highlights the need for singleness of purpose, as with an Olympic athlete in training, with perhaps an element of urgency of desire for only that which will please our Father in heaven. Christians should certainly not live in a constant fear of failure or of divine wrath but be ever mindful of the calling to which they have been called, seeking only the will of Him who has called them out of darkness into light. The writer to Hebrews adds, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” To illustrate, he cites the case of the failure of Israel of old to attain to God’s promises because of unbelief.

A similar thought of working out salvation is given in Rom

5:3-5, "Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." This is how we are to view such experiences; under God's hand they are helping in the working out of our salvation and in the building up of character and Christlikeness. This is not to ignore that some experiences may well be grievous at the time but afterwards they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. (Heb 12:11) and that present light afflictions work out for our eternal glory.

GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

But even with such thoughts in mind, we would be still concerned if the assurance of verse 13 did not immediately follow. How would we feel if we were left entirely on our own to work out our salvation? This next verse is surely one that we cannot read without a "hallelujah" or "amen"! "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." This is an assurance which we can and should take to ourselves personally; God Himself is at work in your life and in mine, not necessarily in the way that we might choose but according to what is pleasing to Him and in accordance with His perfect will. Would we really want it any other way?

How glad we all can and should be that the process of salvation in each one of us is under the management and direction of the great master-builder of the universe. The word "working in", according to Vine, has the idea of a person or power being active or operative, an influential force. The word is used firstly of God, but also of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, of faith and endurance, all of which would represent channels of God's "working in" His people. It is used also of evil influences, but here the objective is clear – the good pleasure of the divine will for each child of God. It is in this context of God's over-ruling care that he or she is to steadfastly work out their salvation, as co-workers with God. In Eph 2:10, the apostle says, "ye are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

What does it mean to be His workmanship? The only other use of the same word in the New Testament refers to things of the physical creation ("things that are made" Rom 1:20) which also give potent evidence of God's eternal power and divine character. Even as our Heavenly Father made the heavens and earth out of what was without form and void, so He is able by His mighty power to create (anew) vessels suited to His purpose out of frail human flesh. The apostle further tells us that this is that same mighty power that He employed in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him on His right hand on high. So it is by His Holy Spirit, by which we have already been begotten into God's family, that He is working in us. Surely this calls for our full submission, so that the precious task of making out of useless clay vessels beautiful and fit for service may go ahead, until finally conformed into the likeness of His Son.

What a lot more work we often feel needs to be done in us; how slowly the pattern seems to be emerging! But we can take comfort, assured that "He who hath begun a good work in us, will perform (complete) it until the day of Jesus Christ." and "faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." (Phil 1:6, 1 Thes 5:24) Our Heavenly Father will not

half finish the work in us or, wearying of the task, abandon us. No, we can be sure that He who has commenced the work of grace in our hearts will not weary but will finish the work in due time to His own glory and our eternal blessing, so long as we remain faithful. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that "God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power." (2 Thes 1:11)

THE LEARNING PROCESS

How then does He work in us? Certainly by the lessons and ongoing experiences of life as we daily learn to love and to trust and to obey Him. Often, it seems we are poor pupils and so we need the chastenings which He allows to come our way, but it is in love, like a merciful father, that He permits the fiery trial. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby." (Heb 12:11) Our Heavenly Father works in us through His people, for it is the privilege of each one of us to build one another up in faith, of bearing one another up in prayer, of comforting one another in distress. He works in us furthermore as His Spirit illuminates the sacred page to our waiting hearts. In all these areas, we need the spirit of lowly teachableness, so that He may the more effectively and freely work in us His good pleasure.

What is His good pleasure for us? What is the desired outcome? It includes – "that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love", "that we might walk worthy of the Lord, fruitful in every good work and increasing in knowledge of God", "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". These all point forward to the carrying out of the divine purpose to bless all mankind in the age to come, for which God has called us, and is even now carrying out His preparatory work in us, as we yield to Him. All God's works are perfect, and His workmanship, the Church of this gospel age, will be no exception, but will be "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish." (Eph 5:27) Redeemed and cleansed in Christ's precious blood, and fashioned by the Father's hand, His peculiar people individually and collectively will finally be fully fitted for the future blessing and restoration of mankind.

The plan of God for human salvation is grand in its scope and depth, it is all-embracing and will surely satisfy the longings and aspirations of all mankind in due time. Within that plan, the present offer of salvation to those with ears to hear and hearts to respond, offers blessings now and in the future with that dear One whom yet unseen we love. Daily let us heed the apostle's words – "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Is God working in us today? Yes, we can be sure that He is working in you and in me, while we remain His faithful children. Amen..

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