

An Unction of the Spirit

“Thou anointest my head with oil.” **POURING OIL ON THE** head seems a far cry from

—Psalm 23:5

shepherding sheep, yet in reality it is not. It has been a common custom of shepherds for centuries to pour oil on the heads of their sheep, particularly at the close of the day or when they are weary from travel. To the sheep it is a welcome and refreshing service rendered them by the shepherd. In this custom we find a beautiful illustration of our Great Shepherd's care for us and the blessings which he bestows on our behalf.

Oil is used in the Scriptures as a symbol of the Holy Spirit—the invisible power and influence of God. (Acts 10:38) The anointing oil poured upon the heads of Israel's high priests pointed forward to the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit. The apostle says of him that he was anointed “with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” (Heb. 1:9) Paul also speaks of the anointing which we have received of God, while John refers to it as an “unction from the Holy One.” (II Cor. 1:21; I John 2:20) The term “unction”—derived from a Greek root word meaning

to smear or rub with oil, to consecrate—suggests lubrication and smoothness, so in this also there is an allusion to oil as symbolizing the Holy Spirit and what it accomplishes in our lives.

In this lesson recorded in Psalm 23 we might think of David as representing the entire Christ class, in which case his head would represent Jesus, our Head. (Col. 1:13,18) The statement, “Thou anointest my head with oil,” indicates what is elsewhere clearly taught in the Bible; namely, that the anointing of the Holy Spirit came first upon the Head of the Christ class, and since Pentecost has been received by the various body members only by virtue of the fact that they are counted as members of his body. We can therefore truly say to Jehovah, our Great Shepherd, “Thou anointest my head,” Christ Jesus. From Jesus, who is now our “good shepherd,” that anointing has reached us. (John 10:11,14) Thus we rejoice in the blessings which accrue through the anointing of the Holy Spirit we have received.

While the original anointing of the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus, each member of his symbolic body receives of the same anointing, as this emblematic “oil of gladness” runs down from the Head and covers the entire body. In conjunction with this, one of the primary scriptural lessons associated with the anointing of the Spirit is the divine commission to serve. The prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3 relates to this, and it indicates that the entire Christ company is anointed to “preach good tidings,” and thus to “bind up the brokenhearted.”

With this divine authority to represent God in the earth comes also a wonderful assurance of divine

acceptance and approval. From this standpoint the anointing of the Holy Spirit illustrates the thought of comfort. Indeed, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as a “Comforter” that the Father would give, “the Spirit of truth,” which would guide his footstep followers “into all the truth.”—John 14:16, 17,26; 15:26; 16:7,13, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*

The Holy Spirit was a great comfort to Jesus, our Head. When it came upon him at the time of his baptism he heard the voice of his Heavenly Father from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:17) What greater comfort could be given to anyone than to be assured of divine sonship? This assurance afforded the Master strength for the trials through which he was called to pass. Forty days later, when Satan challenged the Master’s sonship, Jesus could and did resist him, for there was no doubt in his mind as to where he stood with his Heavenly Father. Additionally, when the anointing of the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus it enlightened him concerning his Father’s purposes and the part he was to have in them. The “heavens were opened unto him.”—vs. 16

Through the Holy Spirit Jesus was guided and strengthened for every step of the narrow way in which he walked. Since he is our Head the same comforting blessings of the Holy Spirit that filled him with joy will also be our daily portion. Jesus promised, in fact, that he would give his peace to his faithful followers. (John 14:27) This peace is an important part of the comfort which comes to us through the Holy Spirit. Many are the assurances of the Bible which give us confidence, courage, and

peace, despite the difficulties of the way as we walk in the steps of the Master.—Eph. 3:11,12; Ps. 31:24; Phil. 4:7

A very interesting summary of the blessings which accrue to us as Spirit-anointed followers of Jesus is presented in the 8th chapter of Romans. Opening the subject the apostle writes, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, ... who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (vss. 1,4) Notice that Paul is here speaking of those who are “in Christ Jesus.” This means that Christ Jesus is their Head, the one upon whom was poured the anointing of the Holy Spirit. To such as have him as their Head, there is no condemnation from the Heavenly Father if, as Paul says, they “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Here, as in practically every case of God’s promises, there is a condition attached to its fulfilment, which must be acted upon by faithful obedience in order that the assurance of the promise may properly belong to us. Indeed, to be assured that we stand approved before our Heavenly Father, that for us there is no condemnation, is indeed a rare blessing. We have learned by experience, observation, and from the testimony of the Scriptures, that “there is none righteous, no, not one.” (Rom. 3:10) We have learned also that God cannot look upon unrighteousness with any degree of tolerance. How wondrous, though, is the grace that is provided through Christ Jesus, that those who are in him, and are following the leadings of the Holy Spirit which has reached them through him, are not under condemnation!

Later in the eighth chapter of the Book of Romans the apostle emphasizes this thought with even greater force, saying, "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (vss. 33,34) How precious the thought that from God's standpoint there is no condemnation to the true Christian. It is the Heavenly Father, through the redemptive work of Christ, who has justified us freely from all sin. What difference, then, does it make as to who else may assume to condemn us, whether the Devil or his agents?

However, this condition of "no condemnation" is also dependent upon the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—that is, being filled and guided by God's holy influence and power. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God," writes Paul. Then he explains that we are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell" in us. (vss. 8,9) This means that we can please God if we have complied with the conditions. Those conditions are the full surrender of our own wills—a symbolic beheading of ourselves—and the acceptance of Christ as our Head, and then walking after the Spirit which we receive as a result of being in Christ.—Rev. 20:4

MORTAL BODIES QUICKENED

Paul writes further that "if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Rom. 8:11) This quickening of our mortal bodies is an energizing of them for the service of

the Lord. The fallen flesh by nature does not incline toward spiritual things and shrinks from being sacrificed in the service of the Lord and of his people. However, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, received through our Head, Christ Jesus, our bodies are “quickened,” or stirred up, to serve the interests of God’s divine purpose and plan. The flesh may become “weary in well doing,” but if we continue to walk after the Spirit it will be revived, even as the sheep, when weary at the close of the day, were refreshed when the shepherd anointed their heads with oil.—Gal. 6:9

The apostle continues, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) It was when Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit that he heard the reassuring message from his Heavenly Father, “This is my beloved Son.” Likewise, now, if we are “in Christ Jesus,” and walk after the Spirit by which he was anointed, we have the assurance that we also are “sons of God.” This Spirit which we have received, Paul explains, is not one of “bondage again to fear,” but a Spirit that enables us to address our God as “Abba, Father.”—vs. 15

The Spirit itself,” continues Paul, “beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (vss. 16,17) How precious is this testimony, this “witness” of the Holy Spirit that we are the children of God. Yet note again the condition. This blessed witness of the Spirit is ours only “if so be that we suffer with him.”

The scriptural viewpoint of this can be readily understood. The Apostle Peter explains that the operation of the Holy Spirit in the minds of the Old Testament prophets caused them to testify concerning "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." (I Pet. 1:11) Throughout his epistle Peter makes it plain that these foretold sufferings of Christ are participated in by his body members. It was this, then, that Paul had in mind when he wrote that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, "if so be that we suffer with him." That is to say, if we are in Christ Jesus, and partaking of his sufferings as a result of our laying down our lives in divine service, then the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the prophetic writings of the Old Testament applies to us. Thus we are assured that, like Jesus, we are the children of God, and if faithful, joint-heirs with him in the glorious coming kingdom of blessings.—Matt. 6:10

Peter reminds us that the Holy Spirit, through the prophets, not only testified concerning the sufferings of Christ, but also of the "glory that should follow." In keeping with this testimony, Paul writes, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"—that is, the promised "glory that should follow" the suffering.—Rom. 8:18

"For the creation," Paul further explains, "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." (vs. 19, *Revised Standard Version*) We need only to reflect upon the many prophecies of kingdom glory that are to be found in the Old Testament, and to note the many promises of how that

glory is to be manifested for the blessing of all the families of the earth, to make us long for the time to come when, together with all the divine sons of God, it will be our privilege to manifest the glory of God to the eternal joy of all nations.

“ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER”

Those who, through consecration and the acceptance by God, have come into Christ, and are walking in accordance with the Holy Spirit by which they were anointed, have the assurance that they have been “called according to his purpose.” Of those thus called Paul writes, “We know that all things work together for good.” (Rom. 8:28) However, it requires a strong faith to be assured of this at all times and under all circumstances.

As our minds go back to the illustration of the shepherd and the sheep, we can imagine what difficulty the sheep would have—if they were capable of reasoning on the matter—to understand how some of the experiences of the day would be of benefit to them. If the shepherd was to lead them through a barren wilderness in order to reach green pastures beyond, or perhaps over rugged mountain passes to find refreshing waters, it would be difficult for the sheep to comprehend the necessity of the hardships thus imposed. Yet no matter how difficult the way, the shepherd would understand the necessity thereof; and, if the sheep could but grasp the thought, they would know that “all things” were working for their ultimate good.

Through faith we are able to understand what the sheep could not grasp; namely, that all the experiences through which our Good Shepherd is

leading us are for our very highest and eternal welfare. "We know" this, Paul wrote. The reason we know it is that we have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Under its blessed influence we have been enlightened to know something of the meaning of the trials of the narrow way. We may become bruised and weary from the hardships of the journey, but the anointing of our Head, which has reached us through him, soothes and comforts by making us realize that all things are working together for our eternal good.

Some of the "all things" are of course pleasant and refreshing. The Good Shepherd leads us beside "still waters," and he makes us to "lie down in green pastures." (Ps. 23:2) These blessed provisions are a delight to all the Lord's sheep. However, there are other experiences that are different. In these, too, our faith needs to see value, so that by them we are drawn closer to the Good Shepherd and made to realize more fully our dependence upon him. It is in this vein that Paul inquires, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ," our Good Shepherd? "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."—Rom. 8:35,36

Here the apostle has enumerated some of the truly trying experiences of the Lord's sheep, yet they should not be permitted to weaken our confidence in the wisdom and the tender loving care of our Good Shepherd. We may be "accounted as sheep for the slaughter," and if we were thinking according to the flesh we would likely decide under

such circumstances to cease following the Good Shepherd. Inasmuch, however, as we are walking “after the Spirit,” we should know that all the Lord’s sheep are to be engaged in sacrifice and service. Just as Jesus himself, our Head, was led by the Spirit to sacrifice, even unto death, so it is our privilege, now that he is exalted to glory and is our Good Shepherd, to follow in the footsteps of sacrifice and service which he so clearly outlined by his example.

Thus in all these things we are “more than conquerors,” gaining the victory through faith in Jehovah, the Great Shepherd; faith in God’s only begotten Son, Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd; faith in the divine purpose and plan; and faith that if we carry out our consecration obediently, we shall ultimately “dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” (Rom. 8:37; Ps. 23:6) Knowing this certain outcome of the “all things” which are working together for our good, we can say with the apostle that we too are, “persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Rom. 8:38,39

How thankful we are, then, for the anointing of our Head, and that as members of his body all the riches of divine grace involved in that anointing have come to us. “No good thing will he withhold” as long as we abide in him. (Ps. 84:11) All our needs will be supplied. Strength will be given through the Spirit of power. (II Tim. 1:7) We will be directed in the way in which we should walk. We will know

that “since God is for us,” nothing or no one can be successfully against us, for he is greater than all our enemies. (Rom. 8:31, *The Emphatic Diaglott*; I John 4:4) Truly, we can say with the psalmist that because our Great Shepherd has anointed our Head with oil, our “cup runneth over.”—Ps. 23:5 ■

Our Faithful Guide

*Holy spirit, faithful guide,
Ever near the Christian's side,
Gently lead us by the hand,
Pilgrims in a desert land.
Weary souls for aye rejoice,
While they hear the sweetest voice,
Whisp'ring softly Trav'ler come!
Follow me, I'll guide thee home.
Ever present, truest Friend,
Ever near thine aid to lend.
Leave us not to doubt and fear,
Groping on in darkness drear.
When the storms are raging sore,
Hearts grow faint, and hopes give o'er,
Ah, then whisper, Trav'ler come!
Follow me, I'll guide thee home.
When our days of toil shall cease,
Waiting still for sweet release,
Nothing left but time for prayer,
Waiting to be gathered there,
Wading deep the dismal flood,
Trusting still in Jesus' blood
Whisper sweetly, Trav'ler come!
Follow me, I'll guide thee home.*

—Hymns of Dawn