

# Divine Gifts

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”*

—James 1:17

## THE APOSTLE JAMES

asserts that although we are all fallen by nature, the eternal goodness of God has profound implications for those who have become his children.

We who have consecrated our lives through obedi-

ence to righteous principles as well as devotedness to his cause are especially blessed in being recipients of many gifts from our beneficent “Father of lights.”

As we walk in the way of sacrifice, thus emulating the pattern of Jesus during his earthly ministry, our hearts should respond with deepest gratitude in having been called “out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (I Pet. 2:9) By means of spirit begettal, we have been enabled to appreciate the exalted characteristics of God’s attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power. The grand invitation we have received as footstep followers of our Lord to participate in the process of reconciling mankind back to the Heavenly Father is a gift of immense magnitude that our lives should reflect daily. Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set

on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—Matt. 5:14-16

## **THE GIFT OF GOD’S PLAN**

One of the best known Scriptures among all who profess allegiance to Christ is found in John’s Gospel account. “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.” (John 3:16) God gave his precious, perfect, undefiled and obedient Son to be the ransom price for all mankind, who had been sentenced to death at the dawn of human history because of their forefather Adam’s disobedience and fall from divine favor back in Eden. (Matt. 20:28; I Tim. 2:5,6; Heb. 7:26,27) This gift provides us a glimpse into the inherent love of God by which he provided the means of redeeming the human family from its sinful condition without violating his justice, which is the foundation of his throne.—Ps. 89:14, *Revised Standard Version*

When Adam and Eve transgressed by partaking of the forbidden fruit and were thrust out of their earthly paradise, there was an obscure promise given that at some future time a seed, or offspring, would be provided to reconcile humanity to God. “The LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and

between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”—Gen. 3:14,15

Many centuries elapsed before there was a well-defined understanding as to what or who this seed would be, although there were allusions to its meaning when God told Abraham to offer Isaac in sacrifice on Mount Moriah. (Gen. 22:1-18) We have a clearer view of this Old Testament narrative by reading that through faith Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from death if he slew him. (Heb. 11:17-19) How blessed we are now to understand the full import of that promise of a coming seed. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. ... And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—Gal.3:16,29

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” (Rom. 8:16) The Holy Spirit is the invisible power and righteous influence of God which enables his people to conduct themselves in a manner that is pleasing in his sight. If we have made a full consecration which is acceptable in God’s sight, we will have the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38; 10:45) Having this divine gift, though we still are imperfect in the flesh, we will be able to identify that a transformation is occurring in our lives. This impels us towards doing those things that reflect spiritual mindedness as opposed to focusing upon earthly aims, hopes and ambitions. If for example, we are seeking first the “kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” that will be one of

the evidences that we have received the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 6:33) In fact, the Scriptures indicate that the natural man, that is, one who has not received the Spirit of God, does not appreciate such matters and considers them foolishness.—I Cor. 2:14

We are living during a time of great trouble that is recognized by mankind throughout the world. Society is engulfed with insurmountable problems, and there is a widespread belief that things will never get better because the forces of evil are so overwhelming. Hopelessness is the order of the day in the minds of many. All of God's children desire to tell others of the Bible's promises of future peace and blessings to come, but comparatively few are able to internalize such a prospect. Why is this the case? "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13) Only those who have submitted their lives fully to the will of our loving Heavenly Father and have been enlightened by his Holy Spirit can, by studying and submitting to the precepts contained in his inspired Word, have the assurance that the promises contained in the Bible will come to pass and that a righteous government and peace for all will be established in the earth.—Matt. 6:10; II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-5

## **PEACE**

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27) The promised gift of peace which the Master left as a legacy for the spirit begotten

should inspire all consecrated believers to faithful obedience and zealous activity in his service. This is especially the case as we consider the hope of being united in glory with Christ and being associated in the grand work of reconciling mankind back to God. It is one thing to be no longer under Adamic condemnation. It is quite another, however, to order our lives in accordance with the privileges we have in Christ. That prospect should free us from the anxious cares and sense of turmoil experienced by humanity at large.

How can we maintain this promised peace in a world filled with trouble and adversity? How can we claim the promise, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee?” (Isa. 26:3) One of the most important steps in this regard is to improve our prayer life. This will assist us in accepting all of our experiences, whether painful to the flesh or not, as being under divine supervision. What comforting assurances we receive when we demonstrate fervency in prayer and cast all our burdens on the Lord. When the Master was going through his Gethsemane experience, and throughout his entire ministry, his close communion with God undoubtedly enabled him to faithfully endure all “contradiction of sinners.” (Heb. 12:2,3) Our Head is no less solicitous of the interests of his Bride. He will succor and sustain us if we do our part by keeping close to him through daily prayer and meditation.—Eph. 5:23; Rev. 21:2,9

## **GOD’S GOODNESS**

“This is good and acceptable before God, our Savior, who desires all men to be saved, and to come

to an accurate knowledge of the truth. For God is one, and there is one Mediator of God and men, that man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom in behalf of all,—the testimony in its own seasons.” —I Tim. 2:3-6, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

In verse 3, we note the identification of God, our Heavenly Father and author of the atonement, as “our Savior.” Many false ideas crept into Christianity after the apostles died which have obscured the true nature of the Creator. The Bible informs us regarding his attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power. Because these qualities work in complete harmony with each other, we have positive assurance that he indeed is our Savior even though Jesus Christ, his honored, faithful and well-beloved Son, has been the instrumentality through whom God’s plan is to be accomplished.

One of the false teachings held by some Christians is that God is vengeful and full of wrath, bent on slaying or torturing much of the human family. Furthermore, this view asserts it is only through the intervention of Jesus, who mercifully placated God’s anger by taking the sinner’s place in death, that mankind may be saved from such a fate. What a terrible view to hold concerning our loving Heavenly Father, who is merciful beyond what sinful man deserves. (Ps. 103:8) We also note it is God’s desire for “all men to be saved, and to come to an accurate knowledge of the truth.” Having satisfied ourselves as to the greatness of the Creator’s character, we see that anything God desires must come to pass, for he says, “my word ... shall not return unto me void.”—Isa. 55:11

The ultimate purpose for the bestowal of God’s gifts is to effect salvation for all. We might inquire:

What are all men saved from and what will they gain as a result? Paul explains, “Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”—Rom. 5:18,19

### **PAUL’S TESTIMONY**

“You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”—Eph. 2:1-7

While several of the foregoing verses may appear to be self-explanatory, some elaboration on certain portions may be helpful towards enhancing our spiritual growth and understanding. Verses 4 and 5 allude to God’s desire for a divine family who would have special fellowship with him throughout eternity under the auspices of his beloved and obedient

Son. In order for consecrated believers to qualify for such a position, we must be transformed as New Creatures into the character of Christ.—Rom. 12:2; II Cor. 5:16,17

An important part of this transformation is that we no longer look at our brethren from a fleshly standpoint. Rather, we are to recognize and accept them as spiritually minded and those who are striving mightily to overcome human weaknesses. Furthermore, our present status as sojourners in the flesh credits us as being under priests, symbolically speaking, with our spiritual minds dwelling, as it were, in the “holy” of the tabernacle. Here, we feed at the table of shewbread, guided by the illumination of the golden candlestick, and our prayers are offered with much sweet incense at the golden incense altar. (Exod. 35:13-15; Heb. 9:2,6, *Diaglott*; Rev. 8:3,4) Thus, we are to “seek those things which are above” because we are considered dead to sin through our justification by faith.—Col. 3:1-3; Rom. 5:1

## **IMPORTANCE OF GRACE**

Grace is sometimes defined as unmerited favor. God’s justice did not obligate him to do anything on Adam’s behalf once he sinned nor, hence, upon his posterity, all mankind. Nevertheless, this is what Paul wrote: “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, ... hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” (II Thess. 2:16) Surely, God’s grace was manifested in the sending of his Son, Jesus Christ, to die as a ransom for Adam. Paul in another place says, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”—Eph. 2:8

We may ask: Is faith the gift of God mentioned in the above verse? There are two types of faith. The Scriptures declare that the fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Ps. 14:1) Some do not have faith in the existence of a Creator. Others though, believe there is a God, and in reading the Bible, they come upon this passage: "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is."—Heb. 11:6

Not everyone who appreciates the foregoing text has received the Holy Spirit. Yet, observing the orderliness of nature, they accept that there must be a God. Thus, they have a measure of natural faith, although in their lives they are not consistent in striving to do all they can to please the Heavenly Father. There is also, however, a deeper spiritual faith that only the consecrated possess. "That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith." (II Thess. 3:2) "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17) These texts pertain to spiritual faith which is increased by embracing the precious promises of the Scriptures and continually feeding upon them.

Returning to the question of what constitutes the "gift of God" in Ephesians 2:8, the following translation supports the intended thought, we believe, that the gift referred to in this verse is salvation. "For it is by grace [God's remarkable compassion and favor drawing you to Christ] that you have been saved [actually delivered from judgment and given eternal life] through faith. And this [salvation] is not of yourselves [not through your own effort] but it is the [undeserved, gracious] gift of God."—*Amplified Bible*

## **TWO ASPECTS OF ONE SALVATION**

A heavenly or “so great salvation” is emphasized in much of the New Testament. (Heb. 2:3) However, the totality of the Scriptures shows that there are two aspects of the one salvation which comes from God through Christ Jesus. Here are six considerations pertaining to the matter.

1. Those who would be disciples of Christ have been invited to follow a course of righteous living and self-sacrifice. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”—Matt. 16:24,25

2. As the Captain of all true believers, Jesus led the way to this heavenly salvation for his church by setting an example of self-denial and enduring trials even unto death. (Heb. 2:9,10) The path of discipleship is a difficult one because it requires following in the Master’s footsteps and involves service, sacrifice, suffering and persecution. A high reward is promised to all who persevere faithfully in doing God’s will despite any opposition received. “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. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—Rom. 8:17,18

3. Most of the promises relating to humanity’s future involve an earthly salvation. Mankind was made to live on the earth. “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed

the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.” “The heavens are the LORD’S heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man.”—Isa. 45:18; Ps. 115:16, *English Standard Version*

4. It will be during the thousand-year reign of Christ and his church that the world’s judgment day will be in operation. (Rev. 20:6; Acts 17:31) During this period Satan will be bound. It will be a favorable time for mankind as the New Covenant will be in effect and everyone will come to know God and his righteous laws. The condemnation which fell upon Adam originally and passed to all his posterity will be lifted because of Christ’s sacrifice.—Jer. 31:29-34

5. Presently, there are many evils that afflict humanity which God has promised to eradicate in the kingdom in order to permit mankind to turn to the Lord for blessings. The Prophet Isaiah, among others, speaks of how every imaginable illness, woe and condition of despair will be removed and replaced by rejoicing in God’s kingdom.—Isa. 2:2-4; 11:9; 25:6-9; 33:24; 35:1-10

6. God’s ultimate purpose for humanity is to have them worship him in spirit and in truth. Tests are now being applied upon true Christians who will receive a heavenly life if they prove faithful in their path of self-sacrifice and obedience to God’s will. At the end of the kingdom, when Satan is released for a “little season” after being bound for a thousand years, all members of the human family will likewise be tested. The vast majority, we believe, will prove obedient and loyal to God and will receive eternal

salvation here on Earth. Satan, willful evil doers, and death itself, the “last enemy,” shall be destroyed.— Rev. 20:7-9; Acts 3:20-23; I Cor. 15:24-28

## **HUMAN INSTRUMENTS**

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ... And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:8,11-13) In the foregoing passage we are informed that after Christ’s resurrection and ascension, not only did he gain a great victory by purchasing the human race that was captive to sin and death, but he also “gave gifts” unto men, the main purpose of which was for the “perfecting” of the church for its ministry of reconciliation. These gifts were in the form of human agencies whose role was to edify the church throughout this Gospel Age.

For example, the apostles served as divinely appointed ambassadors during the first century, and as God’s mouthpieces, their teachings and writings were unerring. Jesus told these specially chosen ones, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt.18:18) Accordingly, as we obey the principles found in the New Testament, we can be assured that we are conducting ourselves in a manner that *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) would be pleasing to our Heavenly Father. In order to strengthen us in our desire to be obedient to divine precepts, Christ also gave some to be prophets. In this context, those referred to by Paul as “prophets” [Greek: inspired speakers] would be consecrated, spirit begotten public expounders who faithfully proclaim to others the wonderful plan of salvation that will bless the human family during God’s kingdom.

God has provided other human agencies such as “evangelists; ... pastors and teachers,” whose eyes of spiritual understanding have been opened, and whose lives reflect devotedness to righteous principles, soundness in doctrinal understanding and faithfulness in serving the cause of Christ. These are additional gifts that have been provided to develop spiritual maturity among God’s people.

We are living at a time in Earth’s history when life is chaotic for mankind in general, with no apparent solution for the woes that engulf individuals throughout the globe. To most people, the concept that a loving, powerful and compassionate God is in control of everything and has a wonderful plan that will bring blessings, peace and a righteous environment for all may seem incredulous.

However, consecrated spirit begotten followers of Christ have faith’s conviction that God’s plans for mankind as outlined in the Scriptures will surely come to pass as promised. How thankful we are to have received so many gifts from our beneficent Heavenly Father which have provided us the wherewithal to tell all who have a hearing ear the good news of the coming kingdom that will restore all that was lost in Eden.—Luke 19:10; Acts 3:20,21 ■