

Does Mercy Have Limits?

“Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.”

—Jeremiah 33:11

THE RED CROSS, WHICH for many years has been an organization associated with mercy, especially as manifested in times of disaster, was the subject of a recent news release. “*The New York Times*” International Section published on April 15, 2000, the following from Geneva under the caption, “*World Red*

Cross Movement Takes Step toward Admitting Israel.”

“The Red Cross is moving to adopt a new emblem in addition to its red cross and red crescent, partly to clear the way for Israel to join after fifty years of exclusion.

“A two-day meeting of governments and Red Cross representatives, which ended today, began a process that is expected to lead to the emblem’s approval by year’s end.

“The action followed pressure from the American Red Cross to admit Israel’s equivalent relief services organization, the Magen David Adom, or Red Shield of David, whose symbol is a red six-pointed star.

“In 1949, the International Committee of the Red Cross adopted three symbols: the red cross, the red crescent and the Iranian red lion and sun, which was dropped in 1980. The Red Cross has resisted adding new national or religious symbols, insisting that each new member adopt the red cross or crescent. But even aside from the issue of admitting Israel, which some members have resisted, the Red Cross in recent years has considered adopting a symbol not linked to religion or nationality.

“The new emblem under consideration is a red diamond. Although details have yet to be worked out, it is envisioned that Israel’s emblem, like that of any other national society that wanted to change its symbol, would be an inset in a corner of the diamond. Organizations could also use a combination of symbols, which is now forbidden.

“Although it did not block the plan, the American Red Cross argued that it was unnecessary because the International Committee of the Red

Cross, which is responsible for civilians in war zones, already had the authority to admit Israel's group without the drawn-out process of approving a new emblem.

“Speaking on behalf of the American Red Cross, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, a former American Secretary of State, said it was morally wrong to exclude Israel's society. ‘We've fought this for years,’ he said. ‘It's gone on long enough.’ To make the point, the American Red Cross last month withheld \$5 million in membership dues from the Swiss-run international committee and \$350,000 more from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which cares for disaster victims.

“‘The American Red Cross,’ Mr. Eagleburger said, ‘will work, if necessary, directly with countries’ aid groups’—raising the possibility of a split in the Red Cross movement. Privately, some Red Cross officials here were defiant. ‘We're prepared for a little poverty rather than just doing what they want,’ said one. These officials insisted that they must move deliberately to bring all countries on board to change the emblem and admit Israel, but others argued that delay would just be used to keep Israel out.

“Yitzhak Lior, an Israeli Foreign Ministry official attending the meeting, said it would be up to his country's relief society to decide whether to accept a new symbol. ‘It's not an easy decision,’ he said.

“Behind the emblem controversy is concern that if the Palestinian territories attain statehood, their relief group, which uses the red crescent, will quickly become an official Red Cross member while Israel remains on the sidelines.

“The American Red Cross said it would hold the international committee's president, Jakob Kellenberger, ‘to the promise he made to the American Red Cross and members of the United States Congress to invoke a safety net if this diplomatic approach fails to grant immediate membership to the Red Shield of David by the end of the year.’”

Two months later, another news release said that Israel was rejecting the proposal. On June 3, the “*New York Times*” reported, “Israel said it was rejecting a proposal by the International Committee of the Red Cross to allow it membership if it agreed to replace its red Star of David with a neutral symbol, like a diamond, in certain zones. The director of the

Magen David Adom, or Red Star of David organization, said that since the symbol would be for Israel only, it would be ‘like a yellow star,’ the Nazi insignia for the Jews.”

It may be surprising to many people in the United States to learn of the prejudice that has existed towards Israel by an organization such as the Red Cross, which has been a symbol of mercy. This is not an attitude possessed by the American Red Cross, which has been working hard to admit Israel into the organization. Many of the International Red Cross members are Moslems, which explains, in part, the situation. It appeared hopeful that this prejudice would be lessened because of the effort put forth by the American Red Cross, but now the latest news release of Israel’s rejection of the terms for being approved indicates otherwise.

Mercy is not a quality that can be demanded by anyone. This is made clear in Romans 9, where the Apostle Paul laments that his own kinsmen—the nation of Israel—had failed to seize the opportunity of access to Christ. They had every advantage over Gentiles. God had only known them out of all the families of the earth. (Amos 3:2) Also, Paul says they had “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises.”—Rom. 9:4

In spite of these advantages, Israel was not faithful, or, as he said, “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” (vs. 6) In a similar manner he points to Abraham and the promises made to him and his progeny, and says, “Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (vs. 7), alluding to Ishmael as the child of flesh, and Isaac as the seed of promise (or natural Israel being pictured by Ishmael and spiritual Israel by Isaac).

Using Rebecca’s experience in becoming the mother of twin boys, he reminds us that God had said to her before the twins were born, “the elder shall serve the younger” (vs. 12), concluding finally, with the words spoken by God to Moses: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”—vs. 15; Exod. 33:19

Mercy has many definitions, such as ‘relief of suffering,’ which is the type associated with the work of the Red Cross. It also means ‘compassionate treatment,’ and ‘refraining from harming or punishing others such as enemies, offenders, persons in one’s power.’ Also, it

means ‘a disposition to be kind, forgiving, or having pity,’ and also ‘the power to forgive or be kind.’ It is especially in this sense that God, our Father, has ‘mercy.’

The way ‘mercy’ is used in Romans 9 is along the lines of favor. Exclusive favor was given to Israel in many ways. They were guided and directed by God, and specially blessed as a people. But this favor ended when they rejected their Messiah, our Lord Jesus, and then he rejected them as a nation. It was for this reason that they lost the opportunity of realizing the chief blessings promised to Abraham’s seed.

The Apostle Paul uses a domestic olive tree to illustrate this, and how the branches of that tree were removed and the branches of a wild olive tree were grafted in. This pictures the Gentiles, who received this opportunity instead. (Rom. 11:17-21) Some might interpret this as lost favor forever. This is not so. The apostle makes plain that as Israel’s rejection resulted in favor for the Gentiles, that the return of favor to them would be great blessings for all mankind. As he says, “Now if the fall of them [natural Israel] be the riches of the world [the enlightenment of the world], and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles [only a few received the chief blessing]; how much more their fulness?”—Rom. 11:12

Many people are not able to grasp and understand the teaching of the Bible that God has not cast away this people because of their stiff neckedness and unbelief. This has given rise to much prejudice against them. Anti-Semitism has been severe and unwarranted. God has permitted this to happen so that eventually all people will recognize God as the great, merciful God that he is, as they see his power manifested on behalf of his people. The Bible explains how this will occur, and how there will be even more prejudice arise against Israel. They have been blamed for the economic ills of many countries, and finding fault is likely to increase as we approach the time for God’s kingdom to begin.

From Biblical prophecies such as Ezekiel 38,39, we are given a preview of events that will lead to “Jacob’s trouble,” an expression found in Jeremiah 30:7. In Jeremiah’s prophecy, it is clear that this great trouble of Jacob (another name for the nation of Israel) occurs after the Lord will “restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land which I gave to their fathers, and they

shall take possession of it.” (Jer. 30:3, *Revised Standard Version*) The setting, therefore, for the events described in Jeremiah 30 is the present time of Israel’s regathering.

Prior to ‘Jacob’s trouble,’ the Lord tells Israel that they will not be unpunished. He says, “I will chasten you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished. For thus says the Lord: Your hurt is incurable, and your wound is grievous. There is none to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you; for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant. Why do you cry out over your hurt? Your pain is incurable. Because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant, I have done these things to you.”—Jer. 30:11-15, *RSV*

The Lord’s permission of evil toward Israel by other nations will appear to be incurable, unstoppable. But this will not be so. In that prophecy God makes it plain that the intense trouble that arises will bring destruction to the other nations, and not to Israel. As it is written: “Thus says the Lord: We have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale? Alas! that day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it. And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will break the yoke from off their neck, and I will burst their bonds, and strangers shall no more make servants of them. But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, says the Lord, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for lo, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with you to save you, says the Lord; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end.”—Jer. 30:5-11, *RSV*

This prophetic destruction of the nations that have harassed Israel is continued in this prophecy after telling about the punishment that had to come to Israel. “Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured, and all your foes, every one of them, shall go into captivity; those who despoil you shall become a spoil, and all who prey on you I will make a prey. For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the Lord,

because they have called you an outcast: It is Zion for whom no one cares!”—Jer. 30:16,17

The remainder of this beautiful prophecy tells of God’s mercy being used on behalf of Israel (vs. 18) and describes in much detail the blessings they are to receive. It is at that time that the Lord says, “Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (vs. 22) The prophecy concludes by saying, “In the latter days you will understand this.”—vs. 24, *RSV*

How glad we are that God’s mercy endureth forever, and that all nations will be beneficiaries of that wonderful mercy, love, and goodness of our glorious Heavenly Father. To him be praise forevermore. Amen.

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Be an Encourager

Key Verse: “*And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?*”
—*Judges 4:14*

Selected Scripture:
Judges 4:1-22

OUR LESSON TAKES place in the experiences of Israel during the time of the Judges. Israel had inherited the promised land of Canaan. They were supposed to have conquered and driven out the residents of Canaan, but had failed to do so completely. Time and again they fell into the idolatry of their neighbors and were punished by being dominated by a neighboring nation or resident group in Canaan. And each time Israel cried to the Lord for help.

After being delivered in recent time by Ehud from Moab, they again did evil and were given into the hand of Jabin, a king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor. He had a huge army under his general, Sisera, and fighting equipment of 900 chariots of iron. He was able to cruelly oppress Israel for twenty years.

God answered Israel’s cry for help by raising up Deborah, a prophetess and faithful woman, who perceived that neglect of Divine Law had been responsible for subjugation of her people, and that what was needed was to guide them back to God. In his dealings with her, God indicated that Jabin’s army under Sisera would be drawn to the valley of Megiddo by the river Kishon in preparation to attack the southern part of Canaan. She was to ask Barak to come and take ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun of northern Canaan to prepare for battle and camp at Mt. Tabor.

Although Barak complied, he was reluctant to go against this vast army unless Deborah also went with him. She consented, but told him that he would lose honor. See Judges 4:9.

On the day of Sisera’s planned invasion, his attention was turned toward Barak’s encampment on Mt. Tabor, and he turned to fight and overwhelm Barak’s army. Deborah told Barak, to arise and descend from Mt. Tabor toward Sisera’s army, because the Lord would deliver him into

his hand, and had already proceeded ahead of Barak to do so. (Judg. 4:14) Indeed, the Lord preceded him and unleashed a torrential rain upon Sisera's army that flooded the River Kishon, drowning and sweeping away many men of his army and miring his chariots of iron in the mud, making them useless. Barak's army swept down upon these helpless men and slaughtered them. In the song of triumph sung by Deborah and Barak these details are made clear. See Judges 5:18-23.

In the midst of this defeat, General Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled on foot seeking refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. The Kenites were at peace with Jabin and were not supposed to be his enemies, but when he fell asleep, she killed him. Barak, who pursued him, found him dead in Jael's tent, as predicted by Deborah. This was the first battle of Armageddon, and clearly the victory was the Lord's as he fought for his people, Israel. The Scriptures then said that "the land had rest forty years."—Judg. 5:31

In this discouraging world, it is so encouraging to know that the imminent final Battle of Armageddon will likewise be a clear victory for our Lord, as outlined in Revelation 16:13-16 and Revelation 19:11-21. Praise be to God for his wonderful plan!

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Be Obedient

Key Verse: *“The LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?”*

—Judges 6:14

Selected Scripture:
Judges 6:11-14;
7:1-26

IN TYPICAL FASHION during Israel’s period of the Judges, when the Lord raised a judge to lead them back from idolatry, they would have peace under that judge. When that judge died, Israel would do evil in the sight of the Lord again. Thus, it happened after Deborah and Barak no longer were around, the Lord delivered Israel into the hand of Midian for seven years. (Judg. 6:1) The Midianites greatly outnumbered the Israelites and regularly raided them with devastating effect. The Israelites retreated into the hill country where they hid in caves and valleys. When the people cried unto the Lord he sent them a prophet

to explain that lack of obedience caused their plight.

At the same time, the Lord started to prepare a judge to deliver them by sending an angel unto Gideon of Manasseh, who told him that he would be the one to save Israel from the Midianites. (Judg. 6:14) Gideon could not believe that he could do this. The angel then performed a miracle and disappeared. Gideon was instructed by the Lord to tear down the altar to Baal. Thus began Gideon’s obedience to the instructions of the Lord after he, being unsure of himself, sought verification of his mission.

When the Midianites came into the valley of Jezreel to oppress Israel again, the spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he gathered all of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali unto himself to deliver Israel. The Lord told Gideon that there were too many people, and that the victory might be interpreted by Israel as being made possible by their own strength. (Judg. 7:2) So Gideon was to tell those who were fearful and afraid that they should leave where they were assembled at Mt. Gilead and return to their homes. Out of thirty-two thousand men,

twenty-two thousand returned to their homes, leaving only ten thousand.—Judg. 7:2,3

The Lord said there were still too many, and he provided a test involving drinking water from a stream. Those who took the water in their hands and drank, after examining the water while watching for a foe, were separated from those who stooped down and sucked the water directly from the stream. There were only three hundred who passed the test, and the others were sent back to their tents and homes. To gain more confidence, Gideon was told to spy on the Midianites with his servant, and the success of his battle was predicted.

This was all that Gideon needed; he returned to Gilead and divided his three hundred men into three companies and gave each a torch, an empty pitcher to cover the torch, and a trumpet. They circled the Midian Camp and, at Gideon's signal, blew the trumpet, broke the pitcher revealing the torch, and shouted "the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." (Judg. 7:19-23) The effect on the Midian Camp was to throw them into total confusion, and they slew one another. The other ten thousand Israelites were called to pursue the remainder of the fleeing army being joined by Ephraim, completely vanquishing them.

The lesson of obedience must be learned by those who will be associated with Christ in the defeat and elimination of the present evil forces.

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Be Faithful

Key Verse: “And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O LORD God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”

—Judges 16:28

***Selected Scripture:
Judges 16:4-30***

“**THE CHILDREN OF** Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.” (Judg. 13: 1) As a consequence the Lord permitted the Philistines to have dominion over them and to oppress them forty years. Under these circumstances God raised up another judge, in a different way than in the past. He sent an angel to the barren wife of Manoah, of the tribe of Dan, to tell her that she was to have a son who would be a Nazarite, and, as a Nazarite, would take a vow unto the Lord and his hair would not be shaved at any time. She bore a son and named him Samson.

During the first twenty years of the Philistine’s dominance, Samson grew to maturity and the Lord blessed him.

When he matured, “the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him.” (Judg. 13:25, *Revised Standard Version*) He spent the next twenty years judging Israel. (Judg. 16:31) He was young; he had tremendous strength; and was a man full of faith. He also had a weakness for beautiful women, and the incidents of his life recorded in Judges, Chapter 14 to 16 highlight this weakness. The women involved were Philistines, and his parents, who expected him to marry a woman of Israel, spoke to him of this. They did not realize that it was the Lord’s doing to get Samson involved with the Philistines in order to break the dominion of the Philistines over Israel.—Judg. 14:4

Samson is not viewed as an example of good moral living expected of the servants of the Lord, yet he is mentioned as one of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11: 32. Therefore, these incidents were to illustrate how God would release his children from captivity, oppression and false religious worship. Samson’s first wife betrayed his secret to her kinsmen and this

caused Samson to slay those who brought on her betrayal. When her father gave her as a wife to a companion of Samson, he took vengeance against the Philistines by destroying their grain crops, so the Philistines burned his wife and father-in-law. Samson slew many Philistines in vengeance.

They, in turn, planned to attack Judah and, out of fear, Judah pleaded with Samson to let them bind him and to turn him over to them. Again, this led to a great slaughter of the Philistines by Samson, who easily broke his bonds. It was only when Samson became involved with Delilah in the valley of Sorek that the Philistines were able to use her to find the source of his strength. They pledged her vast sums of money, and with persistent pleading she finally found the secret of Samson's great strength. She caused him to sleep, and had his head shaved—an indication that his vow had terminated. (Num. 6:19) When he went out to fight the Philistines, his strength was gone and he was taken captive. The Philistines put out his eyes and placed him in prison.

After his hair began to grow back, the Philistines made a great feast to their God, Dagon, and brought out Samson to entertain them, restraining him between two pillars. The house was full of thousands of people. All the rulers were there. Samson prayed for the renewal of his strength and pushed on the pillars with all his might.

The temple collapsed, killing all those assembled.

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Be an Example

Key Verse: *“The LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel.*

Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.”

—I Samuel 3:10

Selected Scripture:
I Samuel 3:2-20; 7:3-12

IN THE TIMES OF THE Judges, Eli was high priest and judge in Israel. He had two wicked sons who, as underpriests, took advantage of their office to commit various atrocities. It was then that God made preparations to raise up another judge for Israel.

God blessed Samuel’s mother, Hannah, who was barren, and she finally had a son. She had prayed for a child and promised the Lord that she would give him to the Lord and he would take the Nazarite vow. Thus Samuel was born, and Hannah, true to her promise, brought him to Eli when he was old enough to no longer require his mother’s care. There,

according to her desire, he was placed in the Lord’s service.

“Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.” (I Sam. 2:18; 3:1) He assisted Eli in his priestly functions. As a child he “did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him.” (vs. 7) It was during this period that God called Samuel. At night he would sleep in the proximity of Eli, and it was during the night that God called Samuel. Samuel awoke and ran to Eli, thinking that he had called him. Eli’s response was that he had not called him and that he should lie down again. Three times the Lord called him; and at the third call, Eli perceived that the Lord was calling Samuel, and instructed him how he was to answer. Samuel did as instructed, and the Lord took him into his confidence and told him that he was through with Eli’s house because of the wickedness of the sons.

Later, when Israel fought against the Philistines, they sought to turn the tide of the battle to their favor. Instead, they were tragically defeated. Eli’s sons were slain, and the Ark of the Covenant fell into the hands of the Philistines for seven months. They returned it to Israel and it was

placed in the home of a Levite—Abinadab—where it resided for about one hundred years.

Twenty years after these events occurred, Samuel grown to manhood, became a Judge in Israel. First, he had Israel give up its idolatry and return to worshipping the Lord. (I Sam. 7:3-6) The Philistines went to this gathering of the people unto Samuel at Mizpeh to subdue them and scatter them. As Samuel prayed to the Lord, the Scriptures say, “the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them.”—vs. 13

We are not told in detail about the natural forces unleashed against the Philistines, but, as they fled in panic, Israel pursued and slew them, gaining a great victory. The Philistines were driven out of the coastal area they had taken over, “and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.”—I Sam. 7:13

The call of Samuel represents the call of the church during the Gospel Age, a time when corrupt worship of God by those pretending to be true worshipers is common. Eventually, however, the prophecy given by a man of God to Eli, will be fulfilled by the glorified Christ class.—I Sam. 2:35

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The Heavenly Calling

CHAPTER 3

VERSE 1 “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”

In the preceding chapter Paul emphasizes that the true disciples of Jesus are also his “brethren” (Heb. 2:11,12), and that the Master is not ashamed to consider them such. In this chapter he reveals that these brethren are ‘holy’ in the Lord’s sight, and that they are partakers of ‘the heavenly calling.’ (vs. 1) There is a wonderful depth of Christian love and understanding manifested in this statement. These Hebrew Christians were far from being in a spiritually-healthy condition, as we shall see later in the 5th chapter; but, nevertheless, Paul still looked upon them as being ‘holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.’

The reference to Jesus as the ‘Apostle’ reminds us that he was the One whom the Heavenly Father sent into the world to be the Redeemer and Savior; the word means ‘one who is sent.’ Jesus chose twelve apostles—Paul later taking the place of Judas—and these were the ones whom he specially sent to be his inspired representatives—“the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Others are referred to in the New Testament as ‘apostles’ because they were sent to preach the Gospel, but these should not be confused with the inspired Twelve, the ones who are symbolically referred to in Revelation as the twelve foundation stones of the New Jerusalem.—Rev. 21:14

We are to ‘consider’ Jesus, that is, to ponder over his glorious qualities, for he was the One specially set apart and ‘sent’ by Jehovah to be the “messenger of the covenant” (Mal. 3:1), the One who was to reveal the love and saving power of God both to the church and to the world. To the Hebrew brethren, and to the whole church, he is the High Priest of our profession. This is an important thought to keep in mind in order properly to understand the Book of Hebrews; the church, the ‘brethren’ of Christ,

are members of a priestly order, not merely those who receive blessings through a priesthood.

The word ‘profession’ in this text is from a Greek word meaning ‘common speech,’ or profession. As underpriests, the consecrated followers of Christ during the present Gospel Age have a common share with Jesus in the work of the priesthood, being ministers “of reconciliation” with him, through the use of the “word of reconciliation.” (II Cor 5:18-19) As his ambassadors, these Christians speak only the things which he gives them to say.

VERSE 2 “Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.”

Faithfulness is one of the very important qualifications of a messenger, or representative, for otherwise he could not be trusted. The Heavenly Father could rely upon Jesus to be faithful to the trust committed to him. The expression ‘appointed him,’ should read, “made him.” This could refer to his being made the High Priest, or possibly it refers to his original creation. In either case, Jehovah knew that he could trust his beloved Son.

Moses was a type of Christ, and Moses was faithful over his house. In telling us of Moses’ faithfulness, Paul quotes from Numbers 12:7, where the Lord said of his ancient servant, “Who is faithful in all mine house.” This was high commendation. There could be no higher.

VERSES 3,4 “For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. “For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.”

“Of whom [God] are all things, ... and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things,” writes the apostle. (I Cor. 8:6) This principle has operated ever since the *Logos* was created. Thus, while Jehovah spoke of the house over which Moses was the chief servant as ‘mine’ (Heb. 3:4,5), we may reasonably conclude that the *Logos* had much to do in organizing the natural descendants of Abraham into that house of servants.

The same is true of the house of sons which has been ‘made’ during the Gospel Age. Jesus is the Head over this house, but he is more than that; for, under the direction of his Heavenly Father, he has been supervising its building. Thus it is very true that Jesus has been more

highly honored in the Divine plan than Moses. The ‘glory’ associated with Moses’ ministry was reflected in his countenance when he came down from Sinai bearing the Ten Commandments. This was typical of the still greater glory of the antitypical Moses when, as a result of the inauguration of the New Covenant, the glory of God will be caused to fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea.

VERSE 5 “And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after.”

The Greek word here translated ‘servant’ does not denote a slave, but merely one who is subservient to another in the sense of having a lower office. Moses was a highly honored servant, and was faithful in all his house ‘for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after.’ The thought clearly is that the house of servants under Moses, and all which pertained to it, was designed by God to be a testimony, or a setting forth by types, of things which would take place later on a higher and grander scale—“a shadow of good things to come.” (Heb. 10:1) This includes the Tabernacle and its services, which the apostle explains later in the Book of Hebrews, and accounts for the exactness with which Moses was required to carry out the details of construction given to him: “See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.”—Exod. 25:40; Heb. 8:5

VERSE 6 “But Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”

Here the more honored position of Jesus as Head over the house of sons is again alluded to, in that the house is said also to belong to him—he is more than its Head—and we are his brethren in this house, or family. True, we are servants, but we serve as sons, and as sons many of the secrets of the Divine plan are revealed. See John 15:15

‘Whose house are we.’ Paul and his Hebrew readers, and eventually the whole church, are included in the pronoun ‘we.’ But we can be a part of the house of sons only on condition that we ‘hold fast’ our ‘confidence’ ‘firm unto the end.’ Evidently the Hebrew brethren, to whom this epistle was written, were having difficulties along this line, for the admonition to steadfastness and to holding fast recurs time and again. Letting these things slip through lack of confidence and rejoicing might well be the

besetting sin mentioned later in Chapter 12, verse 1. This is a sin which easily besets all of the Lord's people. We can well take to heart the warning that only if we actually 'hold fast' can we hope to continue as members of the house of sons.

By including the 'we' class in the house of sons, the apostle brings in the great mystery that the church shares with Jesus in the anointing and in the service assigned to this 'house.' What an inestimable privilege! It is a fellowship of service, life, and training. Through this fellowship there comes into the heart of each member of the church a deep peace and joy which the world is utterly unable to understand. Satan tries to make us loosen our grip on these things, going about as a "roaring lion" (I Pet. 5:8), endeavoring to terrorize the 'brethren' who are partakers of the 'heavenly calling.' But we are not ignorant of his devices, and are confident that he will not be able to pluck us out of our Heavenly Father's care.—John 10:29

In the Greek text, the thought is that we exult in our hope; we rejoice in our hope; that is, we anticipate its realization with pleasure. Let us not permit this hope to become dim by giving too much attention to the world, or to anything which will alienate our affections from the Lord and from his service. There can be no halfheartedness on the part of those who hope to make their calling and election sure to a place in the glorified house of sons.

VERSES 7-9 "Wherefore (as the Holy [Spirit] saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: "When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years."

'Wherefore'—the opportunity of attaining so high an honor and the danger of losing it, emphasizes the importance of holding fast our exultant confidence and hope. How shall we hold fast? By not permitting our minds to question the goodness and faithfulness of our Heavenly Father, and by keeping close to him in prayer and through the study of his Word. If we allow ourselves to be influenced by the enticements of the world, there will develop a dullness of our spiritual minds with a consequent lack of faith, leading finally to unbelief—an unbelief which

will fail to consider properly all the bountiful proofs of God's faithfulness and love.

It is in Psalm 95:7-11 that the Holy Spirit, through David, testifies concerning the importance of not hardening our hearts as did the Israelites in the wilderness. Thus does our loving Heavenly Father help us to keep our feet in the right path. The expression, 'today,' is prophetic of the present Gospel Age, when the privileges of the heavenly calling are open. It is not the only day of salvation, being properly called "a day" of salvation in Isaiah 49:8. For each individual there is only a short time during the present life span in which to prove faithful, but this is sufficient if we "give diligence" to make our "calling and election sure."—II Pet. 1:10

Sometime 'today' will come to a close and many will say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." (Jer. 8:20) The *American Revised Version* reads, "O, that ye might this day hearken to his voice." God does not coerce any of us, but do we appreciate the heavenly calling enough to hearken to and obey his voice? If we keep our exultant confidence and hope 'firm unto the end' we will delight to walk faithfully in the Lord's way even though now it is the way of sacrifice and death.

How do we 'harden' our hearts? By failure to appreciate God's goodness as manifested in his providential leading and care, and by resisting his will as revealed to us through his Word. Every making of an excuse for our lack of obedience renders our spiritual perception more dull, and we become correspondingly less responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In the case of the Jews, because of their continued hardness of heart, no matter how many times the Lord reprovved them, or how richly he blessed them, by their continued waywardness and disobedience they provoked the Lord; so their wilderness experience was to him a day of "provocation."—Heb. 3:8

For the Israelites it was a "day of temptation." (Ps. 95:8) There were ten special trials which the Lord permitted to come upon them. These are referred to in Exodus 5:21; 14:11; 15:24; 16:2; 17:2,3; 32:1; Numbers 11:1,4 (twice); 12:1; and 14:2. Each of these circumstances constituted a test of faith for the Israelites—tests in which they failed. But as the Lord, on each occasion, delivered them from the situation which caused them

to complain, they should have learned to put their trust more fully in him, but they did not.

VERSES 10,11 “Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. “So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.”

The disobedience of the Israelites in the wilderness was of the heart. They could have been excused at first because of their lack of faith, but as time after time the Lord demonstrated his love for them and his power to deliver them, they should have learned to put their trust in him. But they did not, for the reason that they did not want to. They had a disposition of rebellion against their God. ‘They do alway err in their heart.’

Because of this, and not because of inherited weakness, the Lord was ‘grieved,’ and in his ‘wrath’ he ‘sware,’ or definitely determined that all the males of the nation who were numbered and were of responsible age would not be permitted to enter into the Promised Land, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua. Nor could they enter into God’s rest to enjoy peace of mind and soul, based on full confidence in Jehovah’s care for them.

VERSE 12 “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

We should examine our own hearts carefully; but it is often difficult to see our own defects, so we need Divine help in scrutinizing ourselves. How appropriate is the prayer of the psalmist: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”—Ps. 139:23,24

Those who have unbelieving hearts not only rob themselves of the peace and joy they might otherwise have, but they send out an evil, hurtful influence to those around them. How important that we take heed to our hearts. To do this we will need to give close attention to the instructions of the Lord, and not permit ourselves to be subject to outside influences, nor listen to other voices than that of the Lord.

VERSE 13 “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

The Greek word here translated ‘exhort’ is similar to the one which is translated ‘Comforter’ when this name is given to the Holy Spirit. It means to strengthen together, and thus to comfort one another. This is one of the blessed privileges of each member of the New Creation. May we all be faithful in our endeavors to strengthen and encourage our brethren.

We are to continue exhorting the brethren to faithfulness while it is called ‘today’; that is, throughout the Gospel Age, the period in the Divine plan when the ‘heavenly calling’ is operative. It is especially urgent that we continue faithfully to exhort one another, for soon the door to the heavenly calling will be closed, and the Gospel Age ended.

There is always a danger that our hearts become hardened by ‘the deceitfulness of sin.’ The ways of error and sin are almost always made to appear very bright and worthwhile. Satan, therefore, will deceive and delude, as many as are not taking heed. Everything which is out of harmony with God and with righteousness is a delusion. If we permit our hearts to be drawn away by such influences, and hardened toward the Lord and toward his people, we will ultimately experience the loss of everything, including life itself.

VERSE 14 “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.”

This text clearly disproves the theory of “Once in grace, always in grace.” It states definitely that the only ones who actually partake of Christ are those who hold the beginning of their confidence “firm unto the end.” (Heb. 3:6) Jesus said, “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” (Matt. 24:13) In Revelation 2:10 we read, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” The ‘beginning’ of our confidence is a reference to that fresh vitality, the eager interest, and that all-absorbing determination which was ours when we were first convinced of the truth of the Gospel and of the heavenly calling, and decided that we would give our all to the Lord in full consecration to do his will.

Paul seemed apprehensive lest the Hebrew brethren might already have lost a measure of their first-love zeal and confidence. Later in Chapter 10 he writes to them saying, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of

afflictions.” (Heb. 10:32) In Chapter 6:11, complimenting them on their love and zeal, he added, “We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.”

VERSES 15-19 “While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. “For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. “But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? “And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.”

In these verses the apostle seems to be emphasizing the vital importance of the admonition he has already given not to permit our hearts to become hardened by unbelief, and through unbelief, to cast away our confidence. He stresses this point by reminding us that this was the unhappy lot of all who came out of Egypt with Moses.

Verse 16 is treated by most modern scholars as being in question form like verses 17 and 18. (*See Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott.*) As a question, the text could read, “Who, when they had heard, provoked? Was it not all who came out of Egypt by Moses?” Caleb and Joshua were the only exceptions among those of responsible age who were numbered at the time of the Exodus, and these two in six hundred thousand are ignored in this exhortation to watchfulness and faithfulness.

Unbelief is a serious thing in the sight of God, for it places a barrier between him and those upon whom he would graciously bestow his blessings. Abraham became the friend of God upon the basis of his faith, or belief. This thought of friendship in relation to faith helps us to appreciate more fully just why faith is so important to God. Even in our relationships with one another there could be no friendship except upon the basis of faith, or confidence. There can be no friendship among nations except as they have faith or confidence in one another. So it is in our relationship to God. If we wish to enjoy the blessings which he is so willing to bestow abundantly upon his friends, we must have confidence in him.

The unbelief of the Israelites was their great sin in the ‘day of provocation.’ In that day when they provoked the Lord they did not have confidence in him, and because of their unbelief, rebelled against his providence. Their sin was the greater because it continued after they had been given many demonstrations of God’s good will toward them, and of his ability to care for them, for then it became willful. They hardened their hearts, with the result that they lost everything so far as God’s blessings at that time were concerned. The ‘rest of faith,’ which God had provided was lost. They did not enter the Promised Land. Their carcasses fell in the wilderness.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Paul Followed Christ

THE APOSTLE PAUL admonished the Church to follow him even as he followed the Master. (I Cor. 11:1) Paul truly did walk according to the example of selflessness displayed by Jesus. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus was given a heavenly vision of the Divine will for him, and he expressed his delight in that will and his determination to carry out all that had been written of him “in the volume of the Book.” (Heb. 10:7) From the beginning, Jesus knew that this would finally lead him into death, but there was no holding back. The same was true with the Apostle Paul. He, too, received a heavenly vision and years afterward he explained to King Agrippa, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” (Acts 26:19) Paul was not disobedient to that vision, though he realized, even as Jesus did, that to be obedient would cost him his life.

THE HEAVENLY VISION

The heavenly vision received by Paul doubtless revealed to him some of the glories that would follow his life of sacrifice and suffering. It also emphasized the fact that he had the privilege of laying down his life for the great Messianic cause. The Lord explained to Ananias that Paul was a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. This was made plain to the apostle, as the Lord explained to Ananias, “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” (Acts 9:15,16) This was part of the heavenly vision. He was shown what great things he must suffer. Paul was not coerced into following this path of suffering, but he gladly walked in it because it was God’s way for him.

Throughout the apostle’s entire ministry we find displayed his determination to be obedient to the heavenly vision no matter what the cost might be. Paul, like Jesus, was informed that in going up to Jerusalem bonds and imprisonment awaited him. Like Jesus, attempts were made to dissuade him from taking a course that would thus result in suffering. But Paul was following the example of Jesus and was glad of the privilege of laying down his life in the Master’s cause.

Thus, in response to those who advised against what to them seemed to be a reckless course to pursue, Paul said, “What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 21:13) Previous to this he had declared his position in the matter saying, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.”—Acts 20:24

Paul had been warned by the Holy Spirit what to expect. However, he did not interpret this warning as meaning that God did not want him to go to Jerusalem; rather, he looked upon it in the nature of a test that his Heavenly Father was placing upon him. It was furnishing the apostle an opportunity voluntarily to lay down his life. Thus did the apostle rejoice in the privilege of following the example of Jesus.

STOP AT TROAS

On his way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped at Troas where he remained for seven days with the brethren, the next stop being at Assos. For reasons not revealed in the account, Paul decided that it was God’s will for him to remain over in Troas for their regular Sunday evening meeting. He permitted the boat to go on, fully realizing that, in order to catch up with it the next day, it would be necessary to walk many miles.

Paul, on this occasion, preached to the Troas brethren until midnight. It must have been a wonderful message, one which Paul considered important to deliver to this ecclesia at this particular time. Nothing demanded that he remain over and put himself to this extra exertion and sacrifice. He did it because he realized it was a privilege to render further service; and no doubt he realized the next morning as he started on that long, wearisome journey to Assos, that it was truly more blessed to give than to receive.—Acts 20:35

NOT REGARDING HIS LIFE

Others in the Early Church caught the spirit of the wonderful example set by Jesus and Paul, when responding to the call to “come over into Macedonia, and help us.” (Acts 16:9-15) These brethren at Philippi had ever been very dear to Paul, and when he was in prison at Rome they sent him a gift—one of their own brethren, Epaphroditus, being the

messenger. (Phil. 2:28; 4:18) Paul appreciated this manifestation of their love, and in writing to them doubtless had this partly in mind when he said, “I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.”—Phil. 1:9

It was not so much the gift which Paul appreciated as the fact that the ecclesia at Philippi had caught the spirit of true Christianity to such an extent that they were willing to make this sacrifice on behalf of one of their brethren in Christ. It was a real sacrifice that Epaphroditus had made in order to deliver the gift to the apostle. Writing to the Philippians about it Paul said, “For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack [the remainder] of service toward me.”—Phil. 2:27-30

Here indeed is a wonderful example of the principle exemplified in the ministry of Jesus and Paul, and explained by Jesus when he said, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it.” (Matt. 16:25) Epaphroditus did not regard his life when he had this opportunity to render a service to one of the Lord’s people. It is doing the things that we do not have to do that constitutes acceptable sacrifice, and results in the promised joy of giving.

SPIRIT OF LOVE STILL LIVES

We have many outstanding examples of this principle of love in the church at this end of the age. Like Jesus and Paul, these also were given a vision of truth. The vision did not reach them in the same miraculous manner. It came through an understanding of the written Word, unfolding wondrous truths of the Divine plan, constituting ‘meat in due season’ for the household of faith during the harvest period.

Like Jesus and Paul, these were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Gladly they accepted its responsibility and gave up all that they had, even life itself, in order that the truth might be passed on for the blessing of others. When the vision reached them some were busily engaged in laying up treasures upon earth. The treasures already accumulated were

gladly transferred to the heavenly account and used to spread the glad tidings of great joy.

They gave up more than merely these treasures. They devoted life to the promotion of that glorious truth which had so thrilled them. Never did they hold back from giving their all to this glorious cause. It cost them not only wealth, time, and strength, but also reputation among men. Like Jesus and Paul, they were cast out as evil; misrepresented and maligned. By faithfulness they showed it was more blessed to give than to receive.

HARVEST WORK

Throughout the entire period of the harvest work there were thousands who endeavored as best they could to follow the example of sacrifice they saw so beautifully displayed in these brethren. Some devoted their time and strength in the pilgrim service. Others—at one time as many as a thousand—wended their weary but happy way up and down the country colporteuring the “*Studies in the Scriptures*.” In most cases these gave up good positions and comfortable homes in order that they might share in the joy of giving the truth to others.

Those who could not devote all their time to this service did what they could along other lines. There was instituted what was known as the volunteer service. This consisted of the distribution of free literature—sometimes at church doors; at other times from house to house. This was done by brethren in their spare time. The ones who engaged mostly in this form of service were not in a position to give all of their time, but they gladly did what they could. Many times this service was rendered by brethren who, had they used human reasoning, would have concluded that the easier course would have been to remain home and rest.

Then there were the many opportunities of service in connection with the meetings of the Lord’s people. The elders and deacons had their opportunities, and all in the ecclesias felt the responsibility that devolved upon them of doing all they could to contribute toward the building up of the body of Christ. Financially also, during that period, the brethren made great sacrifices. Those poor in this world’s goods, nevertheless, found ways to devote their little all to the spread of the truth. Those more favorably situated gladly donated larger amounts. By the pooling of these earthly treasures so gladly sacrificed by those who were laying up

treasures in heaven, finances were adequate, and the truth was promoted to the glory of God and the blessing of others.

GOD'S SPIRIT STILL DISPLAYED

The Spirit of the Lord which thus influenced Jesus, the apostles, the Early Church, and the brethren generally during the time of the harvest, is still working in the hearts and lives of God's people. The spirit of unselfishness which urges on to self-sacrifice that others may know and experience the joys of the truth and of the Lord is still manifesting itself among the people of God today. God's Spirit today, even as in times past, is finding expression in many, varied ways, depending upon the circumstances surrounding the lives of those in which it is working. Today, as in the past, the truest and fullest expression of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people is manifested in their wanting to do things for God, for the truth, and for the brethren.

Like the faithful ones of old, and like our Lord Jesus and the Heavenly Father, they have found it really to be true that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Thus their continued toil is a joyful service to the Lord, and their reward a blessed realization of the fact that in keeping with the Divine spirit of unselfishness their voluntary efforts are helping others to know the God of their salvation.

It is this spirit which is pleasing to God. It is the spirit of wholehearted devotion to him irrespective of whether that devotion finds expression through the little that we are able to give, or through returning to God our larger assets which he entrusts to our keeping as his stewards. We can, if we wish, save our strength, our talents, our money, our all, and enjoy them as earthly treasures; but in so doing we will fail to prove the reality of the principle expressed in our text, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. For such was the example of the Apostle Paul as he followed Christ. May we emulate him, so that we too can hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."—Matt. 25:23

Perfecting Praise

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”
—Psalm 103:2

DAVID, WITH DEEP gratitude in his heart, was moved to give utterance to the thoughts of praise that were welling up within him. We are blessed to have a record of his meditations and deliberations in the Book of Psalms. The 103rd Psalm is

particularly a befitting expression of David’s devotion to God. While it expresses his own sentiments, we feel that his utterances were also prophetic of the true Christian’s feelings and sentiments.

BLESSING THE LORD

The word ‘bless’ in Hebrew means ‘to kneel,’ and by implication has the thought of praising or blessing God as an act of adoration. A summary of the commandment given to Israel was “to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deut. 11:13) David realized that lip worship would be of no value unless the lips were being employed by the heart and soul of the individual. So he does not merely say, ‘Bless the Lord;’ he opens this psalm by saying, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me [heart, soul, strength, being], bless his holy name.”—vs. 1

This act of blessing the Lord in adoration and in worship should cause the Lord’s people to kneel before their Heavenly Father, to prostrate themselves while in his hallowed presence. Can we not all join with the psalmist in saying, “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”—Ps. 95:6,7

It may not be necessary, or even practical, to kneel or bow down every time we offer our prayers of praise. There are times when it would be improper for us to do so when we are in public view where such a position of worship would seem ostentatious, to be seen of men. There are times when most of the Lord’s people can enter into their closets and there bow down in humble, grateful prayer and worship. While we thus bless

the Lord, let us heed David's suggestion to "forget not all his dealings."—Ps. 103:2, *Rotherham*

GOD'S DEALINGS

What are the Lord's 'dealings' which David exhorts us not to forget? The blessings and benefits of the Christian are many. The number we could count would depend upon how minutely we itemized them. We are dependent upon the Lord for everything that pertains to life, for, as the Apostle Paul declared, "In him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts 17:28) Hence, in his 'dealings' he extends to us all the favors of life, such as food, raiment, shelter, sunshine, and rain. We, as Christians, have far more to be thankful for than merely the provisions for our earthly existence—a life which, at best, does not usually exceed four score years, and these often accompanied with sorrow. The Psalmist David goes on to list the benefits of the Lord to 'usward' and those which he itemizes well represent those for which we, as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, have much reason to be grateful.

David explained that it was the Lord "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."—Ps. 103:3-5

There are fitting applications of these words to David's own life. The Lord surely was gracious to him and did forgive his iniquities and crown his life with loving-kindness and tender mercies. The full meaning of his words, however, can better be understood by spiritual Israel, who have been begotten of the Lord's Holy Spirit of power and of a sound mind.

DEALINGS WITH THE NEW CREATION

As New Creatures we, of course, do not sin (I John 3:9) and would need no forgiveness; but in that we are held responsible for our flesh, we then surely need the Lord's forgiveness for all the sins and shortcomings which are committed due to the imperfection of our flesh. The Lord has graciously provided a means of covering our unwilling sins and trespasses with the robe of Christ's righteousness. When we sin, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1),

who intercedes on our behalf, and secures forgiveness for all our deflections from the Lord's approved standards. Even for those sins which are committed out of neglect and carelessness, with what might be termed 'partial willfulness' on our part, the Lord disciplines us with some corrective chastisement. When we learn the needed lessons, and ask his forgiveness, he graciously restores us to his favor. We may join with the psalmist in giving thanks to the Lord that, "there is forgiveness with thee."—Ps. 130:4

Some have erroneously concluded, however, that because the Lord forgives sin, he releases unconditionally from punishment. If the Lord's forgiveness implied this, Adam might have been forgiven without our Master having to give his human life to pay the penalty for the original sin. But this was not the case. While Adam will be released from the penalty pronounced against him, it was necessary that Jesus pay the price with his own precious blood.

The unwilling sins which we commit, due to imperfection that is ever present with us, are covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, and need no chastisement. We did not consent to them, but were merely unable to stem the tide of our human imperfections. But wherein we have been remiss and negligent and allowed our fallen humanity too much liberty, the Lord often sends us some chastening experiences for our correction in righteousness. Thus, he might forgive our transgressions and release us from the severe penalty of withdrawing his favor from us, even though he applies the chastening rod.—Heb. 12:5-11

HEALING OUR DISEASES

In the Lord's dealings with us, David also recalls that he "healeth" all our "diseases." (Ps. 103:3) To the materialistic followers of the Master, this text might bring the hope that the Lord will heal their physical maladies and bring relief from their discomforts in the flesh. But those looking for physical blessings need to reexamine the terms of Christian discipleship during this Gospel Age. Upon more careful study, they will find the Scriptures to show that the "outward man" perishes day by day. (II Cor. 4:16) The 'outward man' is the flesh, and the apostle here testifies that it receives no cures or restorations, but that disintegration and death are before it.

The apostle adds in this same text that “the inward man [the New Creature] is renewed day by day.” How fitting are David’s words, which speak of the healing of all our diseases, when properly applied to the Divine restoration of our hearts from the soul sickness of discouragement, frustration, and indifference! Who that has been any time in the narrow way has not felt an occasional measure of soul sickness, or been at least at a low spiritual ebb? But the Lord does not then forsake us, for he surely heals and strengthens us, and leads us back into a vigorous, healthful condition.

SAVED FROM DESTRUCTION

Another of the Divine ‘dealings’ which we should remember while we give thanks to the Lord is that he provided for our redemption from “destruction.” (Ps. 103:4) He furnished a ransom by sending his Son, his only begotten Son, to be a propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world. (I John 2:2) We were under the yoke of sin and death, and in the Lord’s gracious dealings with us he brought us up “out of an horrible pit, [and] out of the miry clay” and he set our feet upon “a rock,” the Rock of Ages. (Ps. 40:2) No longer do we, his children, stand in dread condemnation as aliens and strangers before the bar of Divine justice. But we have been brought within the inner circle of God’s love and mercy, and as the psalmist exclaimed, he crowns us “with lovingkindness and tender mercies.”—Ps. 103:4

It may seem strange to those in the world who hear Christians speak of the Lord’s loving-kindness and tender mercies which they experience, when the worldly often observe that, as followers of the Master, we have severe trials and difficulties, great self-denials and restraints. They cannot see where there is any profit in serving the Lord. They cannot understand how the Apostle Paul could write as he did, that “we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life,” and yet speak of God who permitted this affliction as “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.”—II Cor. 1:8,3

The real truth of the matter, however, reveals that the ‘God of all mercy and comfort’ is subjecting his faithful followers to painful trials and besetments, and is sacrificing their humanity in his service day by day. This may seem like a calamity to those who do not know the object and purpose of God’s dealings; but to those who know that the Lord is

developing a New Creation to be joint-heirs with Christ, the matter is viewed as most wonderful and blessed.

The trials and hardships of the narrow way are necessary to prove and test the fidelity of the consecrated followers of the Master. They are also necessary to consume the dross of their characters, and to establish indelibly in their hearts the character likeness of their Lord. Even while they are undergoing these trying experiences they have many compensating blessings of peace, joy, and Divine approval. Very satisfying are their present blessings and they more than recompense for the hardships of the 'narrow way.' This being true, we often see them rejoicing in the face of adversities, and patient in tribulation. (Rom. 12:12) And, in spite of all the trials, it can properly be said that they live a richer, fuller, and more satisfying life than the most successful and contented worldly persons could experience.

GOD'S PROVISION

In the Lord's dealings with us, ample provision has been made to satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness. So David truly wrote, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Ps. 103:5) In this day, when there is a famine in the world, "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11), we are being fed sumptuously, and watered with the refreshing and soul-satisfying portion of the Divine Word.

What a blessed and happy feast we are enjoying! The poor world has been feeding on the promises of their fellow men, but these promises are soon broken. They then listen to eloquent philosophers who endeavor to quell their fears with sweet words and enchanting phrases, all of which, at best, only serve to allay their fears, but do not in any way alter the state of affairs in the crumbling world. They turn to the statesmen, who speak of peace and brighter days, if their policies should be adopted—policies which have failed many times in the past. They receive only little lasting comfort. The clergy likewise have no answer or message of comfort to give them, for their proposed plan of converting the world to Christ has been unsuccessful.

A LIVELY HOPE

By the Lord's grace, we are not without a true and living hope in this present world chaos, for the Lord has taken us into his confidence and has revealed his plans and purposes to us. In these last days he has satisfied us with good things from his storehouse of truth. We are privileged to know that the Lord is now selecting a group of faithful followers of the Master to be the kings and priests of the Millennial Age; which age is, in turn, reserved for the restoration and elevation of the entire human race.

This wonderful knowledge is a refreshing portion, indeed, to the Lord's true people. It helps them to take new courage and hope as they see this present evil world passing away. It also enables them to gladden the hearts of others who are looking for the answer to the present distress of nations.

They can assure others that yet a little while and the dominion of darkness shall forever pass away, and the glorious kingdom of light and truth shall be ushered in, lightened by the true Light which will lighten every man in the new age. How this glad message renews our strength and determination to press on in the narrow way. Indeed, as the psalmist said, our 'youth is renewed like the eagle's.'

This message should also have the same impact upon the world. They must wait until the Millennial kingdom of Christ has come, to fully appreciate the sentiments of this psalm. Then God's Holy Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh.—Joel 2: 28

David wrote that, in that day, "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all." (Ps. 103:19) In heaven, all of God's angelic creatures recognize this authority, and are eager to bow down before him. As David says: "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul."—Ps. 103:20-22

When the church is complete, and with the angels of heaven giving praises to God, the remaining need is that the world of mankind be lifted up, going up the "way of holiness" unto perfection, and voicing their praise.—Isa. 35:1-10

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The Exceeding Grace of God

IN SPEAKING OF the grace of God toward his people, it will be noticed that the New Testament writers often use the strongest adjectives they can find as they describe this Divine characteristic of grace. We see the wonder, infinite wisdom, and the loving concern on the part of the Creator for his creatures, both for their present and for their eternal welfare. It is very encouraging to note a few of these emphatic expressions of Divine grace respecting those now being gathered out from the world, and called with the “High Calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) Among the very strong terms frequently used with reference to various phases of God’s grace toward his people, especially by the Apostle Paul, are the words ‘exceeding,’ and ‘exceedingly.’

For instance, Paul tells us that one reason the Law was given to Israel was that sin might become “exceeding sinful.” (Rom. 7:13) If no Law Covenant had been made with Israel, or if God had not revealed the perfect standards of his Law to any people, the sense of sin in the human family would have become gradually lost, and man’s natural impulses would have come to be regarded as the right and proper ones. Selfishness and self-gratification gaining full control would have been the unfortunate and sorry principles governing mankind.

But, as the Apostle Paul states, “When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” (Rom. 7:9) This reminds us how mankind had, to a considerable extent, lost sight of the fine principles of the Divine law and that many things were being said and done which were transgressions of the Divine law. But because of having no perfect standards before them these transgressions were not realized as such, until through the Mosaic Law the Divine principles of righteousness and truth were again set before them, even as these principles had been at the beginning put before God’s perfect creature Adam by being written in his heart.

As soon as the Israelites saw these perfect standards they realized they were much greater sinners than they had previously thought they were; and Paul says, ‘Sin revived, and I died.’ Israel of old lost the hope of life and Divine favor they thought was coming to them under the Abrahamic Covenant. God’s people of spiritual Israel, during the Gospel Age, have

been similarly affected. Many of these, before coming to the Lord, had long wandered in ways of the world, where the great principles of right and wrong were but dimly appreciated by the fallen mind.

There came a time of mental and moral awakening under the influence of God's Holy Word. Sin with its ruinous nature was seen to be exceeding sinful; was seen to be terrible, the source of all the suffering and misery which are the present lot of mankind.

The result of this enlightenment was to cause one here and one there to strive against unrighteousness, for "All unrighteousness is sin." (I John 5:17) Those who came to the Lord in full consecration found that their sins were covered by the merit of Jesus' sacrifice. Thus they experienced deliverance from Divine condemnation into a condition of justification by faith. Then they realized that it was only in the heart that one can live up to the perfect standard of the Divine requirements, while Christ's merit covers all the unwilling shortcomings and imperfections of the fallen flesh.

Sin, therefore, became 'exceeding' sinful as the result of the revelation God gave his people. It enabled them to see that it had been through sin that all the deceptions and trouble, pain and death, have come into the world. They saw it cost the Father a stupendous sacrifice in order to provide a Savior, even his well-beloved Son, the One able and willing to carry out God's loving plan for human salvation and for the removal of sin and its awful results.

GRACE ABUNDANT

This strong word, 'exceeding,' is used in I Timothy 1:14. Paul reminded Timothy (vs. 13) that at one time he himself had been a "blasphemer" and a "persecutor" of God's people, and "injurious" to the cause of truth, and in spite of his past sinfulness, "the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant." This was on account of the faith and love Paul was able to exercise in Christ Jesus.

Although "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), some have drifted much farther from the paths of righteousness than others, and in many cases some of these have been much more responsible for their condition than others. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (Rom. 5:20) And the grace of our Lord which is to take away the sin of the world, can indeed be

described as grace, or favor, that is abounding exceedingly toward those who come to God in true penitence and consecration, and also in the heart attitude necessary for forgiveness and justification to life.—Rom. 5:20,21

And when we think how the child of God may daily come to his Heavenly Father to receive forgiveness for his many sins and shortcomings, such a gracious arrangement for God's favor to continue toward those who have hearts that are right and pure toward him may indeed be thought of as grace that abounds exceedingly. The *New International Version* renders the verse: "The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

GROWTH IN FAITH

Paul says (II Thess. 1:3, *American Standard Version*), "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, ... for that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth."

The Scriptures intimate that in many cases the faith of the Lord's people at first is small. In our early days in the way of the Lord, we see something of Christ's salvation and the Divine plan as a whole, and there is not a great deal of ability to step out by faith upon the Lord's promises, and trust him where we cannot trace him. Hence, almost all need to pray "Lord, increase our faith." (Luke 17:5) We see from Paul's words that as a result of the Lord's providence and his wise dealings with us, our faith and confidence in him increases. We have faith in his goodness, love, great wisdom and power, whereby he is able to make all things work together for our highest good as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. As Paul said of his brethren in Thessalonica, 'Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.'—II Thess. 1:3

GLORY EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL

In view of the course the Lord's people are called to take, described by the Master as the "narrow ... way ... unto life," (Matt. 7:14) they must of necessity meet many trials and other tests of faith as they seek to take up their cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The apostle, in

referring to these experiences, tells how in his own case he thought of them as “light affliction” which endure for a moment, but “worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—II Cor. 4:17

It is indeed a great aid in enduring the trials of the narrow way patiently, to remember that they will soon be over; that the period during which they are being experienced is very short, especially if we take into consideration the eternity of blessing to follow. How thankful we are to be assisted by the Lord’s promised grace! This makes our trials very ‘light’ when compared with the eternal weight of glory to be bestowed upon those who shall be rightly exercised by them to the full, and become partakers of the Divine nature.

Our tests of faith are also light in proportion as we are able by faith to cast our burden upon the Lord, and to keep continually before us the great honor of reigning with Christ to be bestowed upon the faithful. Our burden is light, too, because we have taken upon us our Lord’s yoke.

THINK ON THESE THINGS

It is well for us to remember Paul’s prayer for the church, that “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.” (Eph. 1:15-20) Frequent meditation upon the hope set before us will increase our present blessing and rejoicing. The Master says, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.”—Matt. 5:12

To have experiences similar to those which came to the Lord Jesus is indeed a great privilege. It brings deep joy of heart as we consider that “as he is, so are we in this world” (I John 4:17), and that such experiences are a prelude to a share with him in his kingdom. His own words, “That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom,” suggest the closest possible association.—Luke 22:30

The Apostle Paul, who realized the greatness of the calling, exhorted his fellow runners in the heavenly race, “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.” (Phil. 4:4) He would have the Corinthian brethren know—in spite of some disappointments with them—“Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.”—II Cor. 7:4

EXCEEDING LIBERALITY

The manifestation of unselfishness or generosity in a child of God, a willingness to share with others that which we have, is surely a manifestation of the grace of God in the heart. Some of the Corinthian brethren, it would seem, had gone to exceptional lengths in helping their brethren, “the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.” (Rom. 15:26) This the apostle describes as a manifestation of “the exceeding grace of God” in their hearts.—II Cor. 9:14

The question may be asked, Why should the poor saints at Jerusalem receive financial help from these Gentile brethren? Paul records for our information, “they owe it to them.” (Rom. 15:27, *NIV*) To find a reason for this we must go back to the early days after Pentecost and note the sacrifices made by the Jerusalem church in order that the Divine purpose might be fulfilled, that the glad tidings of salvation might go eventually to “the uttermost part of the earth.”—Acts 1:8

We read how these Jewish brethren sold their houses and lands, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet (Acts 4:34,35) as their only means of survival, because prejudice and animosity made it difficult to earn a living. This resulted in there being ‘poor saints at Jerusalem’ deserving the help of their better-off Gentile brethren. Circumstances being equal, if one gives much in the way of service, it is surely because one loves much, the result of ‘the exceeding grace of God’ in the heart.

IN POWER AND IN WORD

In Ephesians 1:19, Paul says he would have us know “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe,” whether it be in the way of assistance toward measuring up to the standard of character set by the Master, or in the way of power to overcome in other directions. All vital progress results from ‘the exceeding greatness of his power’ operating in the mind and heart; and further, it is a power upon which we can place no limit. None of the called ones, therefore, can possibly say, “I cannot be an overcomer and attain a place in the little flock,” for this would be tantamount to saying that the great power of God is insufficient to accomplish that to which he has sent his hand.

Rather, we must admit that any failure on our part means that we have not been laying hold of, and responding sufficiently to, the grace and strength promised in such abundant measure. Paul, in calling our

attention to God's power operating for the development and exaltation of the church to the Divine nature, tells us that it is the same power that was sufficient to raise Jesus from the dead and set him at God's right hand in heaven. For our encouragement the apostle reminds us that this same great power is being used on our behalf.

Paul further tells us that this exceeding richness of God's grace, or favor, that we have begun to experience, is to be continued increasingly into the ages to come, into the countless ages of eternity, "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."—Eph. 2:5,7

Again, speaking of the grace of God operating in the calling of the church, Paul would remind us that God is prepared to strengthen us so as to be "rooted and grounded in love." (Eph. 3:17) For our Heavenly Father "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." (vs. 20) Hence, if at any time we feel discouraged or cast down, let us remember how God has promised to do for us exceeding abundantly through the various channels by means of which he operates to encourage his people, and that the power by which he is pleased to help us is not only exceedingly abundant, but also exactly suited to our needs, and is being exercised according to his infinite wisdom.

The apostle, having frequently spoken throughout his writings of God's superlative exercise of his power and grace to help and encourage his people, to bring them off conquerors, emphasizing it by the use of the words 'exceeding' and 'exceedingly,' speaks in this same way of his own deep love for the brethren and of his desire to help them. (I Thess. 3:10) Doubtless, too, Paul prayed exceedingly for his own progress and growth in grace, and especially because such progress would make him more useful to others. In Jude 24 we are told that when the members of the church have apprehended that for which they have hoped, and have reached the presence of his glory, they also will have reached a state of "exceeding joy." And what lengths, breadths, heights, and depths of joy will be the portion of the overcomers suggested by the vast infinities of the Divine nature!

Words are very imperfect vehicles of thought when we attempt to describe the glory of the Divine plane. It was not only of the Master that

the psalmist spoke prophetically, but also of the church when he said, “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11

It was the Spirit’s revelations to Paul that constrained him to make such frequent use of the words ‘exceeding’ and ‘exceedingly,’ in his endeavor to express for our learning and encouragement the exceeding riches of God’s grace provided for us in Christ Jesus. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—I Cor. 2:9,10

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