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ARGENTINA: A. Lupsor, Calle Almirante Brown 684, Monte Grande C.P, 1842 Buenos Aires

AUSTRALIA: Berean Bible Institute, P.O. Box 402, Rosanna, Victoria 3084

BRAZIL: A Aurora, Caixa Postal 50088, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, CEP 20050-971

BRITISH ISLES: Associated Bible Students, Brook House, Whitchurch Road, Prees, Whitchurch Shropshire, SY13 3JZ UK

CANADA: P.O. Box 1565, Vernon, British Columbia, V1T 8C2

FRANCE: L'Aurore, 39A rue des Bois, 68540 Feldkirch

GERMANY: Tagesanbruch Bibelstudien-Vereinigung e. V., Postfach 3, 64396 Modautal

GREECE: He Haravgi (The Dawn), PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167 USA

INDIA: P. Kumar/E. Rashmi Manu Residency, #1-N-32-2717/8(2), Near Vigneshwara wood Industries Ashoknagar, Mangalore: 575006

SPAIN/ITALY: El Alba/Aurora, Associazione Studenti Biblici, Via Ferrara 42, 59100 Prato—Italia

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The Glorious Results of Being Baptized for the Dead

***“For just as all
men die by virtue
of their descent
from Adam, so all
such as are in
union with Christ
will be made to
live again.”***

***—I Corinthians
15:22, Williams New
Testament***

FEW WILL DENY THAT THE entire human race is either dead or dying. Paul explains in our opening verse that this began with the first man, Adam. This was due to Adam’s disobedience of divine law. (Gen. 2:16,17; 3:17-19) Essentially, the entire 15th chapter of I Corinthians presents the

assurance that the dead will be given the opportunity for a full restoration to life by means of a resurrection.

Paul explains why this is so: “For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Christ Jesus] came also the resurrection of the dead.” (vs. 21) Here we

are reminded that it was the man Christ Jesus who redeemed the world from death, which is in keeping with Jesus' own words when he said that he would give his flesh "for the life of the world."—John 6:51

The apostle used the word "ransom" to describe this feature of God's plan for the recovery of man from the condemnation of death. He wrote: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."—I Tim. 2:3-6

The Greek word in the New Testament which is translated "ransom" signifies "a price to correspond," a "redemption price." The man Christ Jesus, who the Scriptures declare was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," corresponded with the perfect man Adam, who was created in the divine image. (Heb. 7:26; Gen. 1:26,27) It was Adam who brought death upon himself and upon his entire progeny by transgressing the divine law. The perfect man, Jesus, gave himself in sacrificial death, and in so doing he was a price to correspond. That sacrifice provided redemption for Adam and hence all those whose descent came from him—the entire human race. This "ransom for all," as Paul described it, opened the way for all to return to life.

Paul wrote in another place: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) A similar thought is expressed in John 3:16,17: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

Jesus further explained, “He that believeth on him [Jesus] is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18) These texts reveal that the whole world, by heredity, is under condemnation to death, and that release from this condemnation and the opportunity for restoration to perfect life has been provided through Christ. However, this restoration depends upon the faith and acceptance by the individual for which this loving provision has been made.

During this present time, those who, on learning about this provision of God’s grace, accept it upon the conditions of obedience and full dedication to do the divine will, are said to be “justified,” reckoned righteous in God’s sight. Paul wrote, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1) Those who have not come to Christ in full faith, supported by the complete dedication of their lives to do the will of God by following in the footsteps of Jesus, do not enjoy at the present time this “peace with God.” These are still alienated from him through sin—still under condemnation to death.

There is no other way of salvation from death than through Christ. Speaking of Jesus, Peter said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) The reason there is no salvation from death except

through Jesus is that he is the only one who shed his perfect human blood on behalf of the sin-cursed and dying race. Shed blood is, in the Scriptures, a symbol of life poured out, and Jesus “poured out his soul unto death,” that Adam and all his progeny might have an opportunity to live.—Isa. 53:12

When we accept by faith the provisions of Christ’s shed blood, and devote ourselves to the divine will, we find that there is more to it than merely believing. Paul wrote: “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” (Phil. 1:29) There are many scriptures to indicate that it is the privilege of Christians to suffer with Jesus. In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:11,12

“FOR THE DEAD”

Appropriately, Paul mentions this aspect of the divine will for all believers in connection with his discussion of the resurrection of the dead. There were apparently some in the church at Corinth who did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. He points out that if Christ was not raised from the dead then there is no hope that any of the dead will be restored to life. He shows, on the contrary, not only that Jesus has been raised from the dead, but that all, through him, will be brought back from the dead and have the opportunity to be restored to perfect life.—I Cor. 15:12-22

The apostle shows clearly that this will be accomplished by Christ’s rulership, and that he will reign until all enemies are put under his feet. Even death

itself will be destroyed. When that glorious work is complete Christ's kingdom will be turned over to the Father, that he "may be all in all."—I Cor. 15:24-28

To this Paul adds these words: "What shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die."—vss. 29-32

Here we are reminded that true believers in Christ—those who are actually following in his footsteps at the present time—suffer and die with him. This, Paul explains, is on behalf of the "dead" world of mankind, indicating that in some manner the dead will benefit from the sufferings and death of the followers of Jesus. This, indeed, is one of the important features of God's grand design for giving life to the world of mankind. It is brought to our attention in a number of ways in the Scriptures. One of those is through the promise which God made to Abraham, that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18

Paul identifies this promised seed of Abraham as being Jesus, and adds, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:16,27-29) Here it is evident that those who are baptized into Christ and who are faithful, will inherit with him the promise of blessing all the families of the

earth. Since these “families of the earth” which are to be blessed are either dead or dying, it is logical to think of those who are baptized into Jesus Christ as being, symbolically speaking, “baptized for the dead.” It is through this baptism that they prove worthy, and are prepared for, that great future work of blessing all the families of the earth.

BAPTISM FURTHER EXPLAINED

The water immersion authorized in the Scriptures for Christians is merely a symbol or picture of the true baptism, which is not into water but into Christ, and more specifically into his death. Paul states: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ... For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—Rom. 6:3,5

What was the “likeness” of Jesus’ death? The apostle further explains: “In that he died, he died unto sin once: ... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.” (vss. 10,11) Jesus never had been a sinner. His death “unto sin” was, therefore, a sacrificial death on behalf of the sin-cursed world of mankind. Our being planted with him by baptism into death is likewise a sacrificial death. Paul wrote: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

Referring to his baptism into sacrificial death, Jesus said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50) The Greek word here translated “straitened”

has the meaning of being constrained or preoccupied. The reference by our Lord is evidently to the closing hours of his ministry, when he would be arrested and put to death. Thus his baptism was to be, in a literal sense, a "death baptism."

When two of his disciples asked to sit, one on his right hand and the other on his left hand in his kingdom, Jesus said to them: "Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" —Mark 10:35-38

These two disciples said that they could go through the experiences to which Jesus referred, so he said, "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized." (vs. 39) The word baptize means "to bury," and the reference in these various texts is to a burial of our wills into the will of God. It was God's will that Jesus should die sacrificially for the sins of the world, thus the burial of the Master's will into the will of his Heavenly Father also signified his baptism into death. Similarly, it is the will of God for the disciples of Jesus to follow their Master into death, to be baptized with his baptism, which Paul explains to be a baptism into death.

Jesus' sacrificial death provided for the cancellation of the sentence of death resting against the Adamic race; no other sacrifice is needed for this. However, the world, made free from condemnation, needs to be enlightened concerning the sacrificial work of Christ. In addition to this, mankind needs to be lifted up out of mental and moral degradation, and be cleansed from all the lingering effects of sin, in order to be restored to the perfection lost

in Adam. The faithful followers of Jesus who are planted together in the likeness of his death are to participate in this work of enlightenment and restoration.

RECONCILING THE WORLD

Reconciliation can be defined as the process of settling or resolving differences, contradictions, or conflicts so that two or more parties can be restored to favor with one another. Paul wrote concerning mankind's reconciliation with God: "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." —II Cor. 5:18-20

It is indicated from this passage that the sacrificing followers of the Master participate with him in "the ministry of reconciliation," the work of reconciling the world of mankind to God. This work originates with God, the great Author of the plan of salvation for the lost race. His plan was put into operation through Jesus: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Then we, the followers of Christ, are brought into the picture as Christ's representatives in the work of reconciliation for which he made provision. We are given, or have "committed unto us," the "word of reconciliation."

Verse 21 reads: "Him [Jesus] who knew no sin he made to be a sin-offering on our behalf; that we

might become the righteousness of God in him.” (II Cor. 5:21, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*) Here we have the explanation of the basis upon which we, who are by inheritance members of the sin-cursed and dying race, can be used by God in the work of reconciliation. It is because Christ, first of all, made provision for our reconciliation, and upon the acceptance of this provision we are made the “righteousness of God in him.” We add nothing to the value of the blood by which we are reconciled, but the power of that blood effects our reconciliation, and God reckons us as righteous, and gives us the privilege of participating with Christ in the work of reconciliation for others.

Paul continues in chapter 6, the first verse: “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” How marvelous is God’s grace which the apostle urges us not to receive in vain! This privilege of being workers together with him is a work which embraces two ages in God’s plan of salvation—the present Gospel, or Christian Age, and the coming Messianic Age. Christ commissioned his followers to go into all the world and preach the Gospel [Greek: a good message]—the word of reconciliation. (Matt. 24:14; Acts 1:8) This work requires sacrifice, the laying down of our lives in service to the Lord. It is this that is involved in our baptism into death with Christ, our suffering and dying with him.

Then, as we have seen, the work of the approaching Messianic Age, when Christ’s body members have all been gathered and prepared, will be to reconcile and restore the rest of mankind to life. Paul wrote: “In an approved season, have I hearkened unto thee,

and, in a day of salvation, have succoured thee; Lo! Now, a well-approved season, Lo! Now, a day of salvation.”—II Cor. 6:2, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*

The expression, “Now, a well-approved season,” does not apply to the lifetime of individuals, but to a period in the plan of God—the present Gospel Age—when the Heavenly Father accepts the sacrifice of his people and assigns them a role in his plan as workers together with him. In this text, Paul quotes in part from Isaiah 49:8,9: “Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.”

BOTH HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY SALVATION

During the present time, those who through faith partake of the provision of life made for them by God through Christ, will, if faithful unto death, be exalted to glory, honor, and immortality. (Rom. 2:7) They are spoken of in Hebrews 3:1 as being “partakers of the heavenly calling.” In II Peter 1:4 they are described as being given promises by which they might become partakers of the “divine nature,” which is the nature of God. In Romans 5:2 these are depicted as rejoicing in the “hope of the glory of God.”

The divine nature is not only immortality, but also the source of life. That is why, as in Isaiah 49:8,9, quoted above, those who are referred to as

being preserved by God through all their trials, as they suffer together with Christ in his baptism into death, are represented as saying to the prisoners, "Go forth," and to them that are in darkness, "Shew yourselves." These are the "prisoners," the vast remainder of mankind, both dead and living who, through Christ and his faithful followers, will be brought out of the bondage to Adamic death. These, however, will not be exalted to the divine nature, as will be the church, but will be brought forth "to inherit the desolate heritages."

This is the heritage of life on earth, and the dominion of earth that was given to Adam, but which he lost through sin. This heritage of earthly life was purchased by the blood of Christ, and the church will join with him in restoring this heritage to all who will obey the laws of that thousand-year kingdom of blessing, during which the dead for whom true Christians are now being baptized will be enlightened and given an opportunity to return to perfection of human life.

How thankful we are that our loving and eternal God has been an ever-present help for his sacrificing people throughout this entire "day of salvation," which we believe is now nearing an end! We are glad that, through the merit of Christ's blood, our Heavenly Father accepts the sacrifices of his people, and makes possible the test of their faithfulness to him, looking to their ultimate exaltation to the divine nature.

As we have seen, even during the time when their death baptism has been going on, the Lord has been using them as coworkers in his great plan of salvation. These will continue to be used as ministers

of reconciliation during the next age, for they will convey the message of reconciliation and restoration to all mankind, until eventually this knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14

It will be through the church, as ambassadors for Christ, and using the word of reconciliation, that the knowledge of the “ransom for all” provided by Jesus will, in due time, be “testified,” or made known to all.—I Tim. 2:3-6

THE BRIDE

In symbolic language, the Bible speaks of the faithful church as a whole—all those who, during the present Gospel Age are planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ death—as the “bride” of Christ. In Revelation 19:7, Jesus is mentioned as the “Lamb,” because of the sacrificial nature of redemption. We read: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

This “making ready” at the present time of those who will be united with Jesus in glory and share with him in the restoration of mankind during the Messianic Age, has entailed much sacrifice and suffering. Jesus’ own ministry was predominantly one of sacrifice, which ended in death. The Scriptures urge us to be like him, symbolically to be buried with him by baptism into death.

The adornment of the bride-to-be, in addition to being unselfish love leading to sacrifice for others, is also an adornment of humility and obedience in doing God’s will. It is, in fact, a rich combination of all the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:22,23;

II Pet. 1:5-7) It is only when each prospective member of Christ's future bride is thus "adorned for her husband," and the whole brought forth in the "first resurrection," that the marriage of the Lamb and his bride will take place.—Rev. 21:2; 20:6

Then Revelation 22:17 will be fulfilled, for not until then will there be a completed bride class. The text reads: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." We are informed that the "Spirit," God's holy power and influence manifest through his Son, Christ Jesus, and the "bride," the faithful church, will constitute the means by which mankind will be invited to partake of the "water of life." Thus is revealed again the unique position in the plan of salvation occupied by those who are planted together in the likeness of Jesus' death.

No wonder Paul points out how futile would be Christian suffering and death, how empty of meaning our baptism for the dead, if there is to be no resurrection of the dead! However, we know that there is to be a resurrection of the dead, because Christ, "the firstfruits," has already been raised from the dead and exalted to heavenly glory. (I Cor. 15:23) The "first resurrection" will embrace all who have suffered and died with him that they might live and reign with him, but this glorious hope can be realized only through faithfulness "even unto death."—Rev. 2:10

We rejoice in the assurance of divine help for those laying down their lives in sacrifice. One of the greatest incentives to faithfulness is the promise of the Scriptures that our being "baptized for the

dead” world at the present time is to accrue for their ultimate benefit during the next age in God’s plan. If faithful, we will share in the great future work of restoring the dead world to life, enlightening them, reconciling them to God, and giving them the opportunity to live forever. What a glorious outcome is promised in God’s Word! ■

Praying Properly

Key Verse: “*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*”
—Matthew 6:9

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 6:5-15

AFTER JESUS HAD FIN-ished “praying in a certain place” a disciple asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1-4) We should not suppose this disciple had never before prayed when he asked this question. However, the disciples seem to have realized that not only were Jesus’ teachings considerably different from those of the scribes and

Pharisees on various points, but also his manner of prayer was different. Hence they desired to have his instruction on prayer.

Jesus’ lesson concerning prayer is recorded in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. (Luke 11:1-13; Matt. 6:5-15) We are not to understand that Jesus meant to repeat his words verbatim when praying, but rather he said, “After this manner pray.” In other words, Jesus gave us not the exact words to say, but rather he provided a general example of the style and content of our prayers—simple, brief, direct, orderly, and reverent. Therefore, we should avoid repeating the same formal words in every prayer, or think that by giving a long prayer we will impress those listening or somehow be more acceptable to our Heavenly Father.—Matt. 6:7

“Our Father which art in heaven.” (vs. 9) The expression “Our Father” would have been new to the Jews, for they had been a nation of “servants.” (Ezra 5:11; Neh. 1:6)

In the New Testament, however, the apostle states concerning those Jews who accepted Jesus, “to them gave he power [Greek: privilege] to become the sons of God.” (John 1:12) “Hallowed be thy name” expresses a reverential adoration and appreciation of God’s goodness and greatness. Our first thought in prayer should be upon God, not on ourselves, nor upon others precious to us.

“Thy kingdom come.” (Matt. 6:10) We should pray for God’s kingdom to soon come, which he has promised shall bless all mankind and will be the eternal solution for every problem, trouble, and evil of the present world. This hope of the kingdom will help us to pass through the trials and difficulties of today as we contemplate the prospect of a time of blessing to all.

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” We should express our trust that God will fulfill all of his many promises. “Give us this day our daily bread.” (vs. 11) We should acknowledge our continual dependence upon God, accepting his providential care and direction in our daily lives with regard to both spiritual and temporal matters.

“Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.” (vs. 12, *International Standard Version*) We often come short of God’s perfect standards and therefore should express in prayer our need of his compassion and mercy, seeking forgiveness through the merit of our Savior, and expressing our desire to change. We also are to ask our Heavenly Father to help us develop mercy toward others who may sin against us.—Matt. 5:44

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matt. 6:13) We should request that God guide our steps in life so that no trial comes upon us that we would be unable to bear, and that he help us learn from the trials he permits for our growth. (I Cor. 10:13; Rom. 8:28) Thus we see the manner of prayer given to us by Jesus in order to be pleasing to God, as we express to him our desire to do his will from our heart.—Eph. 6:6 ■

John the Baptist

Key Verse: *“Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*
—Matthew 11:11

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 11:7-15

prepared for the Lord.”—Luke 1:5-17

When Jesus reached thirty years of age he came to John, who had been “preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” When John saw Jesus he proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Then Jesus asked John to baptize him. When Jesus came up out of the water, “John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.”—Luke 3:2-23; John 1:19-34

Later, when John was put in prison, Jesus proclaimed to the multitudes the words of our Key Verse: “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the

BOTH MALACHI AND ISAIAH prophesied that God would select an individual who would “prepare” in advance the way of the Lord. (Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3-5; Matt. 11:10) This special ambassador was John the Baptist. The angel of the Lord informed John’s father that his wife, advanced in age as he was, would bear a son and they should name him John. The angel announced concerning John, that “many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord ... to make ready a people pre-

kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”—Matt. 11:11

The expression “kingdom of heaven” refers to the spiritual phase of the Messianic kingdom, which began to be developed at the time of Christ’s earthly ministry and death. This continued at Pentecost, with the pouring out of God’s Holy Spirit upon individuals who would dedicate their lives to serve our Heavenly Father. (Acts 2:1-41; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 3:1) This heavenly calling has continued throughout the Gospel Age up to and including the present time.

One of the titles the Scriptures assign to Jesus is “Bridegroom.” As a group his faithful followers will become his “bride.” (Rev. 19:7; 22:17) John the Baptist explained, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice.” (John 3:29) John’s ministry belonged to the prior Jewish Age, which was about to end. Yet, because he died before Jesus’ opened the invitation to be part of the “kingdom of heaven,” John would not be considered part of the “bride” class, though he rejoiced to be a “friend of the bridegroom.”

John the Baptist, along with “Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets,” will be rewarded for their faithfulness by being resurrected on earth as perfect human beings. They will be “princes in all the earth,” serving as instructors and examples for all mankind in the earthly phase of the kingdom.—Luke 13:28; Ps. 45:16; Heb. 11:4-40

When Jesus stated that “he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he,” we are not to infer that John the Baptist and all those righteous characters mentioned in the Scriptures who lived before Christ’s earthly ministry were less faithful than the Gospel church. Rather, it means merely that God will resurrect them as perfect human beings on earth, while he has promised to resurrect the Bride of Christ as perfect spirit beings, giving them immortality and the divine nature.—II Pet. 1:4; Rom. 2:7; 6:3-5; II Tim. 2:11,12 ■

The Rich Young Man

Key Verse: *“Again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”*
—**Matthew 19:24**

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 19:16-30

When the young man heard this, “he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.”—Matt. 19:21,22; Mark 10:21,22

Then Jesus said to his disciples: “A rich man shall hardly [Greek: with difficulty] enter into the kingdom of heaven.” He then added the words found in our Key Verse: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” The disciples “were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?” Jesus replied: “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.”—Matt. 19:23-26

Previously Jesus had admonished: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,” but instead “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” because “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matt.

A YOUNG MAN WITH GREAT possessions had come to Jesus, kneeled before him, and asked: “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17; Matt. 19:20; Luke 18:18) After a brief discussion between them, Jesus said, “If thou wilt be perfect [Greek: complete], go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven,” and “take up the cross, and follow me.”

6:19-21) Also, in the parable of the sower Jesus had explained that the seed which fell among thorns, which then sprang up and choked the seed, represents those who hear the Word of God, “but the cares of the present age and the delusions of riches quite stifle the Message, and it becomes unfruitful.”—Matt. 13:22, *Weymouth New Testament*

The Apostle Paul admonishes that “people who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many unwise and pernicious ways which sink mankind in destruction and ruin. For from love of money all sorts of evils arise,” causing some “to be led astray from the faith and be pierced through with countless sorrows.”—I Tim. 6:9,10, *WNT*

A rich person, however, fully surrendering their heart to the Lord and earnestly seeking after God, can with great humility and submission, respond to the heavenly calling and develop a character which will be pleasing to the Heavenly Father. The Scriptures record several individuals who did just that. Zacchaeus, although chief among the publicans, “sought to see Jesus,” and is described as being “rich.” (Luke 19:2-9) Joseph of Arimathea, who is described as “a rich man,” begged Pilate for the dead body of Jesus and laid it “in his own new tomb.” (Matt. 27:57-60) Nicodemus joined Joseph, and brought a very large quantity of spices to anoint the body of Jesus; therefore, he too must have been rich.—John 19:39-42

However, the greatest example of someone who was rich and fully submitted to our Heavenly Father is Jesus. “Though he was rich,” the first and chiefest of all God’s creation, yet for the sake of the poor groaning creation, “he became poor” and “came down from heaven.” He willingly became a perfect man, and gave his life “a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—II Cor. 8:9; John 3:13; 6:38,51; I Tim. 2:5-6



The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

Key Verses: *“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.”*
—Matthew 25:31,32

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 25:31-46

THIS PARABLE ILLUSTRATES both when and how the work during the earthly phase of the Messianic kingdom will occur. The parable begins: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory.” The “Son of man” is our Lord Jesus. (Matt. 16:13; John 5:26,27) Along with the Son of man, “all the holy angels” will be “with him.” This is the completed bride of Christ.—Rev. 14:1-4

The timeframe of the parable is identified by this statement: “Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.” One of the promises given to faithful Christians by the risen Lord is: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set

down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21) Two important statements are given in this verse. First, the reward promised to all the faithful overcomers of the present Gospel Age will be the privilege of working together with him as “kings and priests,” to reign with

him for the purpose of instructing and uplifting mankind during the kingdom. (Rev. 1:5,6; 20:4-6) Second, when this message was given to John, Jesus was “set down” on his Father’s throne, but not yet upon his own throne.

Therefore, the parable is pointing to a future time, when Christ will “sit upon the throne of his glory.” This will occur when “all the holy angels” will be with Christ—that is, once the entire bride of Christ has been completed. On an earlier occasion, Jesus said to his disciples concerning this time: “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones.”—Luke 22:29,30

In the parable the word “glory” is translated from a Greek word meaning “glory, as very apparent.” The Apostle Paul gives an additional proof that when Christ will be in “very apparent” glory, it will be together with all of the Lord’s followers who were faithful unto death. He writes: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear [Greek: be rendered apparent], then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (Col. 3:4) The word “glory” in this verse is from the same Greek word translated “glory” in Matthew 25:31.

During Christ’s kingdom reign, “before him shall be gathered all nations.” All will be made aware of his authority. Then, at the end of the kingdom, the parable continues, “he shall separate them ... as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” (Matt. 25:32) This dividing represents a final test and evaluation of each individual “according to their works” which they will have demonstrated during the kingdom judgment period.—Acts 17:31

Individuals in the sheep-like class will inherit the kingdom because they had developed and voluntarily manifested God’s character of love, helping and encouraging others during that time. Individuals in the goat-like class will demonstrate none of these qualities during the kingdom and only enjoy its blessings for themselves. They will not be permitted to live everlastingly.—Rev. 20:12-15 ■

Progression in Faith

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”
—Romans 1:16,17

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

was Paul’s longest epistle, and in his opening salutation, he makes three important points. First, he defends his apostleship. An apostle is one who is called and sent out, especially to testify of the Gospel. Paul says that he was “called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.” (Rom. 1:1) In this same verse he refers to himself as Jesus’ “servant.” That is, his life was totally devoted to doing God’s

will and spreading the message of the Gospel first given by Jesus.

Second, in his opening words, Paul states that the central theme of the Gospel is Jesus Christ. He says that Jesus is the Son of God, “which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.” (vs. 3) As the “seed of David,” Jesus met one of the

qualifications needed to be a ransom, or corresponding price, for father Adam. That qualification was that he be a human being. Otherwise, he could not be a redeemer that would correspond to Adam, who was also of flesh and blood, and created as a perfect man. The ransom required a perfect man's life for a perfect man's life. As the Son of God, Jesus met another important qualification, that being the requirement of perfection on the part of the one who would redeem Adam and his race. Jesus, although a human being born of a woman, received the spark of perfect life from God his Father, which was placed miraculously by God in the womb of Mary. An understanding of how Jesus met both these qualifications shows us how he was able to be perfect, separate from sinners, and yet be a true corresponding price, or ransom, for Adam.

The third point of Paul's opening words in Romans was that Jesus' life and ministry was not to be carried out for just a few people, or for certain select groups or nations. On the contrary, it was part of God's eternal purpose that the Gospel of Christ would eventually bring salvation to all, through "obedience to the faith among all nations."—vs. 5

FAITH IS PROGRESSIVE

The verses quoted at the beginning of our lesson allude to one of Paul's fundamental teachings of this epistle, that being the importance of faith. The phrase "justification by faith," although not stated specifically here, is alluded to, and as we will later see, it becomes one of the central themes of this letter. Faith was now to become an all-important principle in the lives of all those who would strive

to obtain salvation through the Gospel of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles. In Romans 1:17, Paul reveals two important truths concerning faith. First, faith is a progressive matter, “from faith to faith.” By this, Paul meant that faith has various levels of development in the lives of God’s people. There is a more elementary faith—one that firmly believes in God and his plans, but has not been fully tested and tried in the experiences of life. As the children of God grow and develop, and their faith is put to the test, it develops a greater and more complete level of maturity, which eventually can be victorious in any experience of life regardless of severity or difficulty.

Paul’s second point in verse 17 naturally follows his description of the progressive nature of faith. This character principle should progress to the point that our entire life is one of faith, where every thought, word, and deed—every decision, action and prayer—is a matter of total and complete confidence in God and his will. This is what is meant by his statement, “The just shall live by faith.”

ADMITTING NEED

In Romans 3:23,24, we find these words from Paul: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Paul states earlier in this chapter that Israel had much in the way of advantage in comparison to other nations of the earth because “unto them were committed the oracles of God.” (vs. 2) The phrase “oracles of God” refers to the utterances, or words, of God. Israel had—through both its Law as well as its teachers,

leaders, and prophets—God’s instructions to show how their lives should be lived and to what principles their characters should be conformed. However, they lacked the necessary faith to keep God’s instructions as intended by him, and so Paul asks these further questions, “What if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” Paul immediately gives the answer, “God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.”—vss. 3,4

Paul realized the situation that the Jews suffered under, just as any nation would have that God might have chosen to receive his Law, his words, and his oracles. God’s laws are perfect, and as such they cannot be kept in their totality by an imperfect being regardless of how hard they might try, and how noble their intentions might be. The struggle of man against sin is present with all members of the fallen race. This lack of faith points out the situation in which all mankind finds itself. Paul points this out, when he says, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”—vs. 19

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

The question remains, what about the faithfulness of God? What is his plan for the fallen race, both Jew and Gentile? Can they be recovered? Must God start over? Paul gives us the assurance that the answer lies in the former thought, that God does

indeed have a plan for the recovery of man. "Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." (Rom. 3:21,22) Paul says in these verses that God's plan for man's recovery centers in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. He further indicates that it is through God's grace, or unmerited favor, that this redemption is provided.

Paul continues his lesson by reminding us that although redemption is given freely through the grace of God, there is a responsibility on our part to obtain the benefits provided by the Redeemer. That responsibility is faith in God, the author of salvation, and faith in Jesus, the instrument used to provide it. Together with obedience to God in the daily dealings in our lives he shows us his will and guides us with his providences. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."—vss. 24-28

AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH

"What saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

(Rom. 4:3) No man, Jew or Gentile, could keep God's law perfectly, and we have learned of the great importance of faith in the lives of those who seek to be found acceptable to God. Since Pentecost, the foundation of this faith is seen in the redemptive work accomplished by Jesus. Paul tells us, however, that such faith has always been especially pleasing to the Heavenly Father, and he uses the example of Abraham and his faith to show how God has taken pleasure in those down through the ages who have displayed this characteristic. Because of Abraham's faith, he was counted, or reckoned, as righteous before God. How was this possible? How could an inherently imperfect man, as Abraham was, be considered righteous simply by having this quality of faith?

The answer to this question lies in the great love and mercy of God, and in the great wisdom with which he designed his plan for mankind. In the case of Abraham, God knew well in advance that he could not be justified by the works of any law, "Because the law worketh wrath." (vs. 15) Yet he saw that Abraham had a great desire to serve him, and had a heart condition and motivation toward righteousness that he could use and develop. Knowing this, God devised a method whereby he, without violating his attribute of justice, could "count" or "reckon" Abraham righteous through his faith. Additionally, God tested and tried Abraham's faith in order to prove its depth and sincerity. A few of these tests were: 1) asking him to leave his own country and kindred to go to a land he knew nothing about; 2) not providing a seed to him until he and Sarah were both well past the normal age of

childbearing; and 3) instructing him to slay Isaac, his long-awaited son, and offer him as a sacrifice. (Gen. 12:1,4; 17:15-17; 22:1-13) Abraham passed all of these tests of faith, as well as others. As a result, wonderful promises were made to Abraham—promises that would eventually carry down to all the families of the earth. (Gen. 12:2,3; 18:18; 22:16-18) Abraham's faith, his testing, and ultimate promised blessing, was not the result of his keeping any law, except the law of faith. "The promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law [of Moses], but through the righteousness of faith."—Rom. 4:13

WE MUST ALSO HAVE THIS FAITH

In Romans 4:16, Paul says that Abraham was "the father of us all." This signifies that we, too, in order to receive the blessings of God, must display the same kind of faith that Abraham did. Additionally, our faith must be thoroughly tested as was his, in order for God to prove our loyalty to him under any and all circumstances. Further in this same chapter, Paul states concerning Abraham that "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he was able also to perform." (vss. 20,21) The child of God today must develop this same level of faith exemplified in Abraham.

Just as was the case with Abraham, we too can be counted, or reckoned, as righteous before God through the attribute of faith. As Paul says, "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it [righteousness] was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also,

unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”—vss. 23,24, *Revised Version*

THE BENEFITS OF FAITH

Paul continues the theme of faith with the statement, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1) This is addressed to those who have, through faith in Jesus, righteousness imputed to them. This is what is meant by the phrase “being justified by faith.” As a result of this reckoned righteous condition, these have many potential benefits accrue to them. First, we have “peace with God.” Formerly, as sinners condemned through our inheritance from father Adam, we did not have peace with God. In our undone condition, we were at enmity with him, just the opposite of being at peace. However, through the blood, or merit, of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice, and by our full faith in it, we have obtained peace with the Almighty God, and he is able to deal with us as his children. The Prophet Isaiah speaks symbolically of how one obtains this peace by using the example of clothing which covers natural imperfections and blemishes. He says, “My soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.”—Isa. 61:10

Other benefits obtained by those in this justified condition are that they have access to God which they did not have earlier as enemies, as well as a tremendous hope for the future. All this causes those who are in this condition to rejoice and glorify God. (Rom. 5:2) Paul continues this lesson by telling us

that, as one justified by faith, we will have a lifetime of experiences of all kinds, and that these experiences are specially designed for us by God himself to help us develop our faith even further, and to prove its loyalty under all circumstances. He says, "Not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit."—Rom. 5:3-5, *New American Standard Bible*

GOD'S MERCY AND GRACE

Paul reminds us further in our lesson, lest we become conceited in our own minds, that God showed his love to us by sending his son, Jesus, "while we were yet sinners." (vs. 8) "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (vs. 10) The death of Jesus as the ransom provided the means possible whereby we might have peace with God. However, in order to obtain the full salvation which God desired, it was required that Jesus not remain in death, but be raised again to life, to apply the value of his sacrifice to the bar of God's justice, and hence buy back Adam's race from the condemnation of sin and death. All this was part of God's intent and plan, and was made possible by his mercy and unending love for his creation. Truly Paul could say, "We also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."—vs. 11, *NASB*

Paul summarizes this part of our lesson by saying, “If by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. 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. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”—vss. 17-21

EXPERIENCING NEW LIFE

It is one thing to receive the grace of God, but quite another to act upon that grace in a way that is pleasing to him. We cannot expect to continue to receive of his mercy and favor if we are not seeking to follow it up with proper daily living and character building in our life. This is the point of Paul’s statement: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4) Having freely received of God’s grace through Jesus Christ, we are asked to bury our will into his, even unto death, and follow in the footsteps which he set before us. A godlike character includes service for others, suffering for righteousness sake, and loyalty to God under all circumstances.

(John 13:12-15; Gal. 5:13; I Pet. 3:14; Prov. 3:5,6)
This is what is embodied in the phrase, “buried with him by baptism into death.”

We are reminded that, although Jesus died a sacrificial death he was “raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father.” The resurrection of Jesus was a most glorious event in God’s plan. The scriptural account says, “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.”—Matt. 28:1-7

Jesus’ closest disciples did not at first fully understand the import of this great event. Later, after receiving the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, their eyes were opened to the grand meaning of Jesus’ resurrection. (Acts 2:1-4,14-36) It truly was ushering in a new feature in God’s plan especially designed for those who would desire to be footstep followers of the Master. In Romans 6:3-5, Paul also ties in the truth of Jesus’ resurrection with the

privilege his followers have of walking in his steps. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” Just as Jesus was the recipient of a new life upon his resurrection from the dead, so also we, having fully dedicated, or consecrated, ourselves to God, and burying our wills into death with Jesus, are “raised up” symbolically to walk in “newness of life,” newness of attitude, character, and service.

NEW CREATURES IN CHRIST

Paul in another place identifies this “newness” by saying, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” (II Cor. 5:17) As New Creatures we are to walk and live our life in newness of thought, word, and action, not serving sin as we once did, but serving righteousness to the best of our ability. Although we cannot do this perfectly, it should be our desire to do so if it were possible. Because we are covered with the robe of Christ’s righteousness, as previously discussed, God is able to overlook the unintentional failings resulting from our inherited sinful condition. It is not that we ignore those blemishes and failings, but we must strive each day to overcome as much of the fallen condition as is possible. (Rom. 6:1,2; I Cor. 9:27) Having done that, God exercises his great mercy toward us by viewing us as New Creatures and

looking at the robe covering us, and not at the blemishes residing underneath.

It is not only important that we strive to overcome as much as possible the sinful nature of the old flesh, but also that we replace it with the traits and characteristics that should accompany such a newness of life. Paul mentions a few of the characteristics and positive ways we can develop in this newness. He says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Gal. 5:22,23) Likewise, the Apostle Peter exhorts us to add to our foundation of faith such qualities as "virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love]."—II Pet. 1:5-7

In many ways these characteristics of our new life in Christ begin in the mind and with our thoughts. (II Cor. 10:5) This becomes the great battleground of life as we strive to have our mind and its thoughts conform to those that would please our Heavenly Father. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:8) Let us, then, by the renewal of our thoughts, words, and actions, seek to grow and mature in faith, day by day, experience by experience, remembering that "this is the victory [Greek: means of success] that overcometh the world, even our faith."—I John 5:4■

Self-denial and Cross-bearing

“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.”
—Matthew 16:24

SELF-DENIAL AND CROSS-bearing are two vital terms of Christian discipleship. They are very exacting, so much that they have served to limit the number of the true followers of the Master to a “little flock.” (Luke 12:32) In brief, these terms imply the death,

first of all, of human hopes, aims, and ambitions, and finally physical death in devoted service to the Heavenly Father’s purpose. As a compensating portion to encourage us while thus laying down our lives, we have the Master’s own promise, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

As has happened with so many of the beautiful teachings of the Bible, the true significance of self-denial and cross-bearing has been largely lost sight of by much of churchianity. Hence to most people today these expressions are applied to the little inconsequential pleasures one may forego from

time to time, and to the experiences of life which are not pleasant to bear. These details are indeed a part of true self-denial and cross-bearing, but they are related to the meaning of these terms only as they add up to the full renunciation of self, and a following in the footsteps of the Master all the way into death. They involve finding each step of sacrifice which the Master took, and then resolutely taking these steps until they lead us to sacrificial death.

Jesus was crucified on a cross. This entailed much suffering, hence it has been natural that the cross should come to be used as a symbol of trials and difficulties. This symbolism is quite proper, and it is comforting to realize that divine grace helps us to bear our daily "crosses." Yet this limited meaning of cross-bearing should not be confused with what the Master meant when he addressed the words of our text to his disciples. It was toward the close of his ministry. In Matthew 16:21 we read, "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."

Here we find Jesus explaining to his disciples that his pathway of devotion to the Heavenly Father was leading him to death. This was quite out of keeping with the viewpoint the disciples had of what the ministry of Jesus was to accomplish and the way in which it would terminate. To them he was the Messiah of Israel, sent of God to deliver their nation from the Roman yoke, enthrone it as the leading nation of earth, and through it fulfill the divine promise to bless all people. How could Jesus accomplish

all this if he exposed himself to the animosity of his enemies, permitting them to arrest him and put him to death?

Probably all of the disciples thought that Jesus was making a great mistake, and the impulsive Peter so expressed himself in no uncertain terms. The account reads, "Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." (Matt. 16:22) Peter, not yet begotten of the Holy Spirit, like all natural-minded people who, no matter how noble or devoted they may be, could not see how anything worthwhile could be accomplished by a course of self-sacrifice such as the Master had indicated he purposed to take.

The Master's reply to Peter was straightforward and full of meaning: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (vs. 23) Sacrifice, suffering and death are repugnant to the natural man, and Peter reasoned that if Jesus was the Messiah who had come to bring peace, happiness, and joy to Israel and the world, he was surely going about it in the wrong way. If he had any influence with the Master, Peter would do all he could to change his mind.

How all the disciples must have wondered when Jesus replied to Peter, "Thou art an offense unto me." He simply meant that Peter, despite his good intentions, was advising him contrary to the will of God, hence contrary to the course which he was determined to follow. After Pentecost, when the apostles received the Holy Spirit, they understood why it was necessary for Jesus to suffer and die. Peter himself, in his first epistle, tells us that the

prophets had been inspired to write concerning the “sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”—I Pet. 1:11

INVITED TO FOLLOW CHRIST

It was immediately following this dynamic dialogue between Jesus and Peter, in which each rebuked the other, that the terms of discipleship set forth in our opening text were stated. It would seem that Jesus considered the occasion an excellent opportunity to let the disciples know that if they expected to be his true followers, they too would be called upon to suffer and to die. This was not the first intimation they had heard of this. However, being merely natural-minded men, they had not as yet comprehended this thought. In fact, there is no reason to suppose that even then they realized to any great extent what Jesus meant when he spoke of their need to deny themselves and take up their cross.

To “come after” Jesus, as our text says, means to do as he did, to follow his example. This means self-denial and cross-bearing. To know then what these two expressions involve it is but necessary to observe what they meant in the life and death experiences of the Master. Did self-denial in his case mean merely that each day he would deprive himself of some little thing that might be pleasant to him, or otherwise appeal to his natural senses? Did it mean that one day a week he ate vegetables instead of meat? We have no doubt but that Jesus exercised the spirit of a sound mind with respect to all his daily habits of life. However, his self-denial meant much more than this, and also something more

vital than the daily practice of certain austerities, as Christian theology later construed self-denial to mean.

Jesus' self-denial was, just as the term means, a denial of self—not merely withholding from himself a few things which his natural senses might enjoy, but a complete renouncing of all his rights and privileges of a natural, but perfect, man under the Law that was given to the Jews at Sinai. Jesus, the only one who had been able to keep that Law inviolate, had, by keeping it, gained thereby the right to life upon the earth as a natural man. His death on the cross, therefore, implied much more than was the case with others who were thus put to death. With others crucifixion meant merely that they died some little time before they would have had to die in the normal course of events. However, not so with Jesus. He would not have died at all had he remained perfect and not voluntarily given himself up to die.

Jesus' denial of himself, therefore, was the renouncing of that which was properly his under the Law—namely, the right to live forever as a perfect human being. This, which was rightfully his, is what he “denied.” With his right to life as a human being went all the privileges of a natural man. All of this he denied, and concerning it we read that “he was cut off out of the land of the living,” and there was none to “declare his generation.”—Isa. 53:8

The Master's conduct during the three and one-half years in which he was laying down his life was in keeping with his purposed self-denial. He did not seek to get all he could out of his earthly life. Rather, he used his strength, his time, his talents, his all,

in doing the work the Heavenly Father had given him to do. He never considered his own interests paramount to that of the divine ministry. There was a supreme sacrifice to be made at the end of the way, and there were daily sacrifices all along the way. Jesus was faithful in both—faithful unto death. Thus his denial of self was complete.

THE SYMBOLIC CROSS

The wooden cross that Jesus was expected to carry to Golgotha, and which Simon carried instead, because the Master's strength was not equal to the burden, was symbolic of the real cross which he carried from Jordan to his crucifixion. What was this symbolic cross? It was the daily laying down of his life which he continued to do until on the wooden cross he cried, "It is finished."—Matt. 27:32; John 19:30

Crucifixion was the method of capital punishment under the Roman law, and it was customary for the condemned criminal to carry the cross from the Judgment Hall to the place of crucifixion. Thus, for anyone to be seen carrying a cross meant that he was on the way to death. How significant, then, are the words of our text explaining that the terms of Christian discipleship call for the taking up of a cross and following the Master. Peter had tried to dissuade Jesus from taking a course which would result in his death. However, instead of heeding this advice he rebuked Peter for giving it, and added, by using the symbol of cross-bearing, that his disciples also would be expected to die by voluntarily following in his footsteps.

As incidental items in the one larger experience of death, all the daily trials and persecutions which

came upon Jesus constituted a part of his cross-bearing. Being perfect in the flesh, he would have had no trials of weakness, sickness, and pain, but he was caused to suffer by his faithfulness in the ministry. He was the world's light-giver, but the world hated the light and persecuted the giver, even unto death. (John 1:5; 3:19,20; 8:12) Thus he voluntarily put himself in a position where he had to carry a cross "daily" until the end of the way was reached in death.—Luke 9:23

The Master's denial of himself as a man and the renouncing of his earthly life-rights was not the entire will of God as it had been outlined for him in the "volume of the book." (Ps. 40:7; Heb. 10:7) It was not only necessary that he thus relinquish his claim to all things earthly, but in addition to this his zeal for the doing of his Father's will required that he should actively engage in the work of God. (John 5:36; 9:4) This brought upon him the enmity of those who sat in darkness, which finally resulted in his death. Thus, not only did Jesus deny himself, but he took up the symbolic cross of sacrifice and service each day—even unto death.

WE FOLLOW THE MASTER

When Jesus spoke the words of our opening text, he meant that self-denial and cross-bearing for us would be the same in principle as experienced by him. We, of course, do not have perfect human life to deny or renounce as was the case with Jesus. Nevertheless, the Scriptures show that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, making our standing before the Heavenly Father the same as his. (Rom. 4:3,20-25; 5:1) This means that the voluntary

sacrifice of what little remains of our earthly existence at the present time is a part of our self-denial. It also means that our restitution life of the future is given up in order that we may be a true disciple of Christ.

With us, even as with the Master, the doing of the whole will of God means more than merely a passive willingness to sacrifice earthly rights and privileges. If we are to be true followers of Jesus, we must also take up our cross; that is, our zeal for the work of God must lead us in the pathway of willing sacrifice and service, even unto death. Thus seen, cross-bearing is a step further in doing God's will than is self-denial. Self-denial is our acquiescence to the terms of the narrow way which call for the sacrifice of earthly rights, while cross-bearing is the actual sacrificing.

When we keep in mind the full significance of cross-bearing, the Apostle Paul's several references to being crucified with Christ are most significant. In Romans 6:6, for example, the apostle says, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him." The "old man" here referred to is our earthly life and privileges. It is said to be crucified with Christ because through the merit of his blood the Heavenly Father has made it possible for us to be planted together in the likeness of his sacrificial death. (Rom. 6:4,5) It is in harmony with this thought that the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:44 describes the Christian's change of nature from earthly to spiritual, saying, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ

liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Here we have the same thought, that to be crucified with Christ means that we renounce our earthly life, with its rights, receiving instead a new life which is ours now only by faith in Christ. That Paul understood the terms of discipleship, as set forth by Jesus in our text, is further evident from his statement in Galatians 5:24, which reads, “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” That is, they have taken up their cross to follow Jesus even unto death.

The full symbolism of the cross and of crucifixion is death and dying, and not merely our daily and sometimes petty trials and annoyances. This is further shown by Paul’s statement recorded in Galatians 6:14, which reads: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Here the apostle is telling us, by using the word “crucified,” that the world had become dead to him, and also that he had become dead to the world. The will of God in Christ had completely separated Paul from the world and its spirit, for the purpose of presenting his body a living sacrifice unto death.

Those who have intelligently entered the narrow way of sacrifice by denying themselves and taking up their cross to follow the Master, cannot afford to turn back. In the verse following our text, Jesus points out the consequences of any desire or attempt on our part to save that which has been offered in sacrifice. We quote: “For whosoever will

save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 16:25) Not only would a turning back be displeasing to the Heavenly Father, but such a course, if continued, would result in not receiving the crown of life. This is shown by the apostle where he quotes the words of the Lord from the Old Testament relating to the life of faith, saying, “If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” (Heb. 10:38; Hab. 2:4) Let us, who have taken up the cross, resolve afresh to continue carrying it to the very end of the way. ■

2025 MEMORIAL SUPPER DATE

The proper time for the annual observance of the Memorial Supper will be after sunset on Friday, April 11, 2025.

Memorial Services in MP3 format are available for listening or download at:

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Things Pertaining to Life and Godliness

*“Grace and peace
be multiplied unto
you through the
knowledge of God,
and of Jesus our
Lord, According as
his divine power
hath given unto us
all things that
pertain unto life
and godliness,
through the
knowledge of him
that hath called us
to glory and virtue.”*
—II Peter 1:2,3

ALL TRUE FOLLOWERS OF Christ have entered into a covenant with the Heavenly Father to do his will. The Scriptures describe it as a covenant into which we enter “by sacrifice.” (Ps. 50:5) We pledge with God to sacrifice all that we possess in his service, even as Jesus did. However, this is not a one-sided covenant, for, after he has accepted our consecration pledge to serve him, God has promised to do all things necessary to

help us meet the terms to which we have agreed. It is important to realize this, otherwise we might easily become discouraged. We are blessed, however, through the knowledge of God, and of his Son Christ

Jesus our Lord, to be assured that heavenly grace abounds toward us and that all our needs are continuously supplied.—Phil. 4:19

Our opening verses explain that “all things that pertain to life and godliness” are supplied to us by “divine power.” The Greek word which is here translated “power” means strength or ability, even to the extent of performing miracles. It is used in Acts 1:8 to describe the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the power of God. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of truth,” and a “Comforter.” (John 14:16,17) This divine power operates in our minds and hearts through the Truth of God’s plan.

While this is partially understandable to us, actually it is something which goes beyond human comprehension, for it is miraculous. It involves our begetting, and ultimately, if we are “faithful unto death,” our birth as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. (Rev. 2:10; II Cor. 5:17) In Ecclesiastes 11:5 we read concerning the work of the Spirit in bringing forth life: “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.” While we do not always understand how God assists us in the carrying out of our covenant of sacrifice, we do experience and appreciate the benefits of his Spirit being “poured out in our hearts” and lives. (Rom. 5:5, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) The Apostle Paul gives us the assurance that “since God is for us,” no opposing forces can successfully work against us.—Rom. 8:31, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

We know that as members of Adam’s race, we are fallen and imperfect human beings, and Satan takes

advantage of this in his efforts to discourage us. However, our loving Heavenly Father has given us righteousness, or justification, through Christ, as one of the “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Thus, as Paul wrote in Romans 8:33,34, “It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”—*New International Version*

THE SPIRIT’S BEGETTING

It is by the divine power of the Holy Spirit, that we are “begotten ... again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (I Pet. 1:3-5, *New King James Version*) Even before we enter into a covenant with God by sacrifice, and are begotten by his Holy Spirit, divine power draws us to Christ. We then learn to know something of the privilege that is offered to us to take up our cross and follow Jesus into sacrificial death that we may attain the “prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—John 6:44; Phil. 3:14

When, through the drawing power of our Heavenly Father, we become so overwhelmed by his love that we surrender all in order to do his will, we know that the exceeding great and precious promises of the divine nature belong to us, and they become a life-giving energy in our minds and hearts.—II Pet. 1:4

Those drawn to Christ by the Heavenly Father originally were sinners, but their minds are enlightened

to the need of a Redeemer. Those who accept Christ as their Redeemer and Advocate, and come to the point of full consecration, are said to be begotten of God by “the word of truth.” (I John 2:1; James 1:18) Thus they become New Creatures in Christ Jesus, and all things needed for their spiritual nourishment and growth continue to be provided by divine power.

Realizing their weaknesses and imperfection, through the Word of Truth these true Christians are assured of divine help and gracious forgiveness. Their need for guidance in the narrow way is also assured, for they can ask God for wisdom—spiritual wisdom—and know that they will receive it liberally, and not be upbraided for asking.—James 1:5

Every precious promise of God pertaining to our nourishment and development contributes to the exercise of divine power in bringing us forth as his New Creation. It is by feeding upon these promises that we grow “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Eph. 6:10) It is by the influence of the Spirit of Truth in our lives that we mature from “babes in Christ” to manhood in the Lord. (I Cor. 3:1; Eph. 4:15) Only those who do thus mature will come to spiritual birth through a further exercise of divine power. The Heavenly Father will not exalt spiritual “babes” to the divine nature.

THE DIVINE COMMISSION

There is a divine purpose behind our calling and begetting. We are not called by God merely to be delivered from sin and death, although the divine arrangement provides for this. God’s New Creation is being prepared to be the channel of his promised blessings to all the families of the earth. When

exalted with Jesus in the first resurrection, to live and reign with him, they will be associated with the Master in giving health and everlasting life to all the willing and obedient of mankind.—Rev. 20:6; 21:1-5

Before the members of the New Creation are exalted to the divine nature in the kingdom, their mission is to be the bearers of God's Truth to all who will hear and respond to the message. Indeed, they are commissioned to proclaim the message even though the world gives but little or no heed to it. This divine commission to work for the Lord is symbolically referred to in the Scriptures as the "anointing" of the Spirit. (II Cor. 1:21,22; I John 2:27) This symbolism of anointing is based upon the ancient custom of Israel to anoint kings and priests to office. It was the official designation to office, a symbol of the authority invested in them.—Exod. 28:41; I Sam. 15:1

The Scriptures reveal that all who are begotten by the Holy Spirit as New Creatures are also anointed by the Spirit to be coworkers with God in the outworking of his plan of salvation. (I Cor. 3:9; II Cor. 6:1) This is a wonderful arrangement of divine grace. Actually, in our weakness, and with all our imperfections, we can do nothing for the Lord that is really worthwhile from his standpoint. We cannot imagine that the great Creator of the universe really needs us. There is nothing we can do that he could not accomplish in some other way. Nothing that we can give to him will make him rich, nor will our withholding make him poor.

It is only by divine grace and favor that we are invited to work for the Lord, and this grace is the

more abundant because of the many assurances of the Scriptures that our Heavenly Father really wants us to be partners with him and with his beloved Son, Christ Jesus. This assurance is given to us through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

One of the principal texts referring to the anointing is Isaiah 61:1-3, which reads: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified."

This outline of the Spirit's anointing comprehends briefly the outworking of the entire plan of God. Jesus quoted and applied it to the work he was commissioned to do. (Luke 4:16-21) Jesus not only proclaimed glad tidings to the meek, and the opening of the prison of sin and death to those who are bound, but also gave demonstrations of what the good news of the kingdom would ultimately mean to all the sin-cursed and dying world. The divine commission covers both these aspects of the Master's ministry. It will be under this same divine commission that Jesus will conduct the future kingdom work of healing all the sick and raising all the dead.

Thus it is with us, the Master's followers. We are anointed by the Spirit to be partners with Jesus,

both in proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom, and by-and-by to be associated with him in the great restitution work foretold by all God's holy prophets since the world began. (Matt. 24:14; Acts 3:19-21) What a marvelous blessing this is! Through our understanding of his plan we have come to know God. To know God is to want to talk about him. We "love to tell the story," and through the anointing of the Holy Spirit we are assured that our Heavenly Father wants us to tell the story, that his name might be glorified.

Proper preparation is needed in order to utilize the anointing of the Spirit. When we see a signed and sealed certificate in a doctor's office, it means that the one to whom it applies is authorized and qualified to serve the public as a physician. It means that he or she has made a thorough study of all those things necessary in order to be a doctor of medicine. So it is with our anointing, our authority to be "ambassadors for Christ." (II Cor. 5:20) God expects us to become acquainted with his plans and purposes so that when we speak for him, and in his name, we will not misrepresent his plan with respect to the recovery of the world from sin and death.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." (II Tim. 2:15, *Revised Version*) The Scriptures, Paul further wrote, are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (II Tim. 3:16,17) Indeed, the "all things that pertain unto life and godliness," which have been

furnished to us by divine power, include an understanding of the instructions in the plans and purposes of God that we might, through their faithful use, be completely “furnished unto all good works.”

THE SPIRIT’S WITNESS

Another of the “all things” that the Lord has so graciously furnished, is the witness or testimony of his Holy Spirit that we are his children. It is a blessed thing to be assured that we have been begotten by the Holy Spirit, and thus possess the “spirit of sonship.” (Rom. 8:15, *Revised Standard Version*) How can we know this? The Apostle Paul gives us a definite answer to this question. He wrote, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:16,17

Here Paul says we have the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God if we are suffering with Christ. Why did the apostle state this so definitely? It is because the holy prophets of God, who wrote “as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,” had foretold the “sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.” (II Pet. 1:21; I Pet. 1:11) The Scriptures reveal clearly that those who enter into a covenant with God through sacrifice have the privilege of suffering with Christ, encouraged by the glorious hope of reigning with him. Thus, if we are having the privilege of suffering with Christ, of being ostracized by the world—looked upon as not belonging because of our faithfulness to the Truth—then the Spirit of God which

foretold this is testifying to us that we are the children of God!

This does not necessarily imply that we will be incarcerated, or have physical pain inflicted upon us. It does mean that if we are faithful to the Lord and to the Truth, it may cost us the friendship of this sinful, selfish world. It perhaps could also mean that before we finish our earthly course some severe tests of faith will come upon us in the way of suffering, or threatened suffering, for the Truth's sake. To whatever extent we come face to face with these experiences, be they mild in nature, or severe, we have this as a witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God.

THE SEAL OF THE SPIRIT

The symbol of a seal is sometimes used in the Bible in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts as it molds us into the image of Christ. This is one of the very important "all things" which the power of God is accomplishing for us as New Creatures in Christ. This sealing begins with a knowledge of the Truth, and a knowledge of God, its Author. It is described in Revelation 7:3 as a sealing of "the servants of our God in their foreheads." It is important in this connection that we continue to yield ourselves fully to the molding influences of the Holy Spirit, that our every thought, word, and deed might be more and more fully conformed to the will of God in Christ Jesus.

The Scriptures also use the word "seal" from the standpoint of a guarantee or pledge. It is thus used by Paul in Ephesians 1:13,14. This text reads: "In him [Christ] you also, who have heard the word of

truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”
—*RSV*

Paul says that we are sealed by “the promised Holy Spirit.” It was through the power of God’s Holy Spirit that all the precious promises were recorded in his written Word. Many of these promises seal, or guarantee, our victory through Christ by assuring us of divine help in every time of need. (Heb. 4:16) The sum of all these precious promises is that nothing can hinder us from making our calling and election sure except ourselves, and this would be as a result of our own unfaithfulness.

Paul explains that this seal is the “guarantee of our inheritance”; that is, it is the down payment, so to speak. What a joy it is to realize that this initial payment will, in the first resurrection, be followed by the fullness of the promised inheritance—even glory, honor, and immortality—and the great privilege of living and reigning with Christ a thousand years.—Rom. 2:7; Rev. 20:4-6

PRECIOUS PROMISES

All the promises of God pertaining to his New Creation have been given to us by divine power. In the verse following our opening text Peter writes, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) It is not enough, however, merely to know of these promises, and to rejoice in them. They constitute the very basis of our faith. If God’s promises are to accomplish

his intended purpose in our lives, however, we must, as Peter explains, give “all diligence” in adding to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance [self-control], patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity, or love.—vss. 5-7

“If these things be in you, and abound,” Peter explains, “they make you that ye shall neither be barren [Greek: inactive] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.”—vss. 8-12

An abundant entrance into the kingdom of Christ, to be joint-heirs with him in the blessing of all the families of the earth, is one of the things made possible for us by divine power. We must be willing to do these things mentioned by Peter, and give “all diligence” to this end. However, actual growth in grace and knowledge is possible only as God gives us help. We can work out our own salvation only as God works in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure.” —Phil. 2:12,13

PROPHETIC TRUTHS

Peter’s second epistle, in which our text appears, has much to say concerning the return of Christ,

and the establishment of his kingdom. He uses the prophetic truths of God's Word as an incentive to faithfulness. After describing, symbolically, the destruction of Satan's world, Peter adds, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."—II Pet. 3:11

We are now living in the time when Satan's world is crumbling under its own weight of sin and selfishness. There is, therefore, more reason than ever for giving diligence in making our calling and election sure. The world and her pursuits are perishing; her beauty is fading like a flower, so what type of persons are we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? The Greek word here translated "conversation" denotes more than simply what we talk about. It refers to the entire demeanor of life—to all that we say and do. We are to give diligence in bringing our every thought, word, and deed into conformity with the will of God in Christ.—II Cor. 10:5

The prophecies pertaining to the presence of Christ and the destruction of Satan's world were not put in the Bible to frighten God's people, but to enlighten and encourage them. We are encouraged to understand that we are now living near the close of this "present evil world"; that Christ is invisibly present; and that his kingdom will soon be established for the blessing of all the families of the earth. (Gal. 1:4; 3:8; Acts 3:25) The joy of knowing this is yet another of the "all things" given to us by divine power, and is a great incentive to faithfulness.

Of Jesus it is written that he, "in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the

throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2, *International Standard Version*) The joy of participating with Jesus in the future kingdom work of blessing mankind has also been set before us by the Holy Spirit. This joy helps us to bear our cross and to disregard the shame which is attached to following the Lamb “whithersoever he goeth.”—Rev. 14:4

After telling us about the impending destruction of Satan’s world, Peter adds: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:13) “Wherefore,” Peter continues, “seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” Here Peter explains the “manner of persons” we ought to be.

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1) As long as we remain under the protection of faith in Jesus’ blood, our Heavenly Father will look upon us as being without spot and blameless. However, this does not relieve us of the responsibility of “giving all diligence” in conforming our lives as nearly as possible to the perfect pattern set before us in Christ Jesus our Lord. We still must add virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. If we lack these things we will become spiritually blind, and the prophecies of the good things to come will fade from our spiritual vision.—II Pet. 1:9

On the other hand, if we diligently “do these things,” we shall “never fall.” (vs. 10) This does not mean that we will never make a mistake. It does not mean that we can have peace with God apart from the righteousness of Christ. It does mean, however, that we will not fall away from divine grace, from

the keeping power of God. The promises of God assure us of this, and these promises are among those things that “pertain to life and godliness.”

“A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand,” wrote the psalmist, “but it shall not come nigh thee.” (Ps. 91:7) What a blessed assurance this is of the keeping power of God! Through the psalmist, the Holy Spirit also gives us the assurance which reads: “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) What a wonderful protection is thus assured to all who “do these things.”

“Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them,” the psalmist further wrote. (Ps. 119:165) The thought here is that they shall not be permitted to stumble and fall. The reason is that they love God’s laws, his righteous ways, his plan, and his Word. If we truly love the Lord and his instructions, we will give all diligence to conform our lives to them. Making our calling and election sure will not become an incidental, half-hearted effort of life, but will continue to be an all-consuming work, indeed, the working out of our own salvation.

If we truly love God and his Word, we will not be like those who, according to Peter, pervert the Scriptures, “unto their own destruction.” (II Pet. 3:16) Instead, we will take God at his word and obey his instructions without hesitation. We know that the human heart is deceitful. (Jer. 17:9) It can influence our minds to interpret Scriptures in such a manner as to make the narrow way of sacrifice a little less narrow, if we permit it to be so. However, if we give all diligence to study, and then sincerely apply the Lord’s instructions, we will be protected

against all influences which would take us out of our Heavenly Father's loving care. Even Satan will not be permitted to harm us as New Creatures, if we remain devoted to the doing of God's will and submissive to all the providences which divine power permits and overrules for our good.—Rom. 8:28

Just as divine power has provided all things pertaining to life and godliness, we can also be assured that it will not allow anything to interfere with the accomplishment of God's purpose in our lives. Surely this is a blessed promise, for we know that greater is he who is for us than all who are against us. (Rom. 8:31; I John 4:4) Let us daily rejoice in the abundance of God's grace as we continue zealously to fulfill the terms of our covenant with him by sacrifice, strengthened by the certain knowledge that our Heavenly Father will be faithful to us. (I Thess. 5:24) If we do this, when the due time comes, we shall have an abundant entrance into that glorious kingdom which is to uplift and bless the people of all nations.—II Pet. 1:11 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

FEBRUARY 6—"Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another."—Psalm 75:6,7 (Z. '95-11 Hymn 331)

FEBRUARY 13—"Love thinketh no evil."—I Corinthians 13:5 (Z. '98-84 Hymn 143A)

FEBRUARY 20—"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, ... this man's religion is vain."—James 1:26 (Z. '99-215 Hymn 267)

FEBRUARY 27—"Let your moderation be known unto all men."—Philippians 4:5 (Z. '03-7 Hymn 95)