

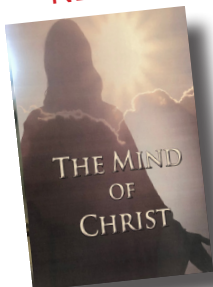
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Is Christianity Failing?

“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”—Luke 18:8 **ACCORDING TO A PEW** Research Center study published in December 2021, those in the United States who identify themselves as “religiously unaffiliated” are dramatically increasing in numbers. As part of the research study, a survey found that, whereas 16% of American adults claimed no religious affiliation fourteen years ago in 2007, by 2021 the number had grown to 29%, nearly doubling.

The Pew study also noted that although Christianity is still the widely dominant religion in the United States, its once rock-solid footing is slipping in a marked manner. In 2007, 78% of adults identified themselves as Christian. By 2021, that number had declined to 63%. Another interesting observation is the tracking of people who describe themselves either as atheists, agnostics, or “nothing in particular,” as far as religious persuasion is concerned. Fourteen years ago, this group was outnumbered by Christians by nearly 5 to 1. Today that ratio is close to 2 to 1, according to the Pew research.

The above-cited results are only a sampling of what seems to be the trend of nearly a worldwide decline in Christianity. Hence, the question of our title. Is Christianity failing in its oft-stated mission to convert the world, and beyond that, of leading mankind to peace and prosperity? To many, this seems to be where Christianity is heading. As sincere students of the Bible, how should we view these perplexing conditions?

A correct answer to the question as to whether Christianity has been successful or is failing first depends upon a proper understanding of what constitutes Christianity, and just what God intended it should accomplish in the Earth. Christ is presented to us in the Bible as the Savior of the world; and the logical conclusion is that God had planned for the world to be converted to him, and thus to be saved from death. However, nearly two thousand years have passed since Jesus came to Earth to die for mankind, and yet the world is still far from being converted. Christianity in general is rapidly losing ground, and whole nations have set themselves against religions of various kinds. Are we to judge from this that God's plan, centered in Jesus, has failed?

The disciples, in Jesus' day, based their hopes in his Messianic kingdom upon the prophecies of the Old Testament. Doing so, in the main, was correct. They failed to understand, however, that the time had not then come for the establishment of that kingdom. Just so with most professing Christians since then: their belief that God had planned the conversion of the world through Christ and the church is correct, but they have failed to see from

the Scriptures that this is not the age in which God purposed that this work should be accomplished.

The immediate disciples of Jesus failed to note from the prophecies that the Messiah must suffer and die as man's Redeemer before the promised kingdom blessings could come to the world. Similarly, professed Christians have failed to see from the Scriptures that the true church of Christ must suffer and die with him before having the privilege of sharing with him in the future kingdom work of converting and blessing the world of mankind. The Apostle Paul states this matter clearly, saying, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."—Rom. 8:17,18

CHRISTIANS FOLLOW JESUS

This is in reality what Jesus himself taught his followers. For example, he said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23) That these were to follow him all the way into death is made positive by the resurrected Jesus' words to the church recorded in Revelation 2:10, which reads, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." This faithfulness implies fortitude in the face of suffering and persecution, and is shown by Jesus' further promise, "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

When the divine commission was given to the church to go into all the world and preach the Gospel of the kingdom, the purpose was distinctly stated to be that of giving a witness. (Matt. 24:14) This witness was not intended by God to conquer the world, but to result in the preparation of individual Christians for the future work of reigning with Jesus. This is made clear in Revelation 20:4. We quote: "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, ... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

If the mission of Christians in the world has been that of converting all during the present time, then we might indeed think that Christianity has been failing. We see, however, that true Christianity has not failed; it is merely the false hope of many professed believers that has not materialized. When we see that the present mission of the church is one of sacrifice and suffering rather than one of conquering and converting the world, many puzzling questions are at once cleared up.

For example, many have wondered why it is that faithful Christians have usually suffered more than unbelievers. Why, after Jesus came as the light of the world, did mankind soon plunge into a long period of darkness, which we now refer to as the Dark Ages? Have we ever pondered why there are many more nonbelievers in the world today than a century ago? Who has not wondered about questions of this nature? Many, as a result of their wondering, have concluded that Christianity is a gigantic charade, and that this supposed foundation and bulwark of civilization has signally failed to make good its claims.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

A popular idea of Christianity has been that one becomes a Christian in about the same manner that they join a civic or social club, and that this constitutes a type of safeguard against divine wrath that otherwise would send the individual to a terrible place of torment at death. Hence it has been supposed that God wants everyone to become Christians so they might escape this terrible fate. Now that it is being discovered, in the fuller light of the present day, that the nightmare of eternal torment is not taught in the Bible, the way is thus becoming clear for a better understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

The word Christ, being a Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah, is used in the New Testament to connect Jesus with that glorious array of Messianic promises found throughout the Old Testament. The first of these promises was given in the Garden of Eden when God said that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. Another, and more specific promise, was given to Abraham when he was told that through his seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.—Gen. 3:14,15; 12:1-3; 22:16-18

Jesus, the Christ, came into the world as the seed of promise to be the one who would bless all humanity. (Gal. 3:16) The Scriptures show that those who become true Christians by following faithfully in his steps of self-sacrifice, even unto death, are to be a part with him of the promised seed.

The Apostle Paul, writing to Christians of his day, said, "If ye be Christ's [Christians], then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:29) In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul

says that Christ “is not one member, but many.” (I Cor. 12:12,14) A very important point for consideration is presented by the apostle in these two statements. They show that in the selection and development of Christians, God is merely carrying on a preparatory work in connection with the future Messianic purpose to bless all nations. It means that God has not been trying to make all mankind Christians at the present time, but merely selecting a few from among the nations to be associated with Jesus in his future work of blessing the entire world, both the living and the dead.

CHRISTIANS SELECTED INDIVIDUALLY

Who are these Christians today whom God is selecting to reign with the Messiah? In what church will we find them? God is the judge as to just who they are. Specifically, a Christian is one who, having recognized that he was a sinner, and alienated from God, has repented, and who, through faith in the shed blood of Christ, has made a full consecration, or dedication, of his time, talents—all that he has—to the Lord, and is faithfully endeavoring to carry out that consecration. Denominational church membership has nothing whatever to do with it.—Rom. 5:1-3; 12:1,2

In the fifteenth chapter of Acts there is a revealing account concerning the divine purpose in the selection of the faithful Christians of this age. Here the apostle explains that “God at the first did visit the Gentiles [Greek: nations],” not to make all of them Christians, but “to take out of them a people for his name.” After this, declares the apostle, divine favor will return to Israel, and the broken-down

“tabernacle of David” will be restored. Then, he says, “the residue [remainder] of men,” and the Gentiles, will have an opportunity to “seek after the Lord.” First, however, as the apostle states, must be completed the work of taking out a people for his name, the bride of Christ, to be made up of all fully consecrated Christians.—Acts 15:14-18

When we see that God does not intend that all the world, in this age, shall become Christians, it helps us to appreciate many passages of the Bible that heretofore have been very difficult to understand. For example, in Revelation 5:10 we are told that the future reign of Christ and the church is to be associated with the Earth. How could this be true if all except the church are to be taken away from the Earth and tormented forever in a burning hell? Over whom, then, would the saints reign here on the Earth? These difficulties vanish when we realize from the Scriptures that the world is to be blessed, not cursed, following the completion of the true church.

Viewing the matter thus, we can see that God’s plan of human salvation provides an opportunity for all, both the church and the world. This does not mean that all are to be saved irrespective of their own cooperation or participation in the divine arrangements. The Scriptures distinctly point out that all who sin willfully after having come to a full knowledge of the Truth are to be punished with everlasting destruction, but not everlasting torment and misery, as many have believed.—Acts 3:22,23

THE TRUE CHURCH’S REWARD

Another interesting point, in connection with God’s selection of the church to be associated with

Christ in his Messianic kingdom, is that such faithful Christians are to have a higher reward than the world in general. God's provision for the world is that they shall be restored to life upon the Earth—a "restitution of all things," and "that which was lost" when our first parents sinned. (Matt. 6:10; Acts 3:20,21; Luke 19:10) To the Christian, however, the Master gave the promise, "I go to prepare a place for you, ... that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2,3) The church is to have a heavenly reward, but it is not God's purpose to take all mankind to heaven.

The prospect of everlasting life through the shed blood of the Redeemer is the blessed hope set before both the church and the world in the Bible. The scriptural presentation is not that of heaven for the righteous and eternal torture for the wicked. Rather, it is that of life, whether on the heavenly or earthly plane—or the cessation of life, which is death.

The first man, Adam, disobeyed and lost life as the penalty for sin; but eventually Jesus came as man's ransom, or corresponding price, and offset that penalty by his own death on the cross. (Rom. 5:12,18,19; I Tim. 2:5,6) As a result of this, the world once more will be given the opportunity to live. This opportunity will in due time come to all; but during this present Gospel Age, fully consecrated Christians are the only ones who actually have an opportunity to benefit from the death of the Redeemer. These, because they follow Jesus in laying down their lives sacrificially, are to be rewarded, not only with life itself, but with immortal life. These are they who "seek for glory and honour and immortality." (Rom. 2:7) The obedient of the world of mankind,

during the future Messianic kingdom, will also be given an opportunity to live, but the life they receive will be the restored perfect human life on earth, which was forfeited by Adam. The obedient will then live everlastingly, not because they will become immortal, but because God will continue to sustain their lives by his manifold provisions.

WHY THE WORLD IS NOT CONVERTED

The work of true Christianity has thus far been that of preparing the future joint-heirs with the Messiah for the great work of his long-promised kingdom. It is little wonder, in view of this, that the attempted work of converting the world has made so little progress throughout the Christian era. The Creator knew that, from the human standpoint, Christianity would appear to be a failure. In our opening text, Jesus himself, in referring to the end of this age, said, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) Thus the fact that relatively few in the world today really believe in the Bible is no surprise to God. His beloved Son Jesus, the Redeemer of the world, foresaw this very condition, and foretold it. This is another good reason why we should have faith in what the Bible says.

The hundreds of divisions among the so-called Christian churches likewise were foretold in the prophetic Word. Paul said that there would come a great "falling away" from the true faith, and this most certainly occurred. (II Thess. 2:3) If Jesus and his apostles were a group of deceiving men, bent on putting over some selfish scheme for the purpose of favorably influencing the whole world of mankind,

would they deliberately predict that it would not be long before their entire scheme would fail and they themselves become laughingstocks in the minds of millions of people? Such pessimistic predictions would not be very encouraging to the early believers, nor induce very many to join the movement. Worldly wisdom would say, “Paint the future as bright as you can, or else you will never make many converts.”

Jesus and the apostles were not guided by worldly wisdom. They fully understood that the purpose of preaching the Gospel in this age was not to build up large and imposing church organizations. They knew that God did not intend that the mere preaching of the Gospel now would lead the world to the feet of Jesus. They foresaw that while a “little flock” of true Christians would be gathered and prepared for the future work of blessing the remainder of mankind, many of the glorious truths the Master taught would be distorted, and that, as a result of this, Christianity would appear to go down in defeat.—Luke 12:32

How glad we are, however, that true Christianity has not failed. God’s plan for this age is being successfully accomplished, and now this preparatory work for the new kingdom is about completed. Indeed, there is much scriptural evidence to show that the period set aside in the divine purpose for the call and preparation of true Christians to reign with Jesus in his Messianic kingdom is nearing its culmination. We rejoice, then, to consider the prospect that we have almost reached the end of this age and the beginning of a new one, in which the foretold blessings of peace and life will be dispensed to a dying world.—Isa. 25:6-9; 35:5-10; Rev. 21:3-5

■

Nathan Rebukes David

Key Verse: “*David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said to David, The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*”
—II Samuel 12:13,
New King James
Version

Selected Scripture:
II Samuel 12:1-14

your neighbor’s wife, ... nor anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Exod. 20:13-17, NKJV) David coveted Uriah’s wife, committed adultery with her, stole her from Uriah and arranged for Uriah’s murder to cover up the sin he had committed.

Perhaps, as king of Israel, David was intoxicated by the power of his office. He may have had the feeling that he was so favored of God that he was above the law. We are cautioned against having such mistaken perceptions of ourselves. Jesus powerfully warned us along this line: “Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see

OUR KEY VERSE BRINGS

into focus the climactic moment of Nathan’s confrontation with David. In all of the Bible’s rich narratives, few have the deep pathos and poignancy of David’s heinous deed. The story is powerfully instructive to all those who seek to walk in Jesus’ footsteps.

King David had transgressed the law of God on multiple levels. God specifically commanded, “You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. ... You shall not covet

the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye."—Luke 6:41,42, *NKJV*

David's anger seethed against the perpetrator in Nathan's allegorical tale recorded in our Selected Scripture passage. "The man who has done this shall surely die," David said. Then came Nathan's revelation, "You are the man!" (II Sam. 12:5,7, *NKJV*) Hearing the truth hit David with devastating impact. His errors became fully apparent to him. With deep remorse, King David acknowledged, "I have sinned against the LORD." (vs. 13) Although he would suffer adversity for the remainder of his life as punishment for his sins, including subversion by his own sons, the mercy of God would endure upon him. The iniquity of David's transgression was forgiven.

One benefit of God's mercy to David was that, because he continued to live, he authored some of the most wonderful and reassuring portions of Scripture. The principle set before us in these words of the psalmist resonates with all God's true children: "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared [reverenced]." (Ps. 130:3,4, *NKJV*) What a blessed thought to know that there is forgiveness with God, and that we may continue to revere and worship him. "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."—Rom. 5:1,2, *NKJV*

David's heartfelt repentance, and his desire to continue serving God, is captured in Psalm 51. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." (Ps. 51:10,11, *NKJV*) May we daily seek God's mercy, repenting of our inevitable sins and pursuing our service to him. ■

Ezra Sent to Teach the People

Key Verse: “*Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*”
—*Ezra 7:10, New King James Version*

Selected Scripture:
Ezra 7:1-28

OUR KEY VERSE IDENTIFIES three principles leading to faithfulness in ministering to God’s people. Ezra had: 1) prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD; 2) done what the law commanded; and 3) conscientiously taught God’s law to Israel.

The Lord moved the Persian king, Artaxerxes, in his heart to bless Ezra and his people. Ezra’s appointment to take the lead in distributing Artaxerxes’

support was doubtless the result of his lifelong devotion to the laws of God. Ezra testified to this effect, “Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king’s mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.”—Ezra 7:27,28, NKJV

Ezra’s three qualities made him the right man for the work at hand. First, he had prepared his heart to seek knowledge of God’s law. This is also important to the Christian. We must keep our heart “with all diligence,”

for out of it “spring the issues of life.” “With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Prov. 4:23; Rom. 10:10, *NKJV*) An intellectual grasp of the divine law is not sufficient. A deep appreciation of God’s ways must reside in the heart also.

The second quality commending Ezra for God’s service was faithfulness in doing what was commanded. So it must be with us. James admonished, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:22-25, *NKJV*) Let us strive daily to be “doers” of God’s Word.

The third quality exhibited by Ezra was fidelity in teaching God’s principles. Ezra did not flinch at the prospect of offending some by what God’s law required. On one occasion, for example, he boldly told the people of Israel that they must not take foreign wives or husbands, nor even seek the prosperity of those from other lands! (Ezra 9:10-15) There was no way to make this palatable to those who had sinned in that manner. Our Father in heaven sometimes asks us to do things that are not pleasing to the fleshly mind. Yet, his commands are not unreasonable. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”—I John 5:2,3, *NKJV*

With these lessons thus in mind, let us be like faithful Ezra—daily preparing our hearts to seek God’s will, faithfully doing it to the best of our ability, and teaching it to others by word and by example. ■

Job's Reply to Bildad

Key Verses: “*God hung the stars in the sky—the Dipper, Orion, the Pleiades, and the stars of the south.*

We cannot understand the great things he does, and to his miracles there is no end. God passes by, but I cannot see him.”

—**Job 9:9-11**, *Good News Bible*

Selected Scripture:
Job 9:1-35

the three comforters sharply: “Oh, that you would be silent, and it would be your wisdom! Now hear my reasoning, and heed the pleadings of my lips. Will you speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for Him? Will you show partiality for Him? Will you contend for God? Will it be well when He searches you out? Or can you mock Him as one mocks a man? He will surely rebuke you if you secretly show partiality. Will not His excellence make you afraid, and the dread of Him fall upon you? ... Hold your peace with me, and let me speak, Then let

THE KEY VERSES ARE A

small extract of Job's reply to Bildad, one of his three supposed comforters. In the preceding chapter, Bildad argued that Jehovah is beyond our comprehension, implying that it is not even worth trying to do so. He makes the further egregious claim that, even if one is in the right, God can still declare them to be wrong. He told Job that it is useless to proclaim his innocence to God. It would not make any difference. Bildad was quite mistaken.

Job was a righteous man and, as such, trusted in the reasonableness of God. He answered

come on me what may! Why do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hands? Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.”—Job 13:5-15, *New King James Version*

For Job to say, “If God slays me, I will still trust him,” is most courageous. Yet Job did not just passively lay down, but added that he would “defend” his ways before God. We may also take our case before the Father’s throne. He desires us to interact with him and probe with him the principles of righteousness. He encourages us to come to him in honesty, confessing our hopes and admitting our faults. These thoughts are strong underpinnings of mature faith.

The power of God is infinite. Our Key Verses acknowledge his omnipotence. He created the stars and arranged them in constellations for us to ponder. He performs wonders that mankind, as yet, cannot comprehend. For all our modern technological prowess we still do not fully understand the origins of the physical universe. God has performed miracles beyond count—making everything in the physical universe out of atoms. Who beside him could precisely adjust the various characteristics and forces of these minute particles into cohesion and with the ability to interact with one another to form molecules? Then, from molecules, who else could make the sun, moon, stars and man?

“God passes by, but I cannot see him,” says Job. God is indeed not far from any of us, although invisible to human sight. As the Apostle Paul observed, “He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, ... so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:26-28, *NKJV*) Let us, then, not fall prey to the opinions of doubting ones such as Bildad, but live, like Job, a life of faith in God. ■

Job Understands and Is Blessed

Key Verse: *“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.”*
—**Job 42:5, New King James Version**

Selected Scripture:
Job 42:1-6, 10-17

IN TODAY’S LESSON, OUR

Key Verse pinpoints the moment of Job’s profound enlightenment regarding the ways of Jehovah. From the time of his first being stricken with afflictions, through the early days of silent mourning, to the hours of philosophical debate with his would-be comforters, Job at last encounters

God. Beginning in chapter 38, God dramatically answers Job from out of a whirlwind, causing all debate and human reasoning to cease: “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2, *NKJV*) That moment must have been both terrifying and thrilling for Job!

God’s words left Job with no answer: “Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.” (vss. 3,4, *NKJV*) In subsequent verses, God’s inquiries as to where Job was when the earth was created, the oceans were tamed, and flora and fauna were made, rendered him speechless. (vss. 5-41) Job now grasped the fact that God is beyond human comprehension. God informs us further: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than

your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”—Isa. 55:8,9, *NKJV*

David, speaking of Jehovah’s omniscience wrote, “O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it.” (Ps. 139:1-6, *NKJV*) Speculate as we may, much about God remains beyond human comprehension.

We had, in time past, heard of God by hearing of the ear, but were often misled in our apprehension of the character of our Creator. Some spoke to us out of their human speculations and prejudices. Others wished to teach us creeds of men as the authoritative explanation of God’s nature and plans. (See Mark 7:5-13) None of these could adequately inform our understanding of God. It was when we turned to God’s Word, the Holy Bible, that we at last could see him for who he really is. “God is love.” “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”—I John 4:8; 1:5

Job was richly blessed by God. (Job 42:10-16) All that he had lost was restored two-fold. His sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys were doubled. Curiously, though he had lost ten children, he did not receive twofold more. Seven sons and three daughters were granted to him after his restoration. This, we believe, is no mistake. Here, in exquisite harmony with the Scriptures, is a beautiful confirmation of the resurrection of the dead. Job did not have twenty children after his ordeal. In the resurrection, however, he will. The ten children who earlier died will return from the grave and be united with their second set of siblings, as well as with their mother and Job, their father. May we, by God’s grace, continue to grow in our understanding of him, and thus be blessed. ■

Power, Love, and a Sound Mind

*“God hath not
given us the spirit
of fear; but of
power, and of love,
and of a sound
mind.”*

—II Timothy 1:7

THE BIBLE MENTIONS

many things which God has given us. Outstanding among these is the gift of his beloved Son to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. (John 3:16) Jesus is referred to by the Apostle Paul as God’s “indescribable gift.” (II Cor. 9:15, *International Standard Version*) Then there is God’s gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that his Heavenly Father is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children.—Luke 11:13

In our text Paul mentions the “spirit,” that is, disposition or influence, of “power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” These qualities are closely related to God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, in that power, love, and a sound mind are outgrowths of the operation of his Spirit in the life of the Christian. They are also evidences that the Holy Spirit is operative in our hearts, and Paul contrasts these

evidences with “the spirit of fear,” which, he emphasizes, is not given to us by the Heavenly Father.

Fear, should it enter the Christian life, has a very blighting effect. Satan is the great instigator of fear. The Apostle Peter wrote, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) The roaring of a lion in seeking out its prey is designed to instill fear in the animal being hunted. This fear, it is said, virtually paralyzes the animal so that it is incapable either of escaping or of putting up resistance.

Fear will also do this to us as followers of the Master if we allow it to take possession of our hearts. Peter gives the antidote for this fear engendered by Satan’s attacks. He wrote, “Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” (vs. 9) Steadfastness in the faith means firm confidence in the outworking of God’s plan in our lives, and a knowledge that Satan cannot harm us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. If Satan’s roaring brings “afflictions” to our flesh, we are to remember that these are the same as those common “in the world,” and are no evidence that God has deserted us.

Regardless of the origin of our fear, we are to remember that it does not come from God. To keep this always in mind, and to believe it with all our hearts, will enable us under all circumstances to proceed in the narrow way, doing those things which we believe the Bible indicates to be God’s will for us. Thus we can have confidence, knowing that the Lord will take care of us, not necessarily from a physical standpoint, but as New Creatures guided by his Spirit.

Peter also wrote, “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (I Pet. 3:13) “That which is good” is God’s will which we are endeavoring to do. Here the apostle assures us that no eternal harm can come to us as long as we walk in the pathway of obedience to the Heavenly Father’s will. However, this does not mean that we will not have difficult experiences along this way of righteousness, for in the next verse Peter adds, “If ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.”—vs. 14

We think of Jesus as one who always did those things which were pleasing to his Heavenly Father. Yet, he suffered for righteousness’ sake, and his enemies did all they could to cause him fear. At the end they spat upon him, beat him, hung him on a cross, and heaped ignominy upon him. (Matt. 27:27-31) However, as Peter assures us, they could not harm him. Indeed, they killed him as a man, but he came through that experience unscathed as a New Creature. So it will be with us. Peter admonishes that in the face of difficulties, from whatever source they may arise, we are not to be “afraid of their terror,” knowing that this type of fear is not of God, but of the Devil, in his attempt to turn us aside from our course of faithfulness in the narrow way.

PAUL’S INVITATION

We frequently gain a fuller meaning of a text when we consider the setting in which it appears. We believe this is true with respect to Paul’s reference to “the spirit of fear.” His second epistle to Timothy, in which this expression is used, was written from Rome,

where he was being held prisoner. Apparently Paul felt reasonably certain that he would soon be executed, and so he wrote: "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me."—II Tim. 4:5-11

In the first chapter of the epistle, we find Paul saying, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me." (vs. 15) The evidence seems clear that Paul felt quite alone and believed that a visit by Timothy would be of great value to him. Additionally, since he had been more or less training Timothy to carry on with the ministry after his own death, Paul doubtless also felt that it would be a great blessing to this spiritual son of his if they could talk matters over face to face.

In verse 8 of the first chapter Paul wrote to Timothy, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." Evidently at least some of Paul's "friends" had turned away, being "ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." They were in a difficult position, for to be friendly with this prisoner

exposed them to danger. Despite this, however, Paul invited Timothy to visit him, though knowing that for him to do so could lead to complications with the Roman authorities.

THE LORD'S PROVISION

It is against this background that Paul reminds Timothy that “the spirit of fear” is not of the Lord, that instead, he gives strength, the spirit of “power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” From the standpoint of the flesh, journeying to Rome and visiting Paul, who apparently had already been condemned to death, would not be an easy task. The apostle knew, though, that God would give Timothy the necessary strength to do this. Being a follower of Jesus is never an easy task. It requires courage and strength beyond our own, but we have the assurance that the Lord does give “power,” and every follower of the Master can testify to the truthfulness of this promise.

How does God give strength to his people? One way he does this is through his promises. To know that God has promised to help us in every time of need is in itself a great source of strength. Isaiah wrote, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”—Isa. 40:28-31

Another way the Lord gives strength to his people is by the providences with which he surrounds them. To know that he, through our guardian angels, and in other ways, is shaping our providences for our eternal good as New Creatures, is a wonderful source of strength! In addition, we know that, when necessary, the Heavenly Father will directly imbue his people with spiritual strength to help them through experiences which, in their own strength alone, they would falter and fall.

THE RESURRECTION POWER

In his letter to the brethren in Ephesus, Paul speaks of the “exceeding greatness” of God’s power which raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to “his own right hand.” (Eph. 1:18-20) Paul says in this passage that the same mighty power which raised Jesus from the dead is now working “to us-ward who believe,” and in his letter to the Philipians he expresses his willingness to suffer “the loss of all things,” that he might know and experience this power working in him.—Phil. 3:7-10

There is no question of God’s ability to care for his people, and there is no question about his desire to do so, because he has promised it throughout the Scriptures. However, we must exercise faith in God’s promises. Peter could walk on the water until his faith wavered; and so can we go through any experience, or have any “mountain” removed which may loom up in front of us, if by faith we continue to hold on to the Heavenly Father’s precious promises.—Matt. 21:21

PERFECT HEARTS

Satan will endeavor to instill doubts and fears into our hearts on the grounds that we are not worthy

of God's continued love and care. Then we think of self, of all the imperfections we know we have, and we begin to tremble. When this happens we must remember that God is not dealing with us according to the flesh, but according to our heart intentions, and that our fleshly imperfections are covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness.—Isa. 61:10; Phil. 3:9

The Scriptures say, "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect [Hebrew: complete] toward him." (II Chron. 16:9) If our hearts are pure then we know that the Lord will continue to strengthen us by giving us the spirit of power.

THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

A pure heart, one that is complete before the Lord, is a heart that is emptied of self, and filled with love. This again is one of the provisions mentioned in our theme text, for God not only gives us the spirit of power, but also the spirit of love. Paul wrote that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." (Rom. 5:5) It is through the Scriptures, which reveal his divine purpose for the church and the world, that we learn about God's love. The Bible tells us that he delights to exercise lovingkindness in the earth. (Jer. 9:23,24) In God's Word, too, we learn about the loving gift of his "only begotten Son."—John 3:16

This knowledge, when properly appreciated, begets the desire to be like God. Hence, we earnestly strive to eradicate selfishness from our hearts, and to be filled instead with the spirit of love. With God's love "shed abroad" in our hearts, we are motivated

by this spirit in all that we do. If Timothy were to go to Rome and visit Paul, love would need to motivate him to do this, else he would not be specially blessed. Earlier in his ministry, Paul wrote that though we might give our bodies to be burned, if we have not love, it will profit us nothing. (I Cor. 13:1-3) How important, then, that we open our hearts to receive this gift from God—the spirit of love.

A SOUND MIND

The third gift mentioned by Paul in our text is the spirit of a “sound mind.” A sound mind is one that can reason correctly, upon the basis of available knowledge, and reach proper conclusions. Among members of the fallen race there are no perfectly sound minds, for all minds are contaminated with sin to some extent. Even among the minds which are considered sound by accepted human standards, there are varying degrees of intellect, though still imperfect in all cases.

However, when Paul speaks of a sound mind he does not refer to human standards of soundness, but to a mind that is regulated by the will of God. Here again the Word of God comes into the forefront as the principal source of instructions which produce soundness of mind from the divine standpoint. To the extent that we forego our own reasoning and accept for our guidance the instructions of the Lord, we have the soundness of mind referred to by Paul.

The Apostle Paul speaks of “casting down imaginations [Greek: reasoning], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:5) The mind of the flesh

is prone to set up its reasoning contrary to the knowledge of God, and by this means endeavors to induce us to be disobedient to his will and to the will of our Head, Christ Jesus. The reasoning of our fleshly minds may not be unsound from the human standpoint, but it will not reflect the spirit of a “sound mind” which is given to us by the Heavenly Father.

PAUL NOT MAD

After the Apostle Paul had testified to Festus, a Roman governor, of the many difficult experiences through which he had passed as a result of his ministry in behalf of Christ, “Festus saith with a loud voice, Paul, thou art mad; thy much learning turneth thee to madness.” Paul answered, “I am not mad, most excellent Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and sound mind.” (Acts 26:24,25, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*) Those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus, suffering and dying with him, are often considered confused in their viewpoint and unsound in their conclusions. Actually, however, they are only following the words of “truth and sound mind” which are in the Bible for their guidance.

Paul sets forth the proper viewpoint again in Romans 12:1, which reads, “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.” A sound mind is a reasoning mind, and from God’s standpoint the reasoning and conclusions must be based on his instructions if we are to have the spirit of a “sound mind” mentioned by Paul in our theme text. We have been invited to lay down our lives in sacrifice, which was illustrated in the services of the ancient

Tabernacle of Israel by the offering of animals on literal altars. In this present Gospel Age we do not offer animals in sacrifice, but we present ourselves. This, Paul says, is a “reasonable” service—that is, it reflects sound reasoning from the divine standpoint.

Paul follows up this admonition in verse 2, which reads, “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” This tells us that in order to have the spirit of a sound mind from God’s standpoint, our view of things has to be transformed by a renewing, or renovation, of our minds. Our old and selfish ideas and the reasoning which supported them must give place to the new viewpoint—to the will of God as expressed through his Word; and his will is that we lay down our lives in sacrifice.

JESUS’ VIEWPOINT

Jesus is our perfect example and guide, and it is interesting to note how his soundness of mind as a New Creature directed him in the doing of his Father’s will. From the very beginning of his ministry his enemies were seeking occasion against him. However, while Jesus knew that he was to lay down his life as the Redeemer and Savior of the world, he did not recklessly expose himself to danger until he knew it was the Father’s due time. (John 7:10) Meanwhile he continued faithfully laying down his life in the service of others.

However, when Jesus knew that the time had come for his sacrifice to be consummated he did not hesitate. 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." Peter did what almost anyone governed by human reasoning would do. He endeavored to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem under such circumstances, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee."—Matt. 16:21,22

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (vs. 23) By advising Jesus not to go to Jerusalem where he would be killed, Peter was obstructing the execution of the divine will, and, in this was unwittingly acting out Satan's desire. Jesus further explained that the viewpoint expressed by Peter was based upon human reasoning, and "not the things that be of God."

Generally speaking, sound reasoning influences us to stay out of danger. However, at that time, this was not sound reasoning for Jesus from the divine standpoint. God's will had been clearly expressed for him, and Jesus had dedicated himself to the doing of that will. It was his Father's will that he should die as man's Redeemer, and the due time for his death had now come. Thus, there was only one reasonable thing that Jesus could do, and that was to present himself to be sacrificed, and that was to take place in Jerusalem, so he went there without reservation.

WE FOLLOW

Jesus took the occasion of his exchange with Peter to teach his disciples that this same principle was

to guide them. He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 16:24,25) This would be strange reasoning from the human standpoint, but it is sound for those who have entered into a covenant with God by sacrifice. They cannot reason any other way and be pleasing to the Heavenly Father.

In the case of Jesus, he had covenanted to give his human life in order to restore life to the world. To shrink from doing this would mean unfaithfulness. In that case, he would not be worthy of the divine nature. Indeed, he would not be worthy of a resurrection at all, and when he went into death it would result in the loss of life eternally. The only way he could "find" divine life in the resurrection was to "lose" his earthly life in sacrifice, as he had voluntarily covenanted to do. Since we are following in the footsteps of Jesus, the same principle applies to us, and it is by faithfulness to this that we manifest the spirit of a sound mind.

It is quite possible that the Apostle Paul had this experience and lesson of Jesus in mind when, near the end of his third missionary journey, he spoke these words to the elders at Ephesus. "Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."—Acts 20:22-24

WRONGLY ADVISED

Even as Peter had done with Jesus, so Paul's friends in the city of Caesarea tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:8-12) Then Paul said to them, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (vs. 13) Surely the apostle was here following very closely in the footsteps of the Master. There is little prospect of our having an opportunity to suffer and die with Jesus in a literal Jerusalem, but we do have our symbolic places of sacrifice. These are the opportunities, small and large, that come to us to demonstrate our loyalty to the Lord and to our covenant of sacrifice by faithfulness in doing the Heavenly Father's will, regardless of the cost, whether it be our time, abilities, influence, material means, and reputation.

Timothy had one of these opportunities when Paul invited him to travel to Rome and visit him before he was put to death. Whether Timothy was able to carry this out and visit Paul before his death is unknown. The Scriptural narrative is silent. However, from everything we know about Timothy's faithfulness, we believe that he would have likely made every effort possible to fulfill the desire of Paul, his spiritual father and mentor.

Situations confront us in which decisions have to be made as to the course we shall follow, whether we shall do this or do that. What is the basis upon which we should make these decisions? Is it whether or not one way would be easier than the other, or more pleasing to the flesh?

The basis of all our decisions as Christians should be what the will of the Lord may be. We should be

guided by his Word as far as possible, even in the little things of life. When we see the will of God in any situation, it should not matter whether the doing of his will may be difficult or entail suffering, or whether it may be pleasant according to the flesh. The decision must be based on the doing of God's will. If we strive to follow this to the best of our ability, then we are being guided by the spirit of a sound mind.

Let us be thankful to the Heavenly Father that, through the Holy Spirit, we are able to overcome the human "spirit of fear" by using the divine provisions afforded us—power, love, and a sound mind. By these we will be given the needed strength to walk daily in the narrow way, and through his Word be guided that we might "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Thus will we be counted worthy to stand with the Lamb on mount Zion, together with all those "having his Father's name written in their foreheads."—Rev. 14:1-4 ■

2022 MEMORIAL SUPPER DATE

The proper time for the annual observance of the Memorial Supper will be after sunset on Thursday, April 14, 2022.

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Faith

***“It is impossible
to please God
without faith.”***

***—Hebrews 11:6,
New Living
Translation***

THE DESIRE OF EVERY

footstep follower of the Master is to please God. Hence it should be profitable for us as Christians to give consideration to the subject of faith

so that we may understand better what it is, and what it accomplishes in our lives. We may prosper according to worldly standards, in fact we may “gain the whole world,” but without faith in God and making his will the guiding principle in our lives, we are certain to lose everything, even life itself.—Luke 9:25

Our faith is “the victory [Greek: means of success] that overcometh the world,” declares the Apostle John. (I John 5:4) The worldly spirit is primarily a self-seeking one. It is God’s will that Christians be unselfish, willing to sacrifice their own interests for the benefit of others and for the glory of God. Only fully developed faith in God and in the wisdom and ultimate triumph of divine love will enable us to turn away from the ways of the world and the flesh and yield ourselves completely to the divine will.

To the physically blind who sought to be healed, Jesus said, “According to your faith be it unto you.”

(Matt. 9:29) Spiritual vision also depends upon faith. In fact, spiritual health along all lines depends upon, and is in proportion to, the degree of our faith in God and in his promises. For this reason, we should pray for an increase of faith, and for the determination to accept the experiences which divine wisdom permits us to have in order to promote the increase for which we have asked. The Apostle Peter explains that our faith is precious, like the gold that is refined in the fire. (I Pet. 1:7) God develops our faith through fiery trials, but we have the assurance that he, as the great Refiner, will not permit us to be tried beyond that which we are able to bear.—I Cor. 10:13

A DEFINITION OF FAITH

What then is that faith without which we cannot please God, and with which we can overcome the world, and that will enable us to rejoice even in the severest of trials? The Apostle Paul answers this question saying, "Faith is a well-grounded assurance of that for which we hope, and a conviction of the reality of things which we do not see." (Heb. 11:1, *Weymouth New Testament*) It is the Scriptures which provide the "well-grounded" basis of things for which we hope, and thus give us a firm "conviction" that even the yet unseen things in our lives are being directed by God. This is the essence of faith.

The worldly-minded person may say, "I can have faith only in those things which I can see," but that does not fit the definition given to us by Paul. By faith the Christian not only understands that which he sees, but more importantly, is able to look upon

and have full confidence in the unseen things of God. Thus, faith, based upon the solid assurances of the Scriptures, is the foundation of all that for which the Christian hopes.

In religious practice, the so-called faith of many is often no more than mere credulity. Credulity, as opposed to faith, is belief based simply on the word of another, without any substance or evidence to back it up. We may believe what someone says simply because it agrees with our view of things, or because it sounds pleasing to our ears—that is credulity, not faith. On the contrary, we may be incredulous merely because we do not wish to believe something that does not appeal to our way of thinking. The point here is that belief to the extent of true faith cannot exist where there is no appreciation or understanding of its basis.

To have faith, our opening scripture says, one must first of all “believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.” (Heb. 11:6, *NLT*) If, to the reasoning mind, there is evidence that God exists, then it is equally reasonable to suppose that he is interested in his intelligent creatures here upon the earth. Such reasonable thinking is in full harmony with the Bible and with God’s plan therein set forth. Thus is provided to us a good foundation for belief that the promises contained in the Scriptures are indeed the promises of God.

Faith in God’s promises, through having a “conviction” of their reality as part of the divine arrangement, leads us as Christians to walk in the narrow way of God’s will, in order that we may attain unto the unseen things of God—those things

which are “eternal in the heavens.” (II Cor. 5:1) Faith, then, is not a mere act of belief, but a daily attitude and mindset which promotes acts of service and sacrifice, and the development in one’s life of the fruits and graces of God’s Holy Spirit. Thus, faith is not a momentary event of belief, but a principle which leads to development and application throughout the life of a Christian.

Faith is not something which, only in an emergency or in desperation, we fall back upon as a last resort. Rather, it is a continuous, abiding necessity in order to attain spiritual growth, progress, and ultimately victory. Faith must be a factor in all our spiritual reckonings, causing and enabling us to set aside the earthly in order to attain the heavenly, impelling us to be “dead with Christ,” that we may also “live with him.”—Rom. 6:8; II Tim. 2:11

FAITH AMONG PEOPLE

Faith, that is, confidence, belief, and trust in others, has long existed in various ways among mankind, although it seems to be rapidly on the wane in the chaotic and perplexing world of today. Trust in one another’s word, in what we are told about things we have never known or seen for ourselves, has historically been at the foundation of all worthwhile human associations. It is a necessary factor in the relationship of children to parents, pupils to teachers, and employees to employers. Great is the importance of family faith; business faith; financial faith; and government faith. Indeed, it is the breaking down of faith along all these lines that is helping to bring the world to a state of ruin in these “last days.”—II Tim. 3:1-4

When one can no longer trust the word of another, they are said to have lost faith in that individual. Christian faith, then, is taking God at his Word—the Scriptures—and believing that his Word is trustworthy and reliable. As followers of Jesus, we must have this persuasion and confidence in order to enter the narrow way of sacrifice; and as we walk with God our conviction is deepened, because we have learned through repeated experiences that his Word never fails.

There are times when our faith may temporarily waver, but this is because we look away from the Lord, and begin to put our confidence in the flesh, either our own or that of others. However, we recall the words of King Solomon when he said of God, “There hath not failed one word of all his good promise.” (I Kings 8:56) There can be no valid reason for ever losing our confidence in God. It would be just as reasonable to suppose that the literal heaven and earth would pass away, as to think it possible that God’s Word might fail.

DIVINE ASSURANCES

God has given us wondrous tokens of the steadfastness of his Word. In Isaiah 45:23 we are assured by him of the ultimate victory of his cause among all men and are reminded of the reliability of his Word. He says, “I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” This is evidently a reference to God’s oath-bound covenant with Abraham, that through his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed.—Gen. 22:16-18

Paul tells us in Hebrews 6:17,18 that God confirmed the promise to Abraham with his oath because he was “willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel.” This, together with the fact that it is “impossible for God to lie,” means that we “have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” It is by the conviction of faith that we lay hold upon this hope, and how condescending on the part of God to be willing not only to give us his immutable word, but to bind that word with his oath.

THE BASIS OF POSITIVE CONVICTION

As already noted, it is only when we lose sight of God and his promises that our faith is not as strong as it should be. When we look to him, however, it is with full assurance that we are looking to one who not only has made promises, binding them with his oath, but who also is able to make good those promises. Paul says, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” —II Tim. 1:12

Like Paul, we know the one in whom we have believed, and this knowledge must be the basis of our abiding and increasing faith. What tragic experiences and sad disappointments have come to people as a result of trusting strangers! God, however, is not a stranger to those whom he has taken into his family. From the time these received their first inkling of knowledge concerning him, they began to trust him. The more they learned, the deeper became their confidence. Then, like Paul, they

were able to commit everything unto him. They knew that all the issues of their lives would have his loving, sympathetic attention, and eventually, in "that day," they would receive the promised "crown of righteousness" which the Lord has reserved for them that love and serve him faithfully.—II Tim. 4:8

Giving ourselves wholly to God and becoming his children, we become acquainted with him as our loving Heavenly Father. As this personal, intimate relationship develops, it becomes a still firmer foundation for our faith. Day after day we learn to know God better. We experience his grace to help in time of need, and we note that whatever those needs might be, his grace is all sufficient and never failing. (Heb. 4:16; II Cor. 12:9) We see how God resolves the problems which are too perplexing for us, and removes the obstacles in our path which are too formidable for us to overcome. As we thus experience his tender, sympathetic care over us, and realize how easy it is for him to cope with the difficulties that, without his help, would overwhelm us, we exclaim with the prophet: "Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee."—Jer. 32:17

This knowledge of God, gained through experience and by relying on his Word, is likened to having his "testimonies" in our hearts. (Ps. 119:11) Having our Heavenly Father's testimony in our hearts means that our confidence in him will be so firmly established that we will not be liable to give ear to the various seductive voices, nor yield to the

flesh-pleasing influences which seek to draw us away from the pathway of true and abiding faith in the divine will for us.

WHAT WE RECEIVE THROUGH FAITH

Only by noting the scriptural testimony relative to the things which faith makes possible in the way of blessings from God, are we able to realize the extent to which the floodgates of divine love are opened up to fill our lives with all the fullness of God. How our own hearts respond with the desire to show appreciation to those who trust us, and who have confidence in our integrity. By contrast, how few throughout all the ages have truly believed in God. Eve was deceived into doubting the integrity of the Creator's word, and mankind since then has likewise been deceived. It is no wonder that Jesus said, "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." (Luke 15:7) True repentance, must, of necessity, be based upon belief in God, and what rich blessings he bestows upon those who please him by believing and trusting fully in him.

The many villainous slanders against God and his character will be dispelled when the Messianic kingdom is established, and then the knowledge of his glory will fill the earth. (Hab. 2:14) Faith in God, even then, will be necessary for those who are pleasing to him, but the exercise of confidence and trust will be made much easier by the abundant manifestations of God's love and power. These will no longer be hidden by superstition and the teachings of men but will be clearly understandable to the human mind. Until then, and while darkness

has continued to cover the earth, God has been specially blessing and rewarding those who believe in him and his Word by inviting them to cooperate in the outworking of his plan.

Abraham, the father of the faithful, was called the "Friend of God." (James 2:23) How could anyone be a friend of another without having full confidence in him? Abraham believed in God, thus establishing their friendship. An even more intimate relationship exists between God and his children during this age. We enter this blessed family upon the basis of our confidence in the integrity of God's Word. He accepts us upon the basis of his provision in Christ and our covenant with him. The only thing that can destroy this blessed relationship is our own unfaithfulness, because God is never unfaithful.—Rom. 8:16,17; I Cor. 1:9

In order to comprehend in more detail some of the many blessings that are ours through faith, we here note just a few of the specific things mentioned in the Scriptures and declared to be made available to us upon the basis of belief.

Remission of sins: "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:43) Life itself depends upon this blessing of the remission of sins.

Justification: "By him all that believe are justified from all things." (Acts 13:39) All the rich blessings of divine friendship and sonship are dependent upon our being justified.

Sanctification: "To open their eyes ... that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith." (Acts 26:18) The Word of truth is the sanctifying

medium in our lives, but its effectiveness depends upon our faith in it, and in the God who inspired it, as well as in his Son whom he has commissioned to execute it.

Salvation: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts 16:31) Christ's death, the basis of salvation for the whole world, avails nothing to us as individuals apart from our faith in its divinely declared efficacy.

Life: "These [things] are written, ... that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:31) What value would there be in the Scriptures if we were to turn away from the words of life as though they were but an idle tale of an irresponsible dreamer?

The Holy Spirit: "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." (Gal. 3:14) Through his Spirit God guides us, comforts us, strengthens us; but to receive that Spirit requires faith.

Hope, joy, peace: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." "We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." (Rom. 5:1,2) Believing fully in God's ability to care for us, we have the "peace of God, which passeth all understanding."—Phil. 4:7

Answers to prayers: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." (James 1:6) Without faith our prayers are no more than empty words, but through faith they are the means of opening the windows of heaven that there may be showered upon us all the rich blessings of divine grace.

Sonship: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:26) The bestowing upon us of this great privilege of sonship depends upon our faith.

Additionally, the Scriptures reveal that we live by faith. (Gal. 2:20) We stand by faith. (Rom. 11:20) We quench the darts of the Adversary by faith. (Eph. 6:16) We fight the Christian warfare by faith. (I Tim. 6:12) We resist the Devil by being steadfast in faith. (I Pet. 5:9) We become grounded and settled by continuing in the faith. (Col. 1:23) We become spiritually strong through faith, as illustrated in the experiences of Abraham. (Rom. 4:20) We abound in the blessing of the Lord through faith. (II Cor. 8:7) We grow in faith and because of faith.—II Thess. 1:3,4

FAITH WHICH IS PLEASING TO GOD

Various terms are used in the Scriptures to describe a faith that is pleasing to God. In I Timothy 1:5 the apostle speaks of having a “faith unfeigned.” This is faith that is genuine, and not merely a profession. An unfeigned faith would be one that is demonstrated by works consistent therewith. An insincere faith would be dead so far as having any influence with God is concerned.—James 2:17-20,26

Jesus said to Peter, “O thou of little faith.” Because of Peter’s smaller measure of faith at the time of this experience he was fearful of perishing after having at first walked on the water toward the Master. (Matt. 14:28-31) Peter’s “little faith” grew mightily, however, so that later he was able to suffer joyfully even unto death. Faith, then, can grow and increase in the Christian life. As faith increases, wavering decreases, and we become “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”—Eph. 6:10

The growth of faith in the life of Peter points out the importance of the Holy Spirit’s power and

influence in the life of a Christian. As such, it requires that we clarify the setting of the above experience. Prior to the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had not been poured out upon the Lord's followers. Hence, in Peter's experience, because it took place before the death and resurrection of Jesus, he did not have the advantage of the Holy Spirit's begetting power to increase his faith when walking upon the water. Such unwavering faith came to Peter following Pentecost, and it can also be ours if, after having fully consecrated ourselves to the Lord, we take advantage of the divine power and influence of the Holy Spirit in our life.

So important is the principle of faith as the means by which we keep in close fellowship with God and are able to please him, that his plan is spoken of as "the faith," and our "most holy faith." (Jude 1:3,20) These expressions are calculated to embrace all the promises and instructions given by God in which we have faith. Our reliance upon these promises, and our obedience to his instructions are the means by which our faith in God is demonstrated. Without the understanding of his will and plan, we have no basis for a justifying faith. We might believe that there is a God, but it is only when we demonstrate our confidence in him by relying upon and obeying his Word, that we are said to have a genuine faith.

A GIFT OF GOD

Paul explains that God's grace, or favor, is a gift from him which enables us to exercise faith in his divine arrangements and promises for the eventual blessing of all the families of the earth. (Eph. 2:8;

John 6:65; Gen. 22:18) The apostle asserts that “all men have not faith,” especially in a future hope for all mankind. (II Thess. 3:2) In their current fallen condition, the faith of many is very limited as to God’s eternal purpose for the restitution and recovery of all that was lost in Eden. (Acts 3:20,21; Luke 19:10) However, when we understand and appreciate that the scope of God’s plan encompasses a hope for all, then we can get the full meaning of Paul’s words concerning divine grace, and that we have nothing whereof to boast.—Eph. 2:9

The exercise of faith in all the various experiences of life, whether blessings or trials, depends upon our assurance of the gift of his continued grace. We have already noted the wonderful way by which God assures us of the integrity of his Word, and how his oath-bound promises guarantee that those who put their trust in him shall never be ashamed. However, let us note additionally some of the inspired testimonies of his holy prophets and apostles respecting God’s faithfulness as a promise-keeping God.

To the Israelites Joshua said: “Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed.” (Josh. 23:14) David wrote: “Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.” “Thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. ... O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?”—Ps. 36:5; 89:2,8

The Apostle Paul says: “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son.”

(I Cor. 1:9) “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ... to bear.” (I Cor. 10:13) “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” (I Thess. 5:24) “The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.” (II Thess. 3:3) “He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”—II Tim. 2:13

In these various testimonies of God’s faithfulness, we are assured of his intention and ability to care for us in trial and temptation; to protect us from the Adversary; to extend mercy to us in our weaknesses; and to faithfully carry out all his promises on our behalf. Having been called to the fellowship, or partnership with his Son, God will enable us, through Christ, to render acceptable service as we endeavor to do our part as co-laborers with him. Surely, we have a firm foundation for faith.

FAITH IN GOD’S PLAN

It is of fundamental importance that we exercise faith in God’s willingness and ability to care for us. It is equally important that we have faith in his entire plan of salvation, and that it will ultimately work out to his glory and to the blessing of all who ultimately believe. Paul speaks of this latter faith, saying, “In faith we perceive that the ages have been so thoroughly adjusted by God’s command, that not from things then manifest the things now seen have come to pass.”—Heb. 11:3, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

What a true statement this is of the manner in which God’s plan of the ages has been developing. Nothing occurred in ages past by which one then living could have determined the many details of what future ages would bring forth. Only God knew

the end from the beginning, and the entire outworking of that plan has been according to his commands. The word that has gone forth out of his mouth has not returned to him void, but is accomplishing all that he pleases, and is prospering in the things to which he sends it.—Isa. 55:11

Especially now, as we near the end of this present age, it is the privilege of the consecrated to see in one glorious panoramic view the entire scope of God's plan of the ages. Indeed, we also can comprehend things yet to come, the "times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21) What a glorious vision faith thus brings before us. May our conviction and confidence in it never waver. Let us more faithfully demonstrate our faith by enthusiastically cooperating with God in that part of his plan which he entrusts to us, as his ambassadors in a dark and bewildered world.—II Cor. 5:20; Phil. 2:14,15

True faith in God's plan precludes the making of unbending plans of our own, either for ourselves or for others. If our faith is pure and simple, we will take the Heavenly Father at his word, and we will know that his way for us, and for everybody else, is best. We will rejoice that all of God's plans and purposes show forth his infinite wisdom, justice, love and power. In this, we can safely and confidently trust while we look to him for the strength that will enable us to be "faithful unto death."—Rev. 2:10 ■

"Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name for ever."—Psalm 72:18,19

The Christian's Sabbath

***“He that is entered
into his rest, he
also hath ceased
from his own
works, as God did
from his.”
—Hebrews 4:10***

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

the word sabbath in most instances is a translation of a Hebrew word which means “intermission,” according to *Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary*.

The texts in which it appears indicate that the intermission being spoken of was for rest from servile and gainful work. Our word rest, or repose, comes closest to defining the word sabbath.

In the New Testament the word sabbath appears, in all, sixty times. Many of these uses are in narratives of events which occurred on the Jewish Sabbath Day, such as the reading or teaching of the Scriptures in the synagogues. We are also informed of the accusations against Jesus for healing the sick on the Sabbath Day. In reply to these charges Jesus explained, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” He also explained that “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath.”—John 5:17; Mark 2:27, *New Living Translation*

Jesus gave no direct commands concerning the Sabbath Day, nor did any of the apostles. The only use of the word in all the epistles of the New Testament is found in Colossians 2:16, which reads, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath."

Beginning with Cornelius, Gentiles began accepting Christ and coming into the Early Church. Their background of religious thought and experience was vastly different from that of their Jewish brethren, and this presented a problem regarding those first believers in Christianity. To what extent should the Gentile believers be expected to conform to Jewish customs and viewpoints?

An apostolic conference was called at Jerusalem to consider this matter. The conclusions reached are set forth in a message, or letter, drawn up at this gathering which was then sent to the various churches. This letter reads, in part, "It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well."—Acts 15:25-29

It is noteworthy that in these "necessary things" from which the Gentile believers were to abstain,

no mention is made of refraining from work on the seventh day. Undoubtedly the reason is that the apostles understood that the Jewish Law was not binding upon the followers of Jesus, except those fundamental principles pertaining to idols, blood and moral defilement. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus had given these a higher, magnified meaning.

Moses summed up the intent and spirit of the Ten Commandments to mean that we should love Jehovah with all our hearts, and our neighbors as ourselves. (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18) Jesus, when asked about which was the greatest commandment, quoted the foregoing words of Moses, and added the comment, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40) Thus, Jesus was indicating what the spirit of the Decalogue involved.

On the night before his death, Jesus then added a "new commandment" for his disciples to follow, "That ye love one another; as I have loved you." (John 13:34) This additional instruction went beyond the two great commandments given by Moses, for it calls for sacrifice and service. We are invited to "lay down" our lives for our brethren in Christ.—John 15:13; I John 3:16

To have such a love for God as would lead one to follow in the sacrificial footsteps of Jesus would most certainly, and of necessity, result in purity of life and conduct. One who is laying down his life in the service of God and of his fellow brethren does not need to be told not to steal; not to covet; not to bear false witness; not to commit adultery; and not to murder.

The Sabbath Day commandment called for abstention from servile and gainful employment on the seventh day. The true Christian is one who has consecrated all that he has and is to God and to his service. All that he may gain by working he acquires for the Lord, so that all his work is holy before him. Those who have such a viewpoint and purpose in life need not be told to consider one day a week more holy to God than another, for they have already dedicated every day to him.

EARLY CHURCH CUSTOMS

It is clear from the Bible record that the apostles, when opportunity afforded, visited the Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath Day. This was not because they were strict observers of the Jewish Law, but because they knew they would find devout Jews in the synagogues on these days to which they could witness the Gospel of Christ.

The apostles were also just as alert for opportunities to serve on the first day of the week, when early Christians formed the habit of meeting on that day in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus, a most appropriate honor to their Redeemer and Savior. One notable example of this was Paul's experience at Troas where, on the first day of the week, he preached and had fellowship with the brethren throughout the night, until his departure the next day.—Acts 20:7-12

This does not mean that the apostles had adopted the first day of the week to be observed as the Christian Sabbath Day. It simply showed that they were ready and glad to serve their brethren and to bear witness to the Gospel wherever and whenever

opportunity offered, regardless of what day of the week it might be.

A REST DAY BENEFICIAL

In connection with the Sabbath Day, Moses reminded Israel of their time as slaves in Egypt when, apparently, no day of rest was provided. (Exod. 5:4-19; Deut. 5:15) It is a recognized fact that human beings need a time of rest from their ordinary occupations. Indeed, for many today, two days a week are provided as a rest from paid employment. As Christians, we should especially rejoice in the opportunities these afford us for worship and service to the Lord and to our brethren.

The commandment relating to the Sabbath simply stated that there were to be six days of labor, and the seventh was to be a day of rest. No indication is given as to when the six days would or should begin to count. Evidently the spirit of the commandment is that one day in seven was to be a day of rest. Some may insist that man has kept such accurate time that the exact same seventh day of the week which we now call Saturday is the same seventh day on which God rested when he had finished the creative work, and therefore no other day could properly be called the Sabbath.—Gen. 2:2,3

In this, certain difficulties are encountered. One is that God's rest day was not one of twenty-four hours. The word "day" in the above citation is translated from a Hebrew word which denotes a "space of time," with no stipulation as to its length. In addition, it is rendered by many different English words in the Bible, such as day, age, life, season, time, and numerous other words. Thus, we see

that no specific twenty-four hour period can be arrived at for calculating the Sabbath.

Scriptural days in the Old Testament were measured from sundown to sundown. (Gen. 1:5,31) This meant that as far as the passage of time was concerned, "evening," or darkness, came first and "morning," or daylight, followed until the next evening. However, depending on the time of year, and the geographic location where one lives, the specific period constituting a "day" of darkness followed by light varies widely. In an extreme, but valid, example, those who live in the maximum northern or southern latitudes experience months of nearly continuous darkness, followed by similarly long periods of daylight. In these areas of the earth, particularly, twenty-four hour time divisions are wholly arbitrary, being governed solely by humanly made time measuring devices.

All of this may seem relatively unimportant to our subject, but it emphasizes the difficulties of endeavoring to establish a particular day out of seven as one which God has made holy, or sacred, above the others. We have already quoted Paul's instructions that Christians are not to be judged upon the basis of whether or not they observe certain days above others or keep the Jewish Sabbath. When we take all the facts into consideration we can see how truly wise Paul was in giving Christians such advice.—Col. 2:16

GOD'S REST

Our opening text indicates that Christians enjoy a sabbath, or rest, which is similar to the rest that God began when the work of the six creative days,

or spaces of time, was finished. Did God cease all activity in order to rest, in the sense that we think of resting? Was God weary or tired? The Prophet Isaiah wrote, "Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"—Isa. 40:28

God was not tired and did not need to rest physically or mentally from his labors. It is apparent, therefore, that there is a deeper meaning attached to the statement that, as Christians, we have ceased from our own works, "as God did from his." Examining the general lesson of which our text is a part, some interesting facts appear. The first verse of the chapter reads, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." (Heb. 4:1) The rest here referred to is something far beyond physical rest during one day in seven, whether it be the first, the seventh, or any other day.

Verses three and four read, "We which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works." Here is a direct reference to the seventh day of God's rest, with the explanation that the Israelites had failed to enter into his rest, though the works he rested from were "finished from the foundation of the world."

How revealing are these texts! It was not that God had been resting one twenty-four hour day in seven from the foundation of the world, and that the Israelites had failed to rest with him on those

seventh days. Rather, the works were finished from the foundation of the world, and God had been resting ever since. His rest had been continuous, but the Israelites had failed to share it with him because of their unbelief.

The apostle then explains that because, as a nation, the Israelites had not entered into God's rest, "therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein." (Heb. 4:6) Verse seven quotes a prophecy from Psalm 95:7 referring to a "certain day," or period, when God's people of this age would be given an opportunity to enter into his rest. Paul explains that if Joshua [*Marginal Translation*] had given rest to God's people in the Jewish Age, Jehovah, through the psalmist, would not have spoken of another day.—Heb. 4:8

The point we wish to emphasize here is that the apostle's lesson pertaining to Christian sabbath keeping could not possibly be applied to resting one day in seven from physical labor. Paul is not discussing the importance of one day above another but is encouraging the Christian to enter into a rest of faith every day.

Verse nine continues the lesson and reads, "There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God." (*Revised Version*) This refers to a far more comprehensive sabbath, or rest, which the people of God will attain in the future by being "faithful unto death." (Rev. 2:10) Again, however, the reference is to a continuous rest, not an intermittent one day in seven cessation from physical labor.

Then comes our theme text. It speaks of those who enter into God's rest, explaining that those who do so cease from their own works as God ceased

from his. Here, also, the reference is to something far more comprehensive and important than resting one day in seven. A Christian ceases from his own works, not merely for the seventh day of each week, but for every day. His rest is as continuous as God's rest has been, and, as previously noted in verse three, his has been an uninterrupted rest from the "foundation of the world."

What, then, are the works from which Christians are to cease? Is it their daily employment by which they make a living? Surely not! We believe the Scriptures reveal clearly that they are our fallen works by which we might attempt to secure the favor and blessing of the Lord. Paul refers to them as the "works" and "deeds" of the Mosaic law by which there "shall no flesh be justified."—Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:11

We cease from these works by placing our faith and trust in the finished work of Christ. Our Lord, through his shed blood, has provided justification and salvation for us which we could not attain by our own imperfect efforts, or works. Our peace, our rest of faith, is in him, and it is a blessed rest we enjoy, because that which we struggled unsuccessfully to attain has been provided by another.—Rom. 5:1,8-11

"AS GOD DID FROM HIS"

From this standpoint, Paul's comparison of the Creator's rest with ours is most interesting and enlightening. During all those "days" or long periods of creation Jehovah and his beloved Son together carried forward the work of preparing the earth to be man's eternal home. John wrote concerning Jesus in his prehuman existence that "without him was

not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3) God directed the work, so we hear him saying to his Son, “Let us make man in our image.”—Gen. 1:26

With the creation of man, the work of those six days was completed. Man had been created in the image of God, with the ability to know right from wrong. He was told that it was wrong to disobey the Creator’s law, and that disobedience would lead to death. He had been created with free will to choose whether to obey or disobey. Divine power would not therefore be used to restrain him from sin. Adam knowingly partook of the forbidden fruit and was sentenced to death.—I Tim. 2:14

Then began the long night of sin and death. The Creator still loved his human creation, but justice demanded that the death penalty continue to be carried out. However, in his wisdom and love, God had formulated a plan for mankind’s recovery from sin and death. It would permit man to experience evil, and to profit therefrom, thus adding to his original perfection that which could be acquired only by experience.

The Heavenly Father’s plan called for a Redeemer, one who would take the sinner’s place in death, and being raised from the dead, serve as the reconciler of the world to God. (I Pet. 3:18) The one chosen for this was his own beloved Son. (John 3:16) Now, God’s Son, who had worked under divine supervision in creating all things, was assigned the responsibility of redeeming and recovering fallen man.

God, therefore, rested from his creative work in the sense of entrusting its completion to another, even to his own beloved Son. Since the Creator’s confidence in his Son was complete, his rest has

been complete. He knew from the beginning that his Son would willingly, gladly, and faithfully carry out every detail of his plan for the redemption and recovery of fallen man from sin and death.

Paul wrote, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.” (II Cor. 5:19, *New International Version*) The Creator is the author of the plan of reconciliation; but, as Paul explains, it is accomplished through Christ, and God rests the matter with him. Now we can see how it is that our rest is similar to God’s rest. We have ceased from our own works as God did from his because, like our Heavenly Father, we look to Jesus to accomplish what we cannot do ourselves.

God could not set aside the death penalty and restore sinful man to life because the sentence of death was just, and divine justice could not be violated. However, the perfect man Jesus became a “ransom,” an exact corresponding price for the perfect man Adam who disobeyed, thus making possible the release of man from sin’s penalty—death. We, as members of the fallen race, are imperfect, and cannot approach God in our own merit. Upon the basis of the ransom provided by Jesus, he becomes our “Advocate” before the Father, so we can be at peace with God, and enjoy a hope of life through our Lord Jesus Christ.—I Tim. 2:5,6; I John 2:1,2; Rom. 5:1-5

The Creator’s confidence in his Son has always been complete. The extent of our rest in Christ depends upon the degree of faith we exercise in this loving provision which our Heavenly Father has made for us. God is active on our behalf even while resting. Jesus said that no one could come to him unless drawn by the Father, and he further promised

that those who are thus drawn, he would “in no wise cast out,” but would raise “up again at the last day.”—John 6:44,37,39

God draws the sinner, not directly to himself, but to Jesus. (vss. 44,45) The sinner cannot go directly to God in his undone condition, but must first recognize the need of redemption through Christ. (John 14:6) What is true in the case of one individual member of the fallen race is true of all. Having brought upon himself the divine penalty of death by transgressing God’s law, if man were ever to live again something must be accomplished for him. He must be redeemed, and God gave his Son the opportunity to be man’s Redeemer.

The divine permission of evil in the long-term view of human experience might properly be considered as the completion, in the sense of a refining, of the human creation. It is a refining work involving the operation of man’s free will. God saw that inexperienced man would transgress his law. God knew, too, that he could not overlook this transgression. The Creator also knew, however, that his beloved Son would gladly take the sinner’s place in death, and thus provide the means for his recovery.

Thus, Jehovah could look down the stream of time to the close of his day of rest and know that the earth would be inhabited by restored man. Mankind would not only be perfect mentally, morally, and physically, but would possess also that strength of righteous character which could be acquired only by experience. With this eternal perspective in view, then, God rested from his work pertaining to man that this ultimate attainment might be reached through the ministry of his beloved Son, Jesus.

The seventh creative day, God's rest day, like the others, began in obscurity. Actually, from the standpoint of light and darkness, it has been more like night than day. However, this long period during which evil has been permitted for the further development of man, is to end in a glorious morning of joy. The psalmist prophesied, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—Ps. 30:5

The work of the final thousand years of this seventh day is described in the New Testament as the time of Christ's reign. (Rev. 20:4,6) Not only has Jesus provided redemption for the human race, but during his Mediatorial reign he will actually restore redeemed humanity to life and to harmony with God. Paul says that Christ must reign until all enemies are put under his feet, and that the "last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."—I Cor. 15:25,26

With the recovery of man complete, and with all the willing and obedient of mankind restored to perfection and able to obey the Creator's perfect Law, Christ's work will have been completed. Then the Creator will resume his direct relationship with his human creation. The work of the last creative day shall then be finished.

Meanwhile, what a glorious incentive we have for fully resting in Jesus to accomplish the divine purpose both in ourselves as individuals, and on behalf of the whole world. Our rest in the Lord is as complete as is our belief in him. If we have only partially believed, we will rest but partially. If we have fully believed, then we can fully rest in faith, and our peace and joy in the Lord will be deep, full and rich. ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are invited by individual classes, or their services have been arranged by their home classes:

O. B. Elbert

Online Broadcast of Convention
Sacramento, CA February 19,20

M. Ensley

Online Broadcast of Convention
Sacramento, CA February 19,20

S. Jeuck

Online Broadcast
New York, NY February 20

B. Keith

Online Broadcast of Convention
Sacramento, CA February 19,20

J. Parkinson

Online Broadcast of Convention
Sacramento, CA February 19,20

D. Rice

Online Broadcast of Convention
Sacramento, CA February 19,20

B. Siwak

Online Broadcast of Convention
Sacramento, CA February 19,20

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

FEBRUARY 3—"My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh."—Proverbs 4:20,22 (Z. '96-180 Hymn 264)

FEBRUARY 10—"Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."—I Timothy 4:12 (Z. '95-251 Hymn 145)

FEBRUARY 17—"Take my yoke upon you, ... for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."—Matthew 11:29,30 (Z. '00-137 Hymn 284)

FEBRUARY 24—"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."—Romans 8:3,4 (Z. '02-248 Hymn 190)

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Katarzyna Muskus, Przychojec, Poland—
November 22. Age, 93

Brother Edgard Teclaf, Kędzierzynie Kozly, Poland
—December 14. Age, 79

Sister Regina Raczyńska, Lewina Kłodzkiego, Poland
—December 15.

Sister Betty Mengos, Phoenix, AZ—December 17.
Age, 99

Brother Randall Cramer, Connellsville, PA—Decem-
ber 23. Age, 76

Brother Bronisław Dziewoński, Kędzierzynce, Poland
—December 24. Age, 74

Brother Zygmunt Roguski, Portland, OR—Decem-
ber 24. Age, 100

Sister Nancy Stoikes, Janesville, WI—December 28.
Age, 78

Brother Eryk Sobczyk, Warsaw, Poland—January 7.

Sister Zosia Kulczycka, Świdnik, Poland—January
9. Age, 73

Brother Bruce Beam, Houston, TX—January 13.
Age, 70

Sister Shirley Chatters Bloom, New Orleans, LA—
January 17. Age, 100

Brother David Harp, Columbus, OH—January 18.
Age, 77

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 19,20—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact K. Freer. Phone: (916) 879-4657 or Email: winnerwear@aol.com

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HIGHLAND PARK CONVENTION, April 2—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact S. Koterba. Phone: (917) 554-2348 or Email: sandykoterba@gmail.com

DETROIT PRE-MEMORIAL CONVENTION, April 2,3—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact P. Nemesh. Email: nemeshfp@aol.com

ALBUQUERQUE CONVENTION, April 15-17—Sheraton Albuquerque Airport Hotel. 2910 Yale Boulevard SE. Albuquerque, NM. Contact S. Thomassen. Phone: (505) 268-8170 or Email: srbt@juno.com

METRO DETROIT CONVENTION, May 7,8—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact B. Johnson. Email: beckystevej@aol.com

*“We are meant to hold firmly to the truth
in love, and to grow up in every way
into Christ, the head.”
—Eph. 4:15, Phillips*

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To us the Scriptures clearly teach . . .

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD

—peculiarly “his workmanship”; that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people”, and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING AND POLISHING

of consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet.1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH

is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 55

