

His Marvelous Work

*“I will praise thee;
for I am fearfully
and wonderfully
made: marvellous
are thy works; and
that my soul
knoweth right well.*

*My substance was
not hid from thee,
when I was made
in secret, and
curiously wrought
in the lowest parts
of the earth.”*

—Psalm 139:14,15

TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE

in the true and living God, all his creative works are marvelous. The human organism, with its ability to see, touch, smell, taste, hear, think; and above all, to know that there is a difference between right and wrong, good and evil, love and hate, and to worship its maker, is one of the Creator’s masterpieces. Indeed, it is true as our opening text expresses, that man is “wonderfully

made,” and that there is much concerning man’s creation that is hidden from his understanding.

It is evidently because the human body is such a marvelous display of divine wisdom that the Creator uses it as a picture, or symbol, of the Christ, Head and body. It is to this symbolic “body” that our opening Scripture particularly applies. This comes to light through a New Testament use of the

expression in our text, “lowest parts of the earth.” In discussing the creation and development of the body of Christ, and the way all the members “fitly framed together” are developed “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” the apostle writes that Jesus “descended first into the lower parts of the earth.”—Eph. 2:21; 4:9-13

Jesus’ coming down from heaven into the “lower parts of the earth” had a direct bearing upon the way the members of his symbolic “body” have been “curiously wrought” or “made.” The term “earth,” as used by the psalmist and by Paul in this connection, does not apply to this literal planet. David was not himself “curiously wrought” somewhere beneath the surface of the ground, nor did Jesus descend literally to any such “lower” strata of the literal Earth.

Evidently the references in these passages are to the symbolic earth—that is, human society, and particularly what human wisdom considers to be the lower layers of society. As God views the human race, all are fallen, are under condemnation to death, and finally go into death. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” Paul wrote. (Rom. 3:23) It was into this “lower” part of the symbolic earth that Jesus, the Redeemer of the world, descended.

John speaks of Jesus as the one who “came down from heaven.” (John 3:13) In coming down from heaven, he who had previously been a powerful spirit being was “found in fashion as a man.” (Phil. 2:8) However, there was more than that involved. He associated with human society, and to a large extent with the lower members of society. One of the charges leveled against the Master was that he fraternized

with “publicans and sinners.” (Matt. 9:10,11; 11:19) When he died, he was “numbered with the transgressors,” and in death he “made his grave with the wicked.” (Isa. 53:9,12; Mark 15:28) Thus Jesus descended from the glory which he previously had with the Father to the “lower parts of the earth.”

“CURIOUSLY WROUGHT”

Jesus’ death as a perfect human provided the “ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (I Tim. 2:5,6) However, his association with the sinful world prior to his death on the cross, and all the painful experiences which came to him as a result, had much to do with his own learning and development, and with the development of his body members as “new creatures” in Christ. (II Cor. 5:17) Hence, Paul explains that it was God’s purpose, “in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”—Heb. 2:10

Both Jesus and his body members are “curiously” wrought or developed. The Hebrew word here translated “curiously wrought” means to embroider. It is related to the Hebrew word translated “needlework” in the 45th Psalm, where the bride of Christ is symbolically depicted as being brought into the king’s palace in “raiment of needlework.” (vss. 13,14) It is a word, therefore, which in the Scriptures is associated with that which symbolizes Christian character development. This is the work which is “curiously wrought” in the lives of those who make up the body members of the Christ class, while dwelling in the “lower parts of the earth.”

We are told that Jesus “learned ... obedience by the things which he suffered,” because of his contact

with fallen humanity. (Heb. 5:8) This does not imply that Jesus was not obedient to his Heavenly Father before he came to earth. The thought is, rather, that by his descending into the “lower parts of the earth” he learned what it meant to be obedient to God under adverse circumstances which cost him ignominy, suffering, and finally death. Thus, it was true of Jesus, even as it is true of each one of his body members, that he was “curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.”

Through these experiences the Master was prepared to deal sympathetically and patiently with his body members, for he was tested “in all points ... like as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15) Through our contacts with the fallen race and with world society we are subjected to the same tests of obedience as was Jesus. Being imperfect, however, it cannot be said of us that we are always victorious, or always “without sin.” We need the provision which has been made through our sympathetic High Priest to come “boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) This too, is a part of the arrangement whereby it is possible for all the members of Christ’s body to be developed and “curiously wrought,” through their contact with the degradation of this “present evil world.”—Gal. 1:4

Jesus said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” That is, How can I be completed, or how can the divine purpose be fully realized in me, until that baptism is fully consummated in death? (Luke 12:50) It was indeed a death baptism, and before Jesus was fully worthy to be exalted to the right hand of his

Father, and in this high position to be the Head over the church, his body, he must be fully faithful, even unto death, because it was the Father's will that he take the sinner's place.

Jesus inquired of two of his disciples, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They asserted that they were able, and so the Master added, "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with." (Matt. 20:22,23) Jesus' question applies to all who would seek to follow in his steps. All his body members, to qualify for a permanent position in that body, must die with him by being "planted together in the likeness of his death." (Rom. 6:5) With these, as with Jesus, their full development as New Creatures is not complete until they descend fully into death, until they have stood every test, learned every lesson, and profited by every experience that comes to them, and continue faithful to their covenant with the Lord that is completed only in death.—Rev. 2:10

THE CREATOR'S SUPERVISION

Paul writes that we are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10) Here we are reminded of God's work in bringing forth the New Creation. It was the Heavenly Father who raised up Jesus as a New Creature from the dead and exalted him to the divine nature, and Paul tells us that we are being "created in Christ Jesus." We, who were "dead in sins," and ourselves a part of the lower strata of the symbolic earth,

have been “quickenened” together with Christ. (Eph. 2:5) God, in his wisdom, and in order that the entire Christ company might be a sympathetic priesthood to deal with fallen humanity during the Messianic kingdom, is able to utilize our experiences in the world as creative tools, as it were, to prepare us for the part he wants us to have in his plan.

In this work of developing a New Creation, the Heavenly Father is testing every potential body member of Christ before exaltation to the divine nature is granted. With all the other works of creation it was different. The angels were created, and then tested. Some of them have failed under test, but many have not. Man was created in the image of God, and then tested. He failed, but God in his mercy and love has provided for another trial, through Christ. However, those who compose the Christ class, Head and body, are tested as they are being developed. This is essential, for their “creation” involves exaltation to the divine nature, to immortality, which is indestructible. God tests these thoroughly and knows upon the basis of these tests that they will always be loyal to him and to the principles of righteousness represented in his perfect laws.

It is this viewpoint which is enlarged upon prophetically by the psalmist in several verses of the 139th Psalm, from which our text is taken. In this prophecy Jesus speaks for himself and for all his body members, saying to his Heavenly Father, “Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.”—vss. 2-4

The psalmist then expresses wonderment over the Creator's marvelous love and care, a supervision that reaches from an exalted position in the heavens, even down to the grave—the condition of death. We quote: "You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up into heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there."—Ps. 139:5-8, *New Living Translation*

Indeed, God's power will, in due time, reach down into the grave and restore all the dead. (Hos. 13:14) However, the thought of this passage seems to be especially fitting to God's dealings with the Christ class. God's presence is peculiarly with them in death, for his plan is that upon the basis of their faithfulness unto death he will give them a crown of life. (Rev. 2:10) Their resurrection to glory, honor and immortality is an evidence that he is pleased with the loyalty which took them into death, that he supervised this, gave them strength to endure, and will remember and reward them.—Rom. 2:7; 8:16,17; Rev. 3:21

REVERENTLY MADE

In the statement, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made," the Hebrew word translated "fearfully" would be more correctly translated "reverently," or to be filled with awe. It seems to describe the heart attitude of each one of the body members of the Christ toward the work which is being wrought in them, and the way it is done. The power of God, as

manifest in the lives of all New Creatures in Christ, is embodied in his Word. Paul speaks of it as the “gospel of Christ,” and says that it is the “power of God unto salvation.” (Rom. 1:16) This Word, or power of God, however, is a creative energy in our lives only in proportion to our reverence for it which causes us to yield in full submission to its molding influences.

The fear, or reverence, of God “is the beginning of wisdom.” (Ps. 111:10) Paul writes, “Let us therefore fear [give reverent attention], lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” (Heb. 4:1) From this we gather that a proper reverence for the Lord is not only the “beginning” of wisdom, but that those who are truly wise toward God will continue to reverence him by giving careful attention to all he has said, that their lives might be fully pleasing to him.

Members of the body of Christ are also “wonderfully made.” The Hebrew word here used means to be distinct, or set apart. The use of this word in David’s prophetic description of the way we are brought forth as a New Creation suggests the thought of our being separated from the world and set apart to God and to the doing of his will. This is one of the conditions upon which each member of the Christ company is “curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.” We are not removed from the world during the period of our development, but by heeding the divine call to consecration we become separated, in purpose and spirit, from the world. “I have chosen you out of the world,” Jesus said to his disciples, and to us. He said of himself, “I have overcome the world.” (John 15:19; 16:33)

He encouraged his disciples in the thought that although they would experience tribulation because of their separation from the world and its spirit, they would be able to overcome, not in their own strength, but in the strength and “power of his might.”—Eph. 6:10

This thought of separation to holiness is contained in what the Scriptures speak of as “sanctification.” Sanctification is a process by which followers of Christ are made holy and set apart by the doing of God’s will in their daily experiences. It is a lifelong work, and involves every facet of life. On behalf of his body members, Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17-19) The sanctification of the body members of Christ does not mean perfection of their flesh, but rather a full heart devotion to God and a complete loyalty to him. As a prophet of old declared, “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 toward him.”—II Chron. 16:9

God discerns and distinguishes between the world and his consecrated people, and he works with those who take a stand on his side. It is these, who, through carrying out the terms of their consecration to him, “work out” their own salvation, while God works in them “to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12,13) It is true also that those in whom the Spirit of God is working will exercise discernment in their tracing of the divine will in all the affairs of life. If they have applied the principles of the truth in their lives, they will be among those “who by reason of use [habit or practice] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”—Heb. 5:14

HOW GOD WORKS IN US

We have seen how the experiences of Jesus in descending into the “lower parts of the earth” not only had much to do with his preparation for exaltation to the divine nature, but also furnished him with an understanding of the temptations and tests to which all his body members are subjected while they are being developed to share his glory. In addition to this, the apostle tells us that when Jesus ascended on high he “gave gifts unto men.” These gifts were the various servants of the church—apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists—as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 4:8,11; Acts 2:38) The function of these gifts has been to assist in ministering the Truth in order that its sanctifying power might be operative in the lives of all the body members of Christ.

To use the apostle’s words, he explains that the purpose of these gifts to the church is “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [complete] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:12,13) All of the gifts which God has provided are essential.

IN SECRET

“When I was made in secret,” David writes. (Ps. 139:15) So far as the world is concerned, the bringing forth of God’s New Creation has been a secret indeed. It is referred to in the Scriptures as a great mystery, “hid from ages and from generations,” but finally, when God’s due time came, revealed to his

“saints,” the separated and holy ones, those participating in God’s great project as prospective members of the body of Christ. (Col. 1:26,27) What a blessing has been the portion of those to whom this secret has been revealed! “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear,” said Jesus. “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God.”—Matt. 13:16; Mark 4:11

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” writes Paul, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.” (I Cor. 2:9,10) He has revealed to us the hope of glory, honor and immortality, that it may be an inspirational power in our lives. In addition, the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God are given, Peter writes, “that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.”—II Pet. 1:4

“WHOM HE DID FOREKNOW”

In the verse following our opening Scripture, the Psalmist David writes, “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” (Ps. 139:16) Here we are reminded of God’s foreknowledge of the Christ, Head and body. Paul writes of this, saying, “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Rom. 8:29) The thought here is not individual predestination, but rather of the characteristics each one must possess to qualify as a member of the body of Christ. “In thy book all my members were written,” David declares. The Prophet Malachi

explains who they are. “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”—Mal. 3:16,17

Those who have been thus “written” in the Lord’s book are those who reverence him and who speak often one with the other concerning him, thus thinking upon his name with the desire to please him. They are the ones “which in continuance were fashioned”—that is, who continued to be fashioned—into the image of Christ as the predetermined qualification of each of the body members.

All who continue to yield their lives in full submission to the molding power of the Word of God will maintain their standing as part of Christ’s body. This was true of Jesus, and it has been true of each body member since. To all these the Word of God is their life. “How precious ... are thy thoughts unto me, O God!” says the psalmist, and “How great is the sum of them!” (Ps. 139:17) The thoughts of God are indeed precious, and the more so when we realize that it is the power of his thoughts, made available through his Word in the lives of his consecrated people, which is bringing forth his New Creation.—II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

The “sum” of God’s thoughts includes all his exceeding great and precious promises, also his instructions and commands. His thoughts tell us of his love in correcting his (Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 31) people when necessary, and of his mercy in forgiving them. They tell of his loving arrangement through Christ, that by faith we may live in him and for him. They reveal the privilege of sacrifice which is ours, that “living sacrifice” which is holy and acceptable through Christ. (Rom. 12:1) Through the revealed thoughts of God we also have learned of his love for all mankind, and of his purpose to bless all the families of the earth through the “seed” of promise, that seed which is the Christ, his New Creation.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Gal. 3:16,28,29

“I will praise thee,” declares our opening text in describing the attitude of Jesus and his church. To know of the Creator’s marvelous works in connection with his New Creation, and of his purpose through the Christ to bless all mankind with life, is indeed a great cause of praise. Not only will we want to praise God, but we will realize this to be one of the great privileges of our lives, the use of which will prove our worthiness to be members of the glorified Christ. Using various terms to describe the glory of the Christ class, Peter writes, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

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