

The Water of Life

“He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”
—*Revelation 22:1*

WHEN GOD DESIGNED the earth to be man’s eternal home, he provided an abundance of water. He also provided a means of cleaning it when it is discarded or contaminated. The sun provides energy to vaporize such water from all exposed bodies—the oceans, lakes, ponds, and rivers. This vapor gets blown inland where it meets colder air in the atmosphere. The lower temperature air causes it to condense into small droplets of liquid that form clouds. When enough cooling and vapor combine, rain comes down upon the earth which flows off the land into brooks, creeks, and rivers. Or it soaks into the ground and encounters a rock strata that makes it flow as an underground river.

WATER PURIFICATION

This distillation of water separates it from all associated contaminants. Pure water falls as rain and rivers would be pure except that air pollutants can be dissolved by the rain as it falls through the atmosphere. Mankind dumps pollutants into the river, so that it can carry these away into the ocean. God also made it possible for such polluted waters to be cleansed in other ways than by distillation. When waste material is dumped into the river it may contain anaerobic bacteria, which can cause illnesses. As the river flows it dissolves oxygen from the air, and the oxygen fosters the growth of aerobic bacteria that feed upon the harmful anaerobic bacteria and after awhile the river is cleansed. The river would stay cleansed if no one else dumped pollutants into it, but with today’s population levels increasing, this is not possible. Hence man has to treat and purify the water used for drinking if it is taken from surface waters. This treating method usually consists of aeration in huge vats, adding coagulants and absorbents, filtration, and treating with a bactericide to destroy harmful organisms. Small amounts of chlorine are usually used for this purpose. All the developed nations have such treating facilities to insure that their inhabitants have purified drinking water.

UNITED NATIONS SURVEY

This is not true, however, in all of the world. A United Nations survey was reported and published in the New York Times on November 22, 2000. It said:

“Forty percent of the world’s six billion people still lack sanitation though it could easily be provided, according to a United Nations report issued today.

“More than a billion people lack the most basic water supply, said the study, backed by World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund.

“It is not a question of cost, but of priority,’ said Richard Jolly, chairman of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, sponsored by the W.H.O.

“‘Bringing water and sanitation to all would cost \$10 billion a year,’ Mr. Jolly said. ‘That,’ he added, ‘is one-tenth of what Europe spends on alcoholic drinks each year, about the same as Europe spends on ice cream, and half of what the United States spends each year on pet food.’

“Governments have made some improvements over the past decade, but they have scarcely kept up with population growth in the developing world, the Global Water Supply and Sanitation assessment said.

“Moving faster would pay big dividends in lives saved, the study said. Safe water and sanitation could cut one-third of the number of diarrhea cases every year—currently 4 billion worldwide, resulting in 2.2 million deaths.

“The report follows the start in March of the council’s campaign, Vision 21, that urges a move away from high-tech, high-cost projects. It holds that responsibility should be given to individual householders and local community organizations.

“Some 500 public health, water, and sanitation experts will meet on Friday in Foz do Iguacu, Brazil, for a conference on the program, which aims to halve the number of people without access to hygienic sanitation and safe water by 2015.

“That is ‘within the world’s grasp and the grasp of any country that chooses to make the modest resources required available,’ Mr. Jolly said.

“In all, 2.4 billion people worldwide lack access to basic sanitation, the report said. They account for 40 percent of the world’s population.

“Asia had the worst sanitation, with 1.77 billion people short of adequate facilities. The figures came from nationally representative household surveys rather than from governments, the study said.

“Africa performed by far the worst in terms of drinking water, the report said. It estimated that 300 million people on the continent, more than a third of the population, have no fixed supply.

“Even for those who do, ‘we are not talking about safe water supply because we have no means to actually measure the safety of the water,’ said an official of the World Health Organization, Jose Hueb.

“Only 35 percent of waste water is treated in Asia, a figure that dwindles to 14 percent in Latin America and a “negligible” proportion in Africa, the report said.”

SHAMEFUL MATTER

It is indeed a shameful matter that so many people in the world have no sanitary facilities or methods of treating and providing safe drinking water. Water is essential to life, being next in importance to the oxygen in the air we breathe. Everyone should have healthful drinking water. We can be assured that this will be so in God’s kingdom. In God’s kingdom the world of mankind will not only receive pure water to drink, but also ‘living water’ that will give them eternal life.

LIVING WATER

Water is used in the Scriptures to show how eternal life will be provided for all mankind. It is an illustration of God’s Word, which provides eternal life to those who believe it. This thought was in Jesus’ mind as he spoke with the woman of Samaria at the well when he said, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” (John 4:10) It has been our blessed privilege to receive from our Lord these blessed living waters to drink.

Faith in the ransom has given us life, and Jesus has brought us to the Father, the Giver of every good and perfect gift. We have found that he is the source of all life, and from him flow all truth and living waters. God, in speaking to Jeremiah, described himself as “the fountain of living

waters.” (Jer. 2:13) Jeremiah used this same description to praise God, when he wrote, “O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters.” (Jer. 17:13) Likewise, David says of God, “With thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.”—Ps. 36:9

In his Holy Word, we have been given a picture of God’s kingdom. This ‘water’ is a full flowing river, with water as clear as crystal. It is called the “water of life” which proceeds out “of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Rev. 22:1) The Psalms also mention this river. David, speaking to God, says, “Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it.”—Ps. 65:9

THE EARTH A DRY GROUND

The world has been a wilderness and a desert place, and mankind is properly pictured in the Scriptures as lost, dying of thirst, without God and hope. Such is the picture given in Psalm 107, verses 33,34, “He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.” But then the process is reversed, “He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation.”—vss. 35,36

These latter passages refer to the Millennial Age work, when mankind is brought out of the condition of sin up to perfection, and all are privileged to know God. The Prophet Isaiah speaks in a similar fashion of God’s favor and blessing returning to natural Israel and extending to all mankind, saying, “Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.”—Isa. 43:19,20

Other scriptures give illustrations of the earth being covered by the knowledge of God. “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”—Hab. 2:14

RIVER OF LIFE

The wonderful ‘river of life’ that flows out of the ‘throne of God and of the Lamb’ in the kingdom is intended for those who become permanent residents of the city of God. It is a blessing that is available to those who truly hunger and thirst for righteousness. The invitation to such is described in Revelation 22:17, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. . . . And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” This river represents eternal life, available to all who drink ‘of’ it, or ‘from’ it. It is described as a pure river, clear as crystal, and an excellent symbol for truth, as well as for the wisdom of God, of which James says, “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”—James 3:17

As water has always been essential for the growth of vegetation, so also the ‘river of life’ is related to the ‘tree of life.’ In a desert land, where there is limited rainfall, the flow of a river through the land can easily be discerned by the green vegetation growing along its banks. In lands where the rainfall is normal, the vegetation is far more copious along the banks of the river. So also in this city: where the river of life flows, the tree of life grows on both sides of the river. This life-giving vegetation represents the sustenance of eternal life available for all the willing and obedient of his kingdom. “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”—Rev. 22:2

Father Adam had access to such a tree; and when he disobeyed God, he was expelled from the Garden of Eden lest he partake of the fruit of this tree and continue to live. It is said that the fruits of this tree are ‘for the nations.’ These are akin to the fruits of the Spirit, such as “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance.” (Gal. 5:22,23) The natural minds of the people of earth will develop along these lines in the kingdom.

The first Psalm uses this same figure of a tree, planted by a river, in describing a godly man, “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” (Ps. 1:3) Although this scripture refers to the church class, called out of this ‘present evil world,’

it applies in principle to all the willing and obedient of mankind in Christ's kingdom. The river of life will cause them to grow and prosper. Isaiah, in speaking of Christ's kingdom, uses the same figure of speech, "A king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."—Isa. 32:1,2

ALL FLESH SHALL COME

The sixty-fifth Psalm in speaking of this kingdom, tells how all flesh shall come unto God, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." (vs. 2) The "river of God," mentioned in the ninth verse of this psalm, flows to enrich the land (all mankind) and is this same river of life. "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing."—vss. 9-13

All the elements of a prosperous and beautiful earth are animated and shown to give honor and glory to God, the Father, as this river of God flows through the earth.

Opening New Doors

Key Verse: “So hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

—Acts 13:47

***Selected Scriptures:
Acts 13:14, 15, 42-52***

AFTER PAUL AND BARNABAS had returned from Jerusalem to Antioch, they, along with other elders of that church, Simeon, called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, a foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, fasted and prayed with the congregation. The Holy Spirit made it evident that Barnabas and Paul were to seek brethren in other areas. The church laid their hands on them and sponsored their journey for this service.—Acts 13:1-3; 14:25-28

Wherever Paul traveled he always went into a synagogue on the Sabbath day, to preach God’s Word. (Acts 13:15)

Paul continued this custom because Israel had God’s Word and Gentiles interested in God’s Word attended the synagogue. In the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, it wasn’t long before envy set in among the Jews when they observed the multitudes that came to hear Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 13:44,45) The apostle made it clear that God had at first honored the Jews with his message, but now they had put away his Word, and had become unworthy of being the bearers of salvation. The apostle said he would turn his message to the Gentiles.—Acts 13:46

Paul quoted the words of the Prophet Isaiah, “I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles.” (Isaiah 42:6) This prophecy would begin its fulfillment shortly after the death and resurrection of our Lord. It was now time for new doors of endeavor to be opened. The time now was at hand to extend to all, Jew and Gentile alike, God’s message of salvation.

As on every Sabbath, there were Gentiles in the synagogue that day, and when they heard the words of Paul, they rejoiced. Many of them received the Holy Spirit, those who “were ordained to eternal life” and

who believed. By their activity, God's Word was "published throughout all the region."—Acts 13:48,49

The unbelieving Jews "stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts." Paul and Barnabas "shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium."—Acts. 13:50,51

Persecution is a concomitant of service for the Lord. In his admonition to the Apostles, our Lord said, "Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles." (Matt. 10:17,18) Again, our Lord said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—Matt. 5:10,16

We are told that the disciples of a new ecclesia formed in Antioch were filled with joy, and the Holy Spirit. When new doors of opportunity to witness are opened to any of the Lord's people, joy should be shown and glory given to God.—Acts 13:52

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Defending the Truth

***Key Verse: “My sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.”
—Acts 15:19***

***Selected Scripture:
Acts 15:1, 2,
6-15, 19, 20***

IN OUR LAST LESSON WE saw that God’s message of salvation had indeed been turned to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27) Problems began to surface. The ecclesia in Antioch of Syria, was visited by various brethren from Jerusalem who questioned whether Gentiles could be saved outside of the keeping of the Law of Moses. These claimed that unless all new male converts to Christianity were circumcised they could not be saved. (Acts 15:1) Paul and Barnabas disagreed, and the church at Antioch decided to send them to Jerusalem to hold a council about this

question and to resolve it. Later, the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans explained the true meaning of circumcision.—Rom. 2:28,29

It was difficult for some to see that a new dispensation was opening, that Gentiles, as well as Jews, were now under the Spirit’s direction. Strict conformity to the commands of the Law was no longer necessary.

At the council in Jerusalem some of the Pharisees claimed it needful to have Gentiles circumcised, and to keep the Law of Moses. Peter stood up and declared, “Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”—Acts 15:10,11

Earlier Peter had said, “God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them [the Gentiles] witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”—Acts 15:8,9

The apostle’s words seemed to calm the multitudes. Paul and Barnabas went on to declare what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. (Acts 15:12) Then James spoke up and said

“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”—Acts 15:13-17

For some of the Jews this was hard to accept. Did they not expect that when the great Messiah would come, he would exalt their nation? They forgot that God had rejected Israel. This very question was asked of our Lord after his resurrection. (Acts 1:6) They could not accept the fact that Jesus had forecast their downfall even before his death. (Matt. 23:37,38) A new work had begun and new doors were being opened, not to Jews only, but to Jew and Gentile alike. It was important that the new Gentile converts should know their relationship to the Mosaic Law.

James then suggested that they write to the Gentiles that “they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.” (Acts. 15:20) They said, “We have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, ... saying, Ye must be circumcised.” They explained that they had not given any such command and would not lay any greater burden on Gentile brethren than the four items. This pleased the apostles and the elders and the whole church, and they sent a letter to Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, by the hand of Barnabas and Paul, with Judas and Silas, from the Jerusalem congregation affirming this decision.—Acts 15:22-29

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Responding to Need

Key Verse: *“A vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”*

—Acts 16:9

Selected Scripture:
Acts 16:6-40

AT THE CONCLUSION OF our last lesson, we found Paul and Barnabas returning to Antioch after the council held in Jerusalem on what part of the Mosaic Law was to be observed by the new Gentile brethren. They decided to take the letter of decisions made in Jerusalem to all the churches they had established during their first journey. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, his nephew, with them and Paul did not. This led to a separation and Barnabas took John Mark and sailed for Cyprus. Paul took Silas and left to visit the churches of Syria, Cilicia, Phrygia, and Galatia.

After delivering the letters to these churches they wanted to go to Bithynia and Mysia but were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to do so.—Acts 16:6,7

One night Paul received a vision asking him to come to Macedonia to help them. Recognizing God’s will in the matter, he and his party immediately left for Macedonia, arriving at Philippi. There was no synagogue in Philippi, but devout Jews went to a place by the river for prayer. There Paul preached the Gospel message for the first time on the continent of Europe and met a well-to-do woman of the city named Lydia. The Lord opened her heart (Acts 16:14) and eventually she and her household were immersed. She asked Paul to come to her home. (Acts 16:15) Hospitality is one of the earmarks of Christian living.—Rom. 12:13; I Pet. 4:9

As Paul’s party of Silas, Timothy, and Luke went to the place of prayer, they were followed by a woman possessed with an evil spirit, who had the power of divination, that is, the ability to predict future events. She followed them crying out, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.” (Acts 16:17) She

kept doing this until Paul finally cast out the evil spirit within her. It was then that her masters, seeing their loss, brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates. Their charge was that “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.”—Acts 16:20,21

Paul and Silas were beaten and cast into prison, their feet placed in stocks. Although suffering pain, at midnight, Paul and Silas sang praises unto God, and all the prisoners heard them. (Acts 16:25) What a witness this was, bruised from the beating and feet shackled, yet able to sing songs of praise to God.

Suddenly there was an earthquake, which opened the doors and released the bands on all the prisoners. The keeper of the prison seeing what had happened thought to take his life. Paul told him not to harm himself saying, “We are all here.” (Acts 16:28) Seeing this, he fell down at the feet of Paul and Silas and asked what he must do to be saved. They responded by speaking unto him and his household the word of the Lord. (Acts 16:32) The keeper of the prison washed and dressed their stripes and as they continued to talk about God’s plan, they were baptized. Paul’s response to the needs of the people in Macedonia had been rewarded by the finding of brethren in Christ. These formed the basis of a new ecclesia and Luke stayed with them as the others moved on.

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Serving with Faith and Confidence

Key Verse: “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

—Acts 20:24

***Selected Scripture:
Acts 20:18-32***

IN TODAY’S LESSON WE find Paul at Miletus. He had wanted to stop in Ephesus but desired to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost. Much was on the mind of Paul. The Holy Spirit had witnessed to him in every city that bonds and afflictions were waiting for him in Jerusalem. (Acts 20:22,23) At Miletus he sent a letter to Ephesus asking the elders to meet him there for a conference. (Acts 20:17) It was his desire that his brethren be aware that one of the concomitants of service was trouble and persecution. (Matt. 10:16-19; Acts 14:22) The apostle desired that his brethren realize that his ministry had been accomplished with humility, and through manifold testing and many tears, teaching publicly from

house to house. His message had always been “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Acts 20:19-21

Was Paul afraid of the bonds and afflictions awaiting him? His words to the brethren from Ephesus indicate otherwise, as he said, ‘None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.’—Acts 20:24

When we ponder these words we are reminded of the apostle’s words to us in the book of Romans. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor

anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Rom. 8:35-39, *New International Version*

Paul was not afraid of death, nor fearful of persecution. However, he knew he would not see them again, and his wish was that they know that he was innocent of the blood of all, that he had ministered all of God’s message of truth.—Acts 20:26,27

All who are ministers of God’s Word, need to remember the admonition to “feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) The apostle knew that after his death, there would be those who would enter in like wolves, not sparing the flock. There would come false teachers, “speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”—Acts 20:29-30

In his parting words, Paul commended the brethren to God’s grace again, saying, “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel.” (Acts 20:33) He said he worked to provide his sustenance. Now, as he told them to support the weak, they all knelt down and prayed with him.—Acts 20:35,36

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Holding Fast to the Faith

ROUGHLY SPEAKING, the book of Hebrews is divided into three sections. The first six chapters are largely in the nature of exhortation, although they lay the groundwork for the doctrinal discussion (the second section) which begins with chapter seven. This doctrinal discussion, with occasional exhortations interspersed, continues until verse 22 of this tenth chapter. The third section begins here, and while still building upon the doctrinal foundation, the apostle exhorts the brethren to renew their faith and zeal lest they let these things “slip.”—Heb. 2:1

VERSE 23 “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)”

After the Apostle Paul has explained how Jesus opened a new and living way for those who would follow in his steps, he exhorts them to hold fast the profession of their faith as they walk in this new way. In the Greek text the word ‘hope’ is indicated, rather than ‘faith.’ The exhortation is, therefore, to hold fast the profession of our hope. It is this hope which is as an anchor to our souls, as it enters into and lays hold upon that which is within the veil. Thus if we are to have “boldness” to enter into the holiest of all, we must hold fast to our anchor of hope, the anchor which should be firmly fixed within the “veil.”—Heb. 10:19,20

Paul has already explained that the ‘veil’ represents Jesus’ flesh—his sacrificed flesh, of course. And if we are to enter into that which is beyond the veil, it means also the sacrifice of our flesh—being planted together in the likeness of his death. We are not sufficient for this of ourselves. It is only as we are “sprinkled” and “washed” that God will consider us worthy. (Heb. 10:22) These thoughts were illustrated by the sprinkling of the typical priests with blood, and by their washing at the laver in the court.

We are to hold fast ‘without wavering.’ The Hebrews were showing a tendency to waver, and the great effort of the apostle throughout his letter is to strengthen their determination to “go on unto perfection,” not to draw back. (Heb. 6:1) They apparently had endured considerable

suffering on account of their faith in Christ, and possibly their wavering was due in part to their lack of understanding of the Christian's share in the better sacrifices of the Gospel Age, hence Paul's effort to show them that they were priests and, as such, must expect to offer sacrifice, not of animals, but themselves. In keeping with this Divine plan, God was faithful. If they expected him to deliver them from all trial, then it would appear that he was unfaithful, but with the proper vision of their place in the plan of God, they should be able to 'hold fast' and with 'boldness' seek to enter into the 'holiest.'

VERSES 24,25 "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Paul wrote to the Philippian brethren, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." (Phil. 2:4) This is what it means to 'consider one another.' We are to give consideration to their needs, particularly along spiritual lines, and noting them, do all we can to help, to encourage, to 'provoke' particularly unto 'love and to good works.' Perhaps the most frequently recurring need of all Christians is thus to be provoked. The flesh shrinks from sacrifice, and it is so easy to become "weary in well doing" that we need the exhortation to faithfulness which we receive from one another.—Gal. 6:9

It is difficult to exhort those with whom we are not associated, so logically the apostle reminds us of the importance of meeting together for mutual encouragement, 'and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.' This epistle was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, which was the time of trouble which brought the Jewish Age to its final end. That trouble was in a measure typical of that which is upon the world today, which now betokens the near approach of the new day of kingdom blessings.

Possibly the conditions leading up to that trouble at the end of the Jewish Age were looked upon as signs that the kingdom was even then near. In any case, the Early Church did not expect that nearly twenty centuries would elapse before the kingdom would be established. Paul wrote that the night was far spent, and that the day was at hand. (Rom. 13:12) To the Early Church the time was short, and this was given as one

reason they should assemble so much the more. With what great force this exhortation applies to the Lord's people now, when the 'day' is not only approaching, but about ready to manifest itself in the blessing of the sin-cursed and dying world. Never before was it more important for the Lord's people to meet together for mutual encouragement.

VERSES 26,27 "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

It is the willful sin of Adam, primarily, that is expiated by the blood of Christ. It is because there is 'no more sacrifice for sins' that those who now, after having come to a knowledge of the Truth, become willful sinners and, continuing their willfulness, will die the "second death." (Rev. 21:8) Carelessness is not in itself necessarily willful sin although it can easily lead to a willful neglect of the grace of God. Perhaps this is why the apostle mentions the point of willfulness and its consequences directly after his admonition not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Certainly a failure to meet with the Lord's people might be a first step toward losing all interest in the Truth and in the Lord.

VERSES 28,29 "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Some Christians might interpret the 'sorer punishment' here mentioned as being eternal torture. But this is not the thought. The wages of sin is death. Those who sinned willfully against Moses' Law died, but their death is not eternal. That was the typical age, and the death penalty then inflicted was merely illustrative of the 'second death,' a death from which the Scriptures promise no resurrection. This latter punishment is therefore 'sorer' because it will last forever.

Paul suggests that the sin which ultimately results in the second death is treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. But notice the expression—"wherewith he was sanctified." This indicates that only those who have accepted the blood,

and have been sanctified by it, can do ‘despite unto the Spirit of grace,’ and receive the punishment of the second death.

VERSES 30,31 “We know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

The statement by the Lord, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will recompense,’ is frequently quoted in exhortations to brethren not to judge one another, but to leave all judgment with the Lord. But here the apostle is using it to emphasize that the Lord will, indeed, punish the willful sinner—‘I will recompense.’ So serious is this for those who reject the provisions of the blood of Christ after having been ‘sprinkled’ and sanctified by that blood, that he adds, ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.’

For such as do despite to the grace of God through Christ, it is indeed a fearful thing. To them nothing remains but a ‘fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries,’ of which they are a part. Falling into the hands of God as here indicated means to be dealt with according to the terms of his strict justice, and without benefit of the atoning merit of the blood of Christ.

VERSES 32-34 “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”

In these verses again is revealed the practical purpose of the epistle; namely, to reestablish the faith and zeal of the Hebrew brethren. The ‘former days’ were ones of zeal and self-sacrifice, days in which they took ‘joyfully the spoiling of your goods.’ But evidently there had been a change. Their “first love” had somewhat cooled. (Rev. 2:4) Paul’s evident object in asking them to recall those former days was in order that they might endeavor to recapture their spirit of love and joy and self-sacrifice.

In this admonition there are revealed two ways in which we may suffer with Christ. The first is that of being at the front of the battle, and thus of

coming in actual contact with the trials and persecutions which result from such active participation in the work of the Gospel. The other is in being the ‘companions’ of those who are ‘so used.’ Paul suffered much under the first category, but many in the Early Church, including the Hebrews, suffered with him by letting it be known that they were his friends and supporters. In one, or both, of these ways it is still the privilege of the brethren to suffer for righteousness’ sake and, by faithfulness, prove worthy of joint-heirship with Christ in the kingdom.

VERSES 35,36 “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”

Again is indicated the evident tendency of the Hebrews to let go their hold on ‘these things.’ Sometimes the sheer weight of trials tends temporarily to discourage. This is understandable but Paul was warning against casting away, or throwing away, their confidence. This might be very close to a willful sin.

‘Ye have need of patience,’ Paul wrote. The Hebrews ran well for a time, but they needed patience in order to continue. They had done the ‘will of God’ in presenting themselves in consecration, but this was not enough, for that alone would not result in their receiving what the Lord had promised. Only those “that shall endure unto the end” receive the “crown of life.”—Matt. 24:13; Rev. 2:10

VERSE 37 “Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

The time element in the plan of God has always been a test of faith to his people. The apostle here alludes to the prophecy of Habakkuk 2:2,3, where the Lord gives us the assurance that the great vision of his plan will not tarry. Paul thus applies this prophecy to the end of the age and to the return and presence of Christ. This great event in the plan of God was the inspiration of the Early Church. Paul’s reference to it here emphasizes that all he had said concerning the hope of both the church and the world must await fulfillment until ‘he that shall come will come.’ And now that he is here, how faithful we should be! How we should hold fast without wavering!

VERSES 38,39 “The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who

draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

The apostle again quotes from the prophecy of Habakkuk (chapter 2, vs. 4)—“The just shall live by his faith.” But the loss of faith means a drawing back. How firmly, yet lovingly, the apostle endeavored to take hold of these Hebrews and lift them up to more solid ground. ‘We are not of them who draw back unto perdition.’ Evidently they had let these things slip to some extent, but they had not yet sinned willfully. They needed to be taught again the “first principles of the oracles of God,” (Heb. 5:12) but Paul believed this possible, and that they were ‘not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.’ Doubtless Paul was right.

Dawn Bible Students Association

When Peter Was Converted

*“Go your way, tell
his disciples and
Peter that he goeth
before you into
Galilee: there shall
ye see him, as he said
unto you.”
—Mark 16:7*

APRIL 15 WAS THE DAY this year when millions throughout the world were reminded once more that nearly two thousand years ago the mighty power of God raised his Son Christ Jesus from the dead. The enemies of Jesus who put him to death thought they had made an end to this man’s claims to being the Son of God and the King of Israel, but they were wrong. While they were jealous of his popularity among the common people,

and feared the extent to which his eloquence and miracles might tend to undermine their power and prestige, they had not realized that Divine power would nullify the result of their wicked assault against Jesus by raising him from the dead.

By this miracle God said to the people of that day, and to those of every generation since who have learned about it, that nothing, not even death, can interfere with the ultimate and glorious triumph of his loving purpose to enlighten and bless all the families of the earth. In his sermon on Mars’ Hill, Paul foretold a future day of enlightenment and trial for the world. He added that God hath given all men assurance concerning this by raising Jesus from the dead.—Acts 17:31

Through the power of the Heavenly Father, the Creator, the resurrection of Jesus was a demonstration of the ability of God to fulfill all his gracious promises, and that ultimately there shall be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust, that ere the kingdom work of the resurrected King of kings is finished, death itself will be destroyed. (I Cor. 15:25,26; Acts 24:15) Jesus gave us this same significance of his resurrection when he said, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, ... and have the keys of hell and of death.”—Rev. 1:18

ANOTHER TRIUMPH

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was more than a demonstration of Divine power over death. It also revealed the triumph of the Divine principle of love over the humanly conceived principle of self-interest. This is brought forcibly to our attention in the instructions given by the “young man” (Mark 16:5) to the women who went early to the tomb on that memorable first day of the week with “sweet spices, that they might ... anoint him.” (Mark 16:1) He said, ‘Tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee.’

That Peter should be singled out for special mention in this announcement of Jesus’ resurrection, helps to bring into focus a most revealing chain of circumstances in which Peter played a leading role. The fact that he was to be especially informed concerning Jesus’ resurrection constitutes one of the important links in this chain, the first link being the occasion when this ardent, fearless disciple of the Master tried to dissuade his Lord from going to Jerusalem where his enemies were plotting to kill him.

When Jesus announced his intention to surrender voluntarily to his enemies Peter rebuked his Master, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord.” (Matt. 16:22) To Peter this was an incredible thing for the Master to do. He was sincere and ardent in his belief that Jesus was the foretold Messiah, the One who had come to be the King of Israel and of all nations. Being a fisherman, Peter may not have been too well acquainted with historical precedents, but he would certainly know that no great ruler or emperor of the past had ever attained his high position of authority over nations by surrendering to those who opposed him.

As Peter saw it, how could Jesus ever support a government on his “shoulder,” the increase of which there would be “no end,” if he allowed the religious rulers of Israel to put him to death? How could a dead king dash the nations to pieces “like a potter’s vessel,” as had been foretold of Jesus? (Isa. 9:6,7; Ps. 2:9) How could a dead king “have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth?”—Ps. 72:8

HUMAN REASONING

Peter’s reasoning was simply human. From the fall of man in the Garden of Eden down to his own day, man had practiced no other principle but self-interest, and self-protection. Abraham had used carnal

weapons and soldiers to rescue Lot. Joshua used the army of Israel to drive the Canaanites from the promised land. Saul had killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands in delivering Israel from her enemies. Could Peter be expected to have any other viewpoint than the one which he expressed?

But Jesus did! When advised by Peter not to go to Jerusalem and expose himself to his enemies, Jesus said to him, “Get thee behind me, Satan: ... thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” (Matt. 16:23) Jesus did not mean that Peter was actually Satan, but merely that he was being guided by a principle that had its origin with Satan, the principle of self first, or selfishness.

Through the ages from the fall of man until now, the two great principles have existed—selfishness and love. God is the sponsor of the principle of love, while Satan is the mastermind which set the principle of selfishness into operation. Its first manifestation was in the sin of our first parents. Self-interest induced them to disobey God’s law. An unselfish attitude in the situation involved would have protected them from sin.

Many noble people throughout the ages of the past saw the vision of love and were moved to action by it. The record of the lives of the Ancient Worthies indicates that the will of God for them was put ahead of self-interest, even when this resulted in cruel persecutions, privation, and death. The three Hebrews, for example, whom Nebuchadnezzar threatened to cast into a fiery furnace, declared that even if God did not protect them in that furnace they would not bow down to worship the image the king had set up.

We are not to suppose that Peter was more human-minded than the other disciples. He saw no way for Jesus to become king of Israel other than to stand up for his rights, and to fight for them, if need be. Jesus’ proposed plan of surrender was unthinkable so far as Peter was concerned, and he did not hesitate to tell his beloved Master what he thought about it. And then, gradually, yet firmly, Jesus began to point out to Peter a better way, the way of love.

After telling him that the viewpoint he had expressed was a human one, and not in harmony with God, Jesus added that those who endeavor to save their lives shall lose them, while they who lose their lives

(voluntarily) shall save, or “find,” them. (Matt. 16:25) How very strange this reasoning must have sounded to Peter! How could one possibly ‘find’ his life by losing it?

So far as the record goes, nothing more was said along this line at the time, either by Peter or Jesus. But neither of them forgot this rather animated exchange of viewpoints. As circumstances later reveal, however, Peter’s mind was not changed. He still believed that Jesus was making a mistake; while Jesus, on the other hand, was still intent on helping Peter to gain the right viewpoint.

SATAN’S DESIRE

Arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples gathered in the “upper room” (Mark 14:15) to celebrate the Passover. While there, he talked to them heart-to-heart on many important issues pertaining to their relationship to him and their future career of service as his disciples and ambassadors. Addressing Peter he said, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”—Luke 22:31,32

Peter was not yet ‘converted.’ There were many vital points of truth that none of the disciples had yet comprehended. Even in that ‘upper room,’ when the atmosphere was charged with tension and their hearts were gripped with apprehension as to what might happen to their beloved Master, they were still overly concerned as to who would be greatest in the kingdom. They all needed to be converted!

USE OF FORCE

Perhaps by singling out Peter as the one to whom he made this remark, Jesus had especially in mind Peter’s outspoken opposition to the course his Master was taking. Probably the others also failed to understand why Jesus should so recklessly expose himself to danger, but they were not endeavoring to hinder him. Peter, on the other hand, had spoken out sharply against it, and later used force to block Jesus’ voluntary offering of himself for death.

This was at the gate of the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter drew his sword and cut off an ear from the servant of the high priest. Jesus knew that Peter’s attitude of opposition would lead him to make this

effort, so purposely made sure that he would have the opportunity. With his disciples in the upper room, Jesus asked them how many swords they had, and the reply was, “Two.” (Luke 22:38) He indicated that this would be sufficient.

One of those swords was held by Peter, and when the mob moved to lay hands on his Master he vigorously went into action against them. This was Jesus’ opportunity to continue the lesson he was teaching this beloved disciple. He commanded Peter to put away his sword, and besides, miraculously healed the wound Peter had inflicted by the one savage thrust he had made at the high priest’s servant.

In further explanation to Peter, Jesus said, “They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” (Matt. 26:52) This was very similar to Jesus’ previous statement to Peter in which he explained that those who endeavor to save their lives shall lose them. In order to establish even more definitely in Peter’s mind that he was voluntarily giving up his life in order to save it, Jesus said, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But [if I do this] how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”—Matt. 26:53,54

Peter, however, was not yet converted. He had heard his Master tell him that his viewpoint was not in harmony with God’s will and way, but he was not convinced. He did not believe that the Messiah could save his life by losing it; that is, by voluntarily surrendering to his enemies and allowing them to put him to death. And now that these enemies had come out from Jerusalem to Gethsemane to arrest his Lord, he did all he could to foil their intentions, putting up his sword only when commanded to do so by the One whom he loved more than he loved life itself.

To obey a command is one thing, but to be at heart in harmony with it is another. Peter doubtless still felt that a great mistake was being made. His vision of Messianic glory and a worldwide kingdom of righteousness which would begin at Jerusalem must have become very dim as with aching heart he saw them lead away to trial and to death him whom he thought was to be King of kings.

Because he loved the Master, and because he had declared his willingness to die for him, we find this confused, but still unconverted, fisherman following Jesus into the judgment hall. Then the test came and

he denied him whom he loved. His verbal and physical opposition to the Master's announced intentions had been frustrated, and he had been severely rebuked by the One whom he was convinced was "the Christ, the Son of the living God;" (Matt. 16:16) but he was loathe to leave his Lord alone with his enemies.

Jesus still had this beloved disciple in training. In the upper room he had forecast that Peter would deny him. Peter vigorously insisted that he would never do such a thing, and doubtless was pained that Jesus suggested its possibility. But in his mixed feelings of fear and confusion he did exactly as his Master had prophesied. Then Jesus looked at Peter in a manner which reminded him of his forecast. This must have caused him to realize that after all, Jesus knew a great deal more about the whole situation than he did: and he wept bitterly over the tragic mistake he had made.

TELL PETER

By now Peter had been given several lessons designed to help him grasp the better and Divine viewpoint of love, but he was not yet converted. His righteous soul rebelled against the thought that Jesus, the One who did no wrong, who had spent his time and strength in naught else but doing good, should be put to death as a malefactor. Since Jesus had actually been crucified, Peter probably had more cause than ever to wonder about the philosophy that one could save, or find, his life by losing it. Certainly Jesus had lost his life. That seemed certain and final!

But there were other lessons to follow. Love had triumphed over selfishness, and God had raised Jesus from the dead. The selfishness of the world had been overcome by him who gave his life a ransom for all. He who loved God supremely and therefore delighted to do the will of God in dying to redeem Adam and his race from death; he who had voluntarily 'lost' his life, had 'found' it, and now he was 'alive for evermore.'

Now it was possible to tell Peter that he might know how right the Master was in the course which he voluntarily and lovingly took. Tell him in order that he may be helped to realize that although it had appeared to him that Jesus had lost his life, and foolishly so, he actually followed the only course which could have saved his life and gained for him high exaltation to glory, honor, and immortality. It was important that all the

disciples be informed of Jesus' resurrection, but it was especially so in Peter's case, for it was another step leading to his ultimate conversion.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Jesus appeared to his disciples on several occasions after his resurrection, and on one of these he continued his instructions to Peter and gave him a special commission to serve the brethren, to "feed my sheep." (John 21:16) This commission was in keeping with what he had said to Peter in the upper room—"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." While Peter was not yet converted, he was learning, and his heart was mellowing under the tender guidance of the Lord's providence.

At this touching meeting Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. There was seemingly a good reason for this. To be rebuked by Jesus as Peter had been, even to the point of having the Master say to him, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' could have left a little resentment in his heart. But even if this had been temporarily so, it had all melted under the tender and sympathetic influence of the Holy Spirit, as manifested in the resurrected Jesus.

"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," insistently replied Peter, when Jesus asked him essentially the same question the third time. (John 21:17) 'Thou knowest all things!' How well Peter realized this. He had not believed that the Lord could save his life by losing it, but now he knew that Jesus had been right. In the upper room the Master forecast Peter's denial, and despite his vigorous protest in which he declared his willingness to die with him rather than deny him, Peter was again proven wrong.—Mark 14:29-31

THOU KNOWEST ALL THINGS

Jesus knew 'all things.' Peter now realized this, and knew that his Master could look into his heart and read his motives better than he could himself. He had not understood why the Lord should voluntarily suffer and die, and he had done all he could to oppose what looked to him like a very unwise course; but he had never ceased to love his Master. His heart was right, even though his reasoning had been wrong; and since Jesus had demonstrated his ability to read his heart, Peter was a little perturbed over being asked three times to affirm his love.

But this was a part of his training, another of those lessons by which he was gradually being brought to that full understanding which would enable him later to strengthen the brethren. To declare his love for Jesus before his brethren would help to strengthen his own resolve to be a faithful follower of his Lord, regardless of the cost. As Peter was later to discover, the commission given him as an under shepherd to feed the Lord's sheep would ultimately cost him life itself.

Jesus continued the lesson, saying to Peter, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." (John 21:18) John adds the explanation that this statement by Jesus was a forecast of the kind of death Peter would die. John added, "And when he [Jesus] had spoken this, he saith unto him [Peter], Follow me."—vs. 19

In the statement to Peter 'when thou shalt be old,' Jesus did not use the word to describe old age, but one which conveys the thought of aging, or becoming old. The contrast which he makes is between Peter's youthful, inexperienced outlook and the manner in which this would change as he matured in experience and in his understanding of the Divine will and purpose. Peter had been accustomed to deciding for himself what was best to be done and what course he should take. 'Thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest,' Jesus said to him.

This had been largely true of Peter even after he became a follower of Jesus. To him, Jesus was the promised Messiah, destined to be the King in the most powerful, glorious, and all-embracing kingdom this earth had ever seen. When Jesus indicated that he would give himself up to die it seemed to Peter that his Master had lost the vision of his purpose in coming to earth, so he undertook the task of preventing what he thought would be a tragedy. He girded himself for this task of interference, but had failed. He had been accustomed to having his own way, but this time he was thwarted. In the Lord's providence, however, it was one of the experiences leading to his conversion.

DEATH FORECAST

The "death" (vs. 19) that Peter should die was a sacrificial one, resulting from his full surrender to the Divine will, as suggested by the stretching forth of his hands and allowing another to gird him—a

beautiful symbol of surrender, of resignation, and a willingness to be girded for service and to be led by the Lord. Such a leading would mean that Peter's death would be a sacrificial one, that he would be "planted together" in the likeness of Jesus' death (Rom. 6:5), that he would "fall like one of the princes," that is, Prince Jesus.—Ps. 82:7

Peter's nature rebelled against such a death. He tried to prevent Jesus from thus dying, saying to him, 'Be it far from thee, Lord,' and later going into action with his sword in an effort to prevent the Master's arrest and crucifixion. Jesus knew that Peter would be converted, that he would see the beauty of the way of love. He knew that when Peter did get the vision, and became convinced that the way for a Christian to save his life is to lose it in voluntary sacrifice, he would be in the forefront of the Christian warfare of love against selfishness.

So it turned out. Peter finally was converted. This occurred at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting church. Jesus had prophesied what would occur in this connection. He had said that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. It would bring to their remembrance the things which he had said to them. He said to Peter—'Whosoever will lose his life ... shall find it;' 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword;' 'Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee;' 'Follow me' into death.

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, all these statements by the Master, and the circumstances with which they were associated, were brought into focus in Peter's mind, and caused to shine with a meaning which previously had been impossible for him to grasp. His viewpoint had been that of a natural man, but now he had spiritual vision; and in the light and inspiration of that vision he stretched forth his hands for the Lord to gird him for the new service of love to which he had been called.

In the upper room Peter sincerely professed his willingness to die with the Master. But what he meant then was that he would gladly die in a fighting—even though futile—attempt to save the Master's life. He would gird himself, and die endeavoring to carry out his own will. But now it was different. He was still willing to die, not in fighting the Lord's way of love, but by yielding to it. He was now willing, as Jesus was, to be led to the slaughter along the road of self-sacrifice, until he was fully and completely 'planted together' in the 'likeness' of Jesus' death.

Being converted, he was prepared to strengthen the brethren, and he did so in an outstanding lesson on Christian sacrifice and what it means in the light of the Divine plan. This lesson is in his first epistle. Here he speaks of the “salvation” which is the “end” of Christian faith—that salvation which is obtainable only by losing one’s life. It was this salvation, he explains, that the prophets foretold when they prophesied “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”—I Pet. 1:9-11

THE WAY TO GLORY

Peter now realized that Jesus had suffered and died in keeping with these prophecies, and also that he had entered into the foretold “glory”—that God “raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.” (vs. 21) Peter not only now saw how obedience to the Divine way of love had resulted in Jesus’ resurrection and glorification, but he had learned that the same opportunity of sacrifice and the same hope of glory had been extended to all the Master’s followers. They are to be stones in a spiritual temple.

It is our privilege to suffer, not for wrongdoing, but for right doing—“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”—I Pet. 2:20,21

Prior to Pentecost, Peter’s great struggle with himself was his insistence that it was a tragedy to suffer for right doing. Now he was converted, and the way of love had been revealed to him. He knew that suffering for righteousness’ sake was the only true way to the “great salvation” (Heb. 2:3) and to ‘glory.’ This he now knew and declared, was the “better” way, the way that was shown to us by Jesus, the way every Christian must take in order to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.—I Pet. 3:17,18

It seemed very strange to Peter when Jesus, the foretold King of kings, announced his intention of giving himself up to be killed; but now that he was converted he was able to strengthen the brethren by writing, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as

though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings."—I Pet. 4:12,13

In his younger days Peter was accustomed to having his own way, and very willfully so. He was master of his own destiny, or thought so. He girded himself. But now he had learned of a better way. He had learned that the will of God was better for him than his own will, and that this was also true of all the consecrated. So he wrote, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." If, by doing this, you seem to be led into situations and experiences that are too difficult to bear, cast "all your care upon him; for he careth for you."—I Pet. 5:6,7

The way of love, as demonstrated in self-sacrifice even unto death, had triumphed. In following this way, Jesus made the supreme sacrifice. He lost his life, but it had been found. All the disciples rejoiced as they learned the good news of their Master's resurrection; but, under Divine providence, it was to mean more to Peter than to the others. To him it was one of the evidences that Jesus knew 'all things,' and therefore knew that if he lost his life voluntarily he would find it on the exalted plane of glory and immortality.

May this be one of the great lessons of Jesus' resurrection to us, and being so, may we be strengthened to continue on in that way in which we are being led by God through his Spirit—the narrow way, the way which, through death, leads to immortality and to glory. As we go forward in this way, let us remember that the mighty power of God which raised Jesus from the dead is now enlisted on our behalf, to give us daily strength, to supplement our weakness, to give us courage to endure unto the end, and finally, to lift us up together with him who is now exalted to the right hand of the throne of God.