

# A Contrite and Humble Spirit

***“Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”***

***—Isaiah 57:15***

footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been.” While impressed with the fact that our Lord is so incomprehensibly glorious, we become enraptured with the thought of his condescending grace, for we are then told, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”—Isa. 66:1,2

## **THE FULLNESS OF THE**

majesty and greatness of God is incomprehensible to the human mind. At the dedication of Israel’s Temple, Solomon queried, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?”—I Kings 8:27

As though to answer, the Lord said, “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my

In the verse following our opening text, the Lord tells us, “I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.” (Isa. 57:16) Indeed, if God were to contend with humanity, the end of the strife would be that mankind would be blotted out of existence. The Scriptures tell us why our God will not “be always wroth.” We read, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”—Ps. 103:8-14

Our God is particularly sympathetic toward those who are of a broken and contrite heart, whose spirit is humble, who realize that they are imperfect, and who desire to be in accord with him. He does not trample them to the dust nor does he turn away from their tears and supplications. He is, as he proclaimed himself to be, “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” (Exod. 34:6) However, in order to obtain his blessings and mercies, the recipient must have the proper attitude of heart and mind.

### **A BROKEN SPIRIT—NOT A BROKEN WILL**

There is a difference between a broken heart and one which is contrite. A heart is broken when it is

bowed down with grief and sorrow. A heart is contrite when it has a quiet, deep, continual sorrow for acts not in harmony with righteousness. A broken spirit is one that realizes its undone condition and is emptied of self-confidence and self-esteem. In humility of heart it can appreciate its own littleness and imperfection. A broken will is not necessarily the same. There may be some whose wills are broken, and who, giving way to despondency, abandon the battle for righteousness and against sin.

The Scriptures state: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Ps. 51:17) In this utterance David reveals the depth of his understanding. He could see that temporal sacrifices and offerings were meaningless to the Lord except they be prompted by a "broken spirit" and expressive of a "broken and a contrite heart." The Lord is not interested in mechanical ceremonies. Rather, he is seeking humble and contrite hearts that will respond to his loving-kindness.

It is the crushed olive that yields oil, the pressed grape that gives forth wine, and it was the smitten rock that gave the people water. Similarly it is the broken, contrite heart that is most rich in holiness and most fragrant in grace. The "high and lofty One" is pleased to dwell with such, not actually, but by his Spirit and his overshadowing providences. Hence, as the psalmist says, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."—Ps. 91:1

It is those with humble and contrite hearts whom the Lord leads to full and unreserved consecration. Only such as are in this condition of heart

are invited to present themselves as a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,” which is their “reasonable service.” (Rom. 12:1) However, contrition and humility are not character traits which we leave behind after we have dedicated our lives to the Lord. They are qualities that all the consecrated must continue to possess in an abounding measure. How befitting, then, are the apostle’s further words to the brethren, when he exhorts each one “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”—vs. 3

As quoted earlier, God has promised to look “to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit,” and who “trembleth” at his Word. Herein is pointed out the fact that those of a humble spirit must also take earnest heed to the Word of the Lord. The Israelites were instructed: “Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD.” (Deut. 8:3) God’s anger was kindled against them, however, when they “cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.” (Isa. 5:24) Thus, while God shows favor to the poor and contrite, he only does so to the extent that they take heed and obey his words.

## **REVIVING THE HUMBLE AND CONTRITE**

The Scriptures inform us that Adam’s posterity “are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Ps. 14:3) From God’s righteous and holy standards the whole human race comes short of acceptability to him. However, there is a manner of life toward righteousness which God can and does approve. Those who

are seeking to be in harmony with him to the best of their ability, who are walking in the ways of righteousness, and who are trusting in the precious blood of the Redeemer, are spoken of as “being justified freely by his grace ... in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:24-26) Of these Jesus said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6) Their desire to be forgiven from all their sins is satisfied and fulfilled because the blood of “Jesus Christ the righteous” cleanses them “from all unrighteousness.”—I John 1:9; 2:1

This class of dedicated and cleansed ones will have afflictions. The Scriptures declare that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (II Tim. 3:12) Some will inquire, how much persecution and trial must the godly suffer? While the degree of affliction that each member of the body of Christ must endure will vary considerably, yet generally speaking, the Apostle Paul showed that these “must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) The proper attitude of these toward the suffering which they must endure is expressed by the apostle, saying, “We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.”—Rom. 5:3-5

As the Lord’s people go through the fiery trials which so often come upon them, they may at times become faint and weary in the struggle. The hosts of their enemies become dreadful, and their frail nature shrinks from the overwhelming opposition. There are both “conflicts on the outside” and “fears

within,” which the Christian must engage. (II Cor. 7:5, *New International Version*) No wonder, then, that these humble and contrite ones need to be revived and strengthened in order to maintain the “good fight of faith.”—I Tim. 6:12

God does not often deliver nor revive the humble or contrite by changing the circumstances of life for them. He does not necessarily deliver them from their financial troubles, their physical ailments, their social maladies, or other difficulties that are common to mankind. What then does the Lord do? The Apostle Paul answers by stating: “No trial has assailed you except what belongs to man; and God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.” (I Cor. 10:13, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) The Lord provides the needed grace in each trial, and this prevents his people from falling. He also promises, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.”—Deut. 33:25

## **OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES**

To the humble and contrite ones of the past who trembled at the Word of the Lord, needful grace was provided. Consider how Abraham had his faith tested, even to the point of offering up Isaac, his son of promise. He was willing to do this because he was fortified with the numerous promises of God that he should have a “seed” who would bless “all the kindreds of the earth.” (Acts 3:25) Hence when he was tried, he believed that God was able to raise up Isaac, “even from the dead.” It was the immutable Word of God that sustained Abraham in every trial so that he “died in faith,” still believing.—Heb. 11:13,18,19

Reflect also upon the great lawgiver, Moses, whom the Scriptures declare to have been “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” Yet, even those of his household spoke against him, saying, “Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?” (Num. 12:2,3) Not only did Moses endure the sedition of his family, but shortly afterward the children of Israel murmured against their faithful leader and said, “Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! ... Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” (Num. 14:2-5) While this humble servant fell on his face when he heard the murmuring of the people, yet he had no resentment in his heart, for he besought the Lord to forgive their iniquity.—vs. 19

What enabled Moses to suffer so unjustly, to endure such unmerited criticism and murmurings against himself by that rebellious group of the Lord’s people? The secret of his faithful perseverance is attributable to his great respect and reverence for the Word of God. He was willing to suffer affliction with and forbear with that wayward people because, as Paul says, he esteemed “the reproach of Christ [for Christ, marginal translation] greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” (Heb. 11:26) Again we see, in the life of this humble servant, how God revived and fortified his spirit with precious promises.

We also take note of that beloved servant of the Lord, David. While the record of his life is outstanding in his devotion and loyalty to God, yet there are some sinful deeds that he committed, which, according to the Law, would have called for his death. No

doubt, if it were not for the fact that he was the Lord's anointed king over Israel, he would have been put to death. However, being spared, though not unpunished, David lived to demonstrate an outstanding degree of heart penitence. By his sins, as Nathan declared, he gave "great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme." (II Sam. 12:14) Yet, in the face of his transgressions, we are given to understand that David's heart was counted as righteous before the Lord.—I Kings 15:5

Such a humble and contrite heart as David had, the Lord would not despise. Rather, he revived David's spirit by his loving-kindness, his tender mercy, and his sure word of promise. What wonder then that we find David offering a song of thanksgiving for God's deliverance and his manifold blessings saying, "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour."—II Sam. 22:2,3

## **THE CONTRITE OF THE PRESENT AGE**

The sons of God are, during this present Gospel Age, especially beset by trials and difficulties. If they should fall, however, the fact that they have stumbled will not make them feel like going back into sin if their hearts are of the right imprint. On the contrary, they will feel like Peter, who, when others were stumbling, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6:68) The true people of God have no desire to go to anyone but him. If they stumble, they recover themselves with the Lord's help, availing themselves of his arrangements for forgiveness and then pressing



forward. By these stumblings they learn of their own weaknesses and then fortify themselves so that they may be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,” in future experiences.—Eph. 6:10

A just man may fall “seven times,” but “riseth up again.” There are various causes for these stumblings. However, if the heart is good and honest, humble and contrite, that man will rise again. The Lord will show him that he has made a mistake and will point out the way to him by which he may recover himself. If he is truly a lover of righteousness, he will desire to press on toward that which is right, just, and approved of the Lord, even if he should stumble many times.—Ps. 37:23,24; Prov. 24:16

God’s grace abounds to his children in this age beyond the measure of human comprehension, and far more than those men and women of old could have asked or hoped for. Isaiah, prophetically writing of our day, says, “Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.” (Isa. 64:4) Paul, commenting on this very Scripture, tells us, “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—I Cor. 2:9,10

If the humble and contrite ones of the past were refreshed by the Word of God, even though they understood but vaguely what it meant, how much more should our spirits be uplifted. Unto us are given “exceeding great and precious promises: that by these,” Peter says, “ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”—II Pet. 1:4

If any of the Lord's people should become faint or weary of spirit, the "high and lofty One" will surely not be unmindful of their need nor fail to fulfill his promises to them. We have the assurance: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." (Isa. 40:29; 59:1) Realizing that we have a High Priest who has been "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," let us "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," knowing that Christ Jesus "ever liveth to make intercession" for us.—Heb. 4:15,16; 7:25

For our encouragement we can also look back to those of old who have the testimony that they pleased God. We should consider what great faith was instilled in their hearts: "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ... That they might obtain a better resurrection." (Heb. 11:33-35) However, our consideration does not stop here, but should be elevated to an even higher degree by "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. ... For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."—Heb. 12:2,3

Indeed, how our spirits are revived and how our hearts are refreshed as we consider our forerunner, Jesus! When we do so, we are reminded of the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," who, "though he was rich,"

yet for our sakes “became poor,” so poor that he could say, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”—II Cor. 8:9; Matt. 8:20

Have our friends proved unfaithful or disloyal? Consider the Master’s “familiar friend,” in whom he trusted, who “lifted up his heel” against him. (Ps. 41:9) Think of Peter also, who denied the Lord three times, even with cursing. Do we have trials and soul-vexing griefs? Think of Jesus who, according to the Scriptures, was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” (Isa. 53:3) Are we disfellowshipped by the world and persecuted? Let us remember how they hated our Lord and Master, how they smote him, spat upon him, and mocked him, crying, “Crucify him, crucify him.” (Matt. 27:30,31; John 19:6) Have we humbling experiences? Consider him, who “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2:8) As we thus consider Jesus, we learn of him who was “meek and lowly in heart” and we find rest for our fainting souls. Then we come to realize that his “yoke is easy,” and our “burden is light.”—Matt. 11:29,30

## **HUMILITY AND CONTRITION ESSENTIAL IN THE NEXT AGE**

All among mankind, who, in the coming Messianic kingdom, would be in harmony with God must also be repentant of their shortcomings. Moreover, they must be appreciative of God’s grand and holy standards. Under the reign of Christ and his glorified church, sympathy and favor will be extended to the humble, contrite hearts, even as now with the footstep followers of Christ.

The Apostle Peter tells us that “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” (I Pet. 5:5) This text applies not only in the present time, but will also have an application in the next age. Among the several things that the Lord hates, the first one the wise man mentions is a “proud look.” (Prov. 6:16-19) Hence there is no provision for the proud, haughty or self-centered, but every provision of God is available for the humble-minded. The Prophet Isaiah, in outlining the preparations to be made for the coming kingdom, said, “Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.” (Isa. 62:10) We can be sure that the standard held up before the people in the incoming age will be that of complete holiness of heart and, by the end of the kingdom, also of conduct.

Realizing that the favor and blessing of God is promised only to the humble and contrite ones, and that there are few in number that are humble at the present time, the question naturally arises: Are there only a few who will bask in the eternal sunshine of God’s love and favor? Ah no! God is now allowing a humiliating influence to work with people which, in the age to come, will have taught them to put away selfishness and pride, and lead them to be contrite of heart.

Now the humble and contrite are trodden down. As the prophet has truly said, “Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” What is to become of the spirit of pride and wickedness? The prophet further declares that

the day is coming when all the works associated with pride and wickedness “shall be stubble,” and these practices will be destroyed from among the people: “The day that cometh shall burn them up.” Hence we see that the pride and wickedness of men shall be thoroughly purged, and to such an extent that it will leave “neither root nor branch” for further development in man’s heart.—Mal. 3:15; 4:1

God through the prophet has said, “I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.” Then, after these humiliating and purging experiences, when men learn to esteem the beauty of holiness, and denounce unrighteousness and sin, he “will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.”—Isa. 13:11,12

God has said, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. ... That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel [representative of all mankind] be justified, and shall glory.” (Isa. 45:22-25) As we thus are now privileged to comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of God’s wonderful plan of salvation, surely we can say with the psalmist, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.”—Ps. 48:1

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