



Volume 81 No.1 MELBOURNE, JANUARY / FEBRUARY 1998

THE WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY

(God's Plan for the Salvation of Mankind)

The careful and reverent student of the sacred Scriptures will find, in the light now due to the household of faith, that the Word of God presents a complete and systematic plan for the salvation and development of the human race, which for ages has been a success in its gradual development, and which in due time will be gloriously completed. The past six thousand years of human history have been necessary to work out that plan to its present degree of development, and one thousand years more will witness its full consummation in the restitution of every willing member of the race to the original likeness of God, and their establishment in righteousness, with the eternal ages of glory and blessing before them.

CHRIST THE CENTRE OF THE PLAN

Such is the scope of God's plan which He formed before the foundation of the world, to be wrought out in Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last of Jehovah's direct creation - His only begotten Son - Rev. 22:13; John 1:4; Col. 1:13. "By Him were all things made, and without Him was not anything made that was made." "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. By Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17) In Him also "we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." -Col. 1:14.

God, having thus honoured His Son by making Him His instrument or agent for the accomplishment of all His grand designs, declared to men: "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." He "hath exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour," and "would have all men honour the Son (as the Father's agent and representative) even as they honour the Father." (Matt. 17:5; Acts 5:31; John 5:23.) Nor does the Son claim higher honour than to be the Father's agent and messenger, "the messenger of the (Jehovah's) covenant" (Mal. 3:1); for He says: "I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me," and "My Father is greater than I." (John 6:38; 5:30; 4:34; 14:28.) To us, as to the Apostle, "there is one God, the Father, of Whom are all things; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things; and we by him." - I. Cor. 8:6.

MAN IN GOD'S IMAGE

After the creation of the angels came the creation of man, a being adapted to live on the earth, and to be its lord and king. Man, as well as the angels, was created in the divine image - that is, with faculties of reason, conscience, etc., capable of discerning right and wrong. Man as king of earth, and perfect, as created, was only "a little lower than the angels" (Heb. 2:7, 9), and that little consisted in his being limited by his nature to the earth, while the angelic nature, being spiritual, has a wider range for observation and hence a broader plane for reasoning. To be an image of God implies freedom of choice or will with respect to one's own conduct. With such freedom man was originally endowed by his Creator, and the alternatives of good and evil were placed before him as a necessity to his trial for lasting life, though not without warning on God's part as to the blessed results of righteousness and the deadly results of evil.

On account of man's inexperience, implicit obedience to God's will was required of him for his safety and protection, as well as for a test of his loyalty to his rightful Lord and Sovereign. Nevertheless, God, by divine intuition, foresaw the course that Adam would take and the fall of the whole race with him into death, and also the lessons which that experience with sin and death might be overruled to teach them when, in due time, through the merit of Christ's sacrifice, He would grant them remission of sins upon their repentance and turn to righteousness. He, therefore, determined to let man take his chosen course, and to inflict on him its just

penalty, and then, in due time, to deliver him from it with a great salvation.

GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE GUIDED

God foresaw that, even with good intentions, man's limited knowledge and experience would continually offer temptations to doubt the wisdom of divine arrangements, if not to disobey them. He, therefore, embraced this opportunity to convey to all of His creatures, as well as to man, a fuller conception of Himself, in order that they might the more fully and heartily worship and obey Him. As a revelation and illustration of His attributes -Justice, Wisdom, Power and Love - God placed His human creation - perfect though inexperienced, and but slightly informed respecting His Creator's attributes - on trial, in order that he might gain a valuable experience, yet foreknowing that although in every respect fairly tried, he would, in the use of his own free will, fall into sin. But God did not purpose to abandon His disobedient and death-deserving creature to eternal ruin, but provided a way of redemption whereby He might be just and yet the justifier of the truly penitent and believing (Rom. 3:26). Thus the painful experience gained under the reign of sin and death might eventually, under this overruling influence of divine providence, serve the more firmly to establish them in righteousness and willing loyalty to God.

The trial in Eden was a test of obedience, or loyalty to God. The fruit of the forbidden tree was good (for all the trees were good) and was desirable to make one wise; and had they proved their loyalty to God by obedience, probably the restriction would in due time have been removed. Knowledge is a blessing only to those who are subject to the divine will. This, God had arranged that man should acquire by experience, and angels by example. The penalty of man's disobedience was death - "In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying, thou shalt die." The penalty was fulfilled to the letter; the dying began as soon as the penalty was pronounced, when they were cast out of Eden and restrained from eating life-sustaining fruits; and it was completed within the thousand-year day, as predicted. (2 Pet. 3:8) The penalty, death, being gradually and not suddenly inflicted, left the condemned pair free to propagate their species, yet subject to the weakness and all the penalty under which they themselves were placed.

THE FALL OF MAN

Thus, by one man's disobedience, sin entered into the world, and death by (as a result of) sin; and thus death passed upon all men, because all are sinners and imperfect by heredity. -Rom. 5:12.

Sin, and death, its penalty, by thus gaining control of Adam, controlled the world, and reigned from Adam to Moses - with but few divine promises to illuminate the dark way. Then "the law came by Moses," offering lasting life to anyone who would observe it in every particular. But in their fallen condition none of the condemned race was able to obey it, and by it to gain the reward of life. As God had designed, however, the law did serve a purpose; it served to show the helplessness of man for his own justification. Also it served to point to another, the holy, harmless undefiled Lamb of God, whose sacrifice, as Adam's substitute or Redeemer, satisfied the claims of justice and bought the world from the slavery of sin and death. This made possible the gospel offer of forgiveness and lasting life, not through our righteousness in keeping God's law (which is impossible by reason of weakness of the flesh), but by our acceptance of Christ as our Saviour, and of his ransom-sacrifice as the satisfaction for our sins before God.

DIVINE TIMES AND SEASONS

It might be supposed that the work of blessing the world should have begun at once when the sacrifice for sin was accepted by the Father, as signified by the giving of the spirit of adoption at Pentecost; but not so. Another feature of the divine plan had first to be accomplished, viz.: The selection and development of the Church to be joint heirs with Christ in His glory and kingdom and work of blessing the world. This was from the beginning a part of the divine plan; and therefore, the glorious reign and work of blessing the world could not begin at Christ's resurrection, nor at Pentecost, but had to be delayed until the selection of all its tried and faithful members could be accomplished. Or, to state it otherwise, the Father's appointed time for blessing the world is during the seventh thousand years, and had it not been for His purpose to select the Church, the "bride" or "body" of Christ, to share with Him in the work of blessing the race, there need not have been two advents of our Lord. One would have been sufficient; for He could have come now, in the end of the sixth thousand years, could have redeemed all and at once begun the great work of blessing and restoring mankind. He came to redeem the world previous to the appointed time of blessing, so as to leave time, before that day, for the selection of His bride from among the redeemed race.

As the occasion of man's fall became God's opportunity for exhibiting to all His creatures His wonderful character from every standpoint - His Justice, His Wisdom, His Power and His Love - so it also became an opportunity for the testing in all points of His only begotten Son. This was preparatory to His yet higher exaltation (Phil. 2:8-10) to the Divine nature, with all which that implies of glory, honour and immortality, and of position next to the Father, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. The same occasion, as prearranged of God, also makes possible the calling, selection and trial of the Gospel Church, now soon to be

completed and made joint-inheritors, with our Lord and Saviour, of glory, honour and immortality, and like Him to be exalted far above men and angels, even to the Divine nature. -2 Pet. 1:4.

REVEALING DIVINE CHARACTER

Only the justice of God's character has yet been made manifest to the world, and much of its glory is sadly beclouded by human tradition. God's love for His creatures, the wisdom of His plan of salvation, and His power to save, are as yet but partially revealed, and by but a few indeed. God's justice has been revealed to all for the past six thousand years in the reign of death, the penalty which He prescribed for sin. God's love began to be revealed at Christ's first advent, but, not seeing all of the plan, few rightly appreciated the love. Nevertheless, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." (1 John 4:9) The wisdom of the Lord's plan will not be appreciated until the Sun of Righteousness has arisen, revealing those features of His plan which then will bring blessings to all the billions which His justice condemned, and which His love redeemed. But the power of God will not be seen in its fullness until well on in the Millennial Day. Although partially revealed in the work of creation, the grandest and fullest exhibition remains to be shown in the resurrection from death of those redeemed ones who, accepting of the gracious provisions of His love, bow in glad submission to all His just requirements.

It is a mistake made by many to suppose that Jehovah's justice and His love are ever in conflict with each other. Both are perfect - His love never desires or attempts what His justice does not endorse; His justice and His love must both approve every act for which his power is exercised. With men, because of lack of wisdom and power, love and justice often conflict. Man's love often has gracious designs which he has not the wisdom or power to accomplish except by violating justice. We must gauge our views by the infinite and stay close to the revelation He makes of His plans, not seeking to make plans of our own for God. God's plan, when clearly seen, fully vindicates His justice as well as His love. The plan of redemption devised by divine wisdom is the essence of unfathomable love based upon uncompromising justice, and will be fully accomplished by divine power.

The first act of God's love was to provide a ransom for Adam, and thus for all his race, since it was by his transgression that all fell into sin and death. Until the ransom was given nothing was done in the way of saving the world; promises and types of coming salvation were made, but nothing more could be done. God had rendered a just sentence, and the penalty could not be set aside; it had to be met. before Adam and his family could be released from the death sentence by a resurrection, the life of another man not under the sentence had to be paid as its corresponding price, that God might be just in justifying and accepting back to harmony and life all who believe in Jesus and turn unto God in his name. (Acts 4:12.) Having accepted Christ as the ransom of all such, the Apostle assures us that now "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." - 1 John 1:9.

RECONCILIATION FOR BELIEVERS

Thus we see, from God's own declaration, that Christ died for our sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, that He ascended up on high, and there appearing in the presence of God on our behalf presented the price of our redemption and became Lord of all, both the living and the dead. There is therefore no longer any legal hindrance in the way of the return of believers to fellowship with God, and to all the blessings and privileges lost under the penalty of the first transgression. The only difficulties remaining are on man's part. In his fallen condition his mind is sick as well as his body. He inclines to believe falsely, and is disinclined to believe in so great a salvation, such "good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people." Besides, he is weak through the fall, and does those things which he often does not at heart approve, and leaves undone much that at heart he really desires to do, and there is no help in himself. Some assistance in overcoming sinward tendencies must reach him or else the cancellation of past sin and opportunity for reconciliation will be a valueless offer.

THE CHURCH IN GLORY

This necessity, which we recognise, is fully met in those features of the Divine plan which are yet to be fulfilled. He who redeemed all is appointed to be both King and Judge of all; for God "hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained," Jesus Christ. (Acts 17:31.) That is, He will righteously grant the world a new, individual trial for eternal life, having cancelled the sentence of the first trial by the propitiatory sacrifice of His Son.

The redeemed, tried and glorified Church, the faithful bride of Christ, is to share with her Lord in this great work, as kings and priests and judges. (Rev. 5:10; I Cor. 6:2, 3.) As kings they will rule the world in righteousness, enforcing and establishing order and justice and truth; as priests they will teach the people, and through the merit of the one sacrifice for sins forgive the penitent, and cleanse and help them out of their weaknesses

-mental, moral, and physical; as judges they will judge the measure of the guilt of all in respect to their course in the future as well as in their past lives, judging not by the hearing of the ear, nor by the sight of the eye, but by an infallible judgement for which they will be abundantly qualified by their exaltation to the Divine nature.

While the promise of God to the Church is a change of nature from human to divine, to be effected at the second advent of her Lord, as the completion of His resurrection - the first resurrection (2 Peter 1:4; I. Cor. 15:50-53; Phil. 3:10-11; Rev. 20:6) - the provision of God's plans for the world at large is quite different, viz. a "restitution" or restoration to all the grand qualities and powers of the human nature (an earthly likeness of the divine), now so sadly blurred and defaced by the six thousand years of slavery to sin and death.

THE WORLD'S BLESSING

Rightly to appreciate human restitution, it must be remembered that every excellent quality exhibited among mankind is but an imperfect exhibition of what belongs to each perfect man or woman, whether it be logical acuteness, mathematical precision, aesthetic taste, art, wit, eloquence, poetic imagination, music, or any other intellectual grace of moral refinement. These, to a higher degree than we have ever seen them exhibited by any fallen being, will, in the process of restitution, become, as at first designed by the Creator, the endowments of each obedient member of the human family. With the restitution of perfect mental and moral balance to man, the original king of earth, will come also a blessing to all his subjects - the beasts of the field, the fowl of heaven, and the fish of the sea (Psa. 8:6-8); and the ordering of the earth itself is likewise promised.

The "times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21) are, we believe the Scriptures to teach, just at the door. Soon the last members of the body of Christ will have finished their course, and then, with their glorious Head and all the other members of the body, they will shine forth as the sun for the blessing of the entire redeemed race.

(P.P 4/4)

The Ascent of the Mount of God

(The Necessity for Keeping Close to the Master)

His subject is of primary importance to us. 1 Whatever may be the stage we have reached in our journey, the one thing needful for all of us is to keep close to the Master, because by doing so, we shall become more like him, and more and more sure of reaching the summit of the mountain of God. We are a nation of mountain climbers. I am not referring to an earthly nation; I mean the nation whose citizenship is in heaven, the holy nation, those who are redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and who are to be made unto our God kings and priests and to reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9,10)

The mountain we are climbing is the mountain of God, Mount Zion, and our Guide is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Master as well as our Guide, for he bought us with his own precious blood.

As mountaineers we are to adopt the usual methods of mountain climbing. We shall require a guide, mountaineering clothes, a knapsack, an alpenstock, and we must have a stout cord to bind us to our Guide and to one another. All these are necessary for climbing the narrow way which in this Gospel Age is the only way, and we will consider them first.

THE EQUIPMENT NEEDED

The first thing that is necessary is to take off the filthy rags of our own righteousness (Isa. 64:6), and put on Christ's robe of righteousness. Without it, we can never hope to attain the summit. The other garments which we require are mentioned in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on the things of the earth. For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God." To this end the Apostle exhorts us to *put off* anger, wrath, malice, etc., seeing we have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man. "*Put on*, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another." These additional things, the graces of the spirit, we must begin to put on even at the commencement of the ascent, and we shall require to put on more and more of them as we go up the mountain side. (Col. 3:1-13)

But there is something additional. The 14th verse continues, "And above all these things." This word "above" does not mean more important than," as might be implied in the Authorized Version. The Diaglott translates it "besides," but that is certainly incorrect. The Greek word is "epi" and means "upon". What we require is a girdle to bind the various garments together, and this girdle is love. "Above (or upon) all these things, put on *love*, which is the bond (or girdle) of perfectness." This girdle is essential. It binds and keeps right all the other graces. The other parts of our mountaineering outfit are the alpenstock and the knapsack. The former represents the power of God, and the latter the Word of God. The knapsack contains the *bread of*

life, the *water* of truth, the *wine* of comfort and exhortation, and the *oil* of joy for our mourning. Thus in our outfit the four attributes of God's character are all represented, the wisdom of God by the knapsack, the justice of God by the robe of righteousness, the power of God by the alpenstock, and the love of God by the girdle.

THE GIRDLE OF LOVE

The girdle not only binds together the various graces of the spirit of which it is the chief, but the same girdle of love also binds us to Christ our guide, and to one another. If we were to attempt to ascend this mountain alone, we should find it impossible. We must have our Guide with us, and probably also some fellow-travellers. In Eccl. 4:9-12, we read: "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour: for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up." If we attempt to go up alone, and fall, we should not be able to raise ourselves, but when we have the Lord beside us, he will help us up, and then both he and we shall have a good reward for our labour. "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone." The reason why the nominal Christian is lukewarm, is because he has not the Lord with him, "And if one prevail against him" - supposing Satan or one of his agents were to attack us when we are alone, he would prevail against us, - but "two shall withstand him," my Lord and I together. "And a three-fold cord is not quickly broken." I am not sure what Solomon meant by this cord which is not easily broken, but probably it is the cord of love, the bond of perfect love, the bond of perfectness, which binds us to Christ and to our fellow-travellers, and by which we are enabled to retain our footing and ascend the mountain of God.

The wise man says that this cord is threefold. Cords are composed of a great number of threads gathered into strands, then these strands are woven tightly round each other. The girdle of perfectness which binds the graces of the spirit and keeps us close to the Master, is composed of three strands woven round one another, and it appears that these three strands are the precepts of God, the promises of God, and the prayers of the saints, the three "P's," we might call them. We cannot succeed with any one of these alone, nor even with two; we must have all the three interwoven with each other, and operating in unison in order to keep us close to the Master, and enable us to reach the summit of the mountain. If we examine these three strands, the precepts, the promises and the prayers, we shall find that there is love in every thread, and so the whole girdle is the cord of love.

All the *precepts* of God, individually and collectively, are love. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Again who can study the many exceeding great and precious *promises* of God without perceiving that they all represent love, the love of God for us, drawing out our love for him!

And then, what are the *prayers* of the saints but love? Is it not our love for, as well as our trust in God and his Truth, that brings out our prayers to him for ourselves and for our brethren, and do not our Heavenly Father's answers to our prayers increase our love and our trust.

THE PRECEPTS OF GOD

The precepts of God are also the precepts of Christ. Jesus said, "If a man love me he will keep my words; and my Father will love him and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (John 14:23,24). The way to keep close to the Master is to love him and keep his words (precepts). Remember that "Love is the fulfilling of the law." This forms an important test by which we may decide whether we have properly grasped and followed the leading of the divine precepts. If we are striving to understand and obey some particular precept and the result of obeying it is love, we may feel sure we are right. But if the result is not love, then we are wrong, either in our interpretation of the precept, or in our method of giving effect to it.

Let me give you an example. You will find it in John 13:14, 15. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." Nothing could be more explicit than that. It may be claimed that if we do not wash one another's feet, we are not obeying the Lord. In the East, where Jesus spoke these words, the people wore sandals, and their feet soon became hot and dusty. Hence, the custom was, when anyone arrived at a house, for one of the servants to take off the sandals and wash the traveller's feet. It must have been soothing and refreshing. That is what Jesus did for his disciples, and what he asked them to do for one another.

This humble service must have been appreciated, especially because of the love and humility which prompted it. But supposing we in the West were to attempt to carry out this injunction according to the letter, the result would not be love, we should simply be a nuisance. This clearly proves that in this instance, we should do wrong to obey Christ according to the letter. Our obedience to this precept should be according to the spirit, that is to say, we ought to wash one another's feet in the sense of humbly and lovingly serving one another, "in honour preferring one another." "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:27).

Of all Christ's precepts the one to which he drew special attention, was the "new commandment." The old commandment was to love our neighbours as ourselves. The new commandment is to love the brethren as Christ loved us, that is to say, more than ourselves, to "lay down our lives for the brethren" (John 13:34; I John 3:16). This means that we must give time, talents, influence, energies, at the expense of our comfort, health and life, for our brethren in Christ. This was not asked of the Jews, nor will it be asked of the world in the Age to follow this, but it is asked of us who desire to be followers of Christ Jesus.

But while endeavouring to bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ, we must be careful to respect each others' liberty of conscience. We must judge not, that we be not judged. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand. Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Rom. 14:4-13). The law of love demands that we should seek the truth and obey it ourselves, and do our best to tell it meekly and lovingly to others, but it also demands that we should neither endeavour to force our opinions on others nor despise or speak ill of them, should they fail to think and act as we do. This is one of the chief tests that the brethren are undergoing in this evil day. Let us pray for one another that we shall humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

THE DIVINE PROMISES

So far we have considered only one of the strands of the cord of love which keeps us close to the Master and one another. May we all be able to say with the Master, "I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart," not within my head only, but deeper down within my heart.

Woven closely round this strand there is another, the bond of *the divine promises*, without which the other would be insufficient. If we were to trust merely to our endeavours to obey God's precepts we should be like Israel under the Law. That which was ordained unto life would be found to be unto death; but, thanks be to God, we are not under the Law but under Grace. The promises of God are so interwoven with his precepts that we find it difficult, impossible in fact, to separate them. I advise you, dear brethren, not to make the attempt. One without the other will prove of no avail to us. Both of them represent love, and the one helps the other.

The threads of this strand are numerous and of different kinds. We are learning and appreciating them more as we ascend the mountain of God.

(1) Many of the promises are for the purpose of assuring us that *God does not expect perfection of conduct* on our part. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. 103:14). With the precepts not to sin, we have the promise of the covering merit of our Redeemer's blood. With the precepts bidding us suffer and die with Christ, we have the promise that we are "accepted in the Beloved," accepted in Christ, not accepted for ourselves.

(2) Knowing our various weaknesses and our tendency to lack of zeal, our Heavenly Father has given us many promises which have for their object *the rousing of our flagging energies and the exciting of our hopes*. Coupled with the precept to be faithful unto death, there is the gracious promise that a crown of life will be given to us. The prospect of this great joy should stir us up to greater zeal and faithfulness. Again, we are told to overcome evil with good, and for our encouragement we are promised, if overcomers, power over the nations and a seat on the throne with Christ.

(1) Still others of the promises are for the sake of *giving us comfort and peace now in the midst of trials and tribulation, enabling us to realize that God is protecting us*. Amongst these are such glorious promises as: "All things work together for good to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28); and the parting legacy of our Lord Jesus: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). The world's idea of the right method of securing peace is by so arranging everything that there will be financial, social and political prosperity. That is why the great armies and navies are maintained, and why laws are passed and everything possible is done to secure good trade and increase the confidence of the people in the government.

But with all its efforts, though the kings and statesmen are crying "Peace, peace," there is no peace. On the contrary, unrest and discontent are on the increase. But Jesus said: "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Christ's method of giving peace is referred to indirectly in John 16:33. "These words I have spoken unto you that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The Lord's method is not by granting earthly prosperity, but by permitting trials and difficulties to come upon us. The purpose is to enable us to realize our own weakness, so that we may learn to place entire reliance on the Lord and not on self. When we are able to say with the Apostle. "I have learnt in whatsoever

state I am in therewith to be content,” then the peace of God will rule in our heart, and we shall be of good cheer, realizing that Christ has overcome the world, and that we are “accepted in the Beloved.”

We are also assured that we shall never be tempted above that we are able to bear; that the weaker we are the more strength the Lord will use on our behalf, and that the victory does not depend upon our strength, nor on our personal righteousness, but upon our faith. We have God’s word also that he will finish the good work which he has begun in us, provided only that we retain our faith.

These are only a few among the many “exceeding great and precious promises whereby we might become partakers of the divine nature.” Like the precepts, they all spell the same word, - LOVE. They show the love of God for us, and draw out our love for him.

THE PRAYERS OF SAINTS

The third strand is composed of *the prayers of the saints*. If we were to trust to the other two strands alone, the cord would snap. God has so arranged his plan that the prayers of the saints are just as essential as the precepts and the promises. The three strands are all necessary to form this cord of love, and “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

Possibly God could have arranged matters differently, so that whether we prayed or not, we should prosper spiritually, but he has not done so.

(1) One reason is that *prayer brings home to us our dependence upon him*, the creator and sustainer of all things, and the giver of every good and perfect gift. It is only he who humbles himself under the mighty hand of God who will be exalted in due time.

Another reason is that *by prayer we are brought into direct communion with the Lord*. That is one of the most precious reasons why God instituted prayer. Our hearts should be full of thankfulness to him that we are permitted to draw near with the endearing name “Father” on our lips.

(2) Still another reason is that we may pray for one another. This *strengthens our sympathy with the brethren* in their trials and difficulties. Nothing binds us closer together than our prayers for the brethren and the knowledge that they are praying for us. We ought to make daily use of this privilege and not only so, but we ought to let the others know that we are praying for them. It encourages them.

(1) A fourth reason why *God has instituted prayer is in order that we might try to search out his will*, so that we may pray according to it. He knows what is best for us. John gives us the blessed assurance that if we ask anything according to God’s will, he hears us, and if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of him (1 John 5:14,15). That is the full assurance of faith. When we search what is God’s will concerning us, we find that “This is the will of God, even our sanctification.” Our prayers should not therefore be so much for temporal earthly things, as for eternal spiritual things. God will supply the temporal necessities without our asking. He wants us to be more concerned about our spiritual needs.

(4) Again, *by earnest prayer we show our desire for the things we ask, and so our hearts and minds are brought into the proper attitude to receive them*.

If we get a thing without asking for it we are apt not to appreciate it, but if we ask for it, especially if we ask again and again for it, not only does this show that we really want it, but *our desire for it is increased*.

(1) Lastly, when sooner or later our prayer is answered in the Lord’s way, and the Lord’s way is always best for him and for us, *our faith is strengthened in the loving-kindness of our God, and in the power of his might*.

Cornelius was a beautiful example of the power of prayer. He was the first Gentile to be received into the body of Christ. Till that time the Jews were exclusively favoured with the opportunity of becoming partakers of the High Calling, while the Gentiles were “strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” When the angel of the Lord was sending Peter to Cornelius in order that Cornelius might receive the Holy Spirit and be privileged to become a partaker of the High Calling, he said to Cornelius: “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.”

Having considered these points; the clothing, the knapsack, the alpenstock, and the cord which binds us to Christ and to one another, we shall now consider whether we have reasonable grounds for faith in our Guide.

(J. Edgar, 1909) (To be concluded)

THE YEAR BEFORE US

Another new year is upon us, another year of discipleship in the School of Christ, another year to praise our God and to declare His glory as we have opportunity, not only in word but also, and more importantly, in our

lives. We do not know we cannot know, what the future holds for each one of us, but we do know who holds the future in His hands, So it is the best, indeed the only way, for us to commit our lives afresh into His keeping, trusting in His love and wisdom for another year.

We are a privileged people, for our Heavenly Father has seen fit to reveal to us, in advance of the rest of mankind, something of His glory, not only as exhibited in His majesty and power, but also in His character of loving kindness and tender mercy. *“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6)* *“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)*

The glory of God has been revealed in some measure throughout the ages and the apostle Paul tells us that it should be evident in His creation. More particularly, it was declared through God’s prophets to His people Israel, though not recognised by the many. The Psalmist, however, a man after God’s own heart was moved to exclaim: *“The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, their voice is not heard. Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” (Psalm 19:1-4 ASV)*

But it is only in the final manifestation of God’s glory in the sending of His beloved Son that it has been fully declared, though again it is as yet only to those with the eyes of the faith that it is revealed. The beloved apostle John who saw and heard and walked with the Master records: *“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)*

All those who followed with Jesus through the years of His earthly ministry indeed heard His gracious words, saw His miracles and His acts of healing and compassion to the sick, the sad and the downtrodden, and the inspired words of the Evangelists recount to us what they had experienced or learnt of that glory, the very image of the

Father’s glory. But still, it is only by the eye of faith and the illumination of the Holy Spirit that we can in measure comprehend that glory.

Such a manifestation of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ is indeed a precious treasure, but it is not given just for the gratification of the recipient, but represents to each one both a privilege and a responsibility.

(1) It should lead to heartfelt and reverent appreciation of God’s glory, His might and majesty, and above all His glorious character of love.

(2) It should lead to fervent desire to grow into the image of His glory as portrayed in our Saviour and perfect Pattern.

(1) It should lead to consistent zeal to show forth His praises, whose glory has shone into our hearts.

(4) It should lead to deep longing for that time when God’s glory will be made known to all mankind, as pictured so beautifully for us by many of the O.T. prophets and by the Revelator.

How blessed we are to know that soon earth’s clouds of trouble will part and the great Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His beams for all people, the glory of God will be shed abroad to all nations and God’s promise will be fulfilled: *“I will make the place of my feet glorious!” (Isaiah 60: 13 .)*

May the new year find each follower of Jesus more and more praising God for the light of His glory so far received, more and more seeking to be changed into the perfect likeness of His Son, more and more showing forth His praises and looking for that day when the *“earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Hab. 2:14)*

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Happy, because He loves thee!
Happy, because He lives!
Bright with that deepest gladness
Which only Jesus gives.
Happy, because He guides thee,
Because He cares for thee;
Happy, ever so happy,
Thus may thy New Year be!

(F.R.H.)