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Think on These Things (Phil. 4:8)

(Convention Address)

What things should we be thinking about? What should be the character of our thoughts? Thoughts are the beginning of all things — the creation of the universe began with a thought.

Thoughts are the seeds which are planted to make our characters grow. Each person is like a farm; Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "Ye are God's husbandry." The thought is—you are God's farm. As with natural farms, there is great diversity. Sometimes we come to a farm where everything looks nice—rows of corn appear lush and everything is green and thriving. There are no weeds, indicating good cultivation. It is refreshing to see a farm like that. However, we may then see another farm where the rows are crooked, the crops do not look well, weeds are thriving and there is evidence of neglect. It is so with the individual. One has a character like a nicely cultivated farm—patience, love, zeal, godliness, earnestness and other grand qualities are growing in his or her character. Another whose character is like the farm overgrown with weeds is growing envy, jealousy, malice, strife and all kinds of evil fruitage. Just as a farmer plants seed to raise crops, so something is needed to raise or grow a character. The little seed which the farmer plants corresponds with the little thought which we plant. The seed is very small yet it produces a large plant. A thought also is a very small thing, yet how much will grow from it.

"Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. 6:7,8) When Paul says "he that sows to the flesh" he refers to those who think thoughts out of harmony with God's will—thoughts in keeping with the spirit of the flesh. If we entertain such thoughts, we are sowing to the flesh. When we read "whatever he sows, that shall he reap," we tend to think of this more along the lines of actions. But why do we do what we do? We begin by thinking—our thoughts determine where we go, what we do, how we spend our money, what words we speak. Everything starts with a thought. The same apostle further states: "I have sown, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Here again he refers to thoughts; when Paul came among them he planted certain thoughts in their minds which they never had before. Apollos encouraged these thoughts and finally God brought them to fruition.

If we are trying to serve the Lord, and a wrong thought comes to mind, then if we plant that thought we are sowing corruption and we will reap corruption. We may not be lost on that account, but we are making it harder for ourselves and if we get into the kingdom, we will have a lower place because we were willing to retain these wrong thoughts. If you or I entertain the thought that God may desert us, we are entertaining an untrue thought and as we do so, it will begin to develop the weeds of doubt. If we go on to harbour these, we may lose our faith. When a thought of this kind comes to our mind, let us reason that it is impossible for God to forget His promises, it is impossible for Him to go back on His word, it is impossible for Him to desert His child. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

The two words—thought and think—can have different meanings:

THOUGHT — idea, notion

THINK — deliberate, meditate, reflect, contemplate

We are not to blame for our thoughts, but we are to blame for what we think. We are not necessarily to be commended for our good thoughts, nor blamed for our bad thoughts. But if we entertain them, that is a different matter.

“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Let us take for our guidance in this matter the apostle Paul’s final admonition to the Philippian church, as recorded in Ch. 4:8. In this chapter, Paul is giving instructions to the church as to how they should build themselves up in the most holy faith. Preceding the text scripture, he gives the following thought: “Therefore my brethren whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord my beloved. Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:1, 4-7 RSV)

Then in the text scripture, Paul imparts to us very detailed instructions on what to think about: “Finally brethren whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Phil. 4:8 KJV); and continuing on into the next verse: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace will be with you.” They should have heard and seen that these good thoughts had brought the peace of God to Paul. In verses 7 and 9, we see that they also can bring us this peace which passes all understanding. If we have this peace, we can then rejoice in the Lord, have no anxiety about anything and let our requests be known to God.

The Manna Comment for April 27 says, in part: “To have the mind of Christ is indeed the one requirement of lawful striving.... a mind which humbly and faithfully submits itself to the will of God, as expressed in His great plan of the ages, and which devotes all energy to the accomplishment of His will, because of an intelligent appreciation of the end He has in view.” All know what a great influence the mind has over the body. The more we think on good things, the better we will be; and just the opposite, the more we think on evil things, the more evil we will become. If a thing has none of the qualities of the text scripture, then we should not think on it at all. But if we think on those things which have the wisdom and depth which comes from God alone, then a wonderful change of character is effected. We must desire to be led by God and to conform our thoughts to His. Thoughts can be controlled, just as words and actions can be controlled.

“My son, be attentive to my words; incline thine ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to him who finds them, and healing to all his flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you. Take heed to the path of your feet, then all your ways will be straight.” (Prov. 4:20-26 RSV) “Out of the heart flow the springs of life.” The heart is the governing power of mankind and represents the will and intention. It must be kept true and centred in God. But the will is subject to many influences and if our thoughts are impure, unjust or unholy, the power of the will becomes weaker. The thoughts of those who are striving to make their calling and election sure must not be permitted to dwell on evil things, but must be disciplined to dwell on the deeper things of the word of God. The new heart is to be kept loyal to God, to the principles of righteousness and to His covenant, to be active in love and helpfulness and in the cultivation of thoughts in accord with the divine.

The Criteria

Turning to the text scripture (Phil. 4:8), the first test quality for our thinking is: “Is it TRUE?” This is the first consideration in any matter. Webster defines true as—reliable, certain, in accordance with fact, agreeing with reality, not false. We know that the word of God is true, and that He will be true to His word, as we read in Psa. 119:160—“The sum of Thy words is truth, and everyone of Thy righteous ordinances endures for ever.” We know that He is the only true God (Jer. 10:10) and that His ways are true (Rev. 15:3). And no person was truer than Jesus—He was the True Light, the True Vine, His word was true and He was the True and Faithful Witness.

But does our text mean to think on anything that is true? There are hundreds of branches of science, each based upon profound truths. Are we to seek to master these, to think upon these things? And beside these, there are many unwholesome, scandalous and trivial things which are also true. Are we to fill our minds with these? Of course not! The apostle’s words require some qualification, a right dividing of the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

When Paul directs us to think on whatsoever things are true, he is speaking of the Truth, as the Lord’s people use and understand His precious words, a knowledge of the great divine plan of ages, the only way in which the scriptures are seen to be both beautiful and harmonious. As we contemplate and meditate on the truth, let us thank God for

1. the plan of salvation, revealing God to be a God of love, compassion and mercy,
2. the philosophy of the ransom, whereby Christ died for all—that God will have all to be saved and come

to a knowledge of the truth, the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by all His holy prophets since the world began, the great mystery of Christ, the Head, and the church, His body—"Christ in you, the hope of glory."

3. the exceeding great and precious promises of God,
4. the special care of God over the church, leading them in the narrow way, and
5. His divine plan of ages, and our part in it, whereby if we are faithful, we may be actually God's instruments in bringing these things to pass, and thus the blessing of the whole world.

"Make me to know Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; for Thee I wait all the day long." (Psa. 25:4,5 RSV) Love for truth lies at the foundation of a righteous life. If we want to be the precious treasure of the Lord, if we want Him to claim us as His own, we must establish habits of thought which will keep the truth fresh, lively and inspiring to us. Whatsoever things are true, of the truth, think on these things.

But the truth of a thing is only one of the tests we should apply. Another is—"Is it HONEST?" Honest means trustworthy, honorable, genuine, real, respectable, showing fairness and sincerity. There are many things that are true, but dishonorable and not worthy of our thought. Honesty is a basic quality; we cannot even start our Christian walk without it. When the apostles chose seven helpers, they chose men who were of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Pet. 2:12 KJV) We should be honorable in all our affairs, confessing to being children of God and walking in the footsteps of Jesus. All should see to it that they are honest in treatment of neighbours, in treatment of the brethren, and above all in their confessions respecting their God and their faith. All of us desire honesty in ourselves, as well as in others. "Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all." (Rom. 12:17 RSV)

We should dismiss all thoughts that are dishonorable and unworthy. Rom. 13:13 admonishes us to walk honestly, as in the day. That day points us to the millennial day, when all will have to walk honestly, if they are to receive the earthly blessings of that age. As new creatures, we have a much higher calling and should voluntarily give the same meticulous attention to our conduct now, as in that day. We know that God is honorable and that He should be honored, along with our Redeemer. Any dishonorable act of ours will bring dishonor on God's name. We desire to bring honor and glory to His name, so whatsoever things are honest or honorable, let us think on these things.

Things that are JUST—here is another test quality we should look for. Justice should be the rule of our lives. Webster gives just as - lawful, right, fair, proper, righteous, upright. We know that God and His dear Son Jesus are just, as we read:

"There is no God beside me, a just God and a Saviour, there is none beside me." (Isa. 45:21 KJV)

"By myself I can do nothing. As I hear from God, I judge and my judgment is true, because I do not live to please myself, but to do the will of God who sent me." (John 5:30 JBP)

That which is just is that which is right; justice and righteousness are synonymous terms. The golden rule—"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you"—is the rule of justice.

We have no right to expect more than justice; whatever we receive more than justice is love or favour. God will be pleased with nothing less than our continued opposition to every form of unrighteousness. Many claiming to be Christians are blind to justice and righteousness in the affairs of life. They have too much mercy on their own shortcomings and not enough on the shortcomings of others. The October 14 Manna comment reads: "We are to grow in love and love is the principal thing, but before we can make much development in the cultivation of love, we must learn to be just, right, righteous. It is a proper presentation of the matter that is given in the proverb that a man should be just before he is generous. All love that is founded upon injustice, or wrong ideas of righteousness, is delusive, is not the love which the Lord will require as the test of discipleship."

We are to learn to apply this test of justice to our every thought, word and act, at the same time learning to view the conduct of others, so far as reason will permit, from the standpoint of mercy, pity, forgiveness, helpfulness. We cannot be too careful of how we criticise, of every thought we entertain, of every plan we nurture, so that the lines of justice shall in no way be infringed willingly by us. We should think not only of the good things, the higher things, but the blessed things to come, and thus have our minds busy thinking on whatsoever things are just. Once it becomes a habit, it will be a constant delight.

Whatever things are PURE—this is the next test quality. To be pure means to be free from anything that adulterates, free from defects, perfect, faultless, free from sin and guilt. Our thoughts should avoid anything that while not impure in itself might have the effect of arousing impurity in another. The heart that is corrupt expects and looks for corruption in others. But the pure avoids evil surmisings. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8 KJV) The heart refers to intention or will. Purity of mind and conduct must be developed insofar as is possible. This must command our best efforts; we are to love and cultivate that which is pure to such an extent that what is impure will become painful to us and distressing, and we shall desire to drop it from memory. This will be accomplished only by continually thinking upon those things that are pure. To think on the purest of things, we must of necessity lift our mental vision to as high a point as possible. Peter said that we are to purify our lives by obedience to the truth and sincere love for the brethren. (1 Peter 1:22)

The scriptures speak to us of the pure doctrine and the pure messages of truth given by the Lord for our enlightenment: “The promises of the Lord are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace, on the ground, purified seven times.” (Psa. 12:6 RSV) “Thy promise is well tried and Thy servant loves it.” (Psa. 119:140 RSV) “The wisdom that comes from above is pure.” (Jas. 3:17 JBP)

The early church had the pure truth; the apostles kept them straight in doctrine. “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27) But when the apostles died, the light began to fade and perverse, impure doctrines were introduced. (See Acts 20:29,30) During the Dark Ages, the truth all but disappeared, but the Lord determined to restore the truth to the household of faith at His second presence and did so by the hand of a faithful and wise servant. “Contend for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3) These pure truths are worth thinking about, fighting for and holding on to.

Think on those things that are LOVELY. This calls our attention to the need not to allow our minds to dwell upon things that are not lovely—we might permit our business to so fill our thoughts that we think continually on that particular thing. Constant thought on these lines is not profitable to the new creature. We must endeavour to bring our thoughts into subjection and train them along the lines that will transform us into the glorious character-likeness of our Lord. The dictionary defines lovely as—beautiful, exquisite, morally or spiritually attractive, having those qualities that inspire love, affection or admiration. How wonderful if our minds were filled only with lovely thoughts! These relate to the things of character, such as the fruits of the Spirit outlined in Gal. 5:22,23—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. If we cultivate these in our hearts, we become more and more God-like, but if we fail to do so, the works of the flesh and the devil will be developed.

There are so many lovely things that we can think about:

1. The divine plan of ages is lovely,
2. God the author of the divine plan is most worthy of love,
3. An object of great loveliness is Jesus—we never tire of thinking of Him, the author and finisher of faith,
4. Our opportunity to reign with Him, if faithful, is also a lovely prospect.

So let us think upon whatsoever things are lovely.

If things are of GOOD REPORT, then they are reputable, well thought of, respectable, not sub-standard, but gracious (as translated in RSV). Two references to this great quality are:

“But Thou Lord art a God merciful and gracious.” (Psa. 86:15 RSV)

“And He began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And all spoke well of Him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.” (Luke 4:21,22 RSV)

The word used includes the thought of being reputable (Diag.), that which would be well thought of by reputable people, or those of good repute. It would not mean that it was necessarily well spoken of by the world. Jesus was of good report but was reviled by the world, which said all manner of things against Him falsely. We need to be so careful in our daily lives, that the only thing which we would suffer for would be that we are Christians.

Just as good report can build one up, so evil report can injure one’s reputation. Fallen human nature is inclined towards evil, and a human trait is to believe evil more readily than good of a person. This is bad enough, but worse, the good things we know about anyone are often forgotten, but the evil things we think we know are repeated and circulated, often with relish. This could have terrible results and seriously hamper usefulness in the Lord’s service. It makes no difference whether the evil thing is true or not; just because it may be true is in itself no reason for telling it. Our thoughts must be gracious, reputable and of good repute if we are to be faithful and give our will to God. Whatever things are of good report, think on these things.

If there be any VIRTUE, or as Webster defines it, excellence in general, moral excellence, good quality, goodness of character; things that are in any degree noble...noble words, noble deeds, noble sentiments of anyone—if we meditate on these, we will find ourselves growing towards those ideals and upon these, our mind—the new nature feeds. Peter tells us:

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge.” (2 Peter 1:3,5 RSV) We need to listen carefully to his following words (verse 8):

“For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thinking on these things will keep us fruitful in the knowledge of God. The people of God who follow the instructions of the divine word become noble people, helpful people, possessed of the spirit of a sound mind. These will also extol the virtues of God Himself, understand more of His glorious character, see that His every act is motivated by love and that He loves us, particularly and individually. If there be any virtue, think on these things.

The last of the eight great qualities is PRAISE. Praise is defined as a simple, basic word implying an expression of approval, esteem, commendation or of lauding the glory of God. We should not even think about praising ourselves, and yet we should try to make our actions praiseworthy. We are to think mainly about the praise of God. Praise to God is an acceptable act of worship. Many psalms speak of praise, such as:

“Praise the Lord. I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.” (Psa. 111:1 RSV) “Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.” (Psa. 106:1 RSV)

Can we imagine any more sincere or enthusiastic occasion of praise than that of the man lame from birth who was healed by Peter and entered the temple, walking and leaping and praising God?

In Acts 16:23-26 we read that Paul and Silas had been brutally beaten in Philippi and were put in chains. At midnight they sang and praised God and the other prisoners heard. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, all the doors were opened and everyone’s bonds were loosed. Do we want doors opened, bonds loosed or problems solved? Let us praise God, extol His virtues, name and recount every wonderful thing we can remember about Him—His personal attributes, His marvellous works of creation, His divine plan so just and yet so merciful, the precious gift of His Son, His incredible provision that we might be associated with Jesus in His kingdom, His providences in our lives, His exceeding great and precious promises, and there are still many more things for which we may praise Him. Let us think indeed about praising God from whom all blessings flow.

These are then the eight scriptural qualities which things must have, before we think upon them. They are to be:

1. True - 2. Honest (honorable) - 3. Just - 4. Pure - 5. Lovely - 6. Of good report (gracious) - 7. Virtuous (excellent) - 8. Praise-worthy

And we need further to remember:

“As a man thinketh, so he is.” (Prov. 23:7) “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” (Gal. 6:7)

Every thought should therefore be challenged because it affects our words and our conduct and extends to others. We should desire to have in our hearts and minds things that are positively good, beneficial and uplifting. Desires for earthly things have a natural attraction for all mankind, but if we want to keep ourselves in the love of God, we must put our affections on heavenly things and continually keep on weeding out earthly desires and attractions. We can hardly over-estimate the importance of right thinking, because of the great influence of the mind over the body. Let us take pleasure in the cultivation of the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. Thus we shall become transformed by the renewing of our minds and come nearer to the glorious likeness of our Master, being changed inch by inch, step by step, little by little during this present life.

Let thoughts of the blessedness of our future work in co-operation with Christ, of the magnitude and benevolence of the divine plan, and of the glory and blessedness of our gathering together into Christ, when the work of the present age is finished, fill our minds and inspire our hearts. And further, let us also receive the additional comfort and blessing of personal communion and fellowship with God through prayer, the study of His word and the assembling of ourselves together for worship and praise. Those who are thinking on the true and lovely and good and beautiful things will speak to each other of these things, hence the importance of having our hearts filled with good things, in order that out of the abundance of our hearts, our mouths may speak continually that which the Lord would approve and that would bring blessing to all who hear. (A.A. 9/91)

THINK ON THESE THINGS!

A New Year Prayer

Another year is dawning;
Dear Master, let it be,
In working or in waiting,
Another year with Thee.

Another year of mercies,
Of faithfulness and grace;
Another year of gladness,
In the shining of Thy face.

Another year of progress,
Another year of praise,
Another year of proving
Thy presence all the days.

Another year of service,
Of witness for Thy love;
Another year of training
For holier work above.

Another year is dawning;
Dear Master, let it be,
In working or in waiting,
Another year for Thee.
(E.R.H.)

Precious Promises (Convention Address)

“May favour and peace be multiplied to you by a knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; even as His divine power has granted to us all things relating to life and piety, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue; on account of which very great and precious promises have been bestowed on us, so that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having fled away from the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Peter 1: 2-4 — Diaglott)

For whom do these words apply? Were these instructions given to sinners? Is this the way sinners approach God? No, these instructions are addressed to those justified through faith in the blood of Christ, as shown in Verse 1: “to those who have obtained an equally precious faith with us, by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” To become a believer in Jesus Christ, a justified and consecrated believer, is not enough. There has to be a progress while in these earthly bodies; if we are faithful, this will be completed in the first resurrection. The apostle’s thought is that of continuous progress.

Many might think of additions and subtractions of grace and peace, finding and losing, but Peter speaks of multiplication. “May favour and peace be MULTIPLIED to you.” Many again lack a knowledge of the things necessary to preserve to them the favour and peace found in Christ as their Redeemer, and lack sufficient understanding to multiply their favour and peace. These are mentioned in 1 Cor. 3:1; “And I, brethren, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly persons, as to babes in Christ.”

The true foundation upon which to build is faith in the righteousness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, faith that His sacrifice for sin was once for all, a full and complete ransom price for Adam and all his posterity, so that all may be brought to a knowledge of Christ in due time. It is those who build upon this foundation who may hope to multiply their grace and peace. But how? Peter answers: “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.’ To some it may seem that we come to know God and to know that there is a Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but a knowledge of God is much more than this. It means an intimate acquaintance with the Father and with the Son, a knowledge of the mind of Christ, which itself is a full and clear representation of the mind of the Father.

We grow in this knowledge by study of the Word of God and by ascertaining how divine justice, wisdom, love and power operate. These are progressive studies. Peter shows us that, through this knowledge of God, there are imparted to us all things related to life and piety or godliness. To know God, as Peter here explains, means an intimate knowledge and it is only when we see the beauties of His character that we can become intimately acquainted with Him. The influence of this knowledge and fellowship reacts upon our hearts and has a cleansing and sanctifying effect. "But we all beholding the glory of the Lord in a face unveiled, are transformed into the same likeness, as from the Lord, the Spirit." 2 Cor. 3:18.

The apostle Paul prays that believers may grow in the knowledge of God, as in Eph. 3:14-19: "For this cause I bend my knees to the Father, from whom the whole family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He may give you according to His glorious wealth, to be powerfully strengthened through His spirit in the inner man; that the Anointed One, through the faith, may dwell in your hearts; that, being rooted in love and well-established, you may be fully able to understand with all the saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, to know even that which surpasses knowledge—the love of the Anointed One; so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

The world in general does not know God, and it is evident also that many professing Christians know little about Him. Paul explains to us that Satan is particularly interested in hindering any from obtaining the light of truth. He declares in 2 Cor. 4:4: "the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Here we see the constant conflict of darkness against light; the darkness hates the light for all who see and rejoice in the light are the children of the light. After the image of the Lord has been impressed upon their hearts, they become light-bearers, reflecting to others the light shining on them from the divine source.

On account of this call of God, great and precious promises have been given to His people. These are so many and so precious that it is difficult to know which to rank first. But perhaps the first of all is the precious promise that, although what we shall be like has not yet been made known, "when He our Lord shall appear, we shall be LIKE HIM, for we shall see Him as He is." "If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I overcame and am set down with my Father on His throne." "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." (my treasured possessions).

"For these light afflictions do work out in us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "Then we will be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings, that we may also share in His glory." "To him that overcometh I will give authority over the nations, just as I received authority from my Father." (1 John 3:2, John 14:3, Rev. 3:21, Mal. 3:17, 2 Cor. 4:17, Rom. 8:17, Rev. 2:26,27)

These are only a few of all His exceeding great and precious promises; they are summed up by Peter, who says that it is God's will and purpose that through these we might become partakers of the divine nature. Who could have thought of such a thing? Our earthly minds might have thought to reach human perfection, or even to go to heaven as an angel, but though the angelic nature is higher than the human, that is not what God has promised. No, He has promised the overcoming church, the little flock, that they shall share the divine nature of her Lord, as well as share in His heavenly kingdom. We cannot really comprehend why the great Creator should exalt to His own nature, but we accept that the lengths and breadths of His grand designs surpass all human knowledge. Having been privileged to see something of His glorious character, shall we not want to attain to all He might be pleased to reveal to us? to be partakers of His likeness, more and more acceptable? and finally to be actually and everlastingly accepted in our beloved Lord? This will indeed be the full realisation of the blessings and promises God has given us.

Such promises and such knowledge should inspire our hearts to love and sacrifice, as the apostle John tells us in 1 John 3:3: "Everyone having this hope in him purifies himself, as He is pure." May the exceeding great and precious promises of God continue to sustain us in the narrow way. (D.O.)

A Peculiar People

"Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." —Titus 2:14.

A Special Treasure

The Greek word translated “peculiar” in our text, according to Prof. Strong, means that which is special, or beyond the usual. The apostle’s thought evidently is that this people whom Christ purifies unto Himself are esteemed by Him and by the Heavenly Father as a special treasure. Similar language is used by God concerning natural Israel. We read, “Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is Mine. And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”—Ex. 19:5,6.

High indeed was the possibility of Israel’s relationship toward God, but it was dependent upon continued faithfulness in obeying His voice and keeping His commandments. As a nation Israel failed all along the line; and finally, when the nation rejected Jesus, was cast off from all hope of enjoying the chief place of favor in the divine arrangement. Concerning this Paul explains: “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”—Romans 11:7.

The apostle explains, however, that a remnant of individuals from among Israel qualified for the chief blessing. This agrees with the statement concerning Jesus which says that “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not; but as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.” (John 1:11,12). But there were not sufficient who received the Master to make up the foreordained number of the special people, so the remaining ones were called from among the Gentiles. Explaining this Paul says that the Gentile branches were grafted into the Jewish olive tree to take the places of the natural branches that were broken off because of unbelief. (Rom. 11:17-30). This is a “graft” which is “contrary to nature,” because usually it is tame branches that are grafted into a wild root; and the nature of the branches determines the kind and quality of the fruit. But not so with the Gentiles grafted into the Jewish tree.

Zeal For God’s Will

Israel’s standing as God’s peculiar treasure continued only as long as the nation was zealous for hearing and obeying the voice of God. So we, who have come into this favored position as spiritual Israelites can hope to be reckoned among God’s choice treasure only if we are “zealous for good works”. “Take heed,” the apostle warns, for if God spared not the natural branches He will certainly not spare us if we become unfaithful. Evidently the one characteristic above all others which commends an individual to God is that of zeal for doing His will. Without this zeal no one can hope to be a part of God’s peculiar people.

The example of zeal which we should endeavour to emulate is that which was displayed by Jesus. The zeal of God’s house consumed Him; and we are called to follow in His steps. Jesus’ zeal was manifested in the sacrifice of His earthly life on behalf of the church and the world. We are invited to lay down our lives for the brethren, and also to be baptized for the dead. Jesus’ sacrifice constitutes the basis of redemption for both the church and the world, and we are invited to share with Him in administering the benefits of the ransom. No matter how much zeal we might display, our sacrifice would not be acceptable apart from the Master’s; but because we serve in His name we have the assurance of being “holy and acceptable.”

Redeemed and Purified

In our text the apostle tells us that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity.” As members of the condemned and fallen race we were contaminated with sin, because “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23). Jesus’ redemptive work makes it possible for us to be made free from “the law of sin and death,” and acceptable unto God by Him. But the mere fact that we accept this provision of divine grace is not sufficient to constitute us a part of God’s peculiar people. In addition to this we must be “purified.”

This purification is effected by our obedience to the truth—the “washing of water by the Word.” This is a cleansing from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. It is the washing away of selfishness and self-will so that the divine will may reign supreme in our hearts. This cleansing must be thorough if we are to be God’s peculiar people. It must be more than a mere passive submission to His will. It must be a consuming zeal for the accomplishment of the divine will irrespective of what the cost to us may be. To thus be purified will mean that we are, indeed, a people “zealous of good works.”

These “good works” for which we will be zealous are God’s works. It was so in Jesus’ case. He came, not to do His own will and work, but the will and work of His Father. In a prayer to His Father, Jesus said, “As Thou has sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them in to the world.” (John 17:18). This is a wondrous partnership in which we are invited to share. We can add nothing of value to the partnership, and the only way by which we can commend ourselves to the Lord is through our zeal for the work that is being done. As “workers together with Him” are we endeavouring to set everything else aside in order that we may zealously engage in that which