

Abounding with Thanksgiving

*“As ye have
therefore received
Christ Jesus the
Lord, so walk ye in
him: Rooted and
built up in him,
and stablished in
the faith, as ye
have been taught,
abounding
therein with
thanksgiving.”
—Colossians 2:6,7*

THOSE WHO HAVE entered into the blessed relationship described in our opening text should be, as the Apostle Paul states, “abounding therein with thanksgiving.” The Greek word here translated “abounding” literally means to “be in excess.” In other words, to be abounding Christians implies zeal, labor, sacrifice, and application of righteous principles

in excess of the normal way of life. This abounding, the apostle further indicates, includes our thankfulness to the Heavenly Father for having been brought into the body of Christ and made members of the family of sons.

In I Corinthians 15:58, Paul says, “Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Here, he associates steadfastness

with abounding in the work of the Lord. One who is not steadfast, and not unmoveable, cannot abound in the Lord's work. Such a one is described by the Apostle James as "double minded," and "unstable in all his ways."—James 1:8

"SO WALK YE IN HIM"

Paul, in our text, admonishes us to walk in Christ in keeping with the manner in which we have received him. We "received" Christ Jesus by first recognizing our own sinful and undone condition; that we were members of a sin-cursed and dying race not meriting any favors from God. Then we understood that the sacrificial work of Jesus provided redemption for us, and that through the merit of his sacrifice we could be acceptable to God. We saw in this provision a marvelous manifestation of divine love, and by it we were constrained to present ourselves in full devotion to do God's will. This step of consecration is described by the Apostle Peter as "the answer of a good conscience toward God."—I Pet. 3:21

This meant the giving up of our own wills, and the acceptance of the will of God as expressed through Christ. Thus, figuratively speaking, we were "beheaded," and accepted Christ as our Head. (Rev. 20:4) This was the condition upon which we were eligible to become members of the "body" of Christ, to be "in him," and thereafter to "walk" in him. Even then, it was only because the merit of Christ was imputed for our justification that we could be accepted into this arrangement. Paul explains, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, ... who walk not after the

flesh, but after the Spirit”—the Holy Spirit by which we are anointed.—Rom. 8:1,4

Briefly, then, we “received” Christ because we accepted his will as our rule of life, and because the merit of his atoning blood made us acceptable. Thus, when the apostle exhorts us to continue walking in him as we received him, it simply means that we are continually and humbly to recognize our own unworthiness, as we did in the beginning. It means also to put down our own will and desires, as in our consecration we agreed to do, and endeavor to become more and more responsive to the leadings and the influence of the Holy Spirit, through which the will of God is revealed to us.

This formula for faithfulness to the Lord is very simple. Yet, it is most exacting because it is the difference between saying “Lord, Lord,” and actually maintaining a surrendered will regardless of what the cost may be. It is the difference between knowing the scriptural “philosophy” of the Christian life, and “living” the Christian life. We have accepted the philosophy, and now the test is to “walk ye in him.”

Our text further says that in order to carry out daily the terms of our consecration, and to continue doing so faithfully to the very end of our earthly walk, it will be necessary to be “rooted and built up in him.” Here Paul changes the figure of speech from “walking” in Christ to being “rooted” in him. It might well be that the apostle had the following words of the psalmist in mind when combining the thought of walking with being rooted: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, ... But his delight is in the law of the

LORD; ... And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.”—Ps. 1:1-3

A tree, to be firmly established, must have its roots grow deep into the soil. In addition, for the tree to flourish and bear fruit, its roots must also come in contact with sufficient water or moisture to meet its needs. Thus the psalmist explains that the man who loves the law of the Lord, or has fully surrendered his own will in favor of the Lord’s will, and is continuing to walk in this way of consecration, is “like a tree planted by the rivers of water.”

Applying the illustration to ourselves, it means that we need our “roots” of understanding and faith deeply embedded in the great foundations of the Truth, as they are centered in Christ. Merely a passing, surface knowledge of these will not enable us to stand resolute against the many “winds” of false doctrine which are assailing the Lord’s people in this “evil day.” (Eph. 4:14; 6:13) Indeed, as Paul states in our text, we must be “stablished in the faith.” It will not be sufficient that we believe the Truth, in any of its many facets, simply because someone else has told us to do so. Our own “roots” must strike down deeply into the precious promises of God which reveal his plan, and absorb their refreshing nourishment, in order for our faith to be firmly established.

If we are properly “rooted” we will be enabled to withstand all the unfavorable elements with which we are daily surrounded as Christians. In order to grow and bear fruit a tree needs both the sunshine and the rain, as well as varying degrees of temperature. Even storms are an aid in strengthening its trunk and branches. Similarly, as Christians we

need the sunshine and gentle rain of God's favor, as manifested in many of the precious blessings of Christian experience. We also need the trials, persecutions, hardships and disappointments. The stormy winds that blow are also required if we are to be properly rooted and grounded in the Truth. All of these experiences serve to establish us the more that we might thus be "abounding therein with thanksgiving."

"BUILT UP IN HIM"

In addition to being rooted in Christ and in the precious truths of which he is the embodiment, Paul says we are to be "built up" in him. In another of his epistles, the apostle writes that by "speaking the truth in love" we "grow up into him [Christ] in all things." (Eph. 4:15) While the thoughts of being "built up" and to "grow up" are slightly different, the "all things" applies to both. If we are walking in Christ as we have received him, and if we are properly rooted in him through a personally applied understanding of the Truth, our endeavor will be to have our lives conformed to his teachings and example in "all things."

By nature, all the Lord's people differ more or less in temperament from one another. We may find it comparatively easy to be "built up" into Jesus' example along certain lines. However, there are also circumstances that may arise in which we pay insufficient attention to those directives of the Word that are contrary to the downward tendencies of our own human desires. To the extent that we fall victim to this, we cannot truly be "abounding" Christians.

To be built up into Christ also means to “love one another” as he loved us—that is, to have a sacrificing love which leads us to “lay down our lives for the brethren.” (John 13:34,35; I John 3:16) This has to be more than merely a thought. It must be translated into action, not half-heartedly, but in an abounding manner. The measure of an abounding love for the brethren will not be our convenience, but the extent of their need and the opportunity we have to sacrifice our time and energy on their behalf. The example of Jesus’ sacrificing love will be our guide as to the strength and the means we will devote to the service of our brethren, whether it be ministering to the needs of one or more of them individually, or in a general service on behalf of all the consecrated.

Jesus was “the light of the world,” and he said that we also were to be “the light of the world.” (John 8:12; Matt. 5:14-16) We know how faithful Jesus was in bearing witness to the Truth. It mattered not to him how much it cost of his time or strength, or even of reputation. He was always ready and glad to speak those things which the Father had given him to say. His was an abounding service, far in excess of the demands of justice. It was a service which daily absorbed his vitality to the very limit of human endurance. This is another of the “all things” in which we are to be built up into him who is our Head and our perfect example.

Throughout this present Gospel Age, only a “little flock” is found worthy to live and reign with Christ in the heavenly phase of his kingdom. (Luke 12:32) One reason is that so few who accept Christ seem to be able to progress beyond the point of merely

being beneficiaries of divine grace. They are glad that they are “saved,” and the ethical teachings of the Bible may affect a moral reformation in their lives. The Christian life, however, is much more than this. We receive all the riches of divine grace through Christ in order that we may lay down our lives as his ambassadors.

Are we abounding in this God-given “vocation” of bearing witness to the Truth, as was Jesus? (Eph. 4:1) Are our efforts in this direction in excess of our convenience, and at the cost of time and strength which could otherwise increase the ease and the pleasures of the flesh? Self-sacrificing zeal as light-bearers is one of the evidences of being built up into Christ, one of the “all things” in which his image is reflected in our lives.

“IT IS WRITTEN”

Another prominent characteristic in Jesus’ life of faithfulness was his unswerving loyalty to the Father’s Word. “It is written,” was his reply to temptation. (Matt. 4:3-10) To those who followed him, he said, “I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.” (John 12:49) Later, he said to his Heavenly Father, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” (John 17:4) In saying the things and doing the work given him by the Father, Jesus explicitly followed his instructions. There was no deviation, no compromising, and no holding back.

It is this that we agreed to do in our consecration. It is the Word of God, which now includes the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, that reveals the

Heavenly Father's will, and we have agreed to do his will. We know this to be true, but how deep do our "roots" go down into these precious truths? Are we "doers" of the Word, or merely "hearers?"—James 1:22

Paul admonished, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God." (II Tim. 2:15) It is not merely the reading and studying of the Word which brings divine approval. Our study should be for the purpose of discovering God's will in all the various details of our lives. Bible study, therefore, whether individually or together with others, is a challenge to the depth of our consecration. To read Jesus' instructions, for example, to "turn the other cheek" when smitten by an enemy, provides us with a very high standard of what God "approves," when compared to what might be the natural inclinations of our flesh.

We could easily become so inspired with the beauties of the Truth, and so filled with the desire to tell the whole world about it, that we would neglect our responsibilities toward those who are properly dependent upon us. This, too, would be contrary to what God approves. Paul wrote that one who provides not for his own is worse than an unbeliever. (I Tim. 5:8) Thus, in our study to show ourselves approved, we need to find the proper balance between the directive to let our light shine and meeting our temporal responsibilities.

GO TO HIM ALONE

Because we are all still weak, according to the flesh, we may at one time or another encounter misunderstandings with others of like precious faith. We use the word "misunderstandings" because

we doubt that any truly consecrated Christian would purposely and willfully do injury to another. Nevertheless, there are times when certain circumstances may result in a conflict of some kind with another brother or sister in Christ. Situations of this kind call for the exercise of sympathetic understanding and brotherly love, and the following of Jesus' explicit instructions concerning such matters.

The Master said, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." (Matt. 18:15) We note that Jesus did not say: If he hear thee, thou hast justified thyself and punished thy brother. The sole purpose of such an encounter should be to fully restore to fellowship the one who we believe may have erred against us. Clearly, such an outcome is much more likely if we go to him alone, in the spirit of love.

By doing this, it would be found in most instances that what seemed to be a trespass against us appeared so only because certain words or acts had been misunderstood, and there was no intent to cause injury. Even if one had willfully trespassed in some measure, the Christlike, loving attitude we should exemplify in going to him alone, rather than involving others, would probably go far in gaining his understanding and rectifying the matter. Indeed, this would be the real purpose in going to the brother, rather than seeking recompense for injury we might have received.

PRESENT STRESS AND STRAIN

The stresses and strains of the experiences which the world is passing through at the present time have resulted in a mixture of restlessness, irritability,

anger and fear on the part of nearly all mankind. The Lord's own people are not free from these influences. We may, at times, in looking at the conditions in the world around us, or even at our own experiences, have varying conceptions of what we hear, see, or experience, from others among the brotherhood. We must take great care, however, that we do not allow these things to impact our relationship with Christ's fellow body members in any negative way.

This is especially so since Satan is ever alert to stir up strife among the consecrated people of God, and is ready and anxious to pit our opinions one against the other. Let us all, then, practice the art of being good listeners, and careful observers. As Paul states, let us not say or do "anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." (Rom. 14:21) This application of the law of love is part of the fulfillment of our consecration and is one of the aspects of the will of God enjoined on us by his Word.

Due to our own imperfections and fleshly weaknesses, we may at times find ourselves in the midst of vexing situations, not knowing which way to turn, or what to do. These are experiences which indeed try our souls, and the temptation may come to us to make some rash move which might well add to the difficulty rather than lessen it. It is well to remember that life is filled with challenges which oftentimes we cannot solve by our own reasoning, nor by our own strength.

However, the Lord knows all about these trying situations. When Moses and the Israelites stood before the Red Sea with the Egyptian army close behind them and ready to destroy them, the situation looked

hopeless. They could do nothing about it, and Moses was helpless by his own power. The Lord knew, though, and provided the solution.

As we walk in Christ Jesus and are being built up in him, we will encounter Red Sea experiences. There will be perplexities which we will be unable to get around, over or through based on our own efforts. There will be times when the only thing we can do is what the Israelites were told to do: "Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD." (Exod. 14:13) Jeremiah learned this also, and wrote: "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD."—Lam. 3:26

ABOUNDING WITH THANKSGIVING

The 26th of this month is set aside as a national day of thanksgiving. This is good, but every day should be one of thanksgiving to the Christian who is abounding in all those things involved in carrying out the terms of their consecration. If we are walking in the Master's footsteps, and are rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, we will find cause for thankfulness in every experience of life. We will thank God for the sunshine and the rain, and we will thank him for the sorrow and the pain.

There seems to be a special significance in Paul's expression, "abounding therein with thanksgiving." Certainly this implies that our thanksgiving will abound, and if it does, it will follow that our abounding will be manifested in every aspect of the Christian life. Will we, for example, be likely to hold resentment in our hearts toward those who vex us, if we thank God for the experiences which reach us through them?

Will we not abound in our patient waiting on the Lord if we thank him for the situations which he permits to test our loyalty and the depth of our consecration?

If we are thankful to the Lord for every opportunity we have to lay down our lives in the service of the Truth, will we be likely to allow those opportunities to pass unused?

If we thank God for his Word, and for the wonderful promises and instructions it contains, will we be lax in our studies “to show ourselves approved” unto him?

If we daily thank God for his love and mercy through Christ, in recognition of our great need of his atoning blood, will it not keep us forcefully reminded of our own imperfections? Will it not also make us more sympathetic toward our brethren whom we know are also acceptable to God only through the merit of the Redeemer?

Indeed, for a Christian to be faithful, he must also be thankful. Those who abound in their thanksgiving will likewise abound in “all things,” and they are the ones who are promised an abundant entrance into “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:3-11 ■