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The Manifold Wisdom of God

(Convention Address)

“UNTO me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”—Eph. 3:8-11.

In these verses, the Apostle is referring to God's grand designs and particularly as they focus on the call and preparation of the Gospel Age Church. This he tells us, in verse 11, is part of His eternal purpose, or as it is often referred to—a divine plan of ages. This expression highlights to us the long-term nature of God's plans, and an understanding of this feature of His will has been a wonderful blessing to His people in the end of this age, assisting them to rightly divide the word of truth, as Paul elsewhere advises, not only in its prophetic messages but also in its personal instructions and admonitions.

However, in verse 10, the Apostle is speaking of God's intention to declare His manifold wisdom by the Church. The thought of the verse seems to be that this wisdom might **be made** known by the Church, rather than **be** known by the Church, as in the Authorised Version. A consideration of His manifold or much-diversified wisdom will certainly lead us to a greater appreciation of His character, as it is expressed in all His works and nowhere less so than in the calling out of a people for His name. The extent and the all-embracing completeness of His purposes are, so the Apostle implies, nowhere better exemplified than in this feature of His plan.

Some translations and expositors read this verse as saying that it is God's manifold wisdom which is now being made known **to** the Church. Certainly, it is to the Church alone that the plans and purposes and the love of God are presently being fully made known. But most students take the thought that it is **by** or **through** the Church, as a part of God's master-plan, that His manifold wisdom is being displayed to the angelic powers. This is in keeping with the trend of the Apostle's message in this epistle and with other passages of the New Testament.

The word translated “manifold” in the Authorised Version is in itself interesting. It is used nowhere else in the New Testament, and in another version is rendered “much-diversified”, while one commentator makes these interesting observations—“What the principalities and powers see reflected in the Church is the iridescent wisdom of God. The adjective that modifies wisdom means literally multi-coloured or much-variegated (and). . . it calls attention to the infinite diversity and sparkling beauty of God's wisdom. For both of these characteristics, one is reminded of the rainbow. . . . In every phase of redemption (as well as of creation) the brilliance of God's wisdom reveals itself. . . There is not a single work of God, whether in creation (or as here in redemption) where that richly variegated wisdom does not manifest itself. It is seen in the Church as a whole when it strives earnestly to live to God's glory. It is seen also in every individual believer, drawn out of darkness into marvellous light.”

That our Heavenly Father should invite any of His creation to the high and heavenly call of the Gospel Age, and that Gentiles should also be included, was hitherto a mystery or divine secret, the Apostle declares (verse 9), though we may see it fore-shadowed in the stars of heaven in the promise of God to Abraham—Gen.22:17.

The Apostle Peter also tells us that the angels in heaven seek to comprehend the wisdom of God in the special grace and salvation that should come to the Gospel Age Church, as follows—"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the spirit which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the holy spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into"—1 Pet.1:10-12.

God's manifold wisdom is specially to be demonstrated in the Church, but it is also wonderfully seen in His creation and in the cross of Christ. Let us briefly consider therefore the many-faceted wisdom of God as set forth first in creation, again in the cross and then in the Church. And there is one further glorious aspect—the consummation, that is, the final outcome of the previous three demonstrations of His wisdom. As we do, we will surely be led to declare with the Apostle, as we comprehend something of the divine character—"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"—Rom.11:33.

There is a note of utter rejoicing in these words, for just as a child rests secure and happy in the apparent all-wisdom of father or mother, so in a far greater way the Apostle, and we with him, rest secure, delighting in the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of His wisdom. Though even yet we only dimly understand, nevertheless we can trace His wisdom and His power and His love in their sheer beauty and comprehensiveness in all His works and ways.

Turning first to God's manifold wisdom as revealed in creation, we are at once reminded that we live in an age when science continues to discover more and more of the wonders of nature, and of human life. But we also live in a time when the Bible account of creation by an all-wise and loving God is increasingly assailed. In a recent newspaper article, a professor of biology told of a young student's dilemma—he could not accept the theory of evolution because the Bible, which he evidently believed in, taught creation, and to abandon that teaching would for him undermine also the moral standards of the Bible. The professor dismissed the problem offhand, saying that there is "of course no connection between that belief (i.e. creation) and any particular moral attitude."

However, we see from the Bible standpoint that God's wisdom must be equally seen and respected both in His mighty works and in His righteous judgments. For if all life, and in particular mankind, merely evolved, and allegedly is still evolving, then the very basis of the ransom is swept away. It seems clear that today's vehement opposition to the Bible account of creation is of more sinister origin than mere science, and may well rank alongside the original great lie of the Adversary to our first parents. Scientific discoveries in themselves throw much light on the wonders of the natural world and as we come to know of these and see the beauty of so much around us how can we seriously doubt the hand of an all-wise and beneficent Creator.

There is an interesting verse in Job 38:22—"Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?" God was questioning Job, who had to admit that he could not answer. But in recent times, man has been able to look into the minute detail and individuality of the snow flakes and the hail, and to see there a beauty and variety unknown in Job's day. The infinite detail and order and harmony of our universe speak to the Christian undeniably of a Creator of limitless power and wisdom. With the Psalmist we confess—"O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches"—Psa.104:24.

But surely one important aspect of God's wisdom in creation is the gift of freewill to mankind. Human wisdom, aware of the consequences of sin in advance, would no doubt argue that things should be so arranged as to make sinning impossible. But this would not be fitting for that creation which was to be in God's image and to fellowship with Him. Science today can produce robots that obey even vocal commands, without question, but how could an all-wise God have delight in such obedience. Rather it is that willing obedience, perfectly exemplified in our Saviour, that He desires, just as a good human parent desires from his or her child. And so the long (in human terms) experience of the sinfulness and consequences of sin has gone on, looking both forward and back to the cross of Christ.

Here again we see in stark contrast the divine wisdom and human reasoning. Paul in that well known passage in 1 Cor.1:18, 23-25 has this to say—"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God (to human

eyes) is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

In these verses, Christ is identified as the supreme display of the manifold wisdom of God, and there could be no greater truth than this. For by means of the cross, God can be not only perfect in justice, but the perfect justifier of all those who believe in Jesus—Rom.3:26. As one writer has well put it, there is the “economy of the cross”, in that Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man. Without an appreciation of the Scriptural teaching of the ransom, together with a realisation and experience of the so great love and justice and power, as well as the wisdom of God, how foolish indeed would be the preaching of the cross.

We can well understand Peter's feelings when Jesus spoke of His coming sufferings and death, as recorded in Mark 8:31-33,—“And Jesus began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. . . . And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But he turning about, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and saith, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men”—Revised Version. Jesus had to take Peter to task here, but He would see in Peter's heart the motive of loving concern, even though this was not yet accompanied by the understanding later to be wonderfully developed in the Apostle by the holy spirit. So Peter no doubt reasoned—Why must you go into danger, into suffering and even death? Why not exercise those great powers we have seen in your mighty works and so restore our nation? This is man's wisdom, as Jesus had to tell Peter, and we can see that man's wisdom would have still left the problem of sin and its power over fallen mankind unresolved.

Concluding his epistle to the Galatians Paul writes—“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature”—Gal.6:14,15. Here Paul highlights a further aspect of the wisdom of God expressed in the cross of Christ, for only by means of the cross and the blessings which flow from the perfect offering can there be new hearts and new minds to serve God acceptably. These will eventually be the portion of all the willing and obedient of mankind under the New Covenant, but they are already the blessed experience of those, the Church, who are even now being prepared as able ministers of that covenant.

And so we come to the particular demonstration of the manifold wisdom of God, to which the Apostle refers in our text. Reading verses 10 and 11 from the Amplified Version—“(The purpose is) that through the church the complicated, many-sided wisdom of God in all its infinite variety and innumerable aspects might now be made known to the angelic rulers and authorities (principalities and powers) in the heavenly sphere. This is in accordance with the terms of the eternal and timeless purpose which He has realized and carried into effect, in (the person of) Christ Jesus our Lord.”

It is truly a wonderful provision that our Heavenly Father should determine that His will to bless all nations should be carried out by a specially favoured class, called out of the world to follow in His Son's steps. In every age, God has had His dear and faithful ones, from righteous Abel down to the patriarchs and on through the noble characters of Israel, some of whom are named in Hebrews 11. Yet in His unfathomable wisdom, God still required a further company, that through them His manifold wisdom might be preached and ministered to all mankind and declared even now to angels and principalities in heaven. It is this latter ministry, the calling out, the trials and testings and the perfect preparation of this people to which Paul specially refers in our text. What a privilege it is to be invited to take our part in this exhibition of His surpassing wisdom!

We might ponder why God could not have used the angelic beings for this task, instead of calling out very fallible human beings. But we remember that in speaking of the Captain, the first and chiefest of our salvation the Apostle says—“Therefore he (Jesus) had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted”—Heb.2:17,18, Rev. S. Version. It is surely necessary that those who are to serve with Him in the work of blessing are aware also of the difficulties and trials of the present evil world and of human infirmities.

Only so, in God's mercy and wisdom, can they become gracious and able ministers of the New Covenant. As well as the need for present experience, there is also the opportunity for present example as the Apostle exhorts in 1 Pet.2:12—“Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of

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While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord's Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported.

Study in Hebrews 10.

The wonderful Plan of God, by which He forgives the sins of all mankind and establishes His new covenant with Israel and ultimately with all the families of the earth, is outlined so clearly and helpfully throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews by the Apostle Paul.

To those who have made an examination of this masterly presentation by the Apostle of the typical and antitypical priesthoods of God, the truths of God's Plan shine out in added beauty, and appeal in ever-increasing grandeur as the various features are grasped and appreciated as coming only from the mind of our gracious Heavenly Father.

In the tenth chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle presents so beautifully the explanation of the antitypical sin offerings which were prefigured on Israel's day of atonement by the slaying of the bullock and the Lord's goat, and the sprinkling of the blood of these animals, in succession, upon the mercy seat in the Most Holy of the tabernacle.

Israel's day of atonement was a 24-hour day, but the antitypical day of atonement lasts the whole of this Gospel Age. So, says Paul, as it is "not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins, wherefore when he (Christ) cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me"—Heb.10:4,5. We surely rejoice that "Jesus was made a little lower than the angels (made flesh) for the suffering of death. . . . that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man"—Heb.2:9.

Our Lord's sacrifice of His humanity to "taste death for every man" constituted the ransom price to take away the sins of the world, and the way in which this valuable price is made applicable to cancel the sins of all mankind is revealed by the sin offerings, so ably presented by Paul in this 10th chapter of Hebrews in particular. Jesus was the antitypical bullock, and, as in the type, the bullock's blood was sprinkled by Israel's high priest on behalf of "himself and his house" only—Lev.16:11—and not for all Israel, so our Lord's sacrifice was applied for His Body and household of faith only, and not for all the world when He "appeared in the presence of God for us"—Heb.9:24.

As it required the sprinkling of the blood of the Lord's goat, in the type, to cancel the sins "for the people"—all the remainder of Israel—Lev.16:15—so in antitype the Lord's people follow in the steps of Christ's sacrifice, and having His merit making their sacrifice "holy, acceptable unto God"—Rom.12:1—they are the secondary offering for sin during this Gospel Age. So, in addition to the thought in Heb.10:5—a body hast thou prepared me—for Jesus to be the ransom—God had prepared the Body of Christ, His Church, representatively in the Apostles and other brethren who were offered in sacrifice at Pentecost. All the Gospel Age other members of the Lord's Body have been "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ"—Col.1:24.

Continuing, the Apostle declares—"He taketh away the first (the typical sacrifices) that he may establish the second (the antitype, the real sacrifices for sin). By the which will we are sanctified (set apart to holy, sacrificial service) through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ (the members of His Body, offered representatively of the whole, at Pentecost). For by one offering (in two parts—the Christ, Head and Body) he hath perfected those being sanctified. Whereof the holy spirit also is a witness to us"—Heb.10:9,10,14,15. Yes, "the spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"—Rom.8:16—and are being sanctified more and more during the daily presentation (offering) of ourselves as members of the Lord's goat class in His service.

The Apostle then proceeds in verses 16 and 17 of this 10th chapter of Hebrews, to refer to the wonderful transformation that will be effected in the lives of Israel (and later all mankind) by the establishing of the new covenant with Israel "after those days"—after the "seven times" or 2520 years of chastisement upon Israel, ending about 1914-18. We are not to conclude that this new covenant should have been established with Israel immediately the "seven times" expired, but rather from that time the Lord's favour would begin to return to Israel, and ultimately "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more"—Heb.10:16,17.

The Apostle had mentioned this new covenant in more detail in Hebrews 8:8—13, and the reason for again bringing it forward in chapter 10 seems to be to show the connection between the "offerings for sin" of the Gospel Age, and the blessings to follow under the new covenant in the Millennial Age, still future. For, says Paul, in verse 18—"Now where there is forgiveness of these (forgiveness of sin for Israel and the world under the new covenant) an offer-

ing for sin is no longer needed." No, indeed, the antitypical offerings for sin will be completed before the new covenant becomes operative, for the very good reason that the secondary antitypical sprinkling of the heavenly mercy seat must be accomplished before the High Priest can "appear the second time without sin (without a sin offering) unto salvation"—Heb.9:28.

How clearly, then, has the Apostle established the fact that the new covenant is to be made with a natural, earthly people, and is not operative with the Lord's people of this Gospel Age, who are developed under the Abrahamic covenant, as shown by Paul in Gal.4:28; 3:29—"Now, we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. . . . And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Also, the purpose of Paul in stressing the benefits to be received under the new covenant, by the forefathers of those to whom he wrote his Hebrew epistle, seems to be to impress the goodness and mercy of God, so that they may be the more encouraged to press on in their privileges as the "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling"—Heb.3:1—and to esteem the opportunity of being counted in with the sacrifice of Christ as the greatest favour ever offered to any of the human family. To us also, in this end of the Gospel Age, does the Apostle's reasoning appeal, as he seeks to lead us forward to grasp more and more of the inestimable favour of being called into the Body of Christ, prepared for sacrifice first of all by our loving Heavenly Father, and later by His grace, to enter into the antitypical Most Holy, "whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec"—Heb.6:20.

Convention News

The 1984 Nambour Convention proved once again a very blessed time of refreshing with fellow pilgrims on the narrow way. We lift up our hearts in thankfulness to our loving Heavenly Father for all the blessings bestowed.

It was a delight to welcome brethren from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. There was once again a very good number present from the Melbourne Class and their service was very much appreciated.

Four interesting and helpful Bible studies were held on James 5:7-12, and selected verses in Romans 11:5,7,28,16,26,30-32; John 10:1-5,26,27, and Matthew 13:44-46,52. This year the Convention was extended to the afternoon of the third day, at which time the last two studies were held. As usual a Question Time was held, when questions submitted by the brethren were considered.

A variety of subjects was chosen for the 10 addresses, as follows:—"Until"; "Some Great Thing"; "God's Manifold Wisdom"; "Faithfulness"; "Daniel, the Great Man of God"; "Anastasis"; "Thoughts of Eden"; "Oneness in Christ and the Father"; "Waiting for the Salvation of the Lord"; and a Young Peoples' Address.

Many messages and greetings were received from various Classes and individual brethren, which were very much appreciated; it was good to know we had their prayers and good wishes. Christian love is sent from the Convention to all who thus remembered us, and to brethren everywhere, together with the Scriptural message in James 5:7-9.

A short Praise and Testimony session was held, which gave opportunity for the brethren to express their thankfulness to the Lord for all His goodness and providential care.

We wish to express sincere thanks to all who served the Convention, to those who sacrificed much in travelling over such long distances to be with us, and the many hours of labour spent in preparation of studies, addresses, and comments, and to the Sisters who catered so well to our temporal needs.

Many lovely hymns were sung throughout the Convention, and a Love Feast was held with the singing of the appropriate hymns—"Blest be the tie that binds" and "God be with you till we meet again." The twelfth Nambour convention closed and we felt it was good that we came and that the sacrifice and labour involved was but a small thing compared to the bountiful blessings received. We know that all the services were rendered as unto the Lord, to whom we give all praise, honour and glory, and to His dear Son, Jesus Christ.

The Church of the First-Born.

"The general assembly and church of the first-born"—Heb. 12: 22, 23.

THE Church of the First-born is not to be confounded with the Church of the First Resurrection. The word first, in the phrase First Resurrection signifies better, superior. The First Resurrection includes only the Lord and "the Church, which is His Body"; in other words, the Bride Class. But in this glorified Church of the First-born are included all those who are born of the spirit. Those who are to be of the spirit nature will be those who have been developed throughout the Gospel Age—before God's favour goes to the world. This Church of the First-born includes all who come into Covenant relationship with God before the New covenant is put into force. Some will have part (an inferior

part, however, to that of the Church) with the great "High Priest of our Profession" in instituting the New Covenant. They will all have some share with Him in dispensing the blessings of the New Covenant to all the families of the earth—to Israel first, and then to all nations.

This Church of the First-born is prophetically pictured in the Old Testament in connection with the Passover. In that night when all the first-born of Egypt were slain, all of the first-born of Israel were passed over. These escaped because of the blood on the lintels of their houses and because of their partaking of the lamb within. We know that afterward all of the first-born of Israel were exchanged for the one tribe of Levi; and that this tribe was separated or divided into two parts—one a priestly class and the other a servant class. The former were called Priests; the latter Levites; though, of course, all were Levites. These two classes were types of the Church of the Gospel Age.

"But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to the general assembly of the church of the first-born"—Heb. 12: 22, 23. More properly we understand this to signify that we have approached—this is that to which we are coming—it is in sight. Some have already reached it. Our Lord has reached the goal. And some others of the First-born have also reached their goal; and some of us have not yet reached it. But this is what we are approaching. We shall all have come into power and into our place in the Divine Plan, at the close of this Gospel Age. Thereupon will follow the "time of trouble" with which this Age will end, typified by the trembling of the mountain of Sinai. Then, in the same connection, we read that we are approaching an innumerable company of angels.

The Apostle seems to be here setting before us the glories of the future. Not only shall we see our heavenly Father and our heavenly Lord, and be ushered into the Assembly of the Church of the First-born, but we shall be ushered into the presence of an innumerable company of angels. These are the angels who encamp round about those that fear the Lord and deliver them—Psa. 34: 7. They are sent to be ministers for those who shall be heirs of salvation—Heb. 1: 14. They have been with us here overseeing our interests; and it will be part of our joy on the spirit plane to make their acquaintance. If the Apostle had neglected to mention these, we would think it strange; for he is enumerating the things to which we are approaching.

Thus we see that the Church of the First-born includes the "Great Company" of the Levites as thoroughly as it includes the smaller company of the Priests. As the Levites had no inheritance in the land, so not only the "Little flock" but also

the "Great Company," the servant class, the companions of the Bride, have no share in the earthly inheritance, but will have a share in the heavenly inheritance.

How to Proclaim the Truth.

"Speaking the truth in love . . . grow up unto him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."—Eph. 4:15.

THE truth is always to be spoken humbly, but fearlessly. The Christian is not at liberty to speak anything but the truth. The great Apostle declared that he counted all things but loss and dross that he might win Christ and "be found in Him"—that he might gain a place in the everlasting Kingdom of Messiah. So then the speaking of the truth is quite essential to the life of a Christian. The truth of God's Word is to be enshrined above all else in the heart of a child of God, and he should esteem it a blessed privilege to speak it.

Our power of speech, of communicating our thoughts to others is the greatest power we possess—the most far-reaching. It is a potent factor for good or evil, for either truth or error. The opportunity to confess Christ before men either publicly or privately is a great privilege. In order to be pleasing to the Lord and to be used effectively, we must speak the truth in love. When one has just entered the family of God, less might be expected of him than of one who has been longer therein. We, as God's dear children, are to grow up into the likeness of our dear Elder Brother, our Pattern, our Head. We are to grow up into Him in all things, and recognize that He is the Head of the Church, that if we are to be members of His Body in glory we must be developed. We are to bear the fruitage of the holy spirit that we may be qualified to share in the future glorious kingdom which is to bless the world.

We are to exercise our function of ambassadorship and show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of the darkness into His marvellous light. And in telling the message of His grace we shall grow spiritually. "He that watereth shall himself also be watered." As we proclaim the truth from an honest, earnest, loving heart, we shall become more and more filled with it ourselves. "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth and it tendeth to poverty," to leanness of soul. As we give out to others our own store of blessing is increased. We are to develop day by day this quality of love. Why is this? Because it will make us like God, and that is one thing to be desired, the one thing necessary.

Our God has other glorious attributes besides Love, but this attribute is the especially predominating, overruling quality of His character. God's justice co-operates with His love, and His wisdom would not attempt to carry out any plans that His love would not approve. So as we grow, this quality of love should be more manifest. We are to see that our words are loving, kind and gentle. We are to curb any tendency to self-glorification in telling of God's great plan to others. Let us keep out of sight that the beauty of the truth may be seen. Our manner of presenting the truth has much to do with its effectiveness. Speaking the truth in love, we shall not only be doing much more for others, but the message will also be more impressed upon our own minds.

Whoever appreciates these things of God, and then speaks forth in love and sincerity will receive a blessing in his own heart and mind, and the truth will become clearer and sweeter. In helping others he will be helping himself. Thus the various features of the plan of God become more firmly engraved on his mind. It is God's plan, not ours, therefore we should try to present it in meekness, gentleness, brotherly kindness and love.

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visitation"—Revised S. Version. The angelic hosts, though always close to the divine throne, have not experienced these things, and as we noted earlier it is this "so great salvation" and the call of the Church which the angels earnestly desire to look into. To these, God's calling out of a people for His name has been all down the Gospel Age a demonstration of His manifold wisdom.

But what of the Old Testament heroes of faith? These have certainly known human frailty, human trials and testings, and by faith overcame them to receive that "good report" of which the Apostle tells us. It is clear from the Scriptures that these are destined for grand service in the earthly phase of the coming Kingdom, and how eminently suitable they will be as guides and leaders of the people. But in His wisdom, God has reserved some "better thing for us"—the call to follow in the steps of His dear Son and to be joint-heirs with Him in that Kingdom. These mighty ones of faith looked forward to the day when that promised seed of blessing should come, but they all died in faith, to await their own reward. It is to God's Gospel Age people that the reality of the hope which inspired those of old times has been made known. These have been privileged to come to know personally by faith Him in whom all the promises of God are made Yea and Amen, who Himself is "the wisdom of God" and in whom "are hid all

the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Not by any merit of their own, but in God's grace and wisdom, these alone have had an opportunity to be called and prepared for God's special purposes.

But why should it be necessary for any others at all to be associated with our Lord in the dispensing of the Kingdom blessings? Here again, it is certainly not a matter of necessity but of God's manifold wisdom. We see the picture way back in Eden of the help meet provided for Adam, as father of the race, and beautifully again in the selection of a bride for Isaac. This illustration is carried over into the New Testament, where the Church is spoken of as the Bride, and the Lamb's wife, and we read in the final chapter of the New Testament that after the marriage of the Lamb, it will be the spirit and the Bride which issue the blessed invitation to whomsoever will—"Come, take the water of life freely"—Rev.22:17.

We can see then in some measure how the beautiful and all-embracing wisdom of God is made manifest in the grandeur of His creation, in the love and justice of the cross, and in the grace and goodness of the call of the Church. And as we meditate on these, surely our hearts respond in wonder, love and praise for such a God and heavenly Father. But there is a further area where the same manifold wisdom must also surely be displayed, not only this time to His chosen ones of past and present ages, but to all mankind. That is in the glorious consummation, the fruition of all His purposes, right from creation. The Apostle speaks of this in Eph.1:9,10—"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." And the Psalmist, by faith looking forward to that time, when all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest says—"All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power"—Psa.145:10,11.

This glorious consummation of all God's purposes is what the Apostle tells us the whole creation groans and travails for even now, and is that for which God's people have so long prayed—"Thy Kingdom come." The wonder and beauty of that time we can only falteringly and dimly conceive, but we have come to see His manifold wisdom in all His works of creation and redemption, and we can be sure that it will be beyond all that we could ask or think. Our present privilege is to show forth His manifold wisdom as He prepares those called according to

His eternal purposes. May this continue to challenge us to closer fellowship with God, that we may be to the praise of His glory, and fitted for His service. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"—Rom. 11:33.

The Good Confession

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"—Matt. 16: 16.

AFTER the many proofs of His divine anointing, which His disciples had seen, the Lord had reason to expect their faith in His claim to the Messiahship to be established. Hence the questions in the context of our text—(1) "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" and (2) "But whom say ye that I am?" The former was but a leading question; the latter, the pointed one, calculated to bring out a full expression of their faith.

Here Simon Peter's impulsive zeal, which sometimes led him into difficulties and errors, led him to a very warm and prompt expression of his full conviction that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. "And Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God!" Such a prompt and full confession of his faith brought the immediate reward of the Master's approval.

The conviction thus impressed upon his mind was not such as the carnal mind would arrive at, but such as the mind could gain only by submitting itself fully to the spirit of God. Peter and all the other Apostles had done this, but Peter, being the most prompt to confess it, received the first and warmest commendation and reward.

Verse 18. "And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter (Greek, petros, a stone, a piece of a rock); and upon this rock (Greek, petra, the rock in mass, the foundation rock) I will build my church; and the gates of hell (hades, the grave, death) shall not prevail against it."

The foundation "rock" was Christ—"This rock"—which Peter had just confessed, and not Peter, as the church of Rome claims, and as some Protestants are now willing to concede. Peter himself disclaims such distinction, and such usurpation of the Lord's place, when he points to Christ as the foundation stone in the spiritual temple of God, and to all the members of His Body as living stones to be built upon that foundation—1 Pet. 2: 4-6. See also Isa. 28: 16; Matt. 21: 42; Acts 4: 11; Rom. 9: 33; Eph. 2: 20; Psa. 118: 22, 23; 1 Cor. 3:11.

The promise that the gates of death should not prevail against the Lord's true Church has indeed been verified; for, though assailed by the

fiercest persecutions, she has never yet been exterminated. Throughout the entire age down to its close in the present time the Lord has preserved a people; and His further promise—"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"—has also been richly verified.

But while the gates of death (hades) have not prevailed against the Church as a whole, they have done so (temporarily) against its members—even against the Head, our Lord. But they shall not prevail everlastingly. Our Lord triumphed or prevailed over hades (the grave) on the third day in His resurrection (by the Father's power), and we His Church also shall prevail in the first resurrection. For it is promised that He who raised up our Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus. And thus the gates of the grave shall not eventually prevail or triumph over us. "Weeping (and death) may endure for a night, but joy (in resurrection) cometh in the morning." (From "Reprints.")

Melbourne Christmas Convention

The brethren of the Melbourne Class extend a cordial invitation to all friends able to attend their Annual Convention to be held this year (DV) from December 22nd, in the Masonic Hall, 12 Prospect Hill Rd., Camberwell. Further information from the Class Secretary—Mr. J.B. Hiam, 27 Redhill Avenue, Burwood East, Victoria, 3151.

Melbourne Class New Address

The Melbourne Class now meets in the Masonic Hall, 12 Prospect Hill Rd., Camberwell. Sunday services are at 11.30 a.m., and 2.30 p.m., to which all interested people are invited for Udenominational study of the Bible.

Thank you, God, for Everything

Thank you, God, for everything—
The big things and the small,
For "every good gift comes from God"—
The Giver of them all—
And all too often we accept
Without any thanks or praise
The gifts God sends as blessings
Each day in many ways—
First, thank you for the little things
That often come our way,
The things we take for granted
But don't mention when we pray,
Then, thank you for the "Miracles"
We are much too blind to see,
And give us new awareness
Of our many gifts from Thee,
And help us to remember
That the Key to Life and Living
Is to make each prayer a Prayer of Thanks
And every day Thanksgiving.

Helen Steiner Rice.