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A New Year Greeting

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (2 Thess 3:18)

As we enter upon another year could we do so ..with better words than these, or words of greater promise? As the old year passes and the new is ushered in, we greet each other with good wishes. Could we do so more fittingly than in the words of our text?

The fashion of this world is rapidly passing away. As we face the future and realize life’s uncertainties, whether we be young or old, if we take our life thoughtfully, and in a Christian spirit, especially if we have consecrated ourselves to do the Father’s will by walking in the footsteps of Jesus to the best of our ability, we feel our need of a higher wisdom, a more pure and enduring energy than our own, to guide our steps, to mould our character, to shape our lot for us.

And so we look up to God and ask, both for ourselves and for the whole dear family of God, his benediction for the year which lies ahead of us, his grace upon all our days and on all our ways – grace sufficient for every time of need, teaching us how to make all things contribute to our highest welfare, thus securing, alike from the bleak winds of adversity as from the warm winds of prosperity, real and lasting benefits.

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *you*.” Do not these words meet *your* sense of need, *your* craving for good, *your* hope of a benediction which will make your new year bright with the lustre of a joyous, holy living? To Paul they conveyed and implied so much, they were so bright with hope, that, as another has observed, “they became his standing good wish for those whom he loved.” They appear at the close of nearly all the letters he wrote, in one place reading, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you”; in another, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit”; and here, in our text, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

It is entirely possible, however, that the very frequency with which we meet these words, has served to dull their force and clearness. As another has expressed, “People, in reading the Bible, are often not conscious of the extreme listlessness with which they pass along the familiar and oft repeated words of Scripture, without the impression of their meaning being at all present with the thoughts,—and how, during the mechanical currency of the verses through their lips, the thinking power is asleep for whole passages together.”

Perhaps this is true in regard to our text. We may never have asked what the words meant originally, and still mean, what the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was and is, and in what senses that grace may be with us, and be the crown and benediction of our whole life. It will be worth our while therefore, if we meditate on the text long enough to note that the phrase “grace of Christ” would convey at least three ideas to the members of the early Church, and should convey the same ideas to us; and that if the grace of Christ is to “be with us” or “with our spirit” we must in all these senses reproduce it, and make it our own.

THE GRACEFULNESS OF CHRIST

The first thought which this phrase would suggest to Paul’s readers, especially to his Grecian readers – and most of them were Greeks – would be the gracefulness, the charm, of Christ. They would understand the Apostle to refer to that exquisite sensibility to beauty, the beauty of nature and of man, by which Christ was distinguished; that love of all that is fair and pure and good which gave a beauty, a winning charm, an attractiveness, to his person, his character, his manner and bearing, and to his words, which no heart not wholly dead to beauty and goodness was able to resist.

Both the Puritan concept and the Monastic, or ascetic, concept of Christ have gone far to hide this thought from us – so far that it has been argued from such texts as “His face was more marred than that of any man” that they do greatly err who attribute any comeliness to the Man of Sorrows. It is difficult, however, to believe that One born of a pure virgin and begotten of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of goodness and beauty, could be other than the most pure, beautiful, and attractive of men.

Who can believe that the one perfect man, he whose majestic bearing was such as to elicit from Pilate the exclamation, “Behold the Man!” was destitute of any outward and visible sign of his inward perfection? A lovely spirit does, indeed, transfigure even the plainest features and lend them a charm beyond that of a simply formal beauty; but a lovely spirit in a lovely form is a still more potent force. Hence the great painters who have invested the face and figure of our Lord with all the perfections of manly beauty, and who have added a pathetic charm to that beauty by depicting the perfect face as worn and wasted with thought, with compassion, with all the toil and burden of his great work of love, have reason on their side, and give us, we may be sure, a far truer concept of him than either the Puritan or the Monk.

For the whole story of his life shows both that he was exquisitely sensitive to beauty in every form, and that he had the still rarer power of reproducing that beauty in his words and ways. The whole world of nature lives again in his discourses and parables, to prove how keen he was to note the loveliness of the world around him; while these same parables and discourses are so perfect, both in substance and in expression, as to prove that he could reproduce this beauty in still more exquisite and enduring forms.

What a keen eye for beauty of character, for a latent unsuspected goodness, must he have possessed, who saw in doubting Nathanael, an Israelite indeed; in fickle and impetuous Peter, a steadfast rock; in timid and halting Nicodemus, and in the woman of Samaria, fitting recipients for the deepest truths of his kingdom; in Mary’s waste of ointment, an insight which transcended that of the Apostles; and in the self-humiliation of the woman who was a sinner, a love capable of transforming her into a saint!

He who spoke the most beautiful words that have fallen from human lips; he who clothed perfect thoughts in forms so perfect that the noblest spirits of every subsequent age have held them to be “sweeter than honey” and more precious than “much fine gold,” and yet in forms so simple that the common people have always heard them gladly; he who was at home with all classes, learned and ignorant, rich and poor, powerful or enslaved, who saw good even in the worst, and found something to pity, something to love in even the forlornest outcast; he to whom little children ran for a caress, round whom wronged women and outcast men gathered as to a friend—was there no beauty, no charm, in him? Was there not rather a charm which no open and susceptible heart could withstand?

This beauty, this charm, this gracefulness, is to be with us, is to be ours, if “the grace of Christ” is to be with us. That is to say, the wish, the benediction of our text summons us to cultivate the love of all that is fair, all that is good—all that is fair in nature, all that is good in men; and to reproduce it, so far as we may, in our words, in our manner, in our lives. We are not to be content with being sourly or austere good, but to aim at being winningly and attractively good.

The beautiful mind, the beautiful manner, of Christ, the charm of his character, his speech, his dealings with men and women, be with us all—this is part of what our new year’s wish implies.

THE GRACIOUSNESS OF CHRIST

But graceful manners soon break down under the strain of change, familiarity, or time, unless they spring from and express a gracious heart. And hence we must be reminded of the second meaning latent in our text. For if “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” would suggest gracefulness to a Greek, to a Jew it would suggest graciousness, a willing, friendly, genial spirit; not righteousness simply, but a genial righteousness; not beneficence simply, but a friendly beneficence.

There are those who are weighted all their lives by an unwilling, a reluctant, an unsympathetic temperament. They do not easily consent to what is proposed to them; their first impulse is to say *no* rather than *yes*. Not only is courtesy difficult to them, but thoughtfulness for others, consideration for their wishes, a lenient judgement of their faults, a kindly interest in that which interests *them*. Their instinct is to differ rather than to concur, to wrangle rather than to assent, to criticize and condemn rather than to work with their neighbours and yield to their influence. Hence, strive as they will – and few but themselves know how hard and bitter the strife sometimes is – they lack the friendly tone, the genial manner, which commands confidence and love, and even when they do good are apt to do it awkwardly and in a way which hurts or offends even those whom they help. They do not give *themselves* with their gifts.

But we find no trace of this stiff, reluctant, self-contained disposition in Jesus Christ. Little though he had to give as the world counts gifts, the world has never seen a benefactor to be compared with him. Not only did he give himself for us all, but he gave *himself* with all his gifts, gave all he had, or all they could take, to every man or woman who

approached him. There was nothing he could do which he was not prepared to do for any who asked his help. So gracious was he, so steadfastly did his will stand at the yielding or giving point, that virtue went out of him without any conscious exercise of will, whenever the hand of faith or need was laid upon him.

How interested he was in all who spoke with him, however ignorant or faulty they might be! How deeply he looked into their hearts; how he drew them on, and drew them out, till they had told him their inmost secret, till they had relieved their bosoms of the perilous stuff hidden there; and then how wisely and delicately he adapted his words and gifts to their needs; as, for example, when he talked with the woman of Samaria by the well! How ready he was to love them, or any trace of good in them, till they rose “to match the promise in his eyes”; as, for instance, in the faith of the Syrophenician woman!

How much good he saw in them which the world could not see, and of which they themselves had lost sight; as, for example, in Zaccheus, that true son of Abraham, whom the Pharisees mistook for a child of the devil, and in the woman who bathed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head! How quick he was to detect any moment of weakness in those who had a little faith in him but held it with a feeble grasp, and how prompt to strengthen them against any sudden pressure of unbelief; as for example, when he said to the faltering ruler of the synagogue, “Only believe; all things are possible to him that believeth”!

But we should have to go through the whole story of his life to fully recount the innumerable proofs of his graciousness, of his willing and friendly heart; the graciousness which enabled him to give so much, though of outward good he had so little to give, and which made his every gift a charm, an elevating and abiding power, to those who received it, or who listened to the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

Yet, with all this graciousness, there was no softness, no weakness, no insincerity, such as is often found associated with a kindly temperament; there was nothing inconsiderate, or indiscriminate, in his boundless charity; no yielding at a single point at which it would have been wrong to yield; no want of faithfulness, or even of severity where severity was needed. He was sincere as he was sympathetic, rare as that combination is. He who cured a sinful man of the paralysis induced by vice, also warned him, “Sin no more, lest a worst thing come upon thee.”

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all in this sense also. May his graciousness, his kindly consideration for others, his genial, warm manner, his friendly tone, be ours.

THE FAVOUR, THE REDEEMING LOVE OF CHRIST

But perhaps one, at this point, might feel led to say, “Well, if the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ means gracefulness and graciousness, then I am afraid it is impossible for me. For I am neither very graceful nor gracious; and while I am learning to appreciate better all that is lovely and fair, both in nature and in people, to reproduce such loveliness in my own thoughts and words and deeds is another matter, and as for being gracious, that does not come at all easily to me.”

Ah! beloved, if the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ meant only his gracefulness or his graciousness, we would all be in great discouragement. But the word has another, a third, meaning, one with which we have long been familiar. The Apostle reminds us of this meaning in 2 Corinthians 8:9: “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich.” Yes, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ means also his favor, his active, redeeming, and renewing love, freely bestowed upon us, and because of this we may entertain high hopes of having his grace, in the other two meanings of the word, fulfilled in us also.

In the New Testament, the grace of Christ is constantly used in this third sense, far more commonly in this sense than in any other. Its most frequent use denotes a divine and loving energy or quality which not only forgives, but also cleanses us from, our iniquity; which not only pardons, but redeems us from, our faults and sins; an energy which attends us through our whole career to guard us against temptation or make us strong enough to resist temptation; able to change, elevate, and purify our whole character and disposition, and to recreate us in its own likeness.

Who dare say that, with this giving, and forgiving energy, this redeeming and renewing grace, ever at work upon and in them, they cannot become pure, friendly, and gracious in heart, and, therefore, simple, courteous, and even graceful in manner and in speech? Who dare despair of themselves or give up self-culture as hopeless, if the strong Son of God is ever waiting to help, ever seeking to bestow his gracefulness, his graciousness, to exert his forgiving and redeeming power upon them, to recast their mind and character, and disposition, and temperament, on the larger, fairer, lines of his own?

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all”; the grace which redeems, renews, recreates the inward man of the heart, and so clothes even the outward man of behaviour with a new and friendlier charm. Amen – so let it be.

(From the “Herald”)

They Had Been With Jesus

How much is told respecting Peter and John, and what their opponents thought of them, in the words of Acts 4:13 - "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

One of the remarkable things connected with an understanding of the Plan of God is its effect upon those who receive it - its transforming effect, its renewing effect. As the Lord knew and foretold, the Gospel message has not in general appealed specially to the rich, the great or the learned; these feel themselves above the Master's teachings, and are comparatively satisfied with their conditions.

The Gospel message takes hold chiefly upon those less favoured in this present life, and this is true as well of the special features of truth as of the general features of the Gospel message. In every case, however, the marked effect of the Gospel of Christ is manifested where it is received into a good and honest heart. It lifts up. It gives courage instead of fear. It gives hope instead of despondency. It gives an aim and purpose in life instead of futility. It cultivates the will and manifests itself in the open expression of the eye, the alertness of the step, the increased deftness of the hand, and the loosing of the tongue to speak of the Lord and His grace.

It is well with us, as with the apostles, that those about us should note that we have the courage of our convictions; that we fear the Lord only; that our highest aim is to give out the good tidings of great joy to all who have the hearing ear. But here we need to note more particularly the importance of the second feature of the verse, namely that "they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus" - that they were His disciples, learners in His school. This is truly the important thing for us - to learn of Jesus, to become like Him.

It is right that we should give due weight to doctrinal knowledge of the Divine character and plan, as set forth in the Word of God. But while emphasising this and its absolute necessity to our growth in grace, how important that all the Lord's followers keep in mind those features of the Master's teachings which constitute more particularly His spirit, His disposition. The sum of these is LOVE. Of our Heavenly Father it is declared that "God is love", so also love is the special characteristic of our Redeemer, who was the image, the very reflection of the Father.

The analysis of love, as given by the apostle Paul, may be understood to be an analysis of the Divine character as exemplified in our Lord Jesus - meekness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, brotherly-kindness, love, And since all His followers are invited to become disciples or learners, under Him as their Teacher, it follows that all who truly learn of Him will gradually attain to these same elements of His character.

How better could we proclaim our relationship to Him? How better could we recommend to others the School of Christ? How better could we show forth the praises of our Master than by living out His example, representing His character before others. Surely, this is the significance of His injunction, "Let your light so shine before men that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." It is proper indeed that we let our doctrines shine out before men, but it is specially important that we let the character of Christ shine out. It is also important that the doctrines and the character correspond and co-attest to each other.

We remember our Lord's words, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." This was His new commandment that we should love one another as He has loved us - with a pure, unselfish love, which thinks no evil, does not vaunt self, is not easily offended, does not seek its own - the love which lays down time, energy and even life itself for the brethren.

We may never become entirely satisfactory to ourselves in thought, word and deed while still in the flesh, and we may never, therefore, be entirely satisfactory to others; but we can, we should, we must, and by the grace of God let us each resolve that we will, attain to all of this, so far as our hearts are concerned. Nothing short of this will be satisfactory to our Lord, to whom we are "betrothed" as members of the chaste, virgin church. If we fail to come up to this reasonable, possible standard, we will fail to make our calling and election sure to a place in the Bride company.

But if we do these things, if at heart we are at this standard, if we are daily seeking to live it to the best of our ability, the heavenly Bridegroom will rejoice to own us as His elect. How much indeed depends upon our learning this lesson! "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." (John 13:17)

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things, you shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," (2 Peter 1:10,11)

The Lord's Requirements

"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" – Micah 6:8

BASICALLY the Lord's righteous requirements of his people in every age are the same although the details in each age will differ. God's people in the Jewish Age were required to render obedience to the Law. In the present age they are called upon to bear witness to the Gospel, and thus to show forth the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. And there are other differences of detail in what God requires of his people from age to age, but these are to be accomplished within the framework of those righteous requirements stated in our text – to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

In so far as the followers of Jesus are concerned, there are many varied allurements which might entice them away from the path of righteousness. One of these is highlighted in the two verses preceding our text. We quote: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Then follow the words, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good," implying that the outline just stated is not considered good by the Lord, and what the Lord does consider good is to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with him.

Satan is too wily a foe to suggest alternatives to the will of God which are related in no way to instructions which God has given. What Satan does is to distort those instructions to give them a meaning which the Lord never intended, and thus to lead the righteous away from the true path of righteousness. The question, "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?" takes us back to some of the requirements of the Law. God had indicated that under certain circumstances burnt offerings would be acceptable to him – an evidence of the true heart condition of those who presented them. He also indicated that calves of a year old could be offered acceptably to him as sacrifices.

But the question implied here is, since this is true, could we be pleasing to the Lord simply by presenting burnt offerings to him or calves of a year old? Certainly that would be a simple way of discharging our responsibility toward the great Creator of the universe. But the Lord never intended that any of his people should take this viewpoint of his requirements and ignore every other aspect of his will.

The next question is, "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" Here is a subtle suggestion indeed! In God's dealings with Israel under the Law he did require, in connection with the tabernacle services, the offering of rams, and indicated that this would indeed be pleasing, and in accordance with his will. But this did not mean that all the Lord required was the continual bringing to him of rams to be sacrificed.

The Lord required oil in connection with the typical services of the tabernacle and in the anointing of Israel's kings. But that did not suggest that one could discharge his responsibility to the Lord simply by offering huge quantities of oil—described in the text as "ten thousands of rivers of oil."

The Lord's people of the present age are not asked by him to bring rams and oil as sacrifices. We are invited to present our own bodies as living sacrifices, with the assurance that they are holy and acceptable to God. (Rom. 12:1) There are various facets of the Lord's will in respect to the manner in which we present ourselves in sacrifice, and if we are not watchful the subtle suggestion will appeal to our minds to make a hobby of one or more of these and ignore the others.

The Lord, for example, has indicated clearly that it is pleasing to him for his people to study his Word, that they might become well acquainted with his will and be able to serve him acceptably. But this does not mean that serving the Lord consists entirely of Bible study. Indeed, Bible study itself is but a preparation for the Lord's service, enabling the Lord's people to know what he wants done, and when and how. So, symbolically speaking, if the Lord has asked us to bring one ram for a sacrifice, let us not suppose that he will be pleased if we bring a thousand rams and ignore everything else which he requires.

Oil is something used in the Bible as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts produces the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, brotherly kindness, patience. This is, indeed, a beautiful facet of the Christian life. But being a Christian includes other things. There is work to be done – hard work, and loads to lift – heavy loads.

Simply being joyful in the Lord is beautiful, and one of the present inheritances of the new creation, but it is not supposed to supplant the work which the Lord wants us to do in his service. He does want us to have the Holy Spirit, and to pray for more of the Holy Spirit, but he would not be happy if we thought that bringing him ten thousand rivers of oil would fulfill his will toward us.

DOING JUSTLY

The Lord says that one of his basic requirements of righteousness in connection with his people is to do justly. This is simply an expression of the principle of justice as exemplified in the Golden Rule. We might at first be inclined to think that we have already passed this test; that for a long time we have practiced justice in our dealings with one another. But are we sure of this?

The Golden Rule speaks of doing unto others as we would that they do unto us. Perhaps it would be well to ask ourselves each day whether or not we have adhered to this principle. Have we refrained from doing unto others what we would not have them do unto us? Perhaps a sincere effort to do this would make each day one in which we would not only be happier ourselves, but would be a great blessing to those with whom we come in contact. How vital indeed is this requirement to do justly!

LOVING MERCY

The second requirement of righteousness mentioned in our text is to love mercy. Mercy itself is a noble and godlike quality, but the Hebrew word here translated mercy is in many other instances translated loving-kindness. This gives us the unique expression of loving loving-kindness. Are we so fully in harmony with God's righteous quality of loving-kindness—unselfishness—that we can say that we are in love with it?

The things with which we are in love take first place in our hearts. We consider them of the greatest importance. Does the love of God take first place in our hearts? We are told that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. This means that one of the manifestations of love is unselfish giving, and in the case of our Heavenly Father it was the giving of the dearest treasure of his heart. Are we in love with that thought, and is this love influencing us to loving sacrifice that others might be blessed? How exacting indeed is the requirement "to love mercy," or loving-kindness!

WALKING HUMBLY WITH GOD

To walk humbly with our God means to be so fully dedicated to the doing of his will that we will not knowingly take a step in life's journey that would be displeasing to him. As long as we are in the flesh we will need to contend with the selfish desires of the flesh, and these desires are almost always contrary to the will of God. If we allow these desires to override the will of God as we go our own way, then we are not walking humbly with him.

To walk humbly with our God means earnestness in our study of his Word to know his will; it means determination to do that will no matter what the cost may be; it means the willingness to give up time, and strength, and money in the service which he has committed to his people in this age; it means doing all these things in the spirit of humility and joy – not rebelling against anything which the Lord indicates in his Word to be his will. All this the Lord requires!

Thou Knowest Lord

Thou knowest Lord, Thou knowest all about me,
And all the winding way my feet have trod;
And now Thou knowest I cannot go without Thee,
To guide me onward through the swelling flood.

Thou knowest my way - how lone, how dark, how cheerless
If Thy dear hand I fail in all to see;
Bright with Thy smile of love, my heart is fearless
When in my weakness I can lean on Thee.

Give me Thy presence! Go Thou, Lord, before me,
Make a plain path where all is rough and drear,
So let me trust the love that watches o'er me,
And in the shadows still believe Thee near.

All He asks

Just to humbly walk with Him,
Where the light is never dim;
Just to listen to His voice,
And to make His will thy choice;

Just to follow where He leads,
Trusting Him to fill all needs;
Just to trust Him and obey,
That is all He asks today.

Underneath are the Everlasting Arms

(CONVENTION ADDRESS)

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. – Deut. 33:27.

What wonderful consolations for the saints of God are to be found in the Bible, that “Boon most sacred from the Lord.” How very appropriate and beautiful is the Apostle’s reference to our God and Father, as “The God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulations.” (2 Cor. 1:3,4.)

To that “great cloud of witnesses” tested and approved in former ages, God was faithful in giving all needed comfort and consolation, so that they should not be discouraged in their desire to merit His favor. The stern requirements of the Law, with its inevitable condemnation, did not make up the sum of Divine revelation even in those days before “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” To Patriarchs and Prophets, and to all who were “Israelites indeed,” this word of comforting assurance was spoken – “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isa. 57:15.)

The warmth of His love, his comforting considerations, therefore, could not be hidden entirely from view behind the inflexible demand of a law which said, “This do and thou shalt live.” His character is such that He must and would remember that even those who delighted in His law and trembled at His unalterable Word, were but dust, incapable of perfect goodness, because evil was so painfully present with them. As we are privileged to know Him today revealed in Christ, so He has always been in character, the same unchangeable God.

The fuller revelation that came with the light of the Gospel, wherein Jesus revealed that “God is love,” was marvellously anticipated in those oft-repeated assurances of that fact given to those men and women of other ages “of whom the world was not worthy,” and who, notwithstanding the utter impossibility of gaining life through the law, “had this testimony that they pleased God.” Thus it is that we find, scattered like guiding stars above their pathway, constant reiterations of this love given to faithful ones long before the Gospel’s “exceeding great and precious promises” shed their rays of light upon the path of the Church. To those humble and contrite ones God gave ample assurance that in all their trials and difficulties He was near with His grace to sustain and His comfort to cheer.

When *servants* of God’s household enjoyed such assurances of His abiding presence and protection as was given to this “great cloud of witnesses,” how very near then should He seem to the *sons* of His family now. If to servants He would say, “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.” what tender consolations He must speak to His own spirit-begotten children. If to obedient, loyal servants encouragement was given in the knowledge that “The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms,” what measures of protection and grace will be the present portion of the dear children of His love.

For these, “some better thing” has been reserved in all God’s appointments, embracing present privileges and future rewards. Surely then such favored children must be encouraged as they hear this “voice behind” them speaking in tones of amplified assurance, testifying to the faithfulness of God toward all who love Him. Plainly this voice must give strength as they hear it directing them in the way that they should walk, and additionally, establishing their faith in the promised grace sufficient for every time of need; yea, that God “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” (Eph. 3:20.)

Could He say more than He has said in giving us so many “exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be made partakers of the Divine nature?” – promises which meet our every experience and need, promises which can never be broken, for they are the promises of One who cannot lie. These precious pledges of God, how dependable they are! Behind us lie long centuries of His care over His people, and the testimony of all such who have preceded us comes floating down with the faith-inspiring assurance that “there hath not failed one word of all His good promises.” (1 Kings 8:56.) Six thousand years of unflinching faithfulness through every possible emergency that could serve to test it –and He has been all this to His people, though none of them have been wholly perfect in their faithfulness to Him.

What more indeed can He say to us then, than we have in these promises—“Wherein God, willing more

abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” (Heb. 6:17,18) Who then, or what power, “shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” (Rom. 8:35,37.)

It may well thrill our hearts to recall the love of Christ for His church collectively, and to remember that all the saints making up that Body are His peculiar charge, for we love to share the joy with all who join in love for Him. But he wants us to realise a more intimate and personal place in that special care He exercises over His own. “He calleth His own sheep by name.” This is the picture Jesus gives us of the shepherd’s intimacy which He has established with the sheep who are all His own. What can He mean by this illustration if not to teach us that each one of us may enjoy so close and personal a relationship as this? Beyond question He is “a good shepherd,” and by God’s appointment He is the “great Shepherd of the sheep”; but more precious still, and best of all, is the fact that each one of the true sheep may say, “The Lord is *my* Shepherd.”

His love is an individualising love, and his attentions are blessedly individual and personal too. The attention I individually need is in no danger of being overlooked in His care for all. By His rod and staff I personally am both comforted and corrected. He is my very faithful Shepherd when He leads me beside the quiet waters and into the green pastures, and He is just as faithful and loving when He lays the rod to my back when my feet wander out of the way, or when I follow other voices than His. O how short would have been my enjoyment of those quiet waters and verdant pastures if He had not been a Shepherd of whom I could say, “He restoreth my soul,” or as a better rendering gives it, “He restores me when wandering.” Prone as we are to wander, none but He could be a Shepherd equal to our needs.

Thus again we are reminded of those Everlasting Arms of God’s provision for us – they are always underneath—underneath our need of a “faithful and merciful High Priest,” faithful to commend when we have done well, and faithful to chastise, and to scourge, if need be, “every son whom the Father receiveth.” Acknowledging, then, our need of discipline lest we run to wood-making rather than fruit-bearing, and confessing our repeated failure to be wholly obedient to Him, we cannot but love Him for giving us the corrections we so much need, and especially so when we know that all the while those Everlasting Arms are underneath us. We could not be otherwise than grateful, for “We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.” (Heb. 12:9,10.)

How great is His mercy and compassion! What pains He has taken to make it clear that He is “touched with a feeling of our infirmities.” If in contrition of heart we are constantly humiliated by our failure and chagrined by the fact that we might well confess ourselves “the chief of sinners,” what then? O to grace what a debtor we are made! Just when it would seem that there is ground for assured defeat and failure, we discover anew that “The eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the Everlasting Arms.” He has anticipated our well-nigh abandoned hope of continuing in His love. He therefore does not come to us and add to our discouragement by saying, What man of you having an hundred sheep, if *one of the best and most faithful of them* wanders away, will he not go out and search for it until he find it? Ah no, our need is to have One “who can have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way,” and such He assured us He is.

No matter how weak and frail we are, if the heart be true, He abideth faithful, and for us He tells it thus: “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them (*any one* of them) doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing . . . Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke 15:4, 5,7.) Truly “the goodness of God leadeth to repentance” and the knowledge of the Everlasting Arms underneath constrains our hearts to more watchful diligence, lest we grieve the patient love of God.

But even if we have not wandered so far afield as this, but seem to have remained within the fold, heeding not the voice of strangers, and zealously intent on obeying the Shepherd’s voice, even then how constantly we are made to realise with increasing clearness the debt of love we owe. Dwelling here where faith may rest in the completeness of His provision for us, what joy there is in remembering that though knowing us as we really are, He loves us just the same. Ah yes, He sees and knows us as we really want to be. No one knows better than He that in attempting to live, we are often spoiling our own work by incongruous temper, or incongruous conduct.

Can we find anywhere a basis for a new beginning in which our confidence, shaken by failure and misunderstanding, can once more lift itself up into joy? Blessed is he who realises in such an hour that he still has left love’s last and greatest refuge, Christ’s knowledge of our sincerity; “Thou knowest that I love thee.” Whatever my own poor, faulty words and ways may say to others, awakening in their minds doubts of my sincerity; whatever the verdicts of others may be concerning me; whatever my own memory holds up before

me of inconsistency and error—"Thou knowest that I love Thee."

In every new experience, in every new temptation, in hours of strength, in hours of contrition, still we say to Him those same words of the deeper, holier fellowship, "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

My beloved Master, "Thou knowest all things." All power in heaven and in earth has been given to Thee. Thou knowest the great secrets of the Father's purposes. To Thee it has been given to know all the contents of the scroll within and without. But of all Thy boundless knowledge, this only gives me courage to come to Thee, and offer Thee this day my faulty life: – O blessed Saviour, "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Here then is the saint's rest; here our faith may drop its anchor in the calm sure heaven of the comforting assurance that "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms."