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Hope

(Convention Address)

“And now abideth Faith, Hope, Love, these three, but the greatest of these is Love.” 1. Cor. 13:13.

The apostle in these words highlights the supremacy of love, but it is also clear from them that faith and hope are also great qualities. So how would we define the second of these —Hope? Dictionaries and other sources are in general agreement on the meaning of hope, for instance:

- (a) Strong — anticipation, usually with pleasure.
- (b) Vine — favourable and confident expectation.
- (c) Reader’s Digest (in a Note) — enjoyment of the future in advance.

A reporter in a daily paper, in a search for the meaning of hope, referred to it as an “eternal generator” — the hope of attaining something drives men and women to the extreme of endurance to attain the goal desired. This accords with what the apostle Paul states in Phil. 3: 8-11. “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.... that I may know Him (Jesus), and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” If by ANY means I might ATTAIN unto the resurrection — this was indeed Paul’s great hope.

A Lively Hope

The apostle Peter describes the Christian’s hope as a lively or living hope. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” 1 Pet. 1:3,4.

True faith and living hope must be based on the sure promises of the word of God. This contrasts with the empty hope of many. Some hope that they may win a lottery, believing that wealth will bring them happiness. With very many, their hope is never realised, while some, After they have perhaps gained some wealth, find that it can only provide temporary realisation of their hope and often merely creates a desire for more.

The hope set out in the Scriptures for the Lord’s people, however, is based on that which we can be absolutely sure will be fully realised, provided only that we remain faithful to our Lord and do not let that hope become dimmed, for “He is faithful who promised”. Heb. 10:23.

We learn from Heb. 11:1 that faith is the substance or basis of things hoped for. The greater our faith, the greater will the hope shine out before us. This is well brought out in Rom. 5: 1-5. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (vv 1,2) These two verses show the progression of the Christian from the time he or she is drawn by the Father to have faith in Jesus. Faith-justification means we have peace with God, then we have access into His grace or favour, in which we stand. This favoured position of consecration, this “fa-

our upon favour” (John 1:16) we have received, leads to our rejoicing in the great hope of the glory of God.

The following three verses (vv 3-5) show how our hope increases. The Amplified Version brings out well the thought. “Moreover, let us be full of joy now! Let us exult and triumph in our troubles and rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that pressure and affliction and hardship produce unswerving endurance; and endurance (fortitude) develops maturity of character — that is, approved faith and tried integrity; and character (of this sort) produces (the habit of) joyful and confident hope of eternal salvation. Such hope never disappoints or eludes or shames us, for God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given unto us”.

Patience of Hope

To wait patiently for something indicates that we are hoping for it. An example of this is brought out in 1 Thes. 1: 3, where Paul writes — “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God, our Father.” The church at Thessalonica was a persecuted church and the apostle commends them for their faith and love and hope. Patience under persecution had only sharpened their faith and hope in the promises that were to be fulfilled in Jesus.

There are other scriptures which tell of the importance of patient, cheerful endurance in hope, such as Heb. 10: 3 5-3 7. “Cast not away therefore your confidence which has great recompense of reward. For you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise. For yet a little while and He that shall come will come and will not tarry.” This clearly implies that after one makes a vow to do the will of God, there is a testing time before that one realises his or her hope.

Luke 8: 5-8 recounts the parable of the sower. Jesus speaks of the seed of truth falling on four different kinds of soil — by the wayside, upon rocks, among thorns and upon good ground. He went on, on this occasion, to tell the meaning of the parable in Verses 11-15. “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are they that hear, then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rocks are they who when they hear, receive the word with joy, and these have no root, who for a while believe and in time of temptation fall away. They which fell among thorns are they, which when they have heard, go forth and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection.—But they on the good ground are they, which, in an honest and good heart having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

This parable describes the various ways in which Christians may be turned away from the realisation of their hope. Only they who bring forth fruit with patience will realise their hope. The first three classes described in the parable are those who make a start along the narrow way but then allow hindrances to prevent them from fulfilling their consecration.

Various hindrances can indeed arise to prevent one from carrying out his or her commitment to the Lord, probably more so than ever before. The rush and tear of life that surrounds us today can allow weeds to grow unchecked and to choke the growth of the Christian. The apostle Paul admonishes — “See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise; redeeming the time because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit.” Eph. 5: 15.

Victory for Christians can be gained only if they continue faithful with hope undimmed. In Matt. 24: 13, Jesus told His disciples — “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” Heb. 6: 10,11 tells us further — “For God is not unrighteous to forget your labour of love which you have showed toward His name in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.”

Assurance of Hope

Note here the reference to the full assurance of hope. Later in the passage the apostle links this up with the hope set before us. “That you be not slothful but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Here again the point is made that faith and patience are needed to ensure the hope is realised. “For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained

the promise.” Heb. 6: 12-15.

The apostle then brings the lesson home to the Lord’s people of this age. “For men verily swear by the greater and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. 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 is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.” Heb. 6: 16-20.

Hope is here likened to an anchor. A ship in a storm drops its anchor to hold it from drifting, possibly on to dangerous rocks. Most importantly, the anchor needs a strong line or cable to hold the ship. So in the picture, the anchor represents our hope the cable represents our faith. If we lose faith and let go of our hope, it will be like the ship breaking loose from its anchor, to drift possibly into grave danger and to be damaged or lost.

Hope — An Anchor

So our hope is the anchor to our spiritual life. If our love for our Lord is strong and our faith remains firm, our hope will hold fast “within the veil”, that is to say, to those precious things promised to us beyond this life. There Jesus has already entered, as our forerunner, a high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. The apostle John enlarges on this — “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God ...beloved, now are we the children of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone that hath this hope purifieth himself as He is pure.” 1 John 3: 1-3.

Thus we can understand what this great hope has done for us. Above all, it has given direction to our lives and a confident expectation for the future. It is a force operating in our minds and lives to urge us onward to the ultimate goal, that of being fitted for usefulness to our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus, in a small way now but more so in the age to come. But beyond the hope of the church of this gospel age, we know and rejoice that there is hope for all mankind. This in God’s due time will include the blessing of all who will be willing to accept the conditions of salvation in the new age.

One reason why the truth of the plan of God means so much to us is that we have learned that His love embraces not only a hope for His people of this age but a hope for all the families of the earth in God’s due time. Such thoughts are old but ever new and have been an anchor to the hope of the church all down the age. The gospel age church has assuredly a favourable and confident hope for the future, which in anticipation it can already enjoy in some measure.

Such hope can indeed be said to be an “eternal generator” urging those who possess it to the extreme of endurance to attain the goal set before them. Paul said of our Lord that “for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Heb. 12: 2. So too may our hope sustain us day by day, as we seek to run with patience the race set before us. (JBH: 1991)

Parting of the Red Sea

(News Item)

Two expert oceanographers have developed 1 what they say is a plausible explanation for the parting of the waters which enabled the Israelites under Moses to escape from the Egyptians. They have calculated that strong winds blowing along the narrow, shallow Gulf of Suez, a northern extension of the Red Sea and the likely site of the crossing, could account for the phenomenon.

Their report adds: “whether this theory explains the crossing or not, (we) believe it should not affect the religious aspects of the Exodus.... Some may even find our proposed mechanism to be a supportive argument for the original Biblical description of this event.” (*From the New York Times, published in The Age, Melbourne*)

NOTE: The Bible Study Monthly (Mar/Apr 1992) carries a review of a book — “Look for the Ancient Paths” 11 Beresford King-Smith. (92 pages, 16 maps, 16 illustrations.) This presents the results of an investigation of the

route of the Exodus based on the premise that the events as related are historically true and the reviewer considers that overall it should be useful to students of the period.

It is available direct from Bethany Enterprises, Moorwood Lane, Nuneaton, Warks CV10 OQH, England at £UK.4.95, incl. postage, or through the Institute at \$A 11.00.

PEOPLES PAPER
AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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

The Whole Armour

(Convention Address)

In nearly all ancient civilisations, armour was used for the protection of fighting men. It was usually made of metal, sometimes of leather. Webster's Dictionary defines Armour as protective covering for the body in battle. The word "Armour" appears 24 times in the Bible, and Strong's Concordance defines the Greek word as full armour or whole armour, or as one hymn puts it — the "panoply" of God.

In Eph 6: 10 & 11 we read "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Adversary". Note that the apostle is very specific that we need the whole armour because the conflict will be with the prince of darkness himself, and that God is the supplier of this armour. The apostle then presents us with a sequence of 7 individual pieces of the soldier's armour, that when put on together form the whole armour of God.

What is to be protected by the armour? Paul writes in (2 Cor. 5: 17), "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." The Christian is a new creature in the sense that he, as an individual, has a new mental outlook on life. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit of Truth.

The Christian through these influences, and a willingness of mind, has the viewpoint of Christ, who said "Not my will, but Thine, be done." (Luke 22: 42). As Christ looked upon life from the standpoint of God's plan as revealed in His Holy Word, so does the Christian. Therefore, the armour of God is for the protection of his mental state, the new mind, the viewpoint of Christ, which the Christian has adopted as his own. Let us examine each piece of armour, and as we do so, we shall find that the use for each piece has a purpose and a protective power.

We have to go back some 2000 years and visualise what a soldier looked like in the ancient world when he went out to battle. i.e. a Roman Soldier. The FIRST piece of armour is the girdle of Truth (verse 14). In olden times, a girdle was used to bind up the garments while work was performed. Therefore a girdle could be a fitting symbol of work or service. The girdle of truth could signify that the Christian is a servant of the Truth. We find this clearly taught in the Bible — that a Christian is an ambassador for Christ holding forth the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5: 18-20 Phil 2: 16).

How is the girdle of truth a protecting power? The piece of armour called the girdle of Truth protects the mind against all teachings or tendencies which draw the Christian away from being a servant of the Truth. The girdle of Truth, therefore, is really the definite teaching of the word of God. If the Christian understands this teaching, and brings his heart into harmony with the spirit and intent of it, he has set up in his mind a barrier to all hostile or intruding teachings, Thus the Christian is protected against the world and the Adversary.

The SECOND piece of armour is stated as "the breastplate of righteousness" (v 14). The fact that it is spoken of as a "breastplate" covering the vital organs of the body (including the heart) suggests that it is extremely important. There are two very prominent teachings in the Bible covering the thought of righteousness.

The first one relates to the righteousness that is in the perfect human sacrifice, the man Christ Jesus. In Heb 7:26 we read he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." He gave himself a ransom sacrifice for Adam and his race. We, being sinners, can approach God only through faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. We recognise that only as we are covered by the merit of our Lord Jesus, do we have a standing in God's presence. Christ is spoken of as our Advocate in 1 John 2: 1, and an advocate is one who "stands beside" as an attorney pleading one's cause. This is an important teaching, and protects us from all ideas which would provoke in us a

feeling of actual personal perfection. “The breastplate of righteousness” accomplishes this proper state of mind, and keeps us humble and thankful.

The second prominent teaching, covering the thought of righteousness, is the one that teaches us that we must be righteous, just, honest in thought and motive. The Christian is to “love righteousness and hate iniquity,” (Heb 1: 9) even as our Lord did. This teaching will protect one when temptations present themselves to the mind. Many temptations may prompt us to be a little dishonest or unjust for selfish reasons. If one has on the “breastplate of righteousness”, he will resist these temptations and thus be protected from them.

The THIRD piece of armour is for the feet — “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” (v. 15) The word preparation is translated from a Greek word, the root of which is to prepare, make ready. Therefore the meaning would be that this piece of armour prepares one to walk in the Narrow Christian Way. The explanation is beautiful and simple. The gospel of peace is really the good news of the Kingdom of God. It is good news to know that a literal kingdom is to be established here upon earth when God’s will shall be done here upon earth as it is done in heaven (Matt 6:10). Then all wars and troubles and death will cease. In due time those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake under new conditions, when the Son of God shall be king. (Dan 12:2).

The Christian has been convinced of the truthfulness of this good news. He has accepted it. He has done more — he has responded to the invitation to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer, which means that he stands for the same ideals and purposes as Jesus did. The Christian lays down his own life as a willing sacrifice in the service of God, which is the service of the Truth and on behalf of the Lord’s people. In connection with all this are certain precious promises of God’s watchcare and affection. The precious promises also include a rich reward at the end of the Christian way, of “glory, honour and immortality.” (Rom 2:7).

The good news of the coming kingdom of God, the invitation to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer, and the precious promises bring to the Christian a state of mind called the “peace of God” (Phil 4: 7) In the midst of the difficulties of life and the troubles in this world, and even while he walks in the “valley of the shadow of death,” (Psalm 23: 4) the Christian has peace of mind. No wonder the third piece of armour is spoken of as sandals protecting the feet. Without the “peace of God” the Christian would not be prepared to go through such difficulties. God in a very simple way protects the Christian against discouragement, and provides him with joy, peace and hope.

In still another way the Christian is protected by the sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace. The Christian is taught to use his faculty of readiness to resist the tendencies of the old will to be selfish and self-reliant. He must be a fighter in the good “fight of faith.” (1 Tim 6:12). He must endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (2 Tim 2:3) However, he must not use his fighting qualities against his fellow man, but only against evil in himself, and in defence of the Truth. Therefore he is taught to be a peacemaker — “blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God” (Math 5: 9).

The Christian is taught to prefer peace to uncontrolled aggression. Thus the Christian is protected against any natural tendencies he might have to argue or fight just for the sake of opposing something. When the Christian understands that the ultimate object of discussion or resistance is to establish peace upon proper grounds, how it helps him to be self-controlled and kind! Even when the Christian finds it his duty to speak sharply he is protected against bitterness and unrighteous anger by the sandals of peace.

The FOURTH piece of armour is the “shield of faith.” (V. 16) “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” The words “above all”, suggests that the shield is extremely important. How true! If one does not have the faith, or confident belief in the teachings of the Bible, he is not a Christian, neither can he stand the assaults of the adversary. Faith is increased and strengthened in at least 3 ways:

1. By the knowledge of the attributes of God as revealed in His plan of loving kindness;
2. By a consideration of fulfilled prophecy;
3. By the witness of the Spirit.

In the first way, how it increases our faith to understand that our Creator is loving and kind, even in permitting the reign of evil for a time! How our gratitude goes out to Him when we are assured that eventually this earth will be

made a paradise, man's eternal home, and that the dead will be awakened from the tomb to live forever, if obedient to the laws of righteousness; the wicked only shall be destroyed! How it increases our faith to know that God's special reward to the church — joint heirship with His Son — is an evidence of His infinite wisdom, and generous love.

In the second way, how it increases our faith to understand prophecy and to be able to appreciate the significance of world events! More than 2,500 years ago, Daniel prophesied (Dan 12: 4) that in the time of the end there would be a "running to and fro, and an increase of knowledge, and a time of trouble such as never was upon the earth." And now the Christian can see the actual fulfilment of these events in the modern contraptions enabling man to "run to and fro" in cars, aeroplanes, rockets, etc.; in the increase of man's knowledge; and in the distress of nations, which is indeed the greatest "time of trouble" (Dan 12: 1) the world has ever known.

In the third way, how it increases the Christian's faith to be able to detect in his life the witness of the Spirit! If he can trace in his life the fulfilment of the Spirit, the intention, the purpose of God (as revealed in the New Testament), then he has reason to rejoice and be full of confidence and trust. God has written us a letter, by His Holy Book. A letter is one's mind or purpose expressed in words. If our minds (spirits) witness or show a fulfilment of God's purpose in us, then our spirit witnesses with God's Spirit that we are God's children.

In this turbulent and changing world there is much to challenge faith, unless faith is founded upon something sound and understandable! Increase of knowledge has stimulated the minds of all to think. As a result, religious beliefs have suffered. The Bible has suffered too, because many had the erroneous thought that the Bible encouraged ignorance. In this time when knowledge has increased, the Christian has his portion of knowledge to enable him to exercise a strong faith in a reasonable and proved Bible beyond any doubt.

The FIFTH piece of armour is the "helmet of salvation" (v. 17) As with the other pieces of armour, so with this one, the position gives us a clue as to its function in protecting the Christian. "The "helmet" being worn upon the head suggests a protection in the form of knowledge, intelligence, information. Christians all down through the Gospel age have had knowledge from God's Holy Word. This knowledge has been an explanation of God's plan of salvation, enabling them to grasp His will concerning them.

It has been suggested that in the end of the age, the Christian is provided with a much larger helmet than was provided for God's people in the past. We are living in a very different time. Daniel said that in the time of the end, knowledge would be increased. This is true. The disciple of Christ has need of a larger helmet to enable him to stand in an intellectual world. The increase of knowledge has discredited many former beliefs that were not well founded in Scripture. Just at the right time the Christian has been provided with concordances, Bible dictionaries and numerous translations of the Scriptures.

All of this is of tremendous importance to God's people, in view of the numerous appeals to the mind from all quarters and on every subject. Libraries and second hand book stores give evidence of the time in which we are living. There are thousands of books, each one possessing a power to affect the mind in some way. How bewildered the Christian would be if he were not provided with the helmet of proper knowledge of the Bible, the Word of God. His helmet proves that the Bible is true, shows what God's plan of loving kindness is, refutes arguments against the Bible, explains prophecy, and intercepts the significance of world events. Thus Christian belief is founded upon proper knowledge which cannot be refuted.

The SIXTH piece of armour is the "sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God." (v.17) This is the only offensive piece of the Christian's armour. Like all other weapons, it can be used properly or improperly. The sword of the spirit is not intended to be used to cut and wound others, but is intended to be used in defence of one's own position and for one's upbuilding. Our Lord Jesus gave us an illustration of its use in defence of His position in Matt. 4: 1-10, where we read how in three ways Satan tempted Him.

These temptations were suggestions to our Lord's mind by the Adversary. We know our minds are capable of forming pictures by our imagination. Such was the case with our Lord. He was not literally taken to a pinnacle of the temple, nor was He literally taken to a mountain top. Rather, his mind formed impressions suggested by the Adversary. It is important to observe the use our Lord made of the sword of the spirit in resisting the temptations. Not once did he bitterly accuse or threaten Satan. Instead, he countered the Adversary's argument with the well chosen and properly applied Scripture. In all three temptations He extinguished the Adversary's intent with "It is written", the sword of the spirit. Satan used the sword of the spirit too, in the second temptation; but he misap-

plied it in his attempt to invite our Lord into unrighteousness.

The sword of the spirit is also for the purpose of destroying everything contrary to the knowledge of God, so that every thought may be brought into full obedience to Christ. (2 Cor. 10: 3-5). So we can see the purpose of the sword of the spirit, according to this scripture, is to put aside all teachings and influences that are against the knowledge of God.

The SEVENTH and final piece of armour is described (v.18) as “praying always”. — The verse reads: “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” A good soldier of the Lord Jesus must keep in touch with headquarters; this he is privileged to do by coming daily to the throne of grace in prayer. We read in John 15:7 — “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.”

One of Satan’s chief lines of attack is to cut off our communication with the Lord. In Mark 14:38, our Master warned, “Watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation.” By watching and praying always, besides having on the whole armour, we will progress. With all our armour, we need to cultivate and use the privilege of prayer.

It is a very great favour to be allowed to approach the supreme ruler of the universe and we should come therefore in a spirit of deep appreciation, earnestness, humility and reverence. The apostle adds the words “watching thereunto” — this calls for an attitude of mental alertness. We should also take heed as to the things for which we ask and be sure that we seek those things which we are promised and are entitled to ask for.

Our Lord frequently called attention to the fact that we should be persevering in prayer. Perseverance is an essential quality in the sight of God. It includes patience, carefulness and interest. Our praying should be in the spirit, in other words, from the heart. The very isolation of our Lord from all human help drew Him the nearer and more frequently to the Father in prayer and communion. As we grow in this character likeness, we will, like Him, “pray without ceasing”, rejoicing in the Lord and recognising Him as the centre of all our hopes.

When all the armour is properly worn, a state of mind is created, which is quite as important as the armour itself. Our Lord was 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness, weak and exhausted physically, yet when He came forth He was strong in mind, strengthened by the word and the spirit of God. The Christian too must be moulded around the word and spirit of God; when this is fully grasped, then we know the means by which we are strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

So may each one of us put on and keep on the whole armour of God; by so doing we will be alert to danger signals and fully prepared, “able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” (AK: 1991).

Out of the Abundance of the Heart

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by the words thou shalt be condemned.” (Mat. 12:34, 37).

The words of our Lord indicate that the heart and the mouth are under very special scrutiny, the former representing the individual character, and the latter being an index of the character.

It is in this same view of the matter that these words of wisdom were penned — “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.” (Prov. 4: 23, 24.) The indication is clear that a right condition of the heart is necessary to right words, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” as experience testifies to every man. It is therefore just that our words should be a criterion of judgment in the Lord’s estimation, as He tells us they are.

Our first concern, then, should be for the heart, that its affections and dispositions may be fully under the control of divine grace, that every principle of truth and righteousness may be enthroned there; that justice, mercy, brotherly kindness, faith, meekness, temperance and love may be firmly fixed as the governing principles of life. If these principles be fixed, established in the heart, then out of the good treasures of the heart, the mouth will speak forth words of truth, soberness, wisdom and grace. Of our Lord Jesus, whose heart was perfect, in whom was no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, it was said, “Grace is poured into thy lips,” and again, “All bare him

witness and wondered at the gracious words that proceedeth out of his mouth.” (Psa. 45: 2; Luke 4: 22.)

So wise, just, and true were the Lord’s words, that though His enemies were continually seeking to find some fault, it is said, “They could not take hold of his words before the people; and they marvelled at his answers, and held their peace.” (Luke 20:26). And others said, “Never man spake like this man.” (John 7:46.) Thus our Lord left a worthy example to His people, which the Apostle urges all to follow, saying — “Let your speech be always with grace (with manifest love and kindness) seasoned with salt.” (Col. 4:6) And Peter adds, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God,” — wisely and in accordance with the spirit and mind of the Lord. Again, it is written, “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile.” “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” “The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious words, but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.” “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God, for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few.” (Psa. 34:13; Prov. 21: 23 Eccles. 10:12, 13; 5: 2.)

Job, in the midst of all his afflictions was very careful not to sin with his lips. He knew that his words would be taken by the Lord as an index of his heart, and he was careful to keep both the heart and his words right, saying “What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil (or troubles for disciplining). The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 2: 10; 1: 21.) There was no spirit of rebellion in a heart out of whose abundance came such words of loving submission, patience and faith under severe testings, and that, too, without a clear vision of the divine wisdom in permitting them.

The Psalmist puts into the mouths of God’s consecrated and tried people these words of firm resolution — “I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth in a bridle, while the wicked is before me.” (Psa. 39:1). How necessary to the stability of Christian character is such a resolution, and the self control which develops under an adherence to it. The world, the flesh and the devil oppose our way; there are fightings within and storms without, and many are the arrows and darts aimed at the righteous, and the safe attitude of the Christian in the face of the opposition of the world is to be silent, and to allow the Lord to work all these trials for our good, for the servant is not above his Lord. As Jesus took the opposition of sinners against Himself with such humble patience, so we too should “go therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach;” as He said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.” So the Psalmist suggests, saying — “I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good” (or from doing what seemed good in my sight). Again it is written — “He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his life, but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” (Prov. 13: 3.)

So we see what importance the Lord attaches to our words, for if our words are rebellious, or disloyal, or frivolous, or flippant, or unkind, unthankful, unholy, or impure, the heart is judged accordingly on the principle that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Thus, our words in all the varied circumstances of our daily life are bearing testimony before God of the condition of our hearts, and the Psalmist puts this prayer into the lips of all the Lord’s people — “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Permit not my heart to incline after any evil things. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes. My tongue shall speak of thy word; for all thy commandments are righteousness. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. I have longed for thy salvation (and for the perfection and beauty of holiness), O Lord; and thy law is my delight.” (Psa. 141:3, 4; 19:14; 119:171-174).

In many things we are all faulty. If any one does not err in word he is a perfect man, able to control the whole body. (James 3:2.) But such a man does not exist; we all need to continually plead the merit of our Saviour and Advocate, while we strive daily to perfect holiness in the reverence of the Lord. Therefore, let our words be few; let them be thoughtful and wise, as uttered before God, and not rash, hasty and ill considered. Let our conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ. “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Phil. 4:8.) Thus, out of the good treasure of the heart, we shall be able to speak words of truth and soberness, and so honour and glorify Jesus and our loving Heavenly Father.

I Will Abide With Thee

I will abide, though night is drawing nigh,
Though clouds and darkness now obscure the sky.
I know thy sorrow, see thy falling tear —
Give Me thy hand, for I am very near.

The earthly joys are passing fast away;
Lean thou on Me and I will be thy stay.
My grace is all-sufficient, rich and free.
Have perfect faith—I will abide with thee.

My eyes are watching o'er thee, troubled child,
My arm shall guide thee, though the path be wild.
Midst storms and tempest, to My bosom flee,
Be not afraid—I will abide with thee.
A little while and then it will be light,
Thy faith shall be exchanged for perfect sight;
No fear to vex thee, nothing to molest,
For thou shall be with Me in perfect rest

When friends may fail thee, I will be thy friend,
My love shall last until thy journey's end.
And when heaven's golden gates thine eyes shall see,
I will eternally abide with thee.

(Inspired by the much-loved hymn “Abide with Me”)