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The High Calling of God

(Phil. 3:14)

The usual thought is that there is only the one calling of God to repentance and the reward of heaven. It is generally thought that Abraham, Moses, David and others of that early time are all in heaven—that all the faithful under the Jewish Law age were rewarded by going to heaven.

Of course, our Lord definitely denied such teaching when He said, “No man hath ascended up to heaven.” (John 3:13.) In Acts 2:34 we read, “David is not ascended into the heavens.” No, there was no promise to any of the ancient worthies of a heavenly reward. The hope of spiritual life in heaven with the Lord is for the church only, to whom our Lord says, “I go to prepare a place for you and if I go, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.” (John 14:2, 3.) In harmony with this the Apostle Paul (Heb. 11:39, 40) speaking of the faithful prior to that time says, “These all died in faith, not having received the promise, God having provided some better thing for us” (the church).

This agrees too with our Lord’s words, “The law and the prophets were until John; since then the kingdom of God is preached,” and “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Luke 16:16; Matt. 11:11.) Yes, the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. (John 1:17.)

The callings of God are not confined to this Gospel Age. In Rom. 11:29 the Apostle speaks of the *gifts and callings* of God. God called Abraham to leave Ur of Chaldea where paganism had its birth and thrived; he was called into a new country and God used him to declare the gospel. It is recorded that “the gospel was preached to Abraham.” (Gal. 3:8.) In the great promise made to Abraham there is indicated an earthly seed and also a heavenly seed. “Thy seed shall be as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the seashore.” (Gen. 22:17.)

The Lord provided wonderful pictures in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for our edification as the Apostle Paul informs us. There was the picture of Sarah representing the gospel of grace, and Hagar, the servant, representing the Law Covenant. Ishmael represented Israel in bondage under the Law, and Isaac represented the church of Christ under grace—“We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” Isaac also was a picture of Christ. Abraham offered him as a burnt offering but his hand was stayed from slaying Isaac by an angel and the ram was offered as for him. God gave His only begotten Son as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world.

Then Isaac must have a bride and there is the beautiful picture of Genesis 24,—the calling and choosing of Rebekah to be the wife of Isaac. What a wonderful picture this is of the “high calling of God,” the call to be members of the Bride class—the Bride of Christ. No one was ever offered the privilege of becoming a member of this Bride class prior to the first advent of Christ. John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, did not have this privilege. He had, however, the privilege of introducing the Bridegroom to Israel. He said (John 3:28, 29), “I am not the Christ. . . He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom; but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom’s voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”

This privilege of being called of God to be the Bride class was first offered to the nation of Israel exclusively, as Paul mentions in Romans 10th and 11th chapters. It was because of their failure through unbelief and their rejection of Messiah that they were cast off and the wonderful privilege of the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus” became available to believers of the Gentiles. “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” (Rom. 11:7.) God then turned to the Gentiles to make up the number of the elect.

There is a definite number to be chosen as indicated in the Lord's parable of the Great Supper, Luke 14:16-24, also in Rom. 11:25-27, which shows that afterwards all Israel shall be saved—blindness will pass away and Divine favour will restore the nation to the Holy Land and use it as the earthly representative of the Kingdom of God for the blessing of all nations.

So there are different callings of God in the different ages. Israel only was called to be a holy nation unto the Lord during the Jewish age. (Amos 3:2, Psa. 33:12; 147: 19, 20.) "The law and the prophets were until John, since then the kingdom of heaven is preached." Israel had been an earthly kingdom of the Lord—"David sat upon the throne of the Lord." The preaching of Jesus was "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was opened up at Pentecost. Since then God has been taking out from the Gentiles a people for His name. (1 Pet. 2:4-10.)

How different is the high calling of God to anything prior to the Gospel Age. Up to the beginning of the Gospel Age there was no promise of heavenly inheritance nor of spiritual life; all the promises to the ancients from Genesis to Malachi were concerning earthly things. Now all the promises to the church, to those begotten of the Holy Spirit, called to be members in Christ, are spiritual; no earthly prosperity is promised. Earthly things are to be forsaken or used in the Lord's service and we are promised persecution and tribulation to assist us in forming a character like Christ's, and to help us to "count lightly the things of the earth, esteeming them only of trifling worth." To become like Christ in character, in heart, mind and disposition is the mark to be reached in order to gain the prize of the high calling of God.

Shall we ask, why is God making this selection, inviting just a "little flock to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom"? Some say that everyone is invited but they will not come. Does it not say "whosoever will" may come? Yes, we find a text like that in the last chapter of the Bible, but let us not forget that there are different callings of God, different invitations, and if we turn to Rev. 22:17 we shall see that the wide invitation to "whosoever will" refers to a time when the church, the Bride of Christ, is perfected, glorified and reigning with her Lord, and the work of lifting up and blessing all nations begins—that is the time when Christ will win the world and bring in lasting righteousness and peace. That is the Divine purpose in first choosing the church, the "stars of heaven" class of the promise to Abraham. It was stated that Abraham's seed should bless all the families of the earth, and the apostles make this plain in Gal. 3:16, 29; Acts 15:14-17, and Rom. 8:19-22, etc.

The Lord is choosing a class that shall rejoice to do such work in the Kingdom Age, those who have faith and will gladly surrender their own wills and do God's will. So there has been a selection going on. In the days when Jesus was preaching on earth He spoke plainly to His disciples, but He spoke to the hypocritical Pharisees always in parables. He explained the reason for this; they were not the kind of people He wanted; they were selfish and proud, so He said He spoke in parables to them that hearing they might not understand lest they should repent and be converted. They were not suitable to be members of His Bride class. It will be remembered how careful Abraham was when he sent his servant to choose a bride for Isaac. "Thou shalt not take a wife unto my son from among the Canaanites." Then, Eliezer did not make the offer to just anyone even in the household of Bethuel; he was directed by God.

What a privilege it is to be invited. Jesus said, "No man can come unto me except it be given unto him of my Father," Again, "No man can come unto me except the Father which sent me draw him,"—call him or invite him. (John 6:65; 6:44.)

How does the Father draw or invite, and how do we know we are invited? It is by the Holy Spirit operating through the Word of truth and through God's people. We are influenced by surrounding circumstances and conditions and come in contact with the message of the Gospel. The seed (the Word of God) takes lodgment in the good ground of our hearts and we feel after God and learn to "love Him because He first loved us," and will learn more of His will. We realise a peace of heart and mind through faith in Christ; we are justified by faith and realise forgiveness and mercy. Then we do not stop here, for we realise a drawing to come nearer. We have reached the Court of the Tabernacle condition. But we came there so as to go on nearer to the Holy of Holies, or in other words, we hear the Apostle's word—"I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice." (Rom. 12:1.)

Having taken this step we receive the Holy Spirit, and can understand the deeper things of God—we become new creatures and find the transforming of our minds progressing so that we come to understand more clearly God's will for us. This is the beginning of the race for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Peter, then, reminds us that we should be "diligent to make our calling and election sure." (2 Pet. 1:10.) This reminds us of Psa. 45:13, 14 where the "raiment of needlework" describes the characteristics of the Bride.

So we see the purpose of the narrow way to life at the present time; what is necessary on our part; what God has promised to do; how we may know that we are called and are in the way; how God will work in us and has promised grace and strength whilst we are covered with the robe of righteousness. ("The Voice")

Millennial Truth PART 2 - THE LAST DAY

(Part 1 of this article, entitled "HOPE FOR ALL MANKIND", appeared in the previous issue of "People's Paper" - March/April 1996)

Let us now look at some of the various titles that apply to the Millennium, and the thoughts that they convey to us. The parable of the sheep and the goats gives us a lead - this parable shows the judging work of that age, and one of its titles is "The Day of Judgement", not a twenty four hour day, as some believe, but the same one thousand year day. The apostle Paul preached this coming day to the Athenians on Mars Hill (Acts 17:31) - *"Because He hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."*

Here we are given the nature of the judgement, i.e. a righteous judgement. We are told that Jesus is the Judge; this confirms our Lord's own words in John 5:22 - *"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son"* - and in verses 28, 29 - *"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"* "Resurrection to judgement" is the correct rendering of the Greek for these final words and most translations, other than the KJV, put it in this way or similarly.

This day is resurrection day, the time when all those in the prison-house of death will be brought back. Those receiving a resurrection to judgement will then be given an opportunity for everlasting life if obedient to the laws of the kingdom in that one thousand year judgement day. We can link this in with our Master's words in John 12; 47, 48 - *"If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."* Jesus, as we see, did not come to judge the world at the time of His first advent.

The "last day" He referred to is again the great, one thousand year Millennial Judgement Day. We think of the words of Martha in John 11:24 - *"Martha saith unto Him (Jesus), I know that he (Lazarus) shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* The term "last day" means the last day in God's program for the rehabilitation of this planet and its people. Ever since the fall in Eden, this work has been quietly progressing behind the scenes, quite unknown to the world in general.

We could liken the Plan of God to a great drama in three parts, part one from Eden to our Lord's first advent, approximately four one thousand year days, during which time a class was being selected to be "princes in all the earth", as we read in Psalm 45:16 - *"Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth."*

These are usually referred to as the "ancient worthies" and we read of many of them in Hebrews 11.

Part two of this great drama runs from Christ's first advent to the start of the Millennium, approximately two one thousand year days. These days were set aside for the selection of the Church, those who are to reign with Christ over the Kingdom on this last day, as we see from Rev. 20:4 - *And I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."*

So then six days of the divine restoration program have elapsed and one day remains, which is the last day. Looking at it this way makes it easier to understand the meaning of the term - Last Day. Act One of the drama was the longest, stretching over four days. Act Two was two days long, just half the time. Act Three, just one day in length, is again half the time of the previous act. While Act Three is shortest in length of time, it could be regarded as the greatest in the amount of wonderful work to be accomplished in it. The two previous acts have been a preparatory work, a preparation for the last great act. We could say that God has been selecting the members of His Government, on its various levels, to take part in the Millennial Age work.

The apostle Peter draws our attention again to this same judgement day in 2 Peter 3:7, 8 - *"But the heavens and earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men, But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."* It is made very clear here that this Judgement Day is one thousand years long. Peter considers it important that we understand this; he does not wish us to remain ignorant of it, but despite his admonition many in fact are still ignorant of it.

We find an interesting statement in 2 Peter 2:9 - *"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgement to be punished."* We know that all evil deeds will bring a recompense, but the Greek word here for 'punished' is *kolazo* and also carries the additional thought of 'restraint'. Vine's Greek Dictionary says it primarily denotes 'to curtail, prune, dock, check, restrain, punish'. We find a similar thought in Isa. 30:21 - *"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee,*

saying, *This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.*"

In the Millennial Day, all evil will be restrained; nothing will be allowed to hurt or harm, as we are told in Isa. 11:9 - "*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*" This same period is spoken of in Isa. 26:9 - "*With my soul have I desired Thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek Thee early; for when Thy judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*" The whole Millennial Day will be a time of learning God's ways and unlearning the old unrighteous ways. This verse further shows that the Judgement Day could not be one of twenty four hours only.

There is a further interesting statement in Isa. 1:26 - "*I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning; afterward thou shalt be called, the city of righteousness, the faithful city.*" The Heavenly Father is the Supreme Judge over all, but He has delegated the judging work to Jesus Christ, as we saw before. This is well put by the apostle Paul in Rom 2:16 - "*In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.*" Jesus then appoints the Church to share in the judging work as Paul again says in 1 Cor. 6:2 (part) - "*Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world?*" The Ancient Worthies, the Princes in all the earth, will also have a part in the judging process as we see in Isa. 32:1. - "*Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness, and Princes shall rule in judgment.*"

The King here could be a reference to Jesus and the Church. The Judges that we saw mentioned before in Isa. 1:26 would seem to refer to the Ancient Worthies. It is Israel's judges that are to be restored - this is an allusion back to the period of the judges in Israel. When we think of a judge and judgment, we picture a judge sitting on a bench and handing down a sentence, but that is not the thought being presented here. The work of the judges in Israel is an illustration of the Millennial Age work. By examining the book of Judges, we find that when a judge was appointed, he delivered the people from their oppressors and brought them peace - this will be exactly the work of the Millennial Age. Notice once more the harmony of all these scriptures.

Another title applied to the Millennium is "The Times of Restitution". We read in Acts 3:21, speaking of Jesus - "*Whom the heavens must receive until the **times of restitution of all things**, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*" Some translations render the word as 'restoration', and this has much the same meaning. This work takes place after our Lord returns. He has remained in heaven through the centuries of the Gospel Age, as we note from 1 Peter 3:22 - *Who has gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.*"

His return ushers in "The Times of Restitution". Restitution means to restore something to what it was before. What then is to be restored in the restitution times? Surely many things, for we notice again that it says "restitution of ALL things". Could there be a thought that during the Gospel Age there has been in effect a restoration of those who have been called to make up the Church? But now it is to be a restoration of ALL Things!

(1) Restitution to Health The apostles Peter and John had just healed a lame man and such a miraculous event would have caused quite a crowd to gather. The apostles were not slow to take advantage of the situation and to preach Christ and the Plan of God. We find the details in Acts 3:7, 8 - "*And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength, and he leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.*" Here was a small illustration of the Restitution work of the Millennium. Let us note Isa. 35:6 - "*Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.*" Even the terminology is the same - "the lame man shall leap".

In that wonderful future Day, there will be no deformed people, no deaf, dumb or blind, no sickness or illness of any kind, as we read in Isa. 33:24 - "*And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.*" In that Day, there is to be complete restoration to the perfect health originally enjoyed by Adam and Eve.

(2) Restitution of the planet itself Through bad management, indiscriminate clearing of forests and so on, vast areas of the earth have been turned into deserts, and have become uninhabitable. These will all be restored to make space for the millions returning from the grave, as in Isa. 35:1, 7 - "*The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose; and the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.*" In part, this work may already have commenced in Israel, Egypt, and other places. We would expect it to be so, because it seems that we are now living in the "day of preparation", preparation for the kingdom, as mentioned in Nahum 2:3.

The whole earth has become very polluted with poisonous chemicals of many different kinds, sprays, artificial fertilisers, fluorocarbons, lead, mercury and many unnatural substances. The times of restitution will correct all this, and the environment will be returned to pristine condition. Isa. 66:1 says - "*Thus saith the*

Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.” Then Isa. 60:13 - “The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together; to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place **of my feet glorious.**” God’s footstool, that is, the whole earth, is to be made glorious, like the pattern that God gave in the Garden of Eden.

(3) Restitution to life No matter how glorious man’s earthly home were made, without life he could enjoy it for only a brief period. By the end of the Millennium, death will be a thing of the past, as we are told in 1 Cor. 15:25, 26 - “For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” Mankind will then be restored to everlasting life, as enjoyed by Adam and Eve before they sinned. Rev. 21:4 says - “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.”

(4) Restitution of Israel The return of the Jewish people to their homeland has been prophesied by many of God’s holy prophets; the bringing of them back again from out of all the nations where they have been scattered is foretold in many scriptures. This is a restitution work that we can see in the process of being fulfilled. Of the many scriptures there are on the subject, let us quote just one, that in Amos 9:14, 15 - “I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no **more** be pulled up out **of** their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.”

(5) Restitution of mankind to perfection There is one more important work to be accomplished. As we saw, Adam was originally created in God’s likeness, that is, His character-likeness, or in other words - perfect. We remember our Lord’s words to His followers in Matt. 5:48 - “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” The words of the Master here are instructions to the Church, but by the end of the Millennium, all those eligible to inherit the earth will have been brought back to the character-likeness of their Creator. Everlasting life on a restored earth would be of little value, if there was still violence and evil abroad as there is today, so we can see that this is a vital part of the Millennial work.

Let us now consider some scriptures related to our part in this great restitution work of the Millennium, firstly Jesus’ words to His disciples in Luke 22:29 - “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me”, then the record of John the Revelator in Rev. 21:9, 10 and 21:2 -

(A) “There came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither; I will show you the Bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”

(B) “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

This great city, the New Jerusalem, is a symbol of the glorified Church beyond the veil. Why is the Church pictured by the city of Jerusalem? Because Jerusalem typifies the Millennial Age government. King David established his government on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. He reigned over God’s kingdom; he was directly appointed by God, so therefore his rule typifies the coming Millennial Age kingdom. Jesus sits on David’s throne as we are told in Luke 1:32 concerning Jesus - “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David.”

The capital city of a country symbolises its government. We often hear the expression that London, Washington or Canberra says this or that, meaning that the statement comes from the government of the country. We see then that the New Jerusalem coming down to earth would mean their authority coming down to earth - the commencement of the Millennial Age reign.

Why is Christ not mentioned here, we might ask. In fact, He is, for we are told that the New Jerusalem is adorned as a Bride for her Husband. We are told in the scriptures that the man, that is the husband, is the head of the wife and that this relationship pictures that between Christ and the Church. (Eph. 5:23) That would be the picture that we have presented here, the Husband Jesus is the Head of the Bride, the Head of the New Jerusalem, the Head of God’s government ruling over the earth.

It is said of Abraham in Hebrews 11:10 - “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This was the city which Abraham looked for, he longed for the time when God’s righteous government would be ruling over the earth. At the present time, we are being prepared to make us suitable material so that we might be worthy to have a position in God’s government under our Head and Master, Jesus Christ. What a privilege, what a thrilling and exciting prospect we have before us! This is Millennial Truth.

May this glorious prospect of having a part in assisting the whole groaning creation up the Highway of

Holiness in the age to come stimulate us to greater zeal in the service of our Lord and of the brethren, here and now, while we continue to pray - *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!"* Amen.

Faith and Gratitude

(Convention Address)

"Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." Luke 4:27

I would like to recall for you the Biblical story of a certain Syrian who had an incurable illness. We would all feel sympathy toward close friends who are going through some kind of physical disability and especially so towards any who fall victims to incurable illnesses. And in these days, the media inform us about new, incurable, previously unknown illnesses and diseases all too often.

One such disease, which is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments, is leprosy. The Old Testament sets out the ways of treating lepers and leprosy in Israel, while in the New Testament we read about people suffering from this disease and how they sought a cure from our Lord Jesus. Our story, however, relates to an Old Testament case of this disease, and it is recorded in 2 Kings 5:1-18.

During the reign of the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser II, in about the 9th Century B.C., Israel and Syria had agreed to permit a mutual exchange between their countries, but Israel's allies had certain reservations about its Syrian neighbours. This was due to frequent raids by small groups of Syrian bandits, so it was only natural that Jehoram, the reigning king in Israel, did not trust his neighbours.

We are told that Naaman, the captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man, honourable, highly respected, a mighty man of valour, but he had fallen victim to the dreadful disease of leprosy. This was an incurable skin disease and in that respect as dreadful a sickness as cancer. The organs of the body are attacked by leprosy and disintegrate, the illness progresses and affects further different parts of the body as well.

In the early stages there is no pain but the final stages are extremely painful. Leprosy usually starts as a swollen wound which progressively develops affecting the eyes and vocal cords, the hands, the feet and finally the whole body, ending in mental imbalance, sleepiness and ultimately death. The historian Josephus writes the "lepers were officially treated as diseased and considered as dead."

In the case of Naaman the leper, we are not told how far his leprosy had progressed, but we are told that he continued to fulfil a very important and responsible role for the Syrian army. So we can only deduce that his leprosy was in the comparatively early stages of development, though the signs and symptoms of it were evident to all the people around him.

In time, a little Israelite maiden noticed it. She was a humble housemaid to Naaman's wife, but she was so full of sympathy for her master that she suggested a way in which he might seek a cure for his illness. Her kind nature could not look indifferently at the sufferings of another human being. She was a God-fearing Israelite girl and believed in the power of God's prophet Elisha to heal her master, Naaman, whom she respected and considered worthy of being healed.

Naaman was a man of high military standing in the Syrian army, yet he accepted the maiden's modest suggestion, the suggestion of a humble servant who was often in the presence of her lord. Naaman's reaction was positive. When God offers His divine help, He always uses godly people who have the character of a quiet, humble and modest disposition, and this can be a lesson for us.

Let us ask ourselves, How often do we accept the good suggestions and opinions of our brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we accept their advice and reminders willingly? or with joy? Or do we go on our guard with a reflex action of rejection? or even with a certain amount of anger? - a negative reaction. Our brothers and sisters in Christ, our wives, husbands, parents, even our children and all with whom we have daily interaction well know our characters and often only too well what advice we have need of. Do we always listen to and appreciate their suggestions? Especially when we are tired after our day's work and our nearest and dearest one gives us good advice, it may not always meet with our positive reaction.

When we ourselves are giving advice and suggestions to others, let us always do so in a godly spirit, with quietness and humbleness. The offering of advice and suggestions has to be always in the proper spirit, in the proper way, also at the appropriate time, at the right place and to the right person. It is always a delicate undertaking and difficult to carry through satisfactorily, but by the correct study of God's word and in a spirit of love and humility, we can come to the right way of giving others advice and reminders. *"A man hath joy in the answer of his mouth; and a word in season, how good is it!" Prov. 15:23.*

Returning to the story of Naaman's leprosy, we find that the intervention of the king of Syria did not bring about the expected results. The king of Israel did not agree to receive the Syrian general, suspecting that in

Naaman's case there was some kind of political provocation or even some trap that would possibly lead to war.

At that time, the prophet in Israel was the renowned prophet Elisha, and when he learnt of Naaman's case, he offered his help. However, we are told that, when Naaman the leper stood in Elisha's doorway, the prophet did not receive him personally but instead greeted him through a messenger, who gave directions that would rid Naaman of his leprosy. Naaman was not impressed with the welcome he received in Israel, when neither the king nor even the prophet personally received him. He had expectations of a grand welcome with a feast and full honours - a royal performance! Yet here he was met with what sounded to him to be ridiculous advice of very doubtful value.

After these surprising events, Naaman became very angry and, turning away in a rage, prepared his belongings as well as his escort for the return journey to Syria. His servants desperately tried to persuade him to reconsider his rash decision - evidently the Syrian general was sympathetic towards his servants and received respect from them, for they all wished that he be cured of his disease. He must have been approachable and good towards his servants, as they were not afraid to question his decision and were eventually able to change his mind. It is rather remarkable, indeed, that a man of such high standing, having a responsible position and authority, could still humbly yield to the suggestions and advice of his servants.

Let us once again recall the lesson of accepting advice and suggestions that come not necessarily from high ranking lines of authority but remember that sometimes it is that quiet and humble voice at our side which can reveal itself as the genuine voice of God.

In accordance with Elisha's advice, Naaman therefore dipped himself in the river Jordan. After the first dip, there was no change; when he dipped a second time, again there was no change. The third and fourth dips likewise brought no improvement. After the fifth and sixth dips, there was still no improvement. But after he had dipped himself the seventh time in Jordan, the body of Naaman the leper was cured! It was faith that had led to his being healed; after the seventh dipping of his body in Jordan, Naaman was the recipient of a great blessing, the blessing of being restored to health!

We recall that the number seven in the Bible symbolises or represents perfection, and we can find for ourselves a valuable lesson from this story of Naaman. If we desire the promises and blessings of God, our faith in them must always be perfect and complete as well. Our obedience to God, our baptism into death with Jesus Christ, must also be wholehearted, they must be perfect and complete.

The example of Naaman's faith was mentioned by Jesus in His sermon to the dwellers in Nazareth, and we read in Luke 4:27 - "*and there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.*" The dwellers in Nazareth, from where our Saviour came, did not receive Jesus properly; they knew Him from His birth as the son of Joseph and Mary; they had observed Him growing up in the power of God; and they had also heard that He performed many miracles in neighbouring Capernaum. But when our Lord Jesus came to where He had previously lived, they rejected Him, even planning to destroy Him.

Maybe this event should lead us to examine our own behaviour. Have we become indifferent to our consecration, in that it now lacks excitement and has become commonplace? Perhaps our elders no longer enjoy the appreciation they previously received from us? Are their voices the same as they were, or has even the tone now become rather monotonous to us? We have so many talks on tape to listen to and so many topics to choose from - why should we be bothered to go to meetings, to get up early, to wash and dress, to hurry to get there on time? Surely, God is everywhere - could we not lay a little longer in bed, and so, half asleep, listen to an address of our liking?

The apostle Paul, in 1 Cor. 6:12, says - "*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient.*" Many of us have been "in the truth" for 10 or more years, others 20, 30, 40 or 50 years. Maybe we are proud of our achievement - born and raised in a Christian home, next to the Bible - but maybe we have become used to and complacent about our meetings. Maybe we are coming just to satisfy others, or to fulfil the requests of our parents? or maybe even God? whom we cannot possibly deceive for He knows our heart's condition only too well.

Dear brethren, let us treasure the precious truth which we have been so privileged to receive. Let us refresh ourselves every day with the Divine promises for it is only through them that we can become partakers of the divine nature. Let us respect our brethren, our elders, and how much of their lives they have sacrificed in order to provide us with necessary spiritual food.

In Israel there were many lepers, these were classified as unclean. 2 Kings 7:3 mentions four leprous men at the entrance of the gate of the city; but the prophet did not heal these, as they did not possess faith. From Luke's account, we learn of another ten lepers, who came to Jesus requesting that their leprosy be cured. (Luke 17: 12-19) By a miracle, Jesus cured them all, but only one came back to Jesus to offer his thanks for

being given back his health. Amazingly, he was not a Hebrew but a Samaritan, yet he was so full of gratitude to our Lord. His behaviour reminds us of that of Naaman the leper, for he did not depart immediately to his home after being cured but, instead, returned to the prophet Elisha and offered a gift of high value.

“And he (Naaman) returned to the man of God (Elisha); he and all his company, and came and stood before him, and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused.” 2 Kings 5:15, 16.

Naaman’s character could be a wonderful example for us to follow, both in respect of his gratitude towards Elisha as well as his adoration of the God of Israel. Let us reflect for a moment, how much we should be grateful to our Heavenly Father, who has healed us from the “leprosy” of our sin and forgiven us all our sins. For through faith in the precious blood of our Lord Jesus, we have received forgiveness for all our transgressions, we have been washed clean from the “leprosy” of our sins. The apostle Paul reminds us of the gratitude we owe to God and of our fitting response to His divine goodness in Romans 12:1 - *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service.”*

As already mentioned, in Biblical symbolism leprosy typifies sin, and the wages of sin. We may remember well the story of Moses’ sister, Miriam whom God made to become a leper as a result of her rebellious spirit towards her brother. Her improper attitude of murmuring against Moses was accounted as a sin against the Almighty Himself and it was only because of the prayer of Moses that Miriam’s sin was forgiven and her leprosy removed.

After analysing the story of Naaman the leper as regards Naaman and his character, let us now turn our attention to Elisha. His was a noble character, it did not permit him to accept any reward from the rich general, who was fully prepared to reward him well. Acceptance of Naaman’s offer would represent Elisha as selling God’s power, symbolically speaking it would indicate that God’s power was a marketable commodity. The prophet Elisha knew well that the gifts of God are not for sale and this aspect of his character should be a trait of our characters also, as we impart to others spiritual services. *“Freely you have received, freely give!” Matt. 10:8.*

In 2 Kings 5:20-27, we learn what happened after Naaman had been cured. Elisha’s servant Gehazi had a different heart and mind from that of Elisha; earthly things and material benefits occupied an important place in his heart and for material gain he twice allowed himself to lie. We recall what happened - the leprosy of Naaman came upon Elisha’s servant as a result of his sin. Gehazi had been exposed to Elisha’s work every day yet in all the time he had not learnt anything, he did not appreciate the prophet’s gift, the gift of the power of God. In 2 Cor. 6:1, Paul warns us with the words - *“And working together with Him, we entreat also that you receive not the grace of God in vain.”*

Finally, let us recall the noble and full of gratitude behaviour of the cured Syrian general. After being cured of his leprosy, Naaman made a request that he be allowed to take away a little of the soil of Israel. This soil he planned to keep somewhere close to him, so that on it, on holy ground, he could bend his knees before the true God who had restored his life. It seems certain that, to the end of his life, this man was constantly filled with gratitude to God for the grace he had received.

“Heal me, O Jehovah, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for Thou art my praise.” Jer. 17:14. This same healing and salvation I wish for all brothers and sisters and for myself also.

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