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ONE HOPE OF YOUR CALLING

The beautiful words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:1-6 firstly urge upon all Christians the need for making every endeavour to maintain a spirit of unity among all who belong to Christ. Secondly, they list for us the firm foundations upon which such unity can and should be established. In these profound grounds of unity, there is surely ample basis for that spirit of oneness which our Master earnestly prayed for, and which His commandment to all His followers was given to reinforce -

“A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another” John 13:34,35.

But not only are the one body, one spirit, one hope of your calling, etc., the only basis of true unity, they are the one basis of our standing in the sight of God at this time, and this is particularly so when we consider the third item of that list - *“even as you are called in the one hope of your calling.”* There is not a variety of callings and hopes from which we might choose, but those who are called by God are called in one hope and in one calling. Furthermore, the call is a unique one, a very privileged one and one not to be repeated.

Let us consider the characteristics of this calling as detailed in scripture. To do so cannot fail to impress us with the immensity and the priceless worth of that call. We might begin with Phil. 3:14, possibly the key text as far as identifying the call is concerned. Paul says - *“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* We note here, as elsewhere, that it is God who calls, that the call is into Christ and it is a high calling. A HIGH call, BY God, INTO Christ.

The basic thought of the word HIGH here seems to be of an upward call, as Paul says in Col. 3:1, 2, where the word is translated ‘above’ - *“seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”* So the calling requires at the outset what we might term a transfer of affections, from earthly to heavenly aspirations, interests and aims. Mostly, the word is used of things of heavenly origin or heavenly direction, but even in the sense of noble or grand, how apt is this description of our calling, for its ultimate reward is truly a lofty one.

In 2 Tim. 1:9, Paul refers to it as a HOLY calling - *“God has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”* Again, the call is OF God, it is given IN Christ Jesus and was moreover planned BEFORE the world began, or, more literally, before the ages of time. This holy calling, Paul goes on to say (v.10) has only now been *“made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*

The word “holy” as used in both old and new testament scriptures carries the thought of cleansing, separating and anointing for a sacred purpose. It is beautifully portrayed in many of the tabernacle and temple arrangements of Israel, in the selection and preparation both of the priesthood and the various vessels of service. So the Christian calling is first and always to separateness, to purity, to dedication to sacred service.

The separating or sanctifying influence in each believer’s life is identified for us in our Lord’s great prayer. *“Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth.”* John 17:17. This sealing to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit, of the truth as revealed in our dear Saviour is the beginning and should be the daily experience of each true child of God. Only the word of truth, as manifest in Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life can sanctify. How necessary that our hearts be ever open to hear His word - for His word is truth and the Holy Spirit with which God has sealed His children is the Spirit of truth.

The writer to Hebrews also refers to the calling as a HEAVENLY calling. *“Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession.”* Heb. 3:1. He then goes on to speak of Christ’s perfect faithfulness and exhorts each called one - *“exhort one another daily, while it is called*

today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end." Heb. 3:14. This calling is of heavenly origin, out of the immeasurable love and wisdom of our God, and it has a heavenly reward. It is a call to be identified with Jesus now - "partakers of Christ" - and, if faithful, to be glorified together with Him.

The calling of the gospel age is also a HIDDEN calling, indeed the "*mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations*" but "*now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.*" Col. 1:26, Rom, 16:26 Peter further tells us of this privileged calling - "*of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you (the church) unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you which things the angels desire to look into.*" 1 Peter 1:10, 12.

Comparatively few in our Lord's and the apostles' day heard or comprehended that call, and still today this is so. God who knows the hearts still hides the precious truths of His present purposes from the worldly-wise and reveals them to those who are teachable and humble and who hunger and thirst after righteousness. James speaks of such as being generally "*the poor of this world, rich in faith.*" James 2:5. And this will remain so, until the wondrous calling of God to be joint-heirs with His dear Son is completed, and the marriage of the Lamb, the union of the called ones with Christ, as described in the Revelation takes place.

The calling of this age is also not indefinite but a LIMITED calling. In at least two of the parables, our Lord make it clear that the door of opportunity for this calling of God would in due time close, while In Hebrews 11, the writer after listing the great gallery of faith heroes of old time, tells us that they have not so far received their reward, the call and completion of the church first being necessary, before they should be perfected. Each part of God's plan, indeed, has its own time and season, all working out eventually His perfect will. So the apostle stresses to us in 2 Cor. 6:2, that for those with ears to hear "*behold, now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.*"

Following the completion of the gospel age call, there will be the grand proclamation of the gospel of God's love in Christ to all nations. The rewards of obedience in that time will also be great, but the present calling, once completed, is not to be repeated. That coming age will bring an invitation to "whosoever will" to come and take the water of life freely, but now the calling is a SELECTIVE one. We read in Acts 15:14 - "*Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.*" This is the first step, as it were, in the recovery of mankind process, to be followed by the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David, and the subsequent restoration and blessing of all people. But the calling of the church for a privileged share in that work of blessing must first be completed.

The calling of God in Christ Jesus is additionally a DEMANDING one that calls for self-sacrifice. Our Lord made this very clear from the outset - "*if any will follow me, let them deny self and take up the cross and follow me.*" Matt. 16:24. Jesus added the illustrations of the man planning to build a house and the king preparing to go to war, the lesson in each case being the need for counting the cost of being His disciple. In all cases, the call will require some sacrifice, though this may vary for each one. For some such as Paul, it may mean very great sacrifice and suffering, but he could say "*what things were gain for me, these I counted loss for Christ.*" Phil 3:7.

Peter at one time asked our Lord what he and the other disciples would receive in return for giving up all to follow Him and His answer is in Luke 18:29, 30 - "*There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the age to come life everlasting.*" The call of God to you and me means that all the affairs of our lives are to be carried out as unto Him, that we are stewards of all that He provides for us. If it entails suffering, we are assured that - "*if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*" Rom. 8:17 Peter further tells that a purpose of our calling is that we might fellowship with Christ in His sufferings, in His experience in this world in which we sojourn. He has left us an example, that we should follow His steps. 1 Peter 2:20, 21.

The calling of God is furthermore a LIFELONG one. Here again our Lord desired that there be no misunderstanding. The call of God cannot be taken up lightly or on a temporary basis - once begun, there can be no turning back. The writer to Hebrews urges his readers to steadfastness as they press on in their calling of God. (Heb. 10:35-39) The reward is to those who persevere in faith - "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" Rev. 2:10. This promise was given to the church at Smyrna, a sorely tried and persecuted church, but the message of patient endurance, under whatever circumstances, is equally applicable to all who at whatever time respond to God's call.

The calling of God is a PURPOSE-FULL one. Firstly, God is now preparing His good work and will in those He calls, but they are being called and prepared for a purpose and an important purpose in God's plans.

This is outlined by Paul so clearly in Gal. 3, considering only verses 8, 16 and 29 just now. Verse 8 tells us of the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed, while Verse 16 identifies that seed as Christ and Verse 29 assures us that those who are Christ's, that is those called of God, are also Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. What a glorious purpose awaits those who are called and faithful in those times of restitution spoken of by Peter in Acts 3:21!

These are to have part in the first resurrection and are to reign with Christ a thousand years for the purpose of judging and blessing. Their calling is to be a fruitful one, here and now, in the development of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their individual lives, but even more so in that grand time when the blessings of God flow out to Israel and all nations in the glorious kingdom time. "O that I may be one found worthy to reign with Him a thousand years!"

Perhaps one of the greatest causes of rejoicing over the calling of God is that it is, according to God's word, an ATTAINABLE one. Most of us, at the outset of our Christian life, felt that we were not worthy of such a call. This is, of course, literally true, but usually some older, wiser Christian gently whispered that no-one is worthy, no-one is able, but GOD IS ABLE. A sure foundation for each of us is found in 1 Thess. 5:24 - "*faithful is He who calleth you, who also will do it*" and "*my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" 2 Cor. 12:9. He who calls us, also strengthens us; He can enable us in all things to be "*more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*" Rom. 8:37. "*This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith.*" 1 John 5:4.

So while we look to our Heavenly Father to sustain and strengthen us, we can have that full assurance of faith, which the writer to Hebrews speaks of. "*Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith... let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful that promised.*" Heb. 10:19-23. What a beautiful picture here of our access to our Father and to His keeping and cleansing power! We have Jesus too, as our Advocate, when we fall short of the mark, and He has promised - "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.*"

None should then be deterred from entering upon the race for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus because of frailty of the flesh. Our Heavenly Father reads and knows the heart and we have the assurance of which the prophet wrote - "*He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*" Isa. 40:29-31. In the New Testament, the apostle similarly assures us - "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" Rom. 8:31. Those whom God calls, He is able to keep.

These then are some of the many facets of the high and holy calling of God, which for the past two thousand years has been held out to those of responsive heart, foreknown and drawn of God, who have been determined, by God's grace, to follow in the footsteps of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, even our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us turn briefly now to the one hope of that calling to which Paul refers. For among all its characteristics, it is a hope-full calling, with rewards here and now but even greater to follow. The favour of being named a joint-heir with our dear Lord must surely be included in that hope.

Meantime, now is the time of schooling and development in character likeness of our Lord for those who are called and a great amount of the New Testament deals with the way in which each called one should live. "*I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called*" Eph. 4:1 is a typical exhortation of the apostle Paul. Along the way there will certainly be both trials and blessings, all permitted of God for growth in grace and understanding of the will and character of God. Overall, there is the assurance of Jude as he concludes his epistle - "*Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*"

The apostle Paul, near the end of his life, declared - "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.*" 2 Tim. 4:7, 8. This was Paul's confidence and hope, and surely his life was one of selfless, tireless service. But he does not stop there, he continues - "*and not to me only, but unto all also who love His appearing.*" Here he includes you and me and all God's dear children who faithfully finish their course of life.

The apostle Peter, nearing the end of his life, encourages the faithful in Christ Jesus to "*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. He is not here telling us that our works will earn us the prize, but that to the foundation of faith we should be adding the qualities of character, which are the fruit of God's working in us by **His Spirit**.

A crown of righteousness, an abundant entrance into His kingdom, how wonderful are such prospects; but perhaps even grander is the prospect set out before us in our Lord's prayer - *"I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."* John 17:24. In his first epistle, the apostle John enlarges on this in the lovely words of 1 John 3:2 - *"Beloved, now are we children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is."* (NASB) To see Him as He is, whom yet unseen we love - what a prospect!

This is then the essence of the "one hope of His calling" which unites all the Lord's people. As we head into another year, let us each resolve, by God's grace, to *"run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."* Heb. 12:1, 2. **In a normal** footrace, all runners seek so to run as to win the prize. The calling of God demands that same dedication from all who enter the race for the prize of the high calling, but in this race, we can all be winners if we continue faithful to the end, and furthermore we can and should be ready to help other runners. Through Christ we each entered the race, He has sustained us, He is the goal on which our eyes are set and His presence will be our ultimate reward. (Convention Address - DS 1/95)

The following hymn is based on the lovely sentiments of 1 John 3:2. The third line of each verse highlights the hymn-writer's greatest desire.

1. When all my labours and trials are o'er,
And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore,
Will through the ages be glory for me.
2. When by the gift of His infinite grace,
I am accorded in heaven a place,
Just to be there and to look on His face,
Will through the ages be glory for me.
3. Friends will be there I have loved long ago,
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet just a smile from my Saviour, I know,
Will through the ages be glory for me.

When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory, for me.

"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." Psalm 17:15.

A Personal Testimony

"The Convention is over - my very first Convention! What a blessing it has been! I had no thought that such happiness could be mine. Each day seemed to have more joy, more loveliness, to give greater benefit than the last. The first day I missed a good deal by not being able to attend in the afternoon; the next I missed a good deal also (through unforeseen circumstances), but the ineffable joy of the last two days!

Nothing will ever detract from the beauty of that baptism service, where Bro Sis. . . . and myself symbolised our consecration vows - to be dead with Christ, that we might be accounted worthy, if we make our calling and election sure, to reign with Him in glory in the age to come. God grant that we may prove ourselves to be overcomers, by the Lord's grace! What a thrill to clasp the right hand of fellowship, and know that love from the innermost recesses of the heart was behind that handclasp. Then the further joy of hearing those thrice-lovely words, "The Lord be with you", from each of the little band gathered together.

(Amc: 1938)

"Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness." (Psa. 65:11) As we review the leadings of divine providence during the year that is past, let God's goodness and mercy stimulate our faith and confidence in Him as respects the new incoming year. A proper retrospect on the part of a true child of God will enable us not only to render thanks for the past, but to look up and lift up our heads, realising that our deliverance is nearer than

when we first believed, and that He that began a good work in us is both able and willing to complete it, if we will but continue to submit our wills, our lives, our all, to His wisdom and loving care.” (Manna 30 Dec)

Be Sober, Vigilant, Steadfast

(1 PETER 5: 8, 9)

What more appropriate watchwords than these could express the proper attitude of the Christian soldier? – “Be *sober*; be *vigilant*; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom *resist, steadfast in the faith*, knowing that the same afflictions are endured by your brotherhood in the world.”

The “brotherhood” includes all the soldiers of Christ throughout the world, and this symbol of their present character is not a mere empty sound; for there is a mighty conflict in progress, a war being waged, and the encounter is one of desperate earnestness. Those who know nothing of this great conflict, and who have no part in it, though they may bear the name of Christ – Christians – really have no right to that name; for they are not Christ’s soldiers. Jesus himself was a soldier, and fought the battle through to the bitter end, and gained the victory. And he is the Captain of all those who accept the redemption he purchased and that follow in his footsteps, and he will lead them on to certain victory, if they faint not. – Gal. 6:9.

The Apostle Paul gives the same idea of the Christian life. He represents it as a desperate warfare, and urges all the true soldiers of Christ to “put on the whole armor of God, that they may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; for,” says he, “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places....Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness,” etc.– Eph.6:10-18.

When we consider how strongly our adversary is entrenched in the world - in its ideas, its maxims, its institutions, its policy, its hopes, aims and ambitions - and the Christian life as in direct opposition to all these; and when we further consider how, because we were once partakers of the spirit of the world, the enemy of our souls has strongly entrenched himself in our weak fallen natures; and still further, how, with shrewd subtlety, this invisible, intelligent personal foe is plotting and scheming to allure, deceive and lead us into sin – when with sober judgement we consider all these things, then indeed we realize that we are in the midst of a great conflict.

The three points of attack by the enemy are, as the Apostle John (1 John 2:16) enumerates then, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”

The first of these includes all those appetites and passions common to the whole human family, which in their legitimate uses under the full control of reason find conscience, are right and proper, but which, unduly cultivated until they become the masters of reason and conscience, degrade and debase the person.

The second, – “the lust of the eyes,” – includes all those ambitions to acquire and possess whatsoever things the eye (the natural eye or the eye of the understanding) perceives to be good, i.e., to be gratifying to the carnal mind, the old unregenerate nature. This disposition impels to self-gratification regardless of the rights and liberties of others in any direction. It craves wealth, or fame, or power, or social distinction, and to these ends it inclines to harness every energy of mind and body.

The third, – “the pride of life,” – is the blossom of selfishness, so abhorrent to God and to all good men. It is that disposition in a man which glories in his shame. When the lusts of the flesh and the lusts of the eyes have brought their curse of narrowness, bigotry and conceit; and when they have gone further in depriving fellow-men of their rights and privileges, then pride, the exultation of meanness, has its short triumph, and loftily soars above the unfortunate subjects of its power and gloats over the desolation it has wrought.

These three points of attack by the great enemy are the points which the Lord would have us guard with unwearied vigilance. Be sober, be vigilant, and watch that the enemy gain no approach to the citadel of your heart by any one of these routes.

That he makes repeated attacks is certain; and that these attacks come suddenly and without warning, and often with terrible force, is a matter of experience with all; hence the necessity for sober and constant vigilance. Be assured the ever watchful enemy will take advantage of our unguarded moments and our unfortified conditions if such there be. Even with all the watchfulness and readiness which we can command, the ability to withstand the enemy and to resist his attacks causes more or less suffering, and often taxes the powers of endurance to the utmost. Indeed, we must expect that the tension on our powers of endurance will sometimes be so great as to threaten disruption, and as to surely cause it if we trust to our own strength. We are forewarned to think not strange of the *fiery* trial that shall surely try us if we are indeed the sons of God and

soldiers of Christ, as though some strange thing happened unto us. (1 Pet. 4:12-16) These things should be expected and carefully prepared for by the Christian soldier.

Peter intimates that the power by which we are to resist the adversary is the power of faith – “whom *resist, steadfast in the faith.*” And John expresses the same thought, saying, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4) If we are not strong in the faith, how can we endure hardness for it? Faith must grasp the exceeding great and precious promises of God and appreciate their value. Faith must lay hold also upon the power of God and find the grace to help in every time of need. And faith in a personal righteous God, whose eye is ever upon us, must steadily cultivate those elements of character which are always pleasing and acceptable to him, and which Peter tells us are most essential to our final overcoming in this warfare. – 2 Pet. 1:5-10.

He urges that, in addition to our faith in the exceeding great and precious promises which inspire zeal and give us renewed courage, we should give all diligence to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” Then he adds, “For if ye do these things, ye shall *never fall.*”

The steady persistent cultivation of these graces of character will also clarify our spiritual vision, enabling us the more fully to comprehend the truth of God, and thus. “by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left”, we shall be able to “withstand all the fiery darts of the adversary” and to win the victory of faith and make our calling and election sure.

With this view of the great battle of life to the Christian, what a work we realize to be before us, and what necessity for sobriety, vigilance and steadfastness! It is a life work, a life battle against a mighty foe entrenched in our flesh. The powers without are strong indeed, but the civil war with the powers within is by far the most to be dreaded. If we become in any measure intoxicated with the spirit of the world; – if we give way to self-gratification, love of ease, pleasure, a little indulgence of any of the old dispositions of envy, malice, pride, vain-glory, vaunting of self, headiness, highmindedness, wrath, strife or any such thing – even a little, Oh, how great is the peril to which we are exposed!

Beloved, let us war a good warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil, seeking and finding, daily and hourly, fresh supplies of grace; for every day and every hour is a time of need if we are but awake to realize it. It is to the warfare with the powers entrenched within that we are again referred, when it is said, “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” (Prov. 16:32) Yes, the task is a greater one, and represents a greater, as well as a nobler, effort. Let us fight the good fight of faith along this line. Let our lives be a daily and hourly struggle to overcome the evil that is in ourselves, to purify and beautify our own characters. Thus shall we be the more fully prepared to strive faithfully and steadily against the foes without - to war a good warfare to the end.

The Apostle, out of the fulness of his love and sympathy for all his comrades in the army of the Lord, adds to his earnest exhortation this parting benediction - “The God of all grace who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” It is only through endurance of hardness as good soldiers of Christ that this desirable condition can be attained -viz., perfect self-control and ability to resist evil, established faith, patience and virtue, settled, abiding rest in Christ, and hope through his word of promise. This undoubtedly was the Apostle’s own experience as he grew old in the Master’s service, and so may it be ours. Let each departing year find us nearer perfection!

HEARERS AND DOERS

It does not matter how much we
learn of the truth and of God’s will
- if there is not the obedience to
it after we have come to know the truth,
it will avail us nothing.

A New Joy

“*They departed from the face of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*” Acts 5:41.

We find these once disappointed men suddenly invested with a joy that was unquenchable. Look at them, filled with radiant joy, eating their meal with gladness. There was a holy hilarity about their life; no dragging footsteps now; there was a buoyancy about them that was in strange contrast to what they had been during those days after their Lord was crucified. Their joy could not be quenched; imprison them and they sang hymns, and made the earth quake; beat them and they rejoiced at being counted worthy to suffer shame for

His name.

What was the explanation of that marvellous transformation? The answer is: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit."

"And you will be a blessing"

(Presented at the Melbourne New Year Convention, through an interpreter, by Brother Danael Krawczyk, visiting from Poland)

Dear brethren in Christ, I would like to remind you of the words of God which He spoke to Abraham - "I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing." (Gen. 12:2) (The N.I.V. rendering of these words is - "I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.") So the subject of this address is "And You Will Be A Blessing."

We all feel the blessing and care of our Heavenly Father upon us, but the Lord has promised that He will bless us, *if* we will be a blessing to others. In other words, if God blesses us, and we do not pass on that blessing to others, He is quite capable of taking that blessing away from us. So our duty is to be a blessing to others.

We have had a wonderful past year of divine blessing, but now the Lord is looking to us - are we a blessing to others? Wherever we are, in the family circle, or among others, we should be a blessing to them. God dispenses His blessings abundantly, but it is not for us to keep them to ourselves - we have to pass them on to others.

God, speaking through the Wise Man, Solomon, said - "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." (Prov. 10:22) Some imagine that it is the divine blessing upon them that they are getting richer day by day, but such blessings bring trouble - more trouble and difficulties than it is all worth. This is why all humanity is now complaining, because they do not feel the divine blessing upon them, and we have to watch that such discontentment can so easily come upon us as well. If we were to become like that, would the Heavenly Father take away His blessings from us?

The blessing which the Lord gives will never trouble us. In 2 Cor. 11:2, 3, the apostle Paul is explaining his own care for that ecclesia and says - "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." So the greatest blessing, the biggest and best riches, for us is always Christ the Lord, as we read in Col. 1:27 - "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory.*"

The greatest treasure for us is Christ Himself, not the Christ we know about, but the Christ who dwells in us. The blessing which Christ received from His Heavenly Father He has given to us, and it is His expectation that we will share that blessing with others. For such a blessing, we have to pray, and there is a very interesting comment in the Daily Heavenly Manna for December 4 -

"If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11: 13).

"If the Lord's consecrated people could all be brought to the point where the chief aim in life, the burden of all their prayers, would be that they might have a larger measure of the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of holiness, the spirit of truth, the Spirit of Christ, the spirit of a sound mind, what a blessing it would mean! If then they should wrestle with the Lord until the breaking of the day, their hold upon Him would be sure to bring the desired blessing. The Lord has revealed Himself to His people for the very purpose of giving them *this* blessing; nevertheless, He withholds it until they learn to appreciate and earnestly desire it."

We are entering a new year in which we desire much of the divine blessing upon us. But God will give so much of His blessing to us, as we will be able and willing to share with others. In younger years, a person may think that the blessing of God is of no necessity whatever, but we know of some sad experiences along these lines in Old Testament times. For example, Esau disregarded the blessing and the right of the first-born, and we read that, when he came to a realisation of what he had lost, - "Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept." (Gen. 27:38)

Sometimes, the blessing which is not appreciated will have an adverse influence during all the rest of life. I have had much experience in working with young people during my working life, and have had many pleasant, but also quite a few unpleasant experiences in that work with the young people. They were pleasant where

others wanted to have the divine blessings, but some very unpleasant experiences with those who failed to appreciate and did not seek the blessing of the Lord upon themselves.

Fleshly Israel, while they were entering into the land of promise, had certain conditions to keep and requirements to observe. We too desire divine blessings but here again we have certain obligations put upon us. The land into which they were going was a very pleasant and good land, as we read in Deut. 11:10-12 - "For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowed thy seed, and watered it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs, but the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven; a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year."

Theirs was the land over which the Lord had care, the land His eyes were constantly looking upon and observing. Can we imagine that, on any day during the year, our Heavenly Father is not looking on us? If the Lord was very careful then about conditions of sowing, we can be sure that He is very careful over this time of harvest as well. His promise to Israel then was - "And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord thy God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain of your land in its due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil." (Deut. 11:13, 14)

Dear friends, if we love our Heavenly Father very much, but someone else even a little more, or more or less equally with Him, we will unfortunately not receive the blessing of God. The blessings of fleshly Israel were of a material nature; whether in the field or wherever they worked, the divine blessing was upon them. Our blessings are spiritual and so they are of a much higher nature and of course much greater as well.

I would like now to read from Deut. 11:26-28 - "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known." It is up to us to consider and to choose either blessing or curse.

The apostle James in his epistle brings lessons out of the daily round and common tasks of everyday life and one question he asks is - Can the same tongue utter blessing and cursing at the same time? Maybe on this new year's day, it would be good for us to make clear resolutions to keep our tongues in check. Our Lord Himself in His preaching also had much to say as to how we should behave as recipients of the divine blessings, but this is a topic in itself.

Our Lord has blessed us greatly in Jesus Christ - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Eph. 1:3) And so we receive these blessings from the Lord so that we may share them with others. Could we feel happy, even if we were the richest people on this earth, and just kept it all for ourselves?

I remember an elderly sister who came to a knowledge of the truth late in her life - she went around to all her neighbours telling them that she had wasted practically all her lifetime. They took it up with their priest and he came to visit her and to see what she was doing. He wanted to make a joke out of the Bible and said - "Old lady, there are so many crosses and little stars in there - what do you know about it?" The elderly lady who was in her first year in the truth answered - "All these crosses and little stars I will leave to the knowledgeable ways and the learned men, but the wonderful consolation which I receive out of my reading, I cannot keep to myself without sharing it with others." Then she quoted 2 Cor. 1:3, 4 - "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

God comforts us in every trouble and in every difficulty, so that we can give comfort to others who go through any difficulties or troubles - not by telling them some kind of story, but by telling them of the consolation that we have received ourselves from the Heavenly Father.

To conclude, I would like to read to you from Rev. 20:6 - "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." With my whole heart I would wish that this blessing of the Lord may abundantly be imparted to every one of you, and that it may overflow for the benefit of others - as a blessing for them as well. May we all be sharers and distributors of the divine blessing, and so be able to be partakers in that first resurrection. I wish God's blessing on all the brothers and sisters here assembled.

NO OTHER WAY

There is no other message of eternal life open during the present age than the call to joint-heirship with