

Attaining Peace of Heart and Mind

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”
—John 14:27

WE PRESENTLY FIND OUR-selves nearly two-thirds through what has been a most uncertain and tumultuous year. This properly affords us the opportunity to ask ourselves, “What is my condition, spiritually speaking, with regard to my level of faith and trust in the Heavenly Father, in light of the commotion and confusion of the world’s present experiences?” To answer this question in the most appropriate fashion, we must look to the Scriptures as our chief source of guidance for the attainment of peace, comfort and assurance in such troubling times.

Among the many promises contained in God’s Word, these expressions of the psalmist are notable: “The LORD is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not

we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” “Sing aloud unto God our strength.”—Ps. 27:1; 46:1,2; 81:1

PEACE, CONTENTMENT AND COMFORT

Having and maintaining the peace of God is not dependent upon outward circumstances, but is based on a properly guided development of the inward motives of the heart and meditations of the mind. Thus, the attainment of God’s peace is possible regardless of outward commotion and uproar. In reality, we have nothing to fear, for the Scriptures tell us, “Since God is for us, who can be against us?”—Rom. 8:31, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

To be sure, we need the spiritual rest and peace promised in God’s Word to sustain us in today’s difficult times. We will surely not find these in the world around us, as there is no real peace outside of the Lord’s provision. Whatever outward conditions may prevail upon us, we are to seek and to preserve inner peace. We recall the words of the Apostle Paul, in which he states God’s promise that we be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” Thus, we can have inward peace and contentment, realizing also that “godliness with contentment is great gain.”—Eph. 3:16; I Tim. 6:6

A scriptural passage of comfort which is always appropriate for our meditation is found in the familiar words of the 23rd Psalm. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea,

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

HOW GOD PROVIDES COMFORT

Whatever our testings and trials may be, the Bible assures us that our Heavenly Father cares and is attentive to our needs, both temporal and spiritual. “No trial has assailed you except what belongs to man; and God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.”—I Cor. 10:13, *Diaglott*

God will “direct the issue” of our trials, bringing us needed inner peace and comfort, by various means. It may be through his providential overruling in the experience on our behalf. He might also direct us to the Scriptures, wherein we can find comfort in his divine promises. God may employ our guardian angels to intervene in some way on our behalf. He might also provide a special measure of the Holy Spirit which will enable us to understand and appreciate his eternal purpose in allowing such experiences.

There is another important aspect of the Heavenly Father’s wisdom in permitting us to endure various trials and difficulties. These experiences are helping to equip us for future service as part of that sympathetic Melchisedec priesthood of the next age.

Having gone through many of the same difficulties which the world now experiences, we will be the better prepared to help restore mankind to perfection during Christ's glorious kingdom reign. May we be grateful for God's wisdom in this regard, as we go through the difficulties of the Christian walk. Such appreciation will likewise engender much comfort to our hearts and minds.

PROVIDENTIAL CARE

We are to remember that God's overruling hand is not limited. He is all-powerful and all-knowing. "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness." "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." (Isa. 50:2; 59:1) What wonderful assurances of God's mighty power are found in these words! They are ours to claim by faith and confidence in his Holy Word.

Our experiences, and God's providence in them, are a most valuable and indispensable tool in the life of the follower of Christ. Experience, it is said, is the best teacher, and for the Christian, it is often a means by which we can ascertain more clearly the Lord's will in specific circumstances of life. Thus, we are better enabled to do that which God would desire by rightly learning from our experiences. Paul expresses our progression through experience with these words: "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad

in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.”—Rom. 5:3-5

True spiritual maturity comes best through our experiences, and the recognition of God’s providences in them. Paul spoke of his own growth toward spiritual maturity by using the example of the natural man, saying, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”—I Cor. 13:11

We are to claim God’s promises in our experiences, remembering that in them also his providences are to be found. These precious assurances of the Scriptures provide comfort and peace to all who strive to be submissive to the Father’s will. Through his guidance and direction of our experiences, we are enabled to be properly exercised by them, which is an important aspect of divine providence in our affairs. Paul states: “Now no chastening [Greek: education, training] for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”—Heb. 12:11

If we truly believe that our experiences are “tailor-made,” we should always be on the alert, because the Lord’s will just might be indicated in them. Therefore, the Christian should never view the outcome of any situation as resulting from being “lucky” or “unlucky.” Let us remember the words of the psalmist: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.”—Ps. 37:23,24

GOD'S SPIRIT OF POWER AND LOVE

The Holy Spirit of God is his invisible influence and power as it is employed in any place or time, and under any circumstance throughout the vast domain of his universe. This includes his invisible influence as it governs the minds of those who desire to serve and worship him. Jesus told the woman at the well that true worship of God must be “in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23,24) That is, our worship of the Heavenly Father and our service for his cause are to be guided by the influence of his holy character and in harmony with his eternal purposes.

During this present Gospel Age a special called-out class has been in process of development since Pentecost, and has been privileged to enjoy the begetting of God's Holy Spirit. This power, or influence, upon God's chosen people is variously termed in the Scriptures “the Spirit of God,” “the Spirit of Christ,” “the Spirit of truth,” “the spirit ... of a sound mind,” and “the Spirit of adoption.”—Rom. 8:9,10; John 15:26; II Tim. 1:7; Rom. 8:15

As indicated by the term “Spirit of adoption,” the footstep followers of Jesus have been called to sonship with God. However, such a great privilege brings with it the necessity of character transformation into the likeness of his “only begotten Son,” Christ Jesus. (Rom. 12:2) The sum total of this transformation is stated in the requirements given by the Master, when he said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”—Matt. 22:37-39

The law of the Spirit of God is founded upon love, for we are told that “God is love.” (I John 4:8,16) In us, that spirit should engender first a supreme love for God; second, love for his son, Christ Jesus; and third, love for our fellow man. The Apostle Paul describes love by its actions. He states, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”—I Cor. 13:4-8, *English Standard Version*

SACRIFICES OF PRAISE AND PRAYER

Our attainment of spiritual peace can be greatly aided by maintaining an attitude of praise and prayer toward God. The Psalmist David associates the altar—symbolic of sacrifice—with the voice of praise. “Now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.” (Ps. 27:6) Nothing short of this sentiment should be considered an adequate response to God in return for all that he has done for us.

The Apostle Paul expresses a similar thought, saying, “By him [Jesus] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb. 13:15) Here Paul may have had in mind the statement of the Prophet Hosea, where he speaks of rendering to God “the calves of our lips.”

(Hos. 14:2) The thought in these verses is that praise, given through the prayerful “fruit of our lips,” is shown to be part of our acceptable sacrifice and offering to God—a “reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

There are various ways by which we can offer the “sacrifice of praise” to God. We can sing hymns of praise which, without doubt, is pleasing in his sight. Though not much in the way of sacrifice is involved in this form of praise, it is, nevertheless, a delight to raise our voices in song to the giver of every good and perfect gift. (James 1:17) Our sacrifice of praise is to also include prayer, the “calves of our lips.” In Ephesians 6:13-17, Paul lists the spiritual “armor” which we are to wear in order to repel the attacks of the great Adversary, Satan. The apostle then adds this all-important requirement in order for the individual pieces of armor to work together properly. He says: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”—vs. 18

Sacrifices of praise and prayer will most assuredly result in an increased measure of inward peace and comfort in the life of the Christian. They also produce a sweet-smelling savor and aroma to our Heavenly Father. This was pictured most particularly in the Old Testament by the offering of incense at the Golden Altar in the Holy compartment of Israel’s tabernacle. (Exod. 30:34-38) The prayers of God’s faithful people are often represented symbolically in the Scriptures as a sweet odor of incense which ascends to his presence.—Ps. 141:2; Luke 1:5,8-10; Rev. 5:8; 8:3

OUR FOCUS

What is to be our focus as we strive to maintain the peace which Jesus left with us, as cited in our opening text? First, we must be able to say with Paul, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil 4:13) This may at first seem to be a bold statement, but we should note that Paul’s words are not to be understood as denoting self-reliance, rather, it is only “through Christ” that we can do all things. In another place, the apostle reminds us of the need for a humble and sober assessment of our progress: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” (I Cor. 10:12) The Apostle Paul realized that it was the grace, strength, and “power of Christ,” not his own might and ability, which rested upon him during all of his experiences, and which guided his life in service to the Master.—II Cor. 12:9

God, through his Son, will similarly strengthen and equip us if we focus on him and, in humility, depend upon his grace, strength and help in every aspect of our lives. The Apostle Peter states: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” (I Pet. 5:6) Only through humility and reliance upon our Heavenly Father’s strength can we fulfill our consecration vows and be exalted as New Creatures to the divine nature.—II Cor. 5:17; II Pet. 1:4

Another vital element of our present focus must be faith. Though we can see many aspects of God’s purposes with much clarity, yet we still must live and walk by faith, not by sight. (Gal. 2:20; II Cor. 5:7; Heb. 10:38) We echo these words from the Apostle Paul: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprin-

kled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).”—Heb. 10:22,23

We have had a most wonderful portion of God's plan revealed to us, yet certain events which may lay before us and the world we can, at best, only envision in part. Quoting Paul again, he states, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (I Cor. 13:12) Thus, we are assured that, if faithful unto death, we will, in the “first resurrection,” see, know and understand all things perfectly. For the present, however, we must live by faith. Indeed, our ultimate victory will only come about by faith. “This is the victory [Greek: means of success] that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:4

Our present focus should also include the application of these words of the Master: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) Light is symbolic of truth and righteousness, both of which have their source in God. The Apostle John said, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (I John 1:5) Dwelling in the light which comes from God, and as shown forth by his Son, Christ Jesus, we also have the privilege of reflecting that light to those with whom we come in contact. To the child of God, Peter expresses, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

OUR SPIRITUAL STIMULUS

In recent months, much has been made of the economic “stimulus” packages which have been passed by Congress and signed into law by the President. Included in these packages have been individual stimulus payments to most Americans of various amounts. Spiritually speaking, however, our stimulus or motivation to serve God, and the accompanying inner peace which we enjoy, are not associated with anything related to earthly wealth or goods. Jesus alone paid the price for our redemption. Having done so, he admonished us, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, ... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”—Matt. 6:19-21

Our stimulus and motivation toward faithfulness are to be found in the many assurances of God’s Word. These include such promises as, “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) Those things which “work together for good” include even the delays, difficulties, troubles, persecutions, and seeming disasters that sometimes come our way. These are part of the “all things” which work together for our good as we grow spiritually, and they bring to mind the words of Peter: “That God of all favor, who has called you, ... when you have suffered a short time, will himself complete, confirm, strengthen you.”—I Pet. 5:10, *Diaglott*

Our aim and stimulus to faithfulness is well stated in these words: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” (Col. 3:15) Daily, our lives should be stimulated to meditation upon our

Heavenly Father, the perfect example of his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, and the Word of Truth which they have provided for our daily spiritual sustenance. As for our daily walk, these words of Paul, spoken to Titus, are most appropriate: “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”—Tit. 2:11-13

Let us, therefore, seek the Lord daily with humility, honesty, and peace of heart and mind, without guile or selfishness. Let us also continue to “bear much fruit,” those qualities of character listed by Paul as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. (Gal. 5:22,23) Finally, let us claim the peace promised by our Lord in the words of our opening Scripture: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”—John 14:27 ■