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Why Do the Nations War? Is Christianity at Fault?

THIS subject is very important, as well as timely. The Scriptures, however, undoubtedly contain a complete and satisfactory answer to all right-thinking people, and it is equally true that this answer cannot be gained from any other source than the Bible.

When this question is presented to us—Why do the nations war?—our thoughts may formulate another question— Why should the 'nations war? Truly, it is most repulsive to all noble-minded people to meditate upon actual warfare, and yet there has hardly been a time, over centuries past, when there has not been a war raging, either large or small, in some quarter of the earth.

When we were children at school and were called on to learn history, the main lessons on this subject were connected with the various wars which took place over the centuries past. With some of us, great impressions were made on our minds by the numerous campaigns described: for instance, when we became acquainted with The Hundred Years' War, the very title seemed to leave us aghast, the implications were past our comprehension. Not that war raged, as we know it to-day, for one hundred years on end, but, nevertheless, that particular war lasted for a century, on and off, so we were told.

However, respecting our own century, many of our readers have clearly in mind the events covering the last two World Wars, and other friends will remember other conflicts as well. Casting our minds back about forty years, it will be remembered there was a claim quite prevalent amongst the nations at that time that the world was becoming too civilised to go to war. That was definitely the opinion expressed by statesmen of the world as the German Kaiser was training and equipping his soldiers in preparation for 1914.

One of the saddest features of that period was the fact that this militaristic power of Germany arose in the very land of the great Reformer, Luther, and some may be inclined to ask: What did Luther's Christianity do for Germany? We answer: No doubt there were millions of people in Germany who were ashamed of that nation's military power, and the reason many more of the German people did not follow Luther's example is shown in one of our Lord's parables— The Wheat and the Tares. (Matt. 13:24-43.)

In this parable our Lord showed that after the sowing of the good seed in His day, and when the Apostles had fallen asleep in death, the Adversary sowed tares in the wheatfield. On being queried as to why the tares were found with the wheat, the answer was given—"An enemy bath done this" (verse 28). So it was with the nation of Germany (as with other nations), the spirit of the Adversary hindered the growth of

Luther's Reformation, and this was allowed of God as a part of His wise permission of evil for a limited time.

While, then, this parable of our Lord's had its beginning at His first advent, and in the days following the establishment of the early church, it has been re-enacted, so to speak, throughout the Gospel Age. This parable will come under review later in this article, but just now attention is directed to the assurances of world statesmen at the time of the 1914-18 War, that the great conflict then, was "A War to end War."

There was certainly a noble effort on the part of some nations to make war a thing of the past, with their generous Disarmament Conferences, following the 1914-18 War. However, we are all aware of the rise of the dictators of Europe and the rearming of millions of men, such aggressive tactics bringing on the Second World War. Then came the renewed assurances by leading statesmen of the world, that with the 1939-45 War over, "It must not happen again."

The Atlantic Charter and other Agreements were well meant, but what we have seen in the last five years gives little hope of preserving the peace of the world; indeed, the outbreak of war in Korea, over the last few months has so energized the nations in rearmament that most people believe that only a miracle can prevent a Third World War.

It is not necessary to touch on the dread possibilities of another war amongst the great powers; most people have some idea of the ghastly destruction of human life and property which would be possible with the atomic bombs and other deadly weapons. Our main consideration at this time is: Why do the Nations War? Why was it that the courageous work of the Reformer, Martin Luther, failed to inspire the nation of Germany to better things than that of military conquest? Was it the fault of his form of Christianity? If so, is there a form of Christianity to-day that can save the world from war?

In answer to the first question, we have the Apostle Paul's inspired review of mankind, looking back over the centuries prior to our Lord's first advent, and which helps us to understand the position to-day. Following the fall of our first parents into disobedience and sin, we have a clear picture of the effect upon succeeding generations presented by the Apostle in the first chapter of, his epistle to the Romans, as follows:—"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things. . . . Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever . . .

. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind (margin—a mind void of judgment) to do those things which are not convenient." (Rom. 1:21-25, 28.)

The expression, "God gave them over" is significant, showing that God permitted the free-will of men to operate, even though their own choice was detrimental for the race as a whole; nevertheless, this permission of God will not be in vain in the end, it will provide a lasting lesson for humanity, so that they shall not wish to eat the sour grape again, when the Kingdom is established.

The prophet Isaiah agrees with Paul's description of the fallen condition of mankind, when he states: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." (Isa. 57:20, 21.) Then, from the wise man, in Ecclesiastes 7:29 we read—"Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."

The Hebrew word translated "inventions" means "a contrivance, a warlike machine, or mental (a

machination.)”

This same Hebrew word is translated “engines” in 2 Chron. 26:15, to describe the warlike activities of one, Uzziah, in Jerusalem, which reads—”And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal.” Thus, we see that God made man upright—perfect, noble and peace loving—but with the fall into sin, mankind “sought out many inventions,” warlike machines, to gain advantage over their fellow men. Or, as the Apostle Paul explained in Romans—”Their foolish heart was darkened,” obscured, from the ways and desires of the Lord.

If it was truly said of mankind in those ancient times, “they have sought out many inventions” (contrivances, warlike machines), what can be said of the activities of mankind in the last half-century, with the same meaning in the word inventions? It is not necessary to enumerate the mass of warlike machines in the world to-day; this information appears in our daily press and is common knowledge. However, we believe that the fulfilment of the Scripture, “They have sought out many inventions,” provides the correct answer to our question: Why do the nations war?

God created man upright, in His own image (an earthly image of the heavenly Creator) with a freewill to choose obedience or disobedience; by disobedience and sin, mankind has gone its own way, and except for a few who have returned to God, the mass of humanity is described by the words of Hosea —”They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.”

However, what of our further question: Is Christianity at fault, in the world outlook to-day? Is it the failure of the message of Christ to-day (or in Luther’s day) or the lack of zeal on the part of His followers that accounts for present world conditions? Our Lord gave a graphic picture of events to be expected throughout the Gospel Age, in answer to questions presented by His disciples, in Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 24, as follows:—”Ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. . . Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” (Matt. 24:6-14.)

There can be no doubt that our Lord thus reviewed the Gospel Age, first, from the worldly standpoint, in describing the wars, rumours of wars, famines, etc., and then warned and exhorted His followers how they should act in the face of severe persecutions, even unto death, in their loyalty to His cause of truth in the unfriendly world through which they would walk in His steps of sacrifice. He predicted how many would forsake the Christian way because of the hardness to be endured, but no doubt inspired confidence in the hearts of His true people by assuring them—”He that shall endure unto the end (faithful unto death) the same shall be saved.” What help these words of our Master’s have been to us, as no doubt they have been to many who have taken up the cross to follow Him. Then, the most important instruction continued from the Lord—”This gospel of the kingdom (the glad tidings of the heavenly and earthly phases of the kingdom) shall be preached in all the world for a WITNESS unto all nations, and then shall the end come,” the end of this particular age for the heavenly calling.

How important it is that the Lord’s people discern the truth respecting the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom during this Gospel Age—that the Lord has never commissioned His followers to attempt world conversion, but rather to give out the glad message as a witness to the world, and thus attract to the Lord

those who would be willing to lay down their lives in His service—to take out a people for His name.” (Acts 15:14.)

The result of the witness of the gospel of the kingdom is shown in some detail in the parable previously mentioned—The Wheat and the Tares. In Matt. 13:36-43 the Lord explained this parable in response to the request of His disciples—”Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.” In verse 38 we read—”The field is the world.” The word “world” is translated from the Greek word “kosmos,” meaning order of things. Then, in verse 39, our Lord stated—”The harvest is the end of the world.” This word “world” is translated from another Greek word “aion,” meaning, age. Thus, we have it explained that the “wheat,” the true children of God, are gathered out of the present world, or order of things, during the harvest, or end of this Gospel Age, to inherit the heavenly kingdom with Christ, as shown by verse 43—”Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

That the true message of Christianity was never intended to encourage the followers of the Master to endeavour to control world affairs, is evident from His own words before Pilate—”My kingdom is not of this world (kosmos—order of things) ; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence.” (John 18:36.) Another important statement in this connection is recorded in Matt. 26:51-53, when, a few hours previous to our Lord’s statement before Pilate, He rejected the offer of Peter to defend Him with a sword. The account reads—”Behold, one of them which were with Jesus, stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest’s, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place; for all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels.” Nothing could be plainer, from these words, than that the Lord sets a definite instruction to all His followers to refrain from engaging in any conflict for Him and His cause, however important any emergency may appear to their imperfect minds.

The Apostle James adds a striking testimony to the Biblical records respecting the conduct of the disciples of Jesus, as follows—”Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27.) To keep oneself “unspotted from the world” means a great deal, the fulfilment of which, by the Lord’s grace, will carry the sincere Christian far along the strait and narrow way to life, while removing from his mind any deceptive thoughts which may crowd in, claiming attention on behalf of any system or section of this “present evil world.”

Thus, we find that Christianity is not at fault because the nations do war, one with another, inasmuch as the great Captain of our salvation at no time authorized any of His people to strive to control this world and its affairs, so that wars may cease at the present time.

What, then, is to be done about present world conditions, with the threat of a world war again so real? A leading church minister of Melbourne was reported recently as saying, that the United Nations’ forces should be kept together after the Korean War was over, to act as a World Police Force, to preserve peace. But does the Bible agree with this idea, that Christians should look to worldly arms to keep the peace of the world? No; definitely not! It is human, worldly reasoning, that looks to the arm of flesh. Must wars continue for all time then? as some people are apt to say—”There always have been wars and always will be.” No; definitely no! However, the Scriptures reveal that while the Lord will ultimately deliver a humbled world of mankind from its own chaos and ruin, yet it must be a truly humbled humanity, before He can bless with lasting peace and happiness. This is shown from Proverbs 1:24-31—

”Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will

mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.”

The prophet Nahum reveals additional information concerning the Lord’s dealings with the human family, and which is due for fulfilment in the near future. It is expressed in symbolic language as follows—”The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked; the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea (restless masses of mankind), and maketh it dry, and dryeth up all the rivers . . . The mountains (kingdoms) quake at him, and the hills (lesser governments) melt, and the earth (social order of things) is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks (fortresses of society) are thrown down by him. The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies. What do ye imagine against the Lord? he will make an utter end; affliction shall not rise up the second time.” (Nahum 1:3-9.) Thus doth the Lord give the assurance that affliction in the earth will be no more, when once the human family has lost faith in all its own schemes and devices, and is ready to be instructed in the laws of Christ’s Kingdom which will operate for the blessing of all the willing and obedient upon the restored earth.

The Psalmist provides us also with enlightening information respecting the closing scenes during the transition period from “this present evil world” to the kingdom of Christ. He declared, under inspiration, looking back upon the events accomplished—”The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved; he uttered his voice, the earth melted. Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth.” Thus does the Psalmist attribute the overthrow of the present world order to the Lord Himself, in harmony with another of his declarations—”Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” (Psa. 76:10.) Continuing from the statement respecting the Lord making the desolations in the earth (which agrees also with Joel 2:10), we read—”He (God) maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear asunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.” Thank the Lord for this assurance through His servant, that He will overrule the great forces of human passions, to prostrate all the nations of the earth to a common level of exhaustion, that all humanity may then obey the Lord, if they will, or be cut off from among the people. As the Psalmist continues, speaking for the Lord—”Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Psa. 46:6, 8-10.)

How important it is that Christians, and ultimately all mankind, learn well the lesson of waiting upon the Lord for His outworking in connection with the international, national and individual affairs of this life. Should a Christian become involved in the political, financial, ecclesiastical or social systems of the present world order, he can expect to receive nothing better than the strife and tumults associated with these decaying elements, which, the Apostle Peter assures us, are to be “burned up” or “dissolved,” to make way for the Kingdom of Christ—”the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (2 Pet. 3:10, 11, 13.)

It is to encourage those who have ears to hear, to “wait upon the Lord,” that the prophet Zephaniah was moved of God to proclaim—”Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger; for all the earth (order of earthly society) shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” Then, with the great humbling process completed, with humanity humbled to the dust, we read—”For then will I turn to the people a pure language (the glad tidings of salvation

through Christ, which so few have heard in this life) , that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.” (Zeph. 3:8, 9.)

From that time onward, throughout the Millennial Age, the general resurrection of the human family will proceed, for “all in the graves (death condition) shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth,” to inhabit the restored earth, where “they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain (kingdom) ; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isa. 11:9 ; 2 :1 -4.)

Melbourne Christmas Convention.

The brethren in Melbourne wish to advise all friends that they propose holding the usual Convention at the Christmas period this year (D.V.) . The dates of the gatherings will probably be December 23rd to the 26th, inclusive, also further meetings on the New Year weekend. A cordial invitation to attend these gatherings is extended to all who love the Lord and His truth. Further information will appear in later issues of “Peoples Paper,” and is obtainable also from the Class Secretary—Mr. J. B. Hiam, 44 Heath Ave., Oakleigh, S.E.12,

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A Cross (x) on the wrapper indicates that the Subscription to “Peoples Paper” is overdue.

The Truth on Baptism.

SOME weeks ago the Melbourne "Argus" published an interesting news item which attracted the attention of one of our friends, who in turn kindly passed on the paper cutting. Under the heading, "Christening Wrong, says Vicar," the report stated:

"After baptising 4,000 babies, 70-year-old Rev. George R. Mortimer has resigned because he disagrees with infant baptisms. Mortimer, who is the vicar of Barston, in Warwickshire (England), will auction his furniture, move out of his creeper-clad vicarage, and sacrifice a £500 sterling yearly stipend for his views. 'To suppose that sprinkling water on a baby's head really achieves anything, is too much,' explained the vicar."

It is indeed good to find that the elderly Mr. Mortimer is able to take such a fine stand against such a "form of godliness" as infant baptism. Even though it has taken this gentleman a considerable time to arrive at the truth on this subject, the important thing is, that he is prepared to make a decision that very few in his position are willing to make, should they come to the same understanding on this subject.

This information from England recalls a similar statement on the part of another minister of religion in U.S.A., many years ago, an account of which appeared in a journal as follows:

'Baptism never saved a human soul. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration is both unreasonable and unscriptural. The superstitions that have gathered about infant baptism form one of the saddest chapters in church history. Thousands through all the ages have believed that a child dying without being baptised was eternally lost. This dark and dreary superstition has cast a gloom over the history of the church for centuries.

"This doctrine is heathenism, pure and simple. The idea that God would forever condemn an innocent babe because some one had not put: a few drops of water on its head and face makes God a tyrant. Rather than believe in such a God I would be an avowed infidel.

"This doctrine of baptismal regeneration makes the minister of religion a worker of magic, a fakir, a performer of ecclesiastical miracles. Such teaching is a violation of all sound reason and., true scriptural teaching."

It is always refreshing to learn of those who are getting clear on any of the "sins" of Babylon, for truly the doctrine of infant baptism is another of these "sins" formulated in the dark ages without the slightest Biblical support: Those who are educated church ministers and teach and perform such erroneous ceremonies, without proper examination of the Scriptures, are no doubt more responsible in the eyes of the Lord than the average churchgoer. The danger of this particular error is the feeling of security imparted to parents for themselves and their children when they have complied with the ceremony arranged by their particular church; it helps to lull them to sleep in a false security, whereas a little investigation of the Bible on their own account would at once reveal the deception conveyed by this ceremony of churchianity.

Nowhere in the Bible is there any authority for the baptism of anyone during this Gospel Age who has not made a full consecration of his life to God, and seeing no one can intelligently present their all to the Lord until they reach years of discretion, all ceremonies of this kind for infants and children are so much traditions of men. As illustrating this matter, an anecdote is told of a certain doctor who was called late at night to attend a dying infant. He arrived just a moment in advance of a clergyman, sent for at the same

time. It being evident that the physician could do nothing further for the child, he at once stepped aside, while the minister hastily took a bowl of water, sprinkled a few drops in the face of the child, saying, "I baptise thee in the name of the Father, the Son and the holy spirit." The child a moment or two after expired, and as the doctor and the clergyman left the house together the former remarked to the latter,

"You arrived just in the nick of time; two minutes more and you would have been too late. May I ask what kind of shoes you wear?" "Congress gaiters," responded the clergyman. "Ah, how fortunate!" said the doctor. "Had you worn laced boots you would not have been in time, and think what disaster that would have meant for the child!"

True, many of the more enlightened Christian people would deny any such false, superstitious thought as that God would hand over an unbaptised infant to devils, eternally to torment it, or do anything else to its detriment. Nevertheless, many of these same people manifest great concern if by any means one of their children should die without this ceremony; and some of the more illiterate certainly have a most positive belief in the necessity of the rite and a most torturing fear of the consequences if it is omitted—so strong is the influence coming down to us from the centuries of false beliefs — "the dark ages."

In the Scriptures two kinds of baptism are clearly presented—John the Baptist's baptism and Christian baptism- each being for adults only. Briefly stated, John's baptism, at the time of our Lord's first advent, was for Jews only, who were already recognised as typically cleansed, by the Atonement-day sin offerings. TO that John's baptism signified repentance from recognised sin, violations of the Law Covenant, and a typical cleansing from them. The motive behind John's preaching and baptising was a preparation of the people for the Kingdom of God and for a revelation of Messiah, which John's preaching declared to be imminent, and for which the Jewish people would need to be in a condition of heart-readiness if they would receive an appropriate blessing.

Christian baptism, first introduced by our Lord and symbolised by His immersion in the river Jordan, signifies complete consecration to God. For the Lord's followers the Apostle Paul has presented the matter so clearly and beautifully in Romans 6:3-5—"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death." It will be seen that Paul is not writing here about the baptism in water, but the immersion of our wills into the Will of Christ, which is followed by the begetting of the holy spirit to newness of life—to a new nature.

(Additional information and literature on the important subject of Baptism will be gladly supplied free. The book, "The New Creation," chapter 10, is especially recommended for a detailed explanation. In new edition, this book is supplied at 6/-, post paid.)

Ministers of Reconciliation

(2 Cor. 5:18, 19.) (Convention Address.)

THERE are various kinds of ministers—ministers of state, of religion, and so on. A minister of state has a good deal of authority and power. In religious circles we think of the word more as describing a person who serves, but unfortunately even here, those generally known by the title delegate to themselves more authority and power than is justifiable. Some of them even claim that they have the power to relegate men and women to everlasting torture in hell fire, if they do not strictly conform to the religion they serve. We would not think much of a God who needed ministers like that.

Other ministers claim to be servants of the true God and to serve His people, yet spend their energies proclaiming and acclaiming Satan's kingdom as a blessing of mankind. They have been telling the world for centuries that it is making good progress—that it is surely evolving toward the golden age.

I remember sitting in a church pew shortly after World War 1, and listening to a minister of religion telling his congregation what a salvation the then newly-formed League of Nations was going to effect, and that here was constructive evidence of the increase of Christ's Kingdom. To-day, this man is still in the same ministry, occupying the pulpit of a city church, and possibly exhorting the people to rally to the present United Nations set-up, while the short memories of his earlier congregation knife forgotten or overlooked the clear failure of his earlier prophecy. We do not think much of ministers like that, either, though we bear no personal ill-feeling.

We are sorry that there are ministers so poorly instructed concerning the true God and His methods or plans, and more especially sorry to think, that for the greater part, the people "love to have it so."

Who, then, are these ministers mentioned in our text, and what is their ministry? Have they any ordination of man? Do they wear any robes? Have they any titles? No, the Scripture simply says that they are "ambassadors for Christ" (verse 20), and that their ministry is "a ministry of reconciliation" (verse 18).

We find the meaning of the word "reconciliation" given as—"to effect a thorough change," and also as "renewal of friendship." We can see that these definitions incorporate the thought generally connected with the word reconcile those who were enemies being reconciled to each other.

Who are the enemies that need reconciling? The Bible tells us it is God and men. We read that all men were "alienated from God by wicked works." The same Book makes it very clear that God was not responsible for the enmity, but that it was all man's fault. But God who is rich in mercy, full of love and compassion, so loved the world that at great cost to Himself He moved to make it possible to restore proper relations between Himself and His creation; a creation that, before sin entered, was so delightful in every respect- that all the angels shouted for joy. (Job 38:7.)

Yes, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to effect reconciliation, and restore the shouts of joy that, because of sin, were replaced by sadness, and the groaning and travail of the people. But He didn't do it all at once. He has a long range plan in view which is working out gradually, in order that the reconciliation aimed at will be as perfect and thorough as possible.

The whole plan hinges on two points mentioned in the two verses of our text—first, that God has reconciled us (the Gospel like believers) to Himself by Jesus Christ; and having done that, He has committed unto us a ministry of reconciliation which concerns the whole world. Concerning the first point—God reconciling us to Himself—we have been no better than the rest of the world. No, listen—read Eph. 2:1-3. It is wholly by God's mercy and grace we have been lifted to such glorious heights.

(Read verses 4-6.) And for what reason? (Read verse 7.) And it is to be during those ages to come that the whole world is to be reconciled to God. What exceeding riches of His grace is then to be manifested to us, we cannot fully realise, for in that time we will be associated with Christ as His joint heirs, when all the world is enjoying the benefits accruing through man's reconciliation to God.

The ministry, or word of reconciliation which God has given to the Gospel Age church, the "us" class, is an important and wonderful one. It is a ministry that will never cease nor alter until all who will, have been reconciled to God. During this age, under God's hand, it is effective in seeking out and assisting the "us" class to become members of the Body of Christ, and in the next age, in the heavenly realms with Christ, it will be an effective overseeing- ministry toward "all the world," shepherding them, step by step, over the highway of holiness until they are fully reconciled to God, and enjoying to the full the times of restitution.
(Isa. 35:8; Acts 3:21.)

Thus, truly, God was in (or by, or through) Christ, reconciling the whole world' to Himself and He has commissioned us to declare the message; but He has not as yet fully opened that way of reconciliation. To the Gospel Age church only (the "us" class) is it yet actual: for the world it is still prospective.

When Jesus was teaching His disciples, those who were to become the "us" class, He prayed to His Heavenly Father for them, but concerning the world He said, "I pray not for the world." (John 17:9.) These words do not deny that Jesus gave His life a ransom for all, for the Bible says that He did (1 Tim. 2:6.) ; nor do they conflict with the truth of our text, which declares, that through Christ all the world might be reconciled to God. No, both the Father and His Son knew that full and abundant Provision had been made for the world, to be manifested "in due time."

First of all, however, some companions for Christ, a little flock, were to be conformed to His image and become

His Bride—the Lamb's wife. They were offered the inestimable privilege of reigning with Him in glory after they have suffered some of the experiences their Master endured in the sacrifice that was necessary to reconcile all men to God. And the sufferings are brought about by preaching the word of reconciliation, in all its ramifications, to a world that is still at enmity with God. Nor can this world at enmity be reconciled to Him, until the "us" class has fulfilled its mission and proved faithful unto death, as did its Lord and Head; for not till then will the Christ be complete (Head and Body) and New Covenant be made with natural Israel, the blessings of which will extend to all the nations of the earth.

There is no thought that Christ's sacrifice was insufficient to effect full reconciliation for all at once. but it seems clear that God does not make it available to the world until the "little flock" has consummated its privileges—filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, in a ministry of reconciliation, made possible by His shed blood.

Thus, the position and mission of the church (the "us" class) is not difficult to comprehend. As before stated, they were just sinners as others, but they accepted Christ as their Saviour, they became justified before God through the blood of Jesus—thus gaining life, whereas before they had none. (1 John 5:12.) But the Scriptures clearly indicate, without fear of contradiction, that this new found life is not to be retained for their own benefit now in this age, but is to be consecrated to God's service. Presenting our bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, as Paul beseeched the brethren to do, is another way of saying that we begin the ministry of reconciliation which will never cease until God's plan is ended.

We are still in the flesh it is true, and we are very conscious of our earthen vessels too, but God no longer judges us by the flesh, nor are our brethren to do so. (Read 2 Cor. 5:15-17.) A wonderful being is this "new creature" that becomes an "ambassador for Christ" in a ministry of reconciliation—a ministry well

portrayed in its various aspects in the next chapter,-2 Cor. 6:3-10.

At a time when my thoughts were dwelling round these verses an old brother, in course of conversation with me on spiritual things, said—"I love that verse, brother, where it says, 'when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace to reveal His son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen'." (Gal. 1:15, 16.) He further said, "Now, there is nothing I could ask for more, than that God should reveal His Son in me." I, too, saw the beautiful thought and I pass it on to you.

We know from the Scriptures and experience, that God reveals His Son in His consecrated people in various ways, and sometimes not just the ways that we might expect. Jesus was a man acquainted with grief and sorrow, often persecuted for His loving deeds and words of truth, because those amongst whom He moved were nearly all at enmity with God and therefore could not appreciate real goodness. His faithful followers have had similar experiences, the Apostle Paul being a notable one, and if we can see how Paul viewed such matters we will see better how we should do so. Listen to Paul; read Phil. 3:8-14, especially note verse 10.

Paul sought to have the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. We need to have walked a little along the Christian way, and- to have been enlightened by the holy spirit concerning things not revealed to "babes in Christ" or natural men, before we can appreciate Paul's thought, but it is a very beautiful one. I have seen brethren in very humiliating experiences when they were probably conscious only of the disdain, scorn and disrepute in which others viewed them; I have beheld them and have seen God's Son revealed in them and I loved them.

Paul was made "as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things" by some in his day. (1 Cor. 4:13.) He and his companions had their feet made fast in prison stocks and received treatment such as is generally reserved for the worst type of criminal, when their only offence was preaching the Word of God. (Acts 16:24.) But to Christians God's Son was revealed in Paul through such experiences.

So, dear brethren, we need patience in the blessed ministry with which God has entrusted us—reconciling those at enmity with Him. We need wisdom too, don't we? And we shall have both if we ask for them. (James 1:4, 5.) A word in season, how good it is. It is to be "in season" for the person we endeavour to help. Men all act strangely at times. To illustrate:

A person who is ill often loses his or her appetite for food. The very sight or smell 'of good, wholesome food may become repulsive to them, nauseating. But when they are restored to health there is a thorough change — good food is relished again. Natural men are still "children of wrath," at enmity with God, and have no desire for the good, wholesome food of the truth. Men hate the light and turn from it; they don't want it. But if a change takes place they may begin to desire it, may even seek it. As ministers of reconciliation our labours are to be to the end of effecting such a change. Persons who repel the message at one time, may experience some change later and be able and ready to receive a measure of the truth for their comfort and help. We must, therefore, be instant in season, and out of season to ourselves, noting well how the listener is inclined with the view to effecting a thorough change as time goes on.

But what if all our labours seem to go for nought and it appears as if we have but "brought forth wind." Well, to nearly all the world, Christ's earthly ministry seemed to end that way. So did Paul's and many another saint's. But Jesus' seeming failure, as His life ended in ignominy, suffering and death, was a great victory for Himself and a progressive step in God's plan whereby men could be reconciled to Him. And the church's meagre success in turning men to the way of reconciliation with God, during this age, is not the failure that the world believes it to be. In the divine economy,, the suffering of the saints, like the suffering of their Lord and Head, will not be lost, but will be rewarded abundantly and will be seen to

work out to the praise of God and the blessing of men in the age to come.

It was doubtless through understanding these things that Paul admonished the brethren in 1 Cor. 15:58—
"Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." When the ministry of reconciliation God has bestowed upon the church in

Christ is complete, it will be seen to have turned, not a few, but many to righteousness, and they themselves will be no more dishonoured, but will shine in the kingdom of their Father, as the brightness of the firmament, for ever and ever. (Dan. 12:3.)

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