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Character.

(Convention Address. 1 Pet. 5:10.)

WHAT is the origin or meaning of this word “character”? According to record it is the same word in Greek as in English, and in the first place was the name of a sculptor’s tool. Then it takes in the thought of the tooling process, the shaping or forming of the sculptures. The word to-day is given a still higher meaning also, and may be associated with as high a connection as the Divine character, which is the perfect example. ‘speaking in Hebrews of our Lord as the “express image,” this in the Greek is “charaktare,” and is interpreted in Strong’s Concordance as, engraver, •the tool or the person.

Now, as an engraver must have a set idea in his mind in regard to that which he is going to hew out of the rough material, so must the individual Christian recognise the true ideal of life and follow it with unwavering will and purpose. Thus we realise how important it is that we have proper ideals before our minds, that they be noble ones, of high standard. And this is where the value of the doctrines of Christ set forth in the Scriptures are manifest. They set before God’s people the only true and noble ideal and thus enable those in the school of Christ to develop the character which God can approve.

It has been recorded that every man is the sculptor of his own career. To a large degree this is so, but with the Christian there is a great difference. He gives himself to the Lord, who undertakes to work in him, as we read, “both to will and to do His pleasure.” In another passage it says, “We are His workmanship.” The Lord does not work in us without our co-operation, but He is the mainstay and we are leaning on Him.

While the Scriptures are particular to maintain liberty of conscience for all the Lord’s people, they distinctly set before us the thought that God is the supervisor of the affairs of all His children and that their prosperity will result from their appreciation of Christ’s headship and recognition of those whom God hath “set in the body” as teachers and helpers. The “liberty wherewith Christ makes free,” does not give us a liberty to do things in opposition to His will; but rather gives freedom from sin.

A necessary disposition all real Christians must fully realise in the development of character is to “pray without ceasing.” It constitutes one of the greatest of God’s blessings. The privilege of approaching the throne of heavenly grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need cannot be too highly esteemed. The interests of the day committed to the Lord in the morning should be continually remembered as being in His care throughout the day. The experiences of life as they come should be accepted as under the Divine will, and thanks should be rendered for them whether agreeable or disagreeable to the natural man, “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” This is living up to the high privilege His grace has provided for us.

We read in the Scriptures, “God is light”; our Lord Jesus was called “the true light,” and we remember it was He that said of His followers, “Ye are the light of the world.” The Psalmist declares, “Thy Word is a lamp to my feet, a lantern to my footsteps.” The holy spirit of the Father and the Son has been enkindled in our hearts through the Word of grace and in proportion as we have fed this spirit with the truth we have become burning and shining lights in the world. But how easily such a holy flame may be grieved or even extinguished, and perhaps very quickly, too! A sufficient intake of the spirit of the world might extinguish or quench that flame. If not in one way, then in another we fully realise that our besetments come from the world, the flesh or the Adversary, yet the Apostle intimates that we are responsible or the indwelling of the spirit with us. We can take ourselves out of the Lord’s hands if we choose, but the Adversary is

powerless to do this, if we abide in the Lord in faith, love and obedience. As the flame of love is to be kept burning in our individual hearts, so in the congregation it is also to be guarded.

An element very necessary in these days in developing character is that of patience. We know that God is operating all things according to His own will, along the lines of His wise and righteous laws, and to be impatient would be the greatest folly as He would not be likely to alter any of His fixed principles to suit the various hurried inclinations some possess. It is prudent at all times to wait the Lord's time and way, and the indications of His will in every case, both with regard to ourselves and others. "They that put their trust in Him shall never be confounded." "Let patience have her perfect work"; "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him."

We notice in Rev. 3:10, the reward of those who exercise His patience: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation." In this instance special significance is laid upon patience. Examining the word more closely we notice that it is translated from two different Greek words, and the one in this passage of Scripture has the thought of constancy, cheerful endurance—to endure evil in a cheerful, willing, patient manner. This is therefore an element of character which represents something more than just restraint of feeling and action. It signifies such a development of heart and character as manifests itself in an endurance of wrong or affliction with contentment, without rebellion of will, with full acquiescence in the Divine wisdom and love.

It is only proper that the Lord should demand that those whom He would account worthy of joint-heirship in the kingdom shall not only appreciate His goodness and His character, but that they demonstrate their loyalty thoroughly to those principles to the extent of a joyful willingness to suffer for His sake—to endure patiently on behalf of right. A transitory endurance of one, two or three short trials would not prove the individual to have established character for righteousness, but a patient, cheerful endurance even unto death would prove and demonstrate such a character.

The Apostle Paul exhorts, "Let us run with patience (cheerful endurance) the race set before us." We live in a time when this endurance is most necessary. How few wish to endure anything for righteousness sake, for Christ's sake, or anyone else's sake, and if endurance be thought necessary it is generally with very much of impatience, very much of complaint, more than formerly. This general tendency of the civilised world to non-endurance and impatience necessarily has its bearing and influence to some extent upon those who are seeking to walk in the narrow way, going against the current of public sentiment and custom. We may expect the growth of this disposition of impatience in Christendom, the general thought amongst its leaders being that they must become more aggressive, with the feeling that if they had taken things into their own hands the world would have been converted sooner. But those who have kept the Lord's word of patient endurance and have sought from Him the needed wisdom, have learned that He has a due time in which His purposes shall all be accomplished. They realise that what is permitted is for a wise purpose in connection with the call and preparation of the little flock to be heirs in the kingdom.

In his letter to the Thessalonians the Apostle gives some further intimations respecting the peculiar trials of the hour of temptation, which has not yet reached its intensity, but which is already working, sifting and separating, because the judgment begins with the house of God. We are informed that in the closing period of the Gospel Age Satan will put forth great effort with all power and signs and lying wonders. The Apostle explains the reason why it will be thus, "Because they received not the truth in the love of it, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie, that they all might be condemned who believed not the truth."

Our main object in studying God's Word and His character should always be to bring our own hearts and minds into closer sympathy and likeness and co-operation with His. The Apostle says, "All that will be godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Now, why should the godly suffer? To be godly would be to live in obedience to God. The Scriptures inform us that "God is love," and if we are godly we must love after the same manner as God. And this is what He desires to see in His people, not just an outward manifestation of devotion to Him and to the brethren. Some people may have the view that love is doing all nice things, conceding to all their ideas and agreeing with them in what they appreciate—that you show no opposing feelings in any way. But that is not the love God shows towards His people. Justice must be behind it all, and often stern justice, too. How pleasant it would seem to some if we just blunder along satisfying our own ideas and all this being passed over by the Lord as if it could not be helped. Why, the lesson would be altogether lost. We know by experience and also by observation that those who live godly in this evil world will suffer to the extent that they are out of harmony with the present evil conditions, yet the promised blessings are to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Satan's arts seem employed at times in getting those who are trying to live godly to contend with one another. One device seems to be used in making some think that their viewpoint is something most important and if not accepted with the same enthusiasm by others they become touchy, if not offended. In this way some bring trouble upon themselves but think they are suffering for righteousness sake. We must see, then, that our influence upon others is uplifting; that we are careful we do not cause others to grieve and cause suffering unnecessarily.

In framing- our characters, trials and sufferings are very helpful. The sufferings that come through heredity cannot be classed as sufferings for Christ. We should rather speak of the sufferings of Christ as being voluntary. The Apostle says that if we suffer with the Lord we shall also reign with Him; he means the sufferings which we bring on ourselves through faithfulness to Him. He speaks further of "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." These are not inherited. We are informed that our defects in character are works of the fallen flesh, and in our case (as Christians) these inherited failings and others brought upon ourselves by the violation of the laws of God prior to our entrance into His family as sons, while not sufferings for Christ, will be made advantageous to us. These weaknesses the Father sees fit to leave with us, but assures us that His grace is sufficient to enable us to overcome.

In the building and buttressing of character we need- to watch that we are not cultivating self-assurance, which interferes with true fellowship, but that we develop in that full assurance of faith that results from sanctifying truth. Confidence in self is certainly to be discouraged; we need a strong heart desire to lead us to join wholeheartedly in co-operating with the Lord in His discipline against this self-centred tendency of our flesh. Probably not until His grace has led us to see the flesh in all its uncomeliness can we understand the true situation. The frailties of self had taught the Apostle to abandon such as a guide and to place all his dependance upon the "Captain of our salvation." He says, "We have a strong consolation to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast."

The Apostle Peter spoke of "stirring up your pure minds by way of remembrance." Here it is noticeable that even the pure minds need stirring. Mental alertness is of great value and helps us to give close attention and concentration upon any subject investigated. With some this is very difficult because the mind wanders off on something else, like a person getting sleepy. Our thoughts determine our character, and according to our energy in thought on Christian principles will we progress, by the Lord's grace and strength.

Question Box.

Question.—Regarding the claim of some that 6000 years of human history was reached in 1872 or 1874, and that Christ's kingdom began about 1878, how could that be so, seeing that the Times of the Gentiles did not run out until 1914?

Answer.--It ought to be evident to all that Christ's kingdom on earth could not commence until the "Times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled." (Luke 21:24.) When Christ begins His reign on earth, Satan, who is the present ruler, will have been bound that he may deceive the nations no more, and all the evidences before our eyes to-day demonstrate the fact that he is still the "Prince of this world." It would be sad indeed if; after all, our anticipations and prayers such as "Thy Kingdom 'Come" and "Thy Will be done on Earth as in Heaven," the last 60 years were a sample of the "peace and good-will" promised under the reign of the Prince of Peace. While the world was bad enough prior to 1878, it was probably never in a more godless condition than it is to-day. During the past 60 years the most terrible war has taken place, and the prediction of St. Paul (2 Tim. 3:1-7) becomes more and more definitely fulfilled.

We do not believe that 6000 years of human history ended with 1872-4, nor that it has yet been reached. Without any question we are living in the "Time of the end" (Dan. 12:4), and that the end of this "Time of the end" will be reached before the present generation passes away. We think it reasonable to suppose that the end of the "Time of the end" will be the end of 6000 years, and that the 7th thousand years will be the period of Christ's reign on earth.

We think it reasonable to suppose that the period of probation at the end of this "present evil world" will be about the same as that at the end of the "world that was before the flood," and we rejoice to know that with the establishment of "the world to come wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:6, 7, 13) will come a time of blessing, of peace and joy and goodwill among mankind. We still pray "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on Earth as in Heaven." (Zeph. 3:8, 9.)

Buoyant Strength.

Oh, to go back across the years long vanished,
To have the words unsaid, the deeds undone,

The errors cancelled, the deep shadows banished,
In the glad sense of a new world begun;

To be a little child, whose page of story
Is yet undimmed, unblotted by a stain,

And the sunrise of primeval glory
To know that life has had its start again!

I may go back across the years long vanished,
I may resume my childhood, Lord, in Thee,

When in the shadow of Thy cross are banished
All other shadows that encompass me:

And o'er the road that now is dark and dreary,
This soul, made buoyant by the strength of rest,

Shall walk untired, shall run and not be weary,
To bear the blessing that has made it blessed.

PEOPLES PAPER.

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While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord's Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported.

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World Facing Paganism:

What of the Churches and the Gospel?

SPEAKING at the Methodist Conference, 'the Rev. J. Mackenzie, Moderator General of the Presbyterian Church, said that the world was to-day challenging the Christian Church, and it was very largely in revolt against Christian principles. The world was facing paganism. He raised the question whether the Church had accepted too largely the spirit of the world—he felt that the Church seemed powerless to stem the tide of paganism.

It is sad indeed that the Churches have reached such a condition. It may well be asked: What is wrong that they should have lost the inspiration and power of the past ?

When the Church was young, and “ not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called” (1 Cor. 1:26), and when the preachers were mostly described as “ignorant and unlearned men,” these could stand up in the power of God and withstand paganism—the truth conquered, and paganism was overthrown.

Has the Gospel, “which is the power of God unto salvation,” lost its power? or have the Churches lost the Gospel and failed to perceive the Bible message for to-day?

Mr. Mackenzie suggests where the fault lies, i.e., the Churches have indeed accepted the spirit of the world. Not only by using worldly methods of raising funds for Christ's work, but also in adopting worldly pleasures in the . endeavour to hold their congregations together, including card parties, dances and various clubs and games, is this in evidence. Then, too, the same is shown by adopting worldly titles, seeking worldly honours in higher educations, etc. In the seminaries for the preparation of ministers, the studies are along the lines of the classics, what is called the higher critical study, the object of which appears to be to find fault with what is written, so that by the time a young minister is turned out to preach the Gospel, he has lost faith in the inspiration of the Bible—he really has no Gospel to preach. He may know all about the ancient philosophers, all about mythology and anything that sounds learned, but very little respecting the Divine Plan of the Ages, or God's great design for blessing all the families of the earth—the good news which shall be to all people.

We may rest assured that the Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. It is just as “good news” to-day as when first proclaimed; indeed, it shines “brighter and brighter unto the perfect day,” and is just as powerful to withstand paganism, agnosticism, higher criticism and atheism as every other enemy of light and truth.

The Bible can be more clearly understood to-day than ever before. It reveals a glorious design on the part of the Creator that has been and continues to work out as the ages roll along. God is still in the heavens, and is fully able to control; nothing can hinder the progress of His great purposes. He has declared, “My word goeth forth out of My mouth, and shall not return unto Me void; it shall accomplish that which I please.” “The Lord hath purposed, who can disannul it?”

The very conditions of to-day have been clearly foretold--Bible prophecy is fulfilling before our eyes. The following Scriptures will verify this statement:-1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5 (this refers to those professing to be godly); 2 Pet. 3:3, 4; Luke 17:26-30; Matt. 24:36-40; Dan. 12:1-4, etc.

God can, and will, make the world halt in its present mad course at the right time. In His wisdom He is allowing it to go its own way and bring experiences which will teach necessary lessons and prepare the hearts and minds of men for the Messianic Age.

At the right time the prince of this world (Satan) will be restrained and Christ will take control of earth's affairs. “judgment will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet”; “The knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 28:17; 11:9.)

The time of trouble now developing like dark clouds over all the earth will bring men to their senses and teach them that there is no life worth living apart from God and His righteousness. Obedience to the Divine rule will bring peace and goodwill. This is shown throughout the Bible; for instance, Zephaniah 3:8, 9. When the fiery time of trouble has destroyed all the selfish and unrighteous human systems then the pure language (the true Gospel) will be turned to the people, and they will call upon the name of the Lord with one consent.

The difficulty with the Churches is that the leaders do not know their Bibles; they do not know the Gospel, and

therefore they have not the power to withstand the errors and worldly influences. The truths of God's Word have been beclouded by the false doctrines of the dark ages, introduced into Church teachings by paganism. The clergy of today are like the clergy at our Lord's first advent, blinded by traditions which contradict the law and the prophets.

As then, so now, these leaders in Christendom cannot think that anyone out of their "standing" or class could possibly assist them to understand the way of the Lord more perfectly. The Jewish leaders were persuaded that they were the only people through whom God would send any message. Jesus spoke against their traditions, and anyway, "He was only the carpenter's son from Nazareth," and "could any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Just as it was in that day when the Nathaniels had to "dig for truth as men dig for silver," so now the earnest truth seekers must search for themselves. Finding that no reasonable solutions to difficulties can be found in the Churches, they have to seek elsewhere. The Scriptures show that this condition of things would prevail at the time of the end—that the true Christians would be gathered out of the religious systems. Indeed, when the Laodicean condition of the Church is reached God's people are commanded "to come out of her" (Rev. 3:14-21; 18:4, 5), and in the Lord's great prophecy (Luke 17:30-37) we find they would be gathered like eagles around a carcass, feasting on the good things of revealed truths.

"He Faileth Not."

Each happy morn when I awake,
This promise for the day I take,
"I'll never leave Thee, nor forsake,"
He faileth not.

He bears my burdens, carries, too,
My cares and sorrows all life through,
How good the promise, and how true,
He faileth not.

How sweet His word unto my soul,
To cleanse from sin and make me whole,
To cheer, encourage and console,
He faileth not.

He has not failed me in the past,
He will not fail while life shall last,
For whereso'er my lot is cast,
He faileth not.

Along life's road I'll fear no ill,
For Christ my Lord is with me still,
He never failed! He never will!
He faileth not.

The Saviour's cooling from above,
To take me to His home of love,
His promise I shall faithful prove,
He faileth not.

In daily cares and troubles sore,
When Satan tempts me, o'er and o'er,
His promise stands for evermore,
He faileth not.

And when I reach that golden shore,
My trouble and my labour o'er,
I'll sing this song for evermore,
He FAILED me not!

When dark the days and drear the skies,
And often bitter trials rise,
When all else fails beneath the skies,
He faileth not.

—Selected."

And He went as He was wont to the Mount of Olives.”

Luke 22:39.

THE mountains are Nature's monuments. Like the islands they dwell apart, and like them they give asylum from a noisy and irreverent world. In their silence many a meditative spirit has found leisure for the longest thought, and in their Patmos-like seclusion the brightest visions and largest projects have evolved; whilst by a sort of over-mastering attraction they have usually drawn to themselves the most memorable incident which variegates our human history. And, as they are the natural haunts of the highest spirits, and the appropriate scenes of the most signal occurrences, so they are the noblest cenotaphs. Far off they arrest the eye; and though their hoary chronicle tells its legend of the past, their heaven-pointing elevations convey the spirit onward towards eternity.

We do not wonder that excited fancy has sought relics of the Ark on the top of Ararat; and in the grim solitude of

Sinai, it is solemn to remember and easy to believe that the voice of God has spoken here. Elijah has made Carmel all his own and the death of Moses must be ever Pisgah's diadem. The words of Jesus seem still to linger on the hills of Galilee, their lilies forbidding "thought for raiment," and their little birds twittering "No thought for to-morrow," whilst every grassy tuft and scented flower is breathing its own beatitude. But though heavenly wisdom spake on that mountainside, and excellent glory lighted up the top of Tabor, there is another height to which discipleship reverts with fonder memory, and which it treads with softer step—that mountain where beyond any spot in Palestine "God was manifest in flesh"—where the great Intercessor was wont to pray, where Jesus wept over Jerusalem, on whose slopes He blessed the Apostle-band, and sent His message of mercy to mankind—the mountain at whose base lay Bethany and Gethsemane — on whose gentle turf His feet last stood—the Sabbatic, pensive and expectant Mount of Olives."—
Selected.

“Watch Ye, Stand Fast, Be Strong”

(Convention Address: Continued from last issue.)

ALONG with the thought of watchfulness, the . Apostle urges us to “stand fast in the faith.” The Scriptures frequently exhort us to stand —“stand fast in the Lord” (Phil. 4:1); “stand fast in one spirit” (Phil. 1:27). Again, in Eph. 6:13. 11, we are exhorted to take the whole armour of God “that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand. Stand, therefore having your loins girt about with truth.” To stand is to adhere to fixed principles; or, in other words, to be steadfast. To stand fast in the faith we must have loyalty to it, a love for the truth, and an earnest desire to be guided and controlled by the Word and spirit of God.

The prophet Malachi says (ch. 3:2): “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth ? for He is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap.” Again the Psalmist says: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who’ shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (Psalm 24:3-4.)

Psalm 91 speaks of a time when a thousand shall fall, yea ten thousand at thy right hand. Is not this condition of things with us today? Do we not’ see that, as the result of false teachings, many have had- their faith severely shaken. The Apostle Paul foretold that in the latter times some would depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. (1 Tim. 4:2.) Again he exhorts in writing to Timothy: “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom, thou hast learned them.” (2 Tim. 3:14.) “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Tim. 4:3; 4.) “But watch thou in all things,” he urges; be on guard against the many deceptive influences, and “hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 1:13.)

How we need to hearken to the exhortations of the word of the Lord if we would be of those who will stand fast during this time of trial and testing. We are living in a time when the work of every man (i.e., every one in Christ) is being tested—made manifest; for, says the Apostle (1 Cor. 3:13), “the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” How important that we use the proper material in the building of character —the gold, silver and precious stones, representing the proper understanding of the truth of God’s Word, His plan of salvation, and the application of His Word to our hearts and lives. How necessary in the first place that our faith in the ransom-sacrifice of Jesus Christ be clear and firm, and, then, having made a full consecration of ourselves to be dead with Christ, how important- it is that we strive daily to carry out our consecration vows, seeking by the Lord’s help to develop more of the fruits of the spirit. This is the main object of all God’s dealings with us now. As another has said: “Coming to the Scriptures to ascertain God’s will, we find that the great work which God asks of us not work for others, but work in ourselves; subduing-, conquering, ruling self. ‘This is the will. of God (concerning you), even your sanctification.’ (1 Thess. 4:3.) Everything else, therefore—our service of the household of faith, and our doing good unto all men—is subservient to this most important work within, For, as the Apostle by inspiration declares: Though we should preach the gospel eloquently to others, and though we should give all our goods to feed the poor, or become martyrs for a good cause, without love, the spirit of Christ and the Father, developed in us as the ruling principle of life, we would be nothing from the divine standpoint.”

Standing fast in the faith does not mean standing still. As branches in the true Vine, the Lord expects us to respond to the prunings and bring forth the fruits of His spirit. It does us good sometimes to examine ourselves to see if we can discern indications of growth; we want to build up along those lines where we find we are lacking. We must not allow our failures and shortcomings to hinder our progress in the narrow-way. Satan would try to hinder us and cause us to be discouraged at times; but we need to call to mind the promises of God’s Word. The fact that we may have slipped or stumbled into saying or doing something we ought not, must not be allowed to keep us from the throne of grace. The Scriptures invite us to come with confidence to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Let us remember the Apostle’s words: “If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father,

Jesus Christ, the righteous,” and “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

The Apostle Peter exhorts us to beware lest we fall from our stedfastness. (See 2 Pet. 3:17.) In the same connection (v. 18) he says: “But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” If we are progressing—growing in grace and knowledge—we will not be in danger of falling away. So we must keep pressing on--

“Ne’er think the victory won,
Nor once at ease sit down,
Thine arduous task will not be done,
Till thou hast gained thy crown.”

We must not allow the feeling to grow upon us that there is nothing- we can do to help our brethren in our Class meetings. While it would be quite wrong and harmful to over-estimate one’s abilities and usefulness, yet on the other hand we must avoid the tendency that inclines some to say, “I cannot do anything to help the Class in its meetings.” Paul would urge Timothy to “stir up the gift of God which was in him.” (2 Tim. 1:6.) Similarly, Peter exhorts: “As every man has received the gift even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Pet. 4:10.) The truth has been entrusted to us not to enjoy in a selfish way; if we have accepted it for ourselves we have a responsibility toward it to minister it to others; because it is for the entire household of faith. Let us be zealous in doing our part, “holding fast” and “holding forth” the “word of life.” (Phil. 2:15, 16.)

In order to stand fast in the faith we must not allow any compromising spirit to influence us. The Lord puts His Word on a level with Himself, saying, “If a man love Me he will keep My words”; again, “He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings.” So we are to be tested. Our love for the Lord and for the truth is to be proved. “The Lord your God proveth you to see whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” Let us see to it that we do not allow anything to hinder our full heart devotion to God. Let us ever remember our great high calling and allow the precious promises to inspire our hearts and strengthen our hands for every duty and privilege and service. As our text exhorts, let us “quit ourselves like men” and “be strong.”

The Psalmist says: “The Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.” A comment on these words of the Psalmist is as follows: “As we look back over the years that have passed since first we learned to ‘know the joyful sound’ of the true gospel and consecrated ourselves fully to the Lord, we view with sorrow the imperfection of even our best efforts; and as looking forward we see the difficulties that seem to obstruct our onward course, we shall greatly need to reinforce our courage with the special promises of:divine grace to help in every time of need. Among others, we have the blessed assurance that ‘the Lord will give strength unto His people’: ‘Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.’” (Psa. 50:15.)

As soldiers under our great Captain, we have enlisted in no uncertain struggle unless our own faint-heartedness or unfaithfulness should make it so. We are fully supplied with the whole armour of God, which will amply protect us against the fiery darts of the Adversary, if only we accept it and carefully buckle it on. We have with us the constant presence of our Captain, so long as we are closely following His leading. Above the din of battle His inspiring voice may be heard saying, “Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” “Be of good cheer; I have overcome.” (Luke 12:32; Jno. 16:33.) If we are weak we have only to remember the blessed promise, “The Lord will give strength unto His people”; and by our faithfulness we shall glorify God, who will deliver us from all our foes, both seen and unseen.

Like all others, the Lord’s people need fortitude and patience, else they might soon become discouraged in the conflict with the world, the flesh and the Adversary. They need strength; they need encouragement. In the text under consideration, the word “strength” means, in large measure, courage. The Lord will give courage to His people. He encourages us in a variety of ways; He encourages us through each other, as we build one another up in the most holy faith.

We, nevertheless, look to the individual, innate strength and to its importance. “Be of good courage, and He will strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord:” None have this particular kind of strength, that of the “inner man” except those who have become new creatures in Christ, to whom “old things have passed away, and all things have become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17.) With this particular spirit-begotten class all of the Lord’s dealings are intended to develop character. “Desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby,” and become strong. (1 Pet. 2:

2.) This milk of the Word the Lord gives at first to His children, that the new nature may, grow thereby and become able to digest stronger food and thus develop in character-likeness to our Lord. To all His own He has provided nourishment—milk for babes, strong meat for those more developed. (Heb. 5:12-14.) And any who would be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (courageous) will avail himself of the divine provision.

Our faith, however, is the basis of both our strength and our peace. No matter how fiercely the storms of life may assail us, we must never let go our anchor and allow ourselves to drift; but always remember that “The foundation of God standeth sure,” that “His truth is our shield and buckler,” and “What He has promised He is able also to perform,” notwithstanding our human imperfections and frailties. Covering these, we have the imputed righteousness of Christ, our Surety and Advocate, and the assurance, “The Father Himself loveth us,” and that “He knoweth our frame and

remembereth that we are dust,” and so has compassion for the sons of His love and is very pitiful and of tender mercy. (2 Tim. 2:19; Psa. 91:4; Rom. 4:21; Jno. 16:27; Psa. 103:14.) Indeed, “what more could He say than to us He has said,” to assure our faith and to steady and strengthen our hearts to patient endurance in the midst of the trials and conflicts in the narrow-way of sacrifice?

With abounding compassion and tenderness, our Lord, on the last night of His earthly life, bestowed upon His beloved disciples His parting blessing, His legacy of peace. It was the richest legacy He had to bequeath, and was of priceless value. It was the promise of that tranquillity of soul, that rest and ease of mind which He Himself possessed - -the peace of God. It was the same peace which the Father has always enjoyed, even in the midst of all the commotion which the permission of evil has brought about. In Jehovah, this peace is self-centred, because He realises in Himself omnipotence and infinite wisdom. The peace of Christ was centred not in Himself, but in God, through faith in His wisdom, power and grace. So if we would have the peace of God, the peace of Christ (My peace), it must, like His, be centred in God, by faith..

The peace promised is not the short-lived peace of the world, which is sometimes enjoyed for a little season; but “My peace,” which endures through loss, persecution, scorn and contempt, and even amidst the agonies of the cross. This peace is something which none of the vicissitudes of this life can destroy and which no enemy can wrest from us.

“There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.” (Isa. 48:22.) “The wicked are like the troubled sea, continually casting up mire and dirt.” Their hearts are not in accord with peace and righteousness but are filled with selfishness. The wicked are self-seeking and grasping, filled with anger if they cannot always get what they want; with malice if they see someone enjoying what they cannot have. All of these things indicate a lack of peace.

To the extent that any of the Lord’s people have any of these evil propensities they cannot have the “peace of God which passeth all understanding”—which passeth all description. In this peace lies a satisfaction for all the various qualities of the mind; in proportion as the mind develops the desire of pleasing the Lord, of communicating to others the- knowledge of the truth and the blessed opportunity of salvation, it becomes our ambition to do good, instead of evil. So, ambition being turned into a right line, the peace of God which none can comprehend save those who possess it, comes to the mind and heart.

This promise, that God will give peace to His people, seems to apply only to a peace of heart. Our Lord and the Apostles possessed it to such an extent that they enjoyed themselves much more than did their enemies. Paul and Silas in prison were able to sing praises to God instead of berating the governments and threatening what would be done to them. So with us. In proportion as we see matters from the divine viewpoint, and appreciate the precious promises and let them inspire our hearts, we shall rejoice in those promises, and our hearts will be blessed. Even if we have trials and difficulties that we are not able to surmount, if these are working out for us the fruits and graces of the spirit, we may rejoice and give thanks for these evidences of God’s love.

We see that the peace of God is compatible with great commotion and with sorrow and pain of various kinds; for it is not dependent upon outward circumstances, but upon a proper balancing of the mind and the condition of a perfect heart. The promise in the text—“The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace”—belongs to us now; let us draw near and claim this precious promise.

Let us be loyal to the truth; to God’s Word, and to the principles of righteousness. Let each of us write upon his heart the precious promise—“The Lord will give strength unto His people.” Let us be faithfully “His people,” and let us earnestly desire and faithfully use the strength promised. “Faithful is He that calleth you who also will do it.” “He is faithful that promised.” (1 Thess. 5:24; Heb, 10:23.)

So then, if we lack the strength or the peace promised the fault is our own, not God’s. Either we have not the interests of His service closely enough at heart, or else we do not make proper use of the strength He provides. “The Lord will give strength unto His people” (His trusting, faithful servants, who are using to His praise the talents possessed), “the Lord will bless His people with peace.” (Concluded.)

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