

Our Comforter

***“I will pray the Father,
and he shall give you
another Comforter,
that he may abide
with you for ever; Even
the Spirit of truth;
whom the world
cannot receive, because
it seeth him not,
neither knoweth him:
but ye know him; for
he dwelleth with you,
and shall be in you. I
will not leave you
comfortless: I will
come to you.”
—John 14:16-18***

IN LIGHT OF THE MOST unusual and stressful conditions which we have seen and faced during the past year, how thankful we should be that God has called us “out of darkness into his marvellous light,” and that he has given us the ability to understand “the deep things of God.” (I Pet. 2:9; I Cor. 2:9-11) In response to this, our thoughts should first go to the love of God, who is the source

of the comfort spoken of in our title.

The Scriptures tell us, “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. ... We love him, because he first loved us.” “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” (I John 4:16,19; John 3:16) God’s great love for us should result in a like response in our heart, and a manifestation of our love for him, his Son Christ Jesus, the Word of Truth, our brethren and our fellow man. Such love is identified as the

crowning feature of the Christian character. “Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”—I Cor. 13:13, *New International Version*; Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-7

SOURCES OF COMFORT

The word “Comforter” in our opening text is a translation of the Greek word *parakletos*, and can be variously defined as a consoler, intercessor, guide and helper to the Lord’s people along the Christian way. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” (II Cor. 1:3,4) The apostle continues, “For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, ... because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.” (vss. 5-7, *NIV*) “Comfort” is referred to ten times in these words of Paul, showing both our great need to receive it from God, and also the privilege of sharing it with one another.

Jesus is also a comforter and helper to his followers. Shortly after his baptism, he traveled back to his hometown of Nazareth to begin his ministry. Reading in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, Jesus quoted from the prophecy of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to

the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” (Luke 4:18; Isa. 61:1) Surely we see in these words the spirit of comfort and care which our Master would show forth to all his footstep followers.

The Bible, too, is a great source of comfort to God’s people. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 15:4,5) God’s Word, as the foundation of truth, is not only to be a source of comfort to us, but to also engender within us the desire to “be likeminded one toward another.” Thus we see both the privilege of receiving comfort and of giving it forth to others.

“ANOTHER COMFORTER”

In our opening text, Jesus identifies the “Spirit of truth” as “another Comforter” of great importance to the Christian. Later in this same chapter, Jesus says, “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, ... shall teach you all things.” (John 14:26) The Holy Spirit, which is the invisible power and influence of God, is a comforter to those seeking to know and do the Father’s will, by revealing through the Scriptures his plans and purposes, promises and admonitions. Thus peace, joy and contentment are found in the instruction of God’s Word amid distress, tribulation and even persecution. The Apostle Peter states that God’s “divine power” has enabled us to know and claim for ourselves “exceeding great and precious promises,” by which

we might become “partakers of the divine nature.”
—II Pet. 1:3,4

Later in his discourse to the disciples, Jesus again uses the phrase, “the Spirit of truth.” He states that it “shall testify of me.” Furthermore, he continues by saying that when this Spirit of truth, God’s holy influence, came to his followers, it would guide them “into all truth,” and show them “things to come.” (John 15:26; 16:13) In other words, the Holy Spirit would bring comfort to Jesus’ followers by opening up their minds and hearts to the many facets of truth contained in the Word of God.

ENLIGHTENED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

After Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples did not have long to wait for the fulfillment of this promise. Fifty days later, on the “day of Pentecost,” the Holy Spirit came, and its power was made manifest just as Jesus had promised. Certain outward signs were evident, such as the miraculous ability of the apostles to speak and be understood in other languages. More importantly, however, the influence of God’s Holy Spirit opened the minds of the apostles to an understanding of certain portions of prophecy which prior to that time were a mystery to them.—Acts 2:1-11

One of these was Joel 2:28-32. Peter, newly endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit, came to a sudden awareness that this Scripture was now beginning to have a fulfillment. He realized that the recorded prophecies, visions and dreams which God had visited aforetime upon his people of old, but shrouded in mystery for ages and generations, were now commencing to be understood. The purpose of this understanding was to give vision,

hope and instruction for the call of a new age then beginning. Peter said: "This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit."—Acts 2:16-18

After long centuries of obscurity, this portion of God's Word was being unveiled. The descendants, "sons" and "daughters" of natural Israel, as they were represented in the apostles and their associated Jewish disciples, were on that very day "prophesying," or giving public witness, of the call to come into Christ. The apostles were the "young" and "old" men selected by the Lord to interpret these visions, and to make clear the understanding of things long past received from God and written in veiled language. All of this was for the instruction of those called as "servants and handmaidens" of God, to be joined together as part of the "body of Christ."—I Cor. 12:27

This invitation was "to the Jew first," but eventually extended to those called "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." (Rom. 1:16; 2:10; Rev. 5:9) This new and broader aspect of God's dealings, to be accomplished by the pouring out of his Spirit, was included in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. He said: "The promise [of the Holy Spirit] is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."—Acts 2:39

Other vital truths began to be unfolded to the apostles. They were able to understand that Psalm

16:10, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption,” was not written about David, but was a prophetic statement pointing to the death and resurrection of Jesus. (Acts 2:25-31) Peter’s oration on that day included another important quotation from the Psalms: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:34,35) The apostle applied this Old Testament prophecy to mean that Jesus’ kingdom was future and would be a heavenly or spiritual government. This was a truth which was not previously understood. Yet, it confirmed what Jesus had stated before he died: “My kingdom is not of this world.”—John 18:36

Based on this new understanding, Peter, as spokesman for the apostles, appealed to his listeners to join with them in accepting a call to be joint-heirs with Jesus in his heavenly kingdom, the preparation of which was to be accomplished through the power, influence and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. “Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”—Acts 2:38

“DEEP THINGS OF GOD”

The close association of the Holy Spirit with the Word of Truth is expressed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthian brethren. He wrote, “We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (I Cor. 2:7,8,

Revised Standard Version) The Scriptures which hold the “secret and hidden wisdom of God” were written in ages past for the benefit and glory of Christ’s footstep followers of the present Gospel Age.

Prior to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, no one understood this ultimate purpose of God written within the lines of his Word. Quoting from the Old Testament, Paul said, “Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.” (Isa. 64:4; I Cor. 2:9) This observation, made some 700 years before Christ, ends Isaiah’s treatment of the matter. However, Paul, who was writing to those for whose special benefit the Scriptures were ordained, hastened to add: “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—vs. 10

The “deep things of God” are, in reality, the fundamental truths of the Bible which reveal to us the various features of his plan necessary for our development as “firstfruits of his creatures.” (James 1:18) These truths are “deep,” or mysterious, because those not enlightened by God do not see them. Paul says that this special enlightenment comes through the influence of the Holy Spirit. “The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”—I Cor. 2:11-13

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF TRUTH

The Apostle Paul, in the first chapter of Ephesians, systematically outlines three essential elements of the “deep things of God,” which form a foundation of knowledge necessary to intelligently yield ourselves to the counsel of the Father’s will. He writes: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”—Eph. 1:3-6

Here the apostle beautifully expresses the first of these important truths so inseparably linked to the work of the Holy Spirit—the “high calling” of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:14) He tells us that before the world, or present order of things, came into existence, God preordained to use these conditions as a testing ground for the selection and preparation of a spiritual family—children to be associated with Jesus in his own divine household. The accomplishment of this supreme act of grace by the good pleasure of God’s will, required those called to be thoroughly tested and perfected in the heart qualities of faithfulness and holiness, being “without blame before him in love.”—Eph. 1:4

It was God’s purpose that this high calling would be accomplished by the selection from among mankind of those who would be willing to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, heeding *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) his invitation to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. (Matt. 16:24) To do this objectively, like Jesus, they too must be made aware of, and understand, the scope of the high calling, and what they must do to qualify to be part of God's divine family.

As the logic of the Apostle Paul subsequently unfolds in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, his sound reasoning asserts that a knowledge and appreciation of this great truth of the high calling is vitally essential. It is further necessary that the prospective children of God have the Holy Spirit effectively work in their lives toward the achievement of this grand hope. Peter expresses similar thoughts to those of Paul, saying that those who accept this call are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit. ... Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, ... reserved in heaven for you."—I Pet. 1:2-4

Paul points out a second essential truth necessary for our understanding—redemption through the ransom sacrifice of Jesus—in Ephesians 1:7,8: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." The ministry of sacrifice carried out by Jesus as a perfect man at his First Advent provided the means preordained by God through which the high calling is made available to us. We have redemption, or deliverance, from the fallen condition of

inherited sin, through faith in Jesus' blood, which represents the value of the ransom he provided. Thus receiving forgiveness of sins, we accept the invitation of our Lord to take up our cross and follow him. If faithful in sharing with him in his suffering, we shall also be partakers of his glory.—Rom. 8:17

No other doctrine of truth is more essential as that of our redemption through the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. His dedicated fulfillment of the sacrificial pictures and prophecies of the Old Testament, and the interpretations by the apostles in their writings concerning this outstanding feature of God's plan, have laid for us a proven foundation of faith and knowledge. Such faith reveals the path of attainment to the hope of our calling. By adding the character qualities of patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love, we will be "neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," through which by "giving all diligence," we can make our "calling and election sure."—II Pet. 1:5-10

In Ephesians 1:10, Paul mentions the third essential feature of truth pertaining to the object of our calling—the future work of restoring the entire race of mankind back to life and favor with God. This verse reads: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." This will be the glorious work of the "restitution of all things," and the blessing of all the "kindreds of the earth."—Acts 3:21,25

"ABLE MINISTERS"

It is noteworthy to observe how closely the Scriptures throughout the New Testament relate the

preparatory experiences of the church to their ultimate purpose for the world's salvation. We are being prepared to be sympathetic high priests. How well this point was expressed by Paul when he stated that God is now writing in the hearts of his people, not with ink, but with his Spirit, his purpose of making them "able ministers of the new testament," or covenant.—II Cor. 3:3-6

The New Covenant, to be mediated by the Christ class, will be the means through which all things in earth will be gathered and eventually brought back into harmony with God. Christ and his church, possessing a heart appreciation of God's law, will be able to convey its precepts to the resurrected people of Earth in such a way that they, too, will be effected by the spirit of righteousness. Taking God's law into their own hearts, they will learn to love its principles and desire to live by them. By coming to love God and his law of righteousness, all things "which are in heaven, and which are on earth" will thus be gathered together "in him," Christ Jesus.—Eph. 1:10

These three foundation truths of the Gospel—the high calling, the ransom, and restitution—so nicely sequenced in the first chapter of Ephesians, are compositely referred to in the thirteenth verse as "the gospel of your salvation." Paul says that this Gospel forms the basis upon which we are "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise," not by hearing it only, but by believing. Believing implies understanding, in such a way as forms a firm foundation for faith.

The Holy Spirit of promise is the "pledge and foretaste of our inheritance, in anticipation of its full redemption." (vs. 14, *Weymouth New Testament*) Our

covenant of sacrifice with God, based on our acceptance of the high calling, faith in our redemption through Jesus, and our desire to suffer with him to share with him in the glory of the kingdom, is validated by God with his seal, which Paul says is the Holy Spirit. (vs. 13) As we see its influence working in our lives to help us toward the fulfillment of our covenant, it becomes to us a “pledge” from God, which assures us that, if faithful unto death, we shall be joint-heirs with Christ and coworkers in restoring mankind back to favor with their Creator.

How beautifully this is expressed in the words: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.”—Eph. 1:17-20

Great comfort has come to God’s people through the privilege of being called by him and adopted into his family. Indeed, the begetting of the Holy Spirit, its holy influence, comfort, and help, is a daily guide to our hearts, minds, words and actions. It opens to us the Scriptures, and causes our hearts to burn within us as we are brought to a greater appreciation of the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height,” of our Father’s glorious plan of salvation for ourselves and for all of the families of the earth.—Eph. 3:18 ■