A Little Flock

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."
—Luke 12:32

AS A MAJOR WRITER OF one of the gospels of our Lord Jesus' earthly ministry, Luke has here recorded one of the most beautiful and inspiring promises that our loving Heavenly Father has ever given to his special people. It focuses on the wonderful promise to give us an inheritance in the future kingdom of Christ, and is the fundamental hope that we have for a place in the spiritual kingdom of our Lord. We are in awe to be assured that it is God's good pleasure to offer this unspeakable blessing to those who are yet walking in newness of life with Christ Jesus during this present Gospel Age.

This inspiring hope is uppermost in the minds of all God's people, and particularly we who are now living during the closing harvest years of this age. This prospect includes being with our Lord and sharing in his glory for the future great work of uplifting fallen mankind from the penalty of sin and death which yet prevails over the human family.

Generated by this wonderful hope, the Apostle Paul speaks of the consecrated walk of the New

Creature in Christ Jesus. In his epistle to the brethren at Rome, he points to the complete consecration necessary for those who are being called out of the world for this great inheritance. In his letter, he writes, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written [Ps. 44:22], For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom. 8:35-37) The apostle gives us a powerful insight into the level of dedication that he possessed, and which in turn is a vital encouragement to us.

THE GOSPEL AGE CALLING

Writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, the revelator, too, has pointed to the inheritance that is promised to those who have been faithful to their High Calling in Christ Jesus. God's promise was, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) The faithful members of the body of Christ who have lived during this present Gospel Age are given the promise of receiving Divine glory with our Lord in his kingdom. Many wonderful promises are directed to the Lord's people as outlined in the messages to the seven churches.—Rev. 2,3

SEVEN CHURCHES BLESSED

The first of these blessings was addressed to the brethren at Ephesus at the very beginning of the Gospel Age. Concerning this promise we read, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I

give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." (Rev. 2:7) This promise of eternal life is in full accord with our featured scripture recorded by Luke. It is the gift of life on the highest of all planes on the spiritual realm, and is offered to the faithful members of the church class.

Another promise is pointed out in God's message to the church at Smyrna. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." (vs. 11) The promise of receiving the Divine nature to immortal life is a special gift only to the overcomers of this age. To those of Pergamos we note, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." (vs. 17) The 'hidden manna' suggests the spiritual food that has been given to those who have responded to the High Calling in Christ Jesus. Each one of the faithful will be identified by receiving a new name as a special gift from our loving Heavenly Father. The 'white stone' represents the sealing of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people.

We read of those at Thyatira, "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star." (vss. 26-28) The body members of the spiritual class of followers of our Lord will share in establishing the just rule over the world during the time of Christ's future kingdom.

Those in Sardis were promised, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." (chap. 3:5) Purity in righteousness will be reflected in the new and glorious nature of the elect church.

The revelator next writes concerning the faithful brethren at Philadelphia. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, . . . and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name." (vs. 12) The kingdom of God is represented by the 'new Jerusalem' that will be the new spiritual government over the nations. What a glorious prospect awaits us in God's everlasting kingdom.

The last message concerning the church's inheritance was addressed to the brethren at Laodicea. We read, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." (vs. 21) Here we note the wonderful prospect of sharing in our Lord's glory in his kingdom. The faithful overcomers of this Gospel Age will receive this promise.

A SPECIAL CLASS

The rewards promised to the brethren at the church in Ephesus apply to all of the called and faithful class who have lived during this Gospel Age. Likewise, the other promises of God that are offered to the Gospel Age church are applicable to

all who have responded to his wonderful invitation. The overcomers represented by the church at Laodicea are not the only faithful ones who will sit with Christ in his throne. This honor will be granted to all who have overcome the world, the flesh and the Devil during this age of sacrifice. We thus have a broad range of blessings as special rewards for those who overcome the hardships incidental to their traveling in the narrow way of sacrifice.

In our featured scripture (Luke 12:32), we learned of a 'little flock' to whom God is pleased to give the kingdom. Of them, Paul said, "That he [Christ] might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:27) This class represents those who have overcome the world and its evil influences and are found faithful even unto death.

FAITHFULNESS NECESSARY

In contrast to the faithful bride class who willingly sacrifice their lives in full consecration to God, we note also that there is another class who have defiled their garments and need to wash them in the blood of the Lamb. Of these we read, "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."—Rev. 7:9,10

This is an unnumbered group of Christians who wore white robes, had palms in their hands and

honored the name of our Lord. We read further concerning them, "One of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them."—vss. 13-15

The heart intention of the true members of Christ's body is indicated in the Apostle Paul's second epistle to the brethren at Corinth. He writes, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, . . . for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—II Cor. 4:16-18

WORDS OF TRUTH AND LIFE

The Scriptures provide many valuable admonitions for the Lord's people to consider. For example, we read, "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."—Prov. 4:20-23

How wonderful are these words written by Solomon many centuries ago. Yet they are timely and

powerful admonitions for the New Creature in Christ even during the closing years of this present Gospel Age harvest. They are true words of life, and stand in direct contrast to the carnal mind of the flesh. Since we were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, our carnal mind is sinful and stands in the way of the New Creature. As fallen fleshly beings, we are often prone to act on the impulse of the moment. We may not stop to think whether it is the carnal mind of the flesh, or whether we are acting from the standpoint of our spiritual interests.

If we could consider this before acting, how much richer our spiritual lives would be. In all our reasoning, we should be very careful that self is entirely eliminated, for the carnal mind is so clever that it can often make what is wrong appear to be right. Solomon again says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."—Prov. 14:12

THE NEW CREATURE

Concerning the nature of our High Calling, the Apostle Paul writes, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (II Cor. 5:17) God has planned from the very beginning a New Creation, different from anything he had ever created in the past, or anything that he would ever again create. These were to have his nature and share in his glory.

When anyone becomes a member of the Christ he becomes an heir to that nature. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings

of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:17,18) What Paul means by being 'in Christ' is that we are so closely associated with him that we become a part of the Christ.

BAPTIZED INTO DEATH

Paul explains, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed [justified, *Marginal Translation*] from sin.

"Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."—Rom. 6:3-13

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(Continued from page 31) Another scripture along this same line reads, "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."—II Cor. 5:14,15

When we became associated with Christ, we became partners in his death and resurrection. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." (I Pet. 3:18) Further to this, Paul says, "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." (II Cor. 5:16) This makes clear the statement of being in Christ. Therefore if we share in his death, we likewise will share in his resurrection.

RISEN WITH CHRIST

Even now, while still in the flesh and imperfect we realize that we are accepted as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, how much more sincere our consecrated lives should be. How much more it should intensify the meaning to us of the Apostle Paul's instructions. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication,

uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."—Col. 3:1-5

EXAMINING OURSELVES

One of the best ways to make certain that we will be more than an overcomer is to forget about self. Self takes up so much room in the lives of each of us that very little of our time and talent is left for God. We do the things that are pleasing to us, or we avoid doing those things which are unpleasant. The apostle admonishes us to do all things to the glory of God, whether or not the thing is pleasing to us. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."—Col. 3:17

The little flock and the great company may have a common begetting, but they do not have a common birth. They both receive the pledge of their inheritance, the Holy Spirit of God. Paul wrote, "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." (II Cor. 1:22) The apostle again says, "Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."—II Cor. 5:5

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the vitalizing influence of the Christian, and the mind is the personality. The Holy Spirit thus operating on the mind gradually changes the person into the image of Christ. There, in the mind, the great battle takes place. If we can keep our minds fixed upon Christ by adhering to his words, then Satan can have no influence on us. However, if our minds are centered on the things of

self, then we are consequently very likely to be overreached, and to this extent it is possible to fail in making our calling and election sure. We must ever be on guard at all times.

If, in the many things that go to make up our daily lives, we could forget about self and think only of Christ, how much more blessed our lives would be, and how many heartaches we would save ourselves and others. This thought seems to be borne out by Paul when he wrote, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." (Rom. 7:18-25) This is rather an unhappy state for us to be in, but Paul says there is relief for those who are really striving to be more than overcomers.

CONQUERING THE FLESH

As a final admonition, we note that those who are more than overcomers are those who have conquered self. It is only as we bring every thought into subjection to the will of God in Christ that we can

have the full assurance of faith of the outcome. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."—II Cor. 10:5

Wise scriptural counsel directs our thoughts and actions. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."—Rom. 8:13,14

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." (Gal. 5:16-18) Let us then renew our determination to conquer self in our Christian walk of faith, remembering that it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ■