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The Shaking of All Nations

"But now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." - Heb. 12:26, 27.

THE writer of Hebrews in pointing forward to the close of this Age and the great change then to be inaugurated, graphically calls attention to the tremendous shaking process by which the present order is to be displaced and to give way to the new -- the Kingdom of God. He was undoubtedly making use of the prophecy of Haggai, "For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." Practically all of the ancient Hebrew Prophets have given 'some portrayal of this same important event. Note the following:

"Who can stand before His indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of His anger?" (Nahum 1:3, 6, 7.) "Behold, it cometh mighty and strong from the Lord, as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, and shall cast down to the earth with power the crown of pride." "He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers . . . the mountains quake at Him, and the hills melt, and the earth [symbolic of the entire present order of things] is burned at His presence; yea, the world, and all that dwell therein . . with an overwhelming flood will He make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue His enemies." - Isa. 28:2; Nahum 1:4, 5, 8.

All Nations Assembled

It need hardly be added that frequently the language used by the Prophets was highly poetical and figurative and the terms employed were intended to be descriptive of one phase or another of the

coming trouble. Most logically would we expect those who have spoken as God's mouthpieces in the past, to set forth some of the circumstances associated with the passing of the sovereignty of this earth from Satan to Christ, which will prepare the way for "the desire of all nations" to come.

For nearly a century now devout prophetic students have been observing the indications of this "approaching end of the Age," and setting forth in more or less lucid form the facts regarding conditions in the world, and giving their conclusions that the long predicted end is imminent. Naturally enough, the further along we progress in this time known in prophecy as "the day of the Lord," the more pronounced become the signs and evidences that the change is near., And logically enough, too, this time is characterized by peculiar circumstances and by complexity of conditions, and the world is called upon to face questions, problems and industrial complications that have never before confronted any people. Year, after year in this the day of the Lord, the world's social and economic troubles have accumulated, so that today the situation involving all classes and all nations has indeed become intense.

Accordingly, there is at this time in session in the city of London, a world conference attended by representative statesmen of nearly all the nations of the earth, the object of which is to reach some common understanding with regard to dealing with the present economic world crisis. In other words, the nations are assembled today, from' all quarters of the earth for the purpose of stabilizing the present order of things, realizing instinctively, that unless some drastic action is taken in the near future the entire social fabric is threatened with disaster and ruin. If we but recall that nothing in the world's history offers any comparison to the present social and financial condition, we may well regard with a great deal of charity the conflicting views of able and conscientious men respecting the causes, the disadvantages, the proper remedy, and the outcome of the endeavors and movements now on foot throughout the civilized world.

Modern Knowledge and Selfishness

Statesmen and financiers in all parts of the world are coming more and more to recognize that modern knowledge is largely responsible for new conditions, and these new conditions brought into the civilized world during the past seventy-five, years in particular, have meant a revolution-an irresistible revolution. This has meant that machinery and steam and electric power have in a most remarkable manner become the servants of men, and that these servants have been multiplied at a comparatively small cost, and therefore that the necessities of Christendom are now being supplied by a fraction of the population of the world. This signifies that a large proportion of the population of the earth is in enforced idleness under the present system of government. Those who do not keep in mind therefore that this new and modern situation is the logical result largely of modern knowledge and the invention of machinery of these last times, fail to see that the business pressure which is now exerted is not a voluntary one, but rather an enforced one; for those who would persist in following old-time methods in manufacturing and in business would speedily find themselves bankrupt. Consequently all find it necessary to bestir themselves and adopt new methods of business adapted to our day. As they find themselves pushed on by others, so others in turn are crowded on by them. The civilized world is like a great crowd therefore; at the head are the world's notables, backed each of them by the hundreds and thousands and millions of humanity, willingly or unwillingly, each depending upon them for guidance, for life's comforts, yea, for its necessities. The entire crowd has tasted of the conveniences and blessings of civilization, and the determination of the whole is that they will not go back to barbarism and savagery but will press on; and a fear of personal or class or national

disadvantage is continually prodding the great majority of this struggling mass, bidding each look out for himself and his own interests and let no opportunity escape his grasp.

How truly the Scriptures give us the key to the present situation: they show us clearly that the Divine law of love has always been in opposition to and condemnatory of the law of selfishness under which fallen humanity has long governed itself. The law of selfishness is no worse a law today than it has ever been. It has been the cause of wars, injustices, sufferings, slavery, etc., in all periods of history. It is neither worse nor better today; but new conditions have come upon us; civilization has lifted a fraction of the world to a higher plane of thought and sentiment, and before these, in this the day of the Lord's preparation, He has been gradually lifting the veil and granting discernment of the secrets of nature which has resulted in great chemical and mechanical discoveries. These, while proving great blessings to humanity are sure eventually to bring great calamities, by reason of conflict with the law of selfishness now prevailing. Thus under the present law of selfishness and competition, etc., the vast resources and possibilities of modern machinery in the hands of the brightest and keenest of the world's population has reached a point of a death struggle with the masses of Christendom, and each feels that he is powerless to stem the current, or to resist the pressure which is behind him.

Humanity Learning Important Lessons

If we could imagine that instantly some great change could come to the hearts of the masses of men and if the Spirit of Christ could at once dwell in them all richly and abound, how quickly the world's problems could be solved and the impending disaster averted For we remember that love is not puffed up, vaunteth not herself; seeketh not her own, but is the very embodiment of generosity and kindness. But again it is not the theory that we have to deal with, but facts. In theory the civilized world 'is all "Christian," sometimes called, "The Christian world," and "Christian." But we know that these are misnomers; the fact is the world is not Christian except in name; they are still the governments or "kingdoms of this world," still children of this world and only a remarkably few belong to the Kingdom of the Lord, and either know Him or desire to be controlled by His spirit of love.

As much as we might be inclined to wish or hope that the new dispensation might be ushered in, in a quiet and peaceful manner through a speedy conversion of the hearts of men from selfishness to love, we must remember on the contrary that this is not the Divine method nor the Divine Plan; that in God's great program, part of the important lesson which the world is now learning is the very lesson which was intended it should learn, namely that selfishness always brings misery and sorrow directly or indirectly. Humanity must learn the lesson that the only true prosperity is that which God purposes and will eventually establish through the Kingdom of His dear Son. The world is learning the lesson that wealth does not give complete happiness, but still leaves an aching void; and that all the comforts and conveniences of civilization, coming to the world of humanity, with good food, good clothing, and much advantage every way, do not change the heart nor bring in true happiness. In a word, the world must learn that civilization is not Christianization. Consequently the time of trouble and disaster that many now see impending will evidently be the final lesson by which the Lord will demonstrate to men the difference between the reign of sin and the reign of righteousness-between the reign of selfishness and the reign of love.

The Vision of God's People

The Scriptures very forcefully tell us that when all the various systems, religious, political, social, financial are submerged in lawlessness and anarchy, there will be a great opening of eyes—a passing of present illusions and that "when the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." They will come to see that the Lord's way is the true and right way—the only satisfactory way; that the law of love is the only law which can bring everlasting happiness and blessing to any and to all who will obey it. They will come to see what they do not now realize, namely that the Lord's true Church in the world was a "little flock," a "peculiar people," guided by the Lord's eye, and by His Word, who through much tribulation, trials of faith, trials of patience, etc., will become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ their Lord in the *glorious* Kingdom which will be established upon the ruins of present institutions, for the blessing and uplift of all peoples of the earth, with a righteous government.

But now in advance of the full dawning of this new day of light and peace, and in advance of this great tribulation that *is* to soften and chasten the spirits of men, the children of God realize it their privilege to take the Divine standpoint with regard to what is now transpiring in the world. God's people justified, sanctified and separated from the world, with new aims and spiritual ambitions before them, and with the instruction and enlightenment of the Divine revelation, the Bible, are able to take a calmer, a clearer, a more comprehensive and therefore a more true view of affairs, past, present, and to come, than others; for we are bearing in mind that it is prejudice and self interest which generally has much to do with the blinding of those who see not from God's standpoint.

Oil upon the Troubled Waters

From this position of advantage where we view the present situation, we see that neither the rights nor the wrongs of motive or of action lie all on one side of these questions that are involved today; and seeing this we are better able to take a sympathetic position and to exercise our influence amongst those with whom we come in contact, in the interest of peace. All of the Lord's people should be peacemakers; none of them should be strife-breeders nor of contentious spirit. There are generally a sufficient number of selfish forces at work in and about every individual to stir up his mind, to breed *in* him discontent and to arouse the passions of anger and malice and hatred; and there are few influences at work on behalf of gentleness, meekness, patience, brotherly kindness and love. Hence there is the more necessity that the true people of God continue pouring oil upon the troubled waters—the sweet influences of that Spirit from above, the oil of the Holy Spirit with which their cup should be overflowing; the oil of joy as opposed to the spirit of heaviness and discontent; the oil of hope, which illumines the future gloriously, and thus offsets and counteracts the darkness of present discouragement. For indeed that blessed vision of the great consummation given to the child of God enables him to joyfully anticipate that glorious time when our Lord's great mission shall be accomplished in the earth, when beyond the echo of war and bloodshed, the peace that He came to establish shall be consummated, and wars and strife shall vex the nations no more. And as saith the Prophet Isaiah, "And it shall come to pass in the last *days*, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established *in* the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and

their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." - Isa. 2:2-4.

In the Wilderness

[CONTRIBUTED]

"But He made His own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock." - Psalms 78:52.

A MEDITATION upon the events in connection with the exodus of the ancient Israelites might not to the average person of the world arouse any unusual emotion. To a Spirit-begotten one, however, they are of tremendous interest. Realizing that these people of old performed this difficult trek through the wilderness as an example to us, we witness with fascination each step of their journey-in their experiences we learn lessons of great value to ourselves. We hearken to Paul who twice in the tenth chapter of I Corinthians states that these things happened to the Israelites in their passage from Egypt to Canaan as ensamples or examples for us and were expressly written down for our admonition. Paul in other places makes frequent references, particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to these things and draws marvelous, spiritual pictures before our eyes. Let us therefore linger a few moments upon one particular event which happened to the Israelites quite early in their historic pilgrimage and soon after they had passed through the Red Sea.

Their Groanings and Wailings

In Exodus 15:22 we read: "So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water." - There is great economy of time and space in the holy Word of God. A three days' harrowing experience on the desert sands with a consuming and unquenched thirst for water is summed up in that short sentence. No doubt many a page could be filled with their groanings and wailings if all the details were filled in. The agony which each one of the whole mass must have experienced must have been aggravated by the collective suffering of all. They no doubt added to each others burdens by the complaining as the drought became more and more protracted. In fact, we know that this climaxed in a general discontent. and a placing of the blame for all of this on Moses, as we read in Exodus 15:24: "And the people murmured against Moses saying, What shall we drink?"

In a very well written work called: "The Desert of the Exodus," E. H. Palmer the author who traveled over this same route about 1870, states of this portion of the trail: "We traversed an unvaried desert plain for three days: there is nothing to attract attention but the bleached camel-bones that mark the track and nothing to afford food for reflection but the thought that like the children of Israel, you too have gone 'three days in the desert and have found no water.'" What monotony! How trying and exhausting!

But a still greater disappointment lay in store for them. They came finally to some waters, but when they went to drink of them, they were compelled to give them up, for, as we read in Exodus 15:23, "they could not drink of the waters of Marah for they were bitter," etc. How quickly their sudden joy in coming upon water must have changed into a still greater desperation when they found it so obnoxious! They could not touch their lips to it in spite of three days' feverish thirst. Here certainly, was a climax of disappointments. It was then they murmured against Moses. They were assuredly at the end of hope. Suddenly, however, something happens so the Israelites can - drink of the waters of Marah. The Lord has made the waters sweet-with a certain tree which was

cast into the waters. Now they fill themselves--now they forget their murmuring. Furthermore, it is not, long before "they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees and they encamped there by the waters." - Exod. 15:27.

His Constant Presence

Always it is the bountiful Lord-succoring His people when they need help. He heaps blessing upon blessing on them. Not only does He sweeten the bitter waters of Marah but He leads them to Elim where they obtain good water in abundance, and furthermore, shade in the heat of the day, and retreat from the hot sands.

Are they ashamed now of their murmurings against their faithful leader? Do they feel that they could have borne the inconveniences a little longer--been a little more patient? We must only surmise their reactions in this respect. We can judge them perhaps only by what we would have done under similar circumstances. How quickly they had forgotten, though, the miraculous deliverance from the Egyptians through the Red Sea. Seemingly the fresh recollection of that great occurrence should have strengthened their confidence in the Lord. And besides this, "the Lord went before- them by day in a pillar of a cloud" and "by night in a pillar of fire." (Exod. 13:21.) His constant presence, it seems, should have forestalled the murmurings. Could they actually have ignored such positive and visible signs of the Lord's providence and care over them? Did He not know all the way they were to go? Did He not know how much' trial they could stand? And did He not know the times and places of refreshing? But alas, the flesh is weak -- it is prone to murmur under pain and is disposed to rebuke the one who leads and guides.

Now These were Ensamples

The sufferings of the Israelites in the desert and wilderness were no doubt pictures of the sufferings of the Church. It is, one of the greatest sources of joy to the earnest student of the Scriptures to find such a multitude of types, parallels, pictures and similarities in the experiences of the Jews, relating to the Church, the Israel of God. First, we observe God separating them .from Egypt, leading them by the hand out into the wilderness where they spend forty long years on a trip which normally could be covered in as many days, by the same mode of travel, namely on foot. It is with no little amazement that we scan the map and note that the area encompassing their march is no larger than one of the smaller States of the United States. We ask, almost in wonder: What could have kept them forty years?

The answer comes plainly as we learn of God's purposes. He had many lessons for them to learn, the greatest of which was to know something of His greatness, of His power, and particularly His closeness to them. We marvel at the Lord's long-suffering toward them. They over and over demonstrated their complete unworthiness of His care and love, serving the gods of the heathen and sacrificing to idols. . . . Yet now and then they were stirred by conscience or desperation to honor Him, turning from their debaucheries and calling upon Him for help. Then what do we find? Almost as the first words of their prayers leave their hearts and lips, He is with them again. At the first faint signs of a willingness to confess their sins He takes them to His bosom again. Certainly no love from a human being could ever match the depth of love which the Lord thus shows. Yet He is ever a just God and for their sins and rebellions He punishes them. Even Moses, the ever faithful, patient servant exceeded his authority once, and as a consequence he failed to set his foot in the promised land, howbeit he was given a view of it.

"Lo, I am with You Always"

Thus it is with the Church. Delivered from the world as Israel of old was from Egypt, she is separate and apart and not of the world. She too, must undergo tests and experiences to try her faith. She cannot hurry, she must tread the hot sands of the desert; she must forever learn, often through bitter experience, to lean upon Him, neither murmuring nor complaining.

While the history of the exodus is replete with innumerable pictures, and types of the Church's experience, all of which contain an almost inexhaustible supply of information and instruction to us, we confine ourselves chiefly at this time to that three days in the wilderness of Shur. What lessons are there to us in this event? What can we learn to our edification?

First of all, let us never under any circumstances forget our resurrected Lord's assurance: "Lo, I am with you alway." (Matt. 28:20.) Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, tread the way of suffering first. As He was made perfect through suffering, so must it be with those who expect to share in His glory. Is it difficult to put this and other precious promises into practical effectiveness? Our walk is by faith; we have no pillar of a cloud by day nor pillar of fire by night. We have no Mount Sinai to behold, burning with fire, shrouded in blackness, roaring with tempest, and from which issues forth the sound of trumpet and the voice of words. Our physical food and water are not miraculously acquired.

And yet, which is more satisfying, the manna which rained from heaven upon the desert, or the true bread which God, our Father, sent from heaven in the person of Jesus, our beloved Savior? "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life, he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35.) And who would not rather drink this refreshing than the water from the smitten rock of the desert, albeit that was itself a wonderful miracle and a marvelous evidence of the providential care which the Lord exercised over the Israelites.

Mount Sinai and its happenings are mentioned in Hebrews 12 as having a spiritual counterpart, and while the event is full of the most instructive and edifying material for a spiritual Israelite, as is in fact every experience recorded in connection with the exodus, we pass on to the subject matter at hand.

Long Hours of Waiting

Whatever typical significance it might have, the three days in the wilderness of Shur and the waters of Marah might represent any period or periods in our lives which are drab, monotonous and barren as they have to do with our spiritual affairs. As this experience happened very early in the journey of Israel and when they had received but comparatively little instruction and counsel from the Lord, one might be somewhat lenient toward their murmuring. One might reason that when they saw how miraculously God cared for them in their extremities, they might never repeat the performance but trust Him more fully the next time. Yet it seems no lesson was learned at all, for the very next account in the Scriptures tells of the whole congregation murmuring against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness (after having left Elim) and wishing they had died in Egypt rather than leave the fleshpots there.

Nevertheless, who of God's Israel has not had these periods of long hours of waiting-waiting. and hoping for some new scene, some new refreshing? Have any of us ever marveled, at times when seemingly the way was bleak and full of monotony, as to the Lord leaving us without some new thing, some new light, some new activity to break the spell? Or if no such suggestions intruded themselves (actually the account in Exodus 15 does not mention murmuring until after the Israelites tried the waters of Marah), did we complain and fret when the well of experience we expected to refresh us, turned out to be bitter-obnoxious, because impure and adulterated by a mixture of improper motives, too much of self and the world, and consequent grief? Let us earnestly hope and pray for patience and the spirit of long-suffering under these conditions.

Upon the Everlasting Arms

The Lord can even sweeten these experiences. We then call to mind that beautiful assurance and more often consolation, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." (Rom. 8:28.) Thus, those things which left a bad taste become mixed with some other ingredient which the Lord uses, and suddenly it is all sweet. Blessed ministrations of the Lord! We sing with David

'Bless the Lord, O my soul: . . . who healeth all thy diseases; . . who satisfieth thy mouth with good things." - Psa. 103:1-5.

And then the Lord to crown His goodness, leads us directly to an abundance of refreshing and rest. We are come to Elim where water and shade are in plenty. Have we murmured? Have we complained? Have we shown any impatience or chafing? -If so, we resolve that we have learned our lesson-that we now have a better knowledge of God and His way; that in the future we will rest, when weary, upon His everlasting Arms. The journey is long; we have many trials ere we step into the heavenly Canaan, but the prospect is ever before us. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him, but God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." - 1 Cor. 2:9, 10.

The Unity of the Spirit

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." - Eph. 4:3.

THE unity of all who are true believers in the shed blood of Christ as an atonement for sin, is surely one of those very desirable objectives properly hoped and prayed for by all who love our Lord in sincerity. Ever since Jesus Himself prayed to the Father nineteen hundred years ago, fervently requesting that His followers share in a blessed oneness with God and Himself, there have been longing hearts who have taken up the prayer in a sincere desire to see such oneness present in the Church. And how could it be otherwise in the life of any believer who really loved the Lord Jesus? No one who loved Him could long remain a stranger to those strong impulses of deep affection that constrained Him to pray for the most perfect unity and loving harmony among His people. And He would surely expect to find them equally concerned about the possible effect such love and concord would have upon the world outside. Remembering that His Church would be in the world to carry forward a testimony of His coming into the realms of men to save them from sin and death, He specially desired that the loving unity and deep attachment to each other on the part of His people would serve to convince the world that He had surely been sent by the Father.. (John 17:21.) As we catch a vision, then, of His yearning for this unity, and as we grow in the knowledge and appreciation of its desirability and of *all* that it embraces, it must certainly lead us to a prayerful study of just what it was that Jesus asked the Father for, and the part that we may play in making such a prayer blessedly fulfilled in our experience. Such a study is needed on our part if we would understand how even in the matter of this prayer, Jesus could say that the Father always heard Him (John 11:42), and yet confess, as we must, that the history of the visible Church has been marred by a most lamentable absence of the unity of the Spirit.

The Wheat in the Midst of Tares

If Jesus cannot be satisfied in the depths of His love for us with anything short of the oneness set forth in His prayer -- the oneness of the Divine family -- it follows then that the actual experience of such unity among His followers must represent a wonderful possibility of blessing, a state where the fellowship of such kindred minds would indeed be like to that above. But as we look back over the history of the Church which has stood before the world, and recall the discords, and the failures to measure up in any outstanding manner to the standards of love and unity our Lord has asked for, it is not surprising to find oneself as feeling that nothing but disappointment has been the portion of the Head of the Church in this matter. However, with the better understanding of the purposes of God which we now enjoy, we can see that, deplorable as the records are, they are not entirely a story of defeat and vain hopes. In the wisdom of God there has been a ministry of evil permitted throughout this present Age, and the Enemy has not been kept out of the 'field, but permitted to scatter his tares freely in every quarter where the good seed has been sown. God's Word will enable the true Christian to discern the difference between the Church of which Jesus is the Head, and amongst whom alone the unity of the Spirit can possibly be found, and the church which fills the earth with its Christian name and its worldly standards

and compromises. With this fact,, clearly understood, we can know that notwithstanding all that history reveals of strife, and even of bloodshed among those professing the name of Jesus, yet, after all, Jesus has not experienced disappointment. The unity of the Spirit has never left the earth since Pentecost, and; praise be to God, it will never be permitted to depart from the earth "Till we

all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Many Efforts made to Unify Believers

In a general way may it not be truthfully said that the real purpose behind many of the efforts made toward unity in the past, and behind some present undertakings in the religious world, has been in a considerable degree honest, and therefore to that extent commendable. If the past has witnessed frequent attempts by ambitious men to inaugurate a unity of force, whose lording it over God's heritage has left the deep stain of persecution on church history, surely it must be admitted that other men have come forward actuated by nobler motives and unselfish ideals, genuinely striving to bring about a more harmonious fellowship in Christ. Mistaken views regarding the unity Jesus desired, have been many. Abortive schemes to end divisions, which the Apostle said must come that the approved might be manifested, have long been in evidence. Creeds, written and unwritten, have flourished and have in one form or another contained substantial and thoroughly Scriptural features, and it cannot be denied that the prime movers in some of these very schemes were true Christians, misinformed, but nevertheless sincere. If we today feel disposed to question any or all of these efforts, we should surely do so with humility, and with a proper regard for the pure intentions of all who have given evidence of love for God and His people. Had we ourselves proved that we had passed beyond the possibility of endeavoring to carry out proper and well meant purposes by questionable expedients, then we might be in a position to consider ourselves competent to sit in judgment on others of the past and present. May it not be that the passing of even a little more time will reveal that our vision has also been in a very real sense "through a glass darkly." Some are learning even now,, with considerable humiliation, that greater knowledge of God's Plan of salvation, and an opportunity to profit by the mistakes of our brethren in darker days, has not removed the possibility of being bound, hindered, disfellowshipped; and all because of a failure on the part of many who speak freely enough of liberty in Christ, to really understand that law of love and liberty, and who possess so little of that wonderful carnality - destroying vision and power - "the unity of the Spirit."

The Unity Resulting from the Holy Spirit

One great difficulty in uniting believers, and the underlying cause of so many failures in the various efforts made, has been a failure to understand the most important element essential to a true unity of the Spirit. All along there has been, and even yet there is an oversight of the fact that the Word of God is very exacting when treating such matters. What men might verily believe to be the unity of the Scriptures, might be, and indeed often is, nothing more than the unifying of ideas and objectives congenial to any number of people, and often largely of human origin. The Christian world is full of that kind of union, and we freely admit its existence. *We must* distinguish between the union that is possible where a few people, or a hundred, meet or fellowship together, sharing beliefs *in* common, and that union of the same number of people who meet and enjoy *a* unity that is distinctly the result of the Holy Spirit's work in the inner life of each believer thus united. It is the failure to recognize this fact that has caused so much of harm, and caused *a* multitude of sects and factions to deceive themselves with the idea that they are, regardless of the error in their doctrine, the people among whom the unity of the Spirit is found. Our danger is equally real, in employing such tests as seeing "eye to eye" and others similar, and these can be a snare and a delusion, and will be such unless there be a real vital relationship to the Lord Himself.

The true unity has persisted throughout the Age. God *has* heard the prayer of Jesus for the unity of His devoted followers. A-kinship of spirit uniting every spiritual mind, an affinity of love inherent in every true child of God, a oneness of whole-hearted -devotion-*to*-the person of Jesus Christ, flows out from heart to heart in a blessed sense of unity when the "unity of the Spirit" is possessed in reality. When this unity is bound up in our effectuations, it will sweep away all the barriers of dogma, span the centuries of the Age, and into the depths of the heart there will come the most blessed realization that Jesus has not prayed in vain for the oneness of His people.

Unless the Lord Build the House

Men can, as we have seen, produce union, yes, and produce a unity that is wonderfully adhesive and permanent. But men cannot by any means or methods create or perpetuate the unity of the Spirit. Only the Spirit of God can produce the unifying results set forth in our opening text. The "unity of the Spirit" is therefore not a matter of bringing men into harmony with each other on matters of teaching and practice, but it is positively a matter of bringing individuals into a personal relationship with the Lord. The Word does not say, "If any man believes that Jesus died for our sins, and associates himself with others of similar faith, the same is a new creature," but "If any man be *in Christ*, he is a new creature." (2 Cor. 5:17.) Certainly not otherwise can he be such, and the "unity of the Spirit" is peculiarly limited to new creatures in Christ. Again we read, "There is one Body, and one Spirit. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through *all*, and *in you all*." (Eph. 4:4, 6.) Accordingly, just in so far as a company of people may, be made tip of individuals living in this vital relationship to, Christ, *and indwelt by the Father*, just to that degree can there be a unity of the Spirit. Since it must be confessed that the proportion of those thus indwelt is small, it follows that considerable variation must be expected in groups who meet together, or who *may* be met with from day to day. It is seen then that Paul is not merely expressing a desire for uniformity - of any superficial kind, but he is laying down principles which concern those only who are walking worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, and who are earnest in their desire to attain "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

The Work of the Spirit

That there is a work to be performed in us by the Holy Spirit, there can be no doubt. That it was expedient that Jesus go away in order that the Spirit might come and do in us what He Himself could not have done had He remained with us, is also clearly stated in the Scriptures. And that the work of the Spirit is such as to need no mechanical innovations of 'ours to give effect to its operations, or to meet peculiar situations in the Church, or to attract the eyes of the world, has long been recognized by godly men. That the Lord's assurance that "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit" has been the recognized basis of all successful evangelism throughout the Age, *may* be known by all who will take the time to familiarize themselves --with church history. How strange it is then, in view of the facts just stated, facts universally approved by most Christians, that we hear so little emphasis being placed on the *work of the Spirit*. Theoretically all the above mentioned facts are professedly embraced in the teachings of the majority of believers, and yet when the real verities of the Scriptural teachings regarding the work of the Spirit in a fully surrendered life are emphasized, there seems to be a decided barrier raised against such emphasis. This is all the more difficult to understand when it is observed that the same Christians seem utterly immune to any thought *that their own works* could be other than successful if all hindrances were removed from their path. Under these circumstances how could we expect to

find any very large number enjoying the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Many men of many minds must inevitably find themselves separated by personal preferences, ideas, and policies, while at the same time "the Church which is His Body," moving along amongst the mixed multitude, continues to sing, "My goal is Christ and Christ alone," and perpetuates within their deepest affections the unity of the Spirit.

The Primary Foundation for Unity

What then is the work of the Holy Spirit by and through which true Christian unity may be definitely experienced? In answer to such a question it would seem necessary to give emphasis to the words of Jesus regarding a very important feature of the Spirit's work. Among other things Jesus said that the Spirit would guide us into all truth, and that through the Spirit whatsoever things He had said would be brought to our remembrance. And we cannot forget that in this very connection He said, on the basis of Peter's declaration, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," that "*On this rock will I build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" Oh! that this statement of Jesus had been indelibly stamped on the innermost chambers of every Christian's heart; and oh! that all believers past and present had remembered or would now remember Paul's equally emphatic statement, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11.) Had these great truths been always remembered, oh how much less of discord there would have been. Then the oneness for which Jesus prayed would have been a blessed reality in the Church, and it would today destroy numberless hindrances to the well being of that Body, which by God's unchangeable law, is built up by that which every single part supplies.

And this is exactly what the Holy Spirit will do in us if it is permitted to take the words of Jesus and reveal them unto us. The promise that we would be guided into all truth cannot mean that we will be so completely informed that every vestige of truth will have been compassed by us, for this would be contradicted by Paul's statement "now we know in part." What the promise of Jesus assures us is that we will be enlightened up to the fullest possible measure of our capacity to receive of the Spirit. This promise must not be claimed in any exclusive way by those of us who are now favored with clearer light on times and seasons of the Divine Plan. The early Church could claim this precious promise as fully and as gladly as we can, and that some of them realized its deepest meaning is clearly revealed in the records. They caught the depth of the Master's words, "*I am the Truth,*" and they experienced so complete a transformation of mind that all prejudices, religious and national, were swept away, and "all one in Christ" became a fixed principle of life.

Jesus' Prayer Heard by the Father

The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring together in a "unity of the faith" all who love the Lord in sincerity -- yes, and to cause us to love all who have thus loved Him. Its work will be to break down all the barriers that our inherent tendency to forbid all who walk not with us have raised, until it is realized that in Christ Jesus, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither *bond* nor *free*, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28.) Therefore, whoever forgets this fact and proceeds to make such distinctions in the Body of Christ, does so in violation of the Word of God. And, as we have just seen, this unity of the faith of which our text treats cannot mean the complete understanding of all details of truth, neither does it demand a uniformity of belief on anything but the clearly stated fundamentals of the faith. It must therefore

follow that all believers in the redemptive sacrifice *of* Christ whose characters give evidence of a living union with Him must be embraced by us in the unity of the Spirit. To insist on a more exclusive application of these Scriptures, and to conclude that whatever of dispensational time features some of us may now understand would be a test of membership in the Church or a determining proof of one's being in the Little Flock, would seem to be carrying matters much too far, and it would be an ignoring of some plain facts of Scripture which are abundantly confirmed in the lives of godly men and women. Again we say, the prayer of Jesus for the oneness of His Church *has* been heard by the Father, and that Church "which is His Body has enjoyed and will continue to enjoy the "unity of the Spirit," as a blessed sense of relationship to all true saints past and present.

"This is the work of God" said Jesus, "that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." The written Word is all built up around the Living Word, around the person and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and therefore, whoever he be, and whatever his work in the edification of the saints may be, if this fact stands out preeminently in his life and service, such an one is on the foundation, other than which none can be laid. Blessed indeed, therefore is the heart prepared to receive into full fellowship all such, as sharers together with us of the grace of God. Some one has suggested that "All roads over which human limitations hold sway, lead to Rome, but all roads where the Spirit is permitted leadership will lead to the person of Jesus Christ." No argument *is* necessary to prove that this is so. There will be no more of anything like "I am of Paul," "I am of Cephas," etc., when the work of the Spirit has taught us God's unifying fundamentals of the truth as it is in Christ *our* common Lord.

The Knowledge of the Son of God

How careful God has been to safeguard us against a too hasty conclusion that in so far as we are concerned all His requirements have been met. How many there are who will agree fully with all that has been thus far set forth in this examination of Christian unity, and yet can it be said that all such clearly understand *all that is involved* in the unity of the Spirit? All that has been covered foregoing has to do with the beginnings merely of spiritual unity. It is a well known saying that "Birds of a feather flock together," and it expresses a fact everywhere manifest. In the things of the Spirit the same selection of fellowship holds true. Some there are who confess to a love for the Lord, and who we must accept into the unity of the Spirit as thus far discussed. But Paul advances the further qualification, "and of the knowledge of the Son of God." Is he in this merely rounding out his previous statement, or are we to conclude that this additional remark is a very essential part of the conditions which underlie the "unity of the Spirit" We believe that this emphasis is intended. Paul himself surely knew and practised the unity described thus far, yet notwithstanding his attainments in that regard, we find him still confessing that "the excellency of the knowledge of the Son of God," and the prospect of attaining to yet greater knowledge of Him, had become the absorbing theme of his life. Time and again we find him addressing his letters to "saints" and to "brethren," and then proceeding to tell them in no uncertain terms that he could not write to them as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. Therefore his fellowship of Spirit with them was regrettably hindered. Again we have him saying of others more mature, "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect." - Is it not evident that there- was a very much greater measure of "the unity of the Spirit" present when Paul was in the presence of the latter brethren? Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, yes liberty in thought, liberty in spiritual conversation, liberty in Christ, a liberty to let the Spirit express itself without hindrance, because of an atmosphere free from the carnality Paul deplored, and free from the limitations proper

enough for babes, but wholly incompatible with full grown manhood. This surely is a very greatly enlarged enjoyment of the "unity of the Spirit."

Strengthened with Might by His Spirit

And what is "the knowledge of the Son of God" to which the Apostle refers? Surely it is that revelation of Him that so captivates the heart capable of knowing Him, that every other object is lost sight of. It is that knowledge of Jesus in all the glory of His character, in all the beauty of His devotion to God, in all the complete surrender of Himself to God in carrying out the Plan of salvation, and in all the myriad manifestations of His altogether loveliness. If we would know Him thus, we must advance far beyond the mere elementary understanding of first principles. We must learn what the will of God really is as respects our own personal relationship to Him. The first step in this advanced life is to learn and heartily respond to the invitation to "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." We must be "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" to behold the completeness of the life of surrender which was in the mind of Christ; and to teach us these selfsame things, Jesus declared He must depart to heaven, that the Spirit might come to perform so remarkable a work in us.

"But how can that Spirit lead, purify, transform, fill, and use a life unless it is yielded to Him? What can the potter do with the unyielded clay? How can God fashion the unyielded life? If every idol He shatters is secretly mourned: if every chastening stroke is bitterly denounced: *if every higher purpose is resisted by a hostile will*, how can He mold, and transform, and bless? Surely the ship which God is not piloting is destined to disastrous wreck: surely the harp which God does not attune will ever be a jangle of discordant notes to His listening ear. If we would have them restored to their perfection, we yield our disordered time-piece to the watchmaker: our costly gem with its broken setting to the jeweler: our wounded, bleeding limb to the surgeon. Can we do less toward God with the priceless treasure of life if we would have it meet our highest aspirations? Wherefore the Word of God calls upon us again and again to yield, yield, yield yourselves to God (Rom. 6:13, 16, 19) if we would have His Spirit hold full sway in our lives. He will not compel such surrender. He wants consecration, not coercion. But His fullest purpose of grace, blessing, and ministry is simply baffled in the life which will not yield to Him. Nothing is more striking in Christ's earthly life than this attitude of absolute submission to the Father. 'Lo, I come to *do Thy Will*' was the complete expression of His life and ministry."

I Love Thy Will, Oh God

Oh I how blessed it is to take time to learn at the feet of Jesus some of the most wonderful lessons of what the Father longs to do for us. How possible it is to believe oneself fully informed regarding the will of God, and to go through years perhaps of struggle, disappointment, and discouragement, and through years of a limited understanding of all His will, and then to find that the chief difficulty was in our imperfect understanding of the very things we felt so qualified to teach others. Had we been told that it was all a lack of a rounded-out study of His Word, and a full surrender to God, we would have challenged the statement and declared it untrue, and yet the discovery is being made by one here and there, that after all, there was too much of self-will present, and too little of the faith to appropriate the statements of God's Word regarding *what He can do in us* and for us. The Bible always puts the emphasis on the work of the Spirit, and ever reminds us of the imperfection of our own works. In God's Word it is not consecration in, order that we may do something -for God, but consecration, which means surrender, in order that God

may do everything for us. That He will graciously permit us a part in a service angels might well covet to enjoy, is clear from His Word, and that "He that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto eternal life," is also true, yet our boast can never be in what we are permitted to do for Him, but our glory is ever in the fact that He can do so great a work in us. Yes, and unless that great transforming work, is done in us we have received the grace of God in vain, whatever we may do for Him.

Only Spiritual People can be Living Stones

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness" is our Lord's message to us, and the saving element in the Church throughout the Age has been just- such as these. The great Bible words such as "holiness," "purification," "transformation," "changed from glory to glory," "in Christ," "separation," and others of similar import have been thrilling words to hearts hungering after righteousness, and thirsting after God, as the hart pants for the water brooks. To such - hearts there, comes a thrill of joy when the high, lofty standards of God's Word are magnified, when the holiness without which no man shall see the Lord is emphasized, and when the clean hands and pure hearts (absolutely necessary if any would ascend into the hill of the Lord), are set forth as imperative.

But those thus disposed, and thus emphatic for these great principles and who have such noble aspirations are found to be few. The presence of the mighty transforming, life-changing, heart-searching Spirit, the power that is able to raise us up from defeat and failure, and able to "keep us from falling" and to present us at last "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing," is not generally manifest. And when these things are not present in the life and service, nothing else avails. The Church is called to be a "spiritual house, an holy priesthood." Only spiritual people can be its "living stones," and just as surely, only *spiritual* characters can be that "*holy priesthood*." There may be plenty of outward show, plenty of adherence to sound doctrine even, and yet no Shekinah manifestation of God's presence.

All of these admitted possibilities have much to do with the unity of the Spirit in the lives of saints., Harmony amidst diversity, there can be when it comes to a matter of divergent views on debatable points of Bible interpretation, and it is the duty of every member of the Body to recognize that unavoidable diversity, and love and fellowship without partiality the weak and the strong as brethren in Christ. But as to our reaction toward those who are spiritual and those who are not, the matter is somewhat different. A higher unity of the Spirit must be possible among those who have risen far above the carnal distinctions, than can be possible among such as continue to follow along on the lower levels. Why did Jesus display a special love for John? It were foolish to conclude that the good appearance of John, or his position in life, or his exterior make-up, drew out our Lord's special affections toward him. It is much more reasonable to suppose that it was the possession of beautiful, inward qualities that attracted the love of Jesus. The same must have been true in a little lesser degree in the case of Peter and James. The law of affinities can not be ignored. The Lord Himself so deals with us, and He will come in to sup with us only in proportion to the warmth and sincerity of our invitation.

And so it is with the spiritually minded. There are hindrances caused by, the lukewarmness, carnal-mindedness, etc., in some of the "many called" by reason of which all who revel in the deeper things of inspiration find it impossible to enjoy the unity, oneness, delightful intercourse, and spiritual benefits obtainable when the truly spiritual have found the spiritual. All of these facts are so much a part of the "unity of the Spirit" in its larger dimensions, that they must be

taken into consideration, lest we mistake the beginnings of such union for the finished article, and rest satisfied with less than spiritual unity.

A High Price to Pay if We go Forward

Since sanctification is a progressive matter, and since it is so manifest that some have gone on to greater degrees of sanctification than others, it follows that the varied viewpoints taken regarding this subject must inevitably affect our association together with others of the Lord's people. It is because of this that it is well for the one who would "go forward" to "sit down and count the cost." Not to count the cost from, the standpoint of whether he will find "the regions beyond" worth the effort, for no one has entered that happy sense of *full surrender* and returned to report disappointment. But cost it will, and the reason is obvious: God first, means everything else subordinated. It means getting God's viewpoint of sin and holiness, and God's promises riveted on one's heart as possibilities, and then like faithful Abraham launching out into the inheritance on faith, and if necessary being willing to go on alone. "The same light that shows us sin will show the way out of it" says a very recent writer, and, "thus it is that the surrendered child of God soon finds himself walking the pathway of separation. Things which were *doubtful* before are now seen to be *sinful*. Many aforesaid pleasures are relinquished because they no longer bring enjoyment but condemnation. Hosts of so-called innocent gratifications are clearly seen to be wasteful ones in him who is here now not to do his own will but the will of Him that sent him. The deep change in the inner motive of life -- 'Ye are not your own'-soon works out its consequent changed view of what he dare do with the time, talents, and possessions which are in the stewardship of the man who now belongs to another. He disjoins himself from former favorite pursuits or indulgences because he sees them in an entirely new light, wondering meantime why he did not always, or why others do not now see them thus. And, handfast with separation from things comes isolation from men. *Differences in desires raise barriers, as surely as accord therein begets fellowship.* How far fellowships hinge upon community of interest is only seen when the latter vanishes. The truly consecrated man or woman is the last in the world to cherish a 'holier than thou' spirit that might repel men: longs to be closer to the heart and life of all men than ever before is filled with love beyond all previous experience. Yet companionships change; friends seem to be drifting away; a conscious loneliness: begins to steal into the heart. Part of the price of a persistent determination to climb to the highest mountain peaks of separation and fellowship with God is to lose the comradeship of those who will not climb there with you. It seems a high price to pay but, necessary to win the prize, it is worth the paying. Better a thousand-fold the loneliness of separation from the world than that of separation from God. Better the loneliness of Enoch than the companionship of Lot. There is much danger that our false conceptions of 'all things to all men,' may make us to be nothing to any man. Isolation is insulation. But insulation is power, in the spiritual as well as the electrical sphere. *The hearts that need help and light seek it not among those who walk on the level with them, but from those who walk on the heights with God.* If loneliness comes into the consecrated life because of its close and conscientious walk with God, then welcome such loneliness, for it only brings -a closer fellowship with that Lonely One who was the greatest Helper a needy, sorrowing world has ever known, even though He walked in utter separation from it."*

*"The surrendered Life."

The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

Thus viewed, we can see that "the unity of the Spirit" is a subject, of almost unlimited enlargement. Babes in Christ may enjoy that unity, and seemingly to themselves, enjoy it to the full, and therefore very easily fall into the mistaken belief that anything beyond their limited horizon would be an element of disturbance definitely opposed to "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Others who have advanced to -a further understanding of truth and the things of the Spirit, may likewise enjoy what will appear to themselves a full and satisfactory realization of this desirable unity, and then; like the less developed ones, fall, into the same unfortunate mistake of concluding that they have reached the summit of Christian experience, and verily believe themselves defenders of the faith when opposing higher viewpoints of the Christian's possibilities in God's marvelous grace. Still others; thank God, believe that when Paul talks about "the fulness of Christ" and going "on to perfection," he visualizes for us "regions beyond" that wait for our appropriation. And such possibilities there are hidden for us in "a mine, aye, deeper too, than can mortal ever go." O ye of little faith, search and see. "Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open :you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive." Be one of those full of faith to believe that "Still there's more to follow" and claim all that God has promised, and then be prepared to receive His overflow of blessing. "Only believe and thou shalt see greater things than these."

Such dear, souls must not be considered unfaithful to the appeal of the Apostle's entreaty, that they strive to preserve the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." How very unfortunate it is that they are so frequently considered disturbers of the peace, for most certainly they are true to the very ideals Paul set forth. ;The Apostle would be the last in the world to give encouragement to babes in Christ to remain content with their limited views, and he speaks in no uncertain terms of his disapproval of all immaturity in any saint, though developed a stage beyond babyhood. Present attainments are *never the end* with Paul either for himself or others. His whole appeal in our text and its connections, is an urge to press on to a very much to be desired goal rich is the only objective consistent with a profession of whole-hearted surrender to the will of God. Can any real saint miss the point in such an appeal to go forward, "till we all come [1] in the unity of the faith, [2] and of the knowledge of the Son of God, [3] unto a perfect man, [4] unto the measure of the stature of the fulness- of Christ." Can any one today forget the fact that all believers- among whom we move must represent varying degrees of development, and admitting that anything less than the fullest possible development of Christ being formed in us, is to that extent unsatisfactory to God, shall we not unite in emphasizing this higher ground, until "we all come" to a blessed individual experience of the realities of the life which is hid with Christ in God. "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 37

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith operating in us by love." - Gal. 5:6, Diaglott.

IN CHAPTER 3, verse 21, we saw the Apostle asserting that "his" Gospel of faith-righteousness was "witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." In the last five verses of chapter 3, we saw him demonstrating this assertion to be true by reference to the general tenor and spirit of the Old Testament. Not content with so general a proof he proceeded to cite a particular instance, and in order that the argument might be decisive he appealed at once to the case of Abraham himself. In the first eight verses of chapter 4, we saw him demonstrating that Abraham was justified (declared righteous), not on account of works of law which he had performed, but solely on account of the fact that God, out of His sheer benevolence, had reckoned his faith to him for righteousness. In the verses we now consider (Romans 4:9-12), the Apostle proceeds to show that Abraham was- justified not only by faith, but by faith alone.

Abraham Justified by Faith Alone

"Cometh this blessedness then -- [this imputation of righteousness without works, verse 6; this forgiveness of iniquities, this covering of sins, verse 7; this non-imputation of sin, verse 8]- cometh this blessedness, then, upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say: *To Abraham* his faith was reckoned for righteousness."-Ver. 9, Authorized and Am. R. V.

In the light of Gen. 15:6, so forcefully presented by the Apostle in the preceding passage, a Jewish opponent could not dispute the fact that Abraham was justified by faith, but he would advance the argument that Abraham's case was not in point so far as Gentiles were concerned, but merely illustrated the way the Jews (the circumcision) were to secure justification. Such an objection, doubtless urged many times by opponents of St. Paul's Gospel, has been well expressed by another, thus: You speak of the justifications of David and Abraham. "But David was a child of the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham was the father of that covenant. Do not their justifications speak only to those who stand, with them, inside that charmed circle? Was not Abraham justified by faith *Plus circumcision*? Did not the faith act only because he was already one of the privileged?"

If this contention were true, then those who remained uncircumcised would remain ineligible for faith-justification, and consequently ineligible for the salvation unto which the "righteousness of [or from] God" was designed to lead. (Romans 1:16.) But the Apostle has said, Romans 3:22, that "his" Gospel is "unto all" men, and "upon all" believers, irrespective of any other distinction whatsoever; that in the matter of justification by faith there is "no difference" between the circumcised and the uncircumcised; and before he has finished he will have not only asserted this to be the case, but will have demonstrated it beyond all question.

Abraham Reckoned Righteous Several Years Before Circumcision was Instituted

"How then was it reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision."-Ver. 10.

The point of the Apostle's question here is unmistakable. "Abraham, it is true, was circumcised; but at what time?-before his justification or after? Not before, but long after. Abraham had 'faith counted to him for righteousness' fourteen years, at least, before he was circumcised, even reckoning from the time to which the passage quoted in verse 3 refers. He was a believer some considerable time before that period; for the Apostle mentions, as the effect and evidence of his faith, his leaving his native land, and going out, on the footing of the Divine promise, 'into the place which he should afterward receive for an inheritance, not knowing whither he went.' (Heb. 11:6.) But even the time referred to in the third verse (Gen. 15:6), which the Apostle seems to have selected, because then the first express declaration is made, of Abraham's faith being imputed to him for righteousness, was fourteen years previous to his circumcision; for it preceded Sarah's giving him Hagar, and could not, therefore, be much less than a year before the birth of Ishmael; while, for aught that appears to the contrary, - it might be much more. (Gen. 16:3.) And we know that Ishmael was thirteen years old at the time when circumcision was instituted and first practised. - Gen. 17:25.

"Circumcision, therefore, seeing it took place so long after his justification, could have nothing to do with the ground of it, since a cause cannot follow its effect. From Abraham's being justified when 'in uncircumcision,' it is obvious: *first*, that as circumcision was not, in whole or in part, the ground of *his* acceptance with God, it cannot be a solid foundation of hope to *others*; that dependence upon it, in this view, must be vain, springing from ignorance and misconception. *Secondly*, that uncircumcision is no *hindrance* to the justification of *any*. As Abraham was justified when 'in uncircumcision' an uncircumcised Gentile may now be justified, in the same way with him; *his* justification being the pattern of the way in which God 'justifies the ungodly' in every age. 'They who are of faith,' whether Jews or Gentiles, 'are blessed with believing Abraham!.' - Gal. 3:9, Weymouth.

Circumcision is a Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant

"What, then, it may be asked, did Abraham derive from circumcision? What was the meaning and design of the rite? This inquiry the Apostle answers, in the eleventh and twelfth verses."

"And he received the *sign* of circumcision, *a seal* of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be reckoned unto them; and the father of circumcision to them who not only are of circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our Father Abraham which he had in uncircumcision."

In instituting circumcision God said to Abraham, "It shall be *a token* of the covenant betwixt Me and you." (Gen. 17:11.) In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this word "token" is the same as is here, in Rom. 4:11, translated "sign." Other covenants had been ratified by signs. For example, God set the rainbow in the sky as *a sign* or *token* of His covenant that the waters should not again become a flood so as to destroy all flesh. (Gen. 9:6-17.) In every case the matter of importance of course is the covenant itself, not its sign or token. Rainbows in

themselves are powerless to prevent destructive floods. Their usefulness consists in reminding us of the covenant of our powerful and faithful God.

So with circumcision; it was not the reality, but a sign, or token, of the reality. And what was the reality of which circumcision was the sign? We answer, in the language of the Scripture just quoted: "The covenant betwixt Me and you," that is to say, the covenant between God and Abraham, usually referred to as the "Abrahamic Covenant," into which we shall shortly have occasion to inquire more particularly, but which we may here state is briefly summarized in the statement that in Abraham and in his Seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed: Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:17, 18; 26:4.

Circumcision is also a Seal of the Righteousness of Faith

Circumcision, then, was intended as a sign or token of the Abrahamic Covenant. But the Apostle speaks of it additionally as a "seal"- "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he [Abraham] had while he was in uncircumcision." Circumcision, then, did not *confer* this blessing; what it did was to *confirm* it. It did not *convey* a standing of righteousness before God, but *bore witness* to the righteousness already reckoned. Quoting from an able writer: "In no dispensation do rites bestow anything; they are the shadow, not the substance; they are a seal. But the seal is worthless apart from the matter *or* from the document that it attests. The Jew had torn off the seal from the covenant, and then vainly boasted of this meaningless imprint."

A seal of the righteousness reckoned to him on account of his faith!-what can this righteousness mean but that circumcision of heart enjoined on Israel again and again in the Old Testament; that circumcision which the martyr Stephen testified they were (as a nation) yet without. "And Jehovah thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." "O stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always fight against the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, you also do." (Deut. 10:10; Acts 7:51. See also Deut. 10:12-16; Jer. 4:4.) To this heart circumcision St. Paul has already referred in chapter 2, verses 25-29, considered in Meditations No. 23. There he shows that the mark in the flesh is merely intended as the seal of a proper heart condition. "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward, in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

Of Whom is Abraham "Father"? and Who are They Who are Rightly Called His "Sons"?

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Apostle also draws our attention in these verses to the wisdom displayed by God in arranging the institution of circumcision so that it should occur several years subsequent to the counting of Abraham's faith to him for righteousness. This was by no means accidental, but part of a deep design. It was to the end, "in order that" Abraham might be "the father of all them that believe" whether Gentiles *or* Jews. The sign of circumcision given to him *as* a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision, made him eminently fitted to be a "father" to the uncircumcised believer, that is to say, to the Gentile believer; while possessing the sign of circumcision made it possible for him to be also the "father" of Jewish believers. The word here translated "father" designates an exemplar, a representative, a pattern, a leading and eminent example which others may copy. Thus in Gen. 4:20 we read of Jabal as being the "father" of such as dwell in tents and have cattle, and in the

next verse his brother Jubal *is* mentioned as the "father" of such as handle the harp and pipe. Satan is spoken of by Jesus as the "father" of wicked Jews. (John 8:38.) Conversely we see that it is not sufficient to be born in the physical line 'of descent from Abraham to be considered a "child" or "son" of Abraham. Only "Israelites indeed" (John 1:47), are considered worthy of the title of a "son" of Abraham. Thus our Lord denied' this title to Jews who had proved themselves unworthy of it. Their circumcision meant nothing to Him in the absence of the real circumcision of heart which should have characterized them. "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." (John 8:39.) Note also the sublime remark of our Lord on witnessing the faith of Zacchaeus, as evidenced by his works: "Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold. Jesus said unto him: Today is salvation come to this house, *forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*" -That is to say, forasmuch as he is not only of the circumcision but is treading in the track of the faith of Abraham, and is therefore worthy to be called one of his sons. (Luke 19:8, 9.) In full harmony with this expression of our Lord, the Apostle reasons, in Gal. 3:7, Am. R. V.: "Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham."

Faith without Works is Dead

It is worthy of notice that the Apostle does not say that Abraham is the "father" of those who merely acquiesce in the doctrinal viewpoint he held. Faith, in St. Paul's life and teaching, is much more than a mere mental agreement as to the philosophy concerning God, His attributes, plans, and purposes. The Apostle is speaking of those who "*walk*" in the steps of Abraham's faith. Scholars tell us that the word here translated "walk" is a military term, meaning to "march in file." The picture before the Apostle's mind seems to be that of an army marching, an army whose weapons are not carnal, marching in file. First there comes before his mind the noble *career* of Abraham, which career, both, in its general course and in its crises, gave ample evidence of the faith in God within. Abraham's heart which *actuated* that career. Next he envisions a host of others with similar careers, not similar in their details, for in detail they differ widely, but similar *in* this respect that they result from the same motive, they are animated by the same mainspring, they give evidence that faith in God has been that which has directed their course. Marching in file in the track of that faith which Abraham had before he was circumcised; this is their characteristic. And of such the Apostle writes: Abraham is their "father"; to them as to him righteousness shall also be reckoned.

Mere profession of faith, unaccompanied by "works of faith" is worthless, as St. James has stressed. (James 2:20.) A man *believes* a thing when he *acts* as if it were true. If he fails to so act, instead of producing the evidence that his faith 'is real, he manifests on the contrary that his faith is dead, no matter what his professions may be. It was because Abraham's faith was evidenced by his conduct "*therefore*" (Rom. 4:2) it was reckoned unto him ' for 'righteousness. *How* eloquently Zacchaeus' *course in* life attested his faith! Half of his goods to *the* poor! Reparation of wrong to the extent of -fourfold! Small wonder that our Lord recognized him as a "son of Abraham," -- as one who was marching in file in the track of that faith which Abraham had while as yet uncircumcised.

REPORT OF ANNUAL CONVENTION IN ENGLAND

The following report reaches us of the Annual Convention held June 3-5, in Nottingham, Eng.:

Once again those who were privileged to attend the Annual Convention in Nottingham returned to their homes with grateful hearts -- grateful to the Giver of all good gifts; and to those through whom the treasures were so bountifully dispensed.

The number present was larger than heretofore, and, included representatives from Holland, Denmark, Scotland and Wales, and the local friends, as always, labored untiringly in both spiritual and material service to all. A devotional meeting on the evening preceding the convention was made an occasion of special intercession for Divine blessing and guidance, and for the expression of deep thankfulness to the Heavenly Father for His mercy and loving providences during the past year. A sense of His Spirit's presence was very real to all-who waited in that little upper room, and the gathering was a fitting prelude to the sacred experiences of the, following days.

"It is not possible to give any account of the addresses in detail, but after listening to them all one felt that the message which the Master had impressed upon the mind of each speaker was concerning the blessed spiritual companionship, and personal Divine protection promised to those who share the holy' calling of Christ. ' A reminder was given that we are even here and now "seated *with Christ in heavenly places*" (Eph. 2:6) that "we know that all things *-work together for good* to them *that love God*, to them *who are the called according ,to-His purpose*" (Rom. 8:28); that "The *Spirit of the Lord God is upon me*; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings. unto the meek," etc. (Isa. 61:1); and that "our light affliction , *worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*," etc. (2 Cor. 4:17, 18.) The holy companionship was also emphasized in an address entitled "Walking With God," and the goal very beautifully portrayed by the final speaker as he spoke of "the, joy set before us"-participation in that City of Zion -- which is the desire of Jehovah for His eternal rest and dwelling place. . .

A baptismal service was conducted on the Sunday afternoon, when five followers of the Master symbolized their consecration to God and, together with those who witnessed their confession, were earnestly exhorted to continued faithfulness in their sacred vocation. The speaker's closing' words, a poem, were a message of encouragement and comfort for all who are seeking to "win Christ and be found in Him." . . .

ENCOURAGING LETTERS

Dear Brethren:

We thank you for your insertion in the June issue of the "HERALD" of notice regarding our convention. As arranged, it was held July 1, 2, and we are' glad to say that we experienced once again the joy and privilege which is' inseparable from such a gathering, when, those 'attending it meet with the Spirit recorded by the Apostle-"They were all with one accord in one place," . . "With gladness and singleness of heart." (Acts 2.) The services of visiting brethren were gladly rendered, and as appreciatively received.

About thirty from "over the line" responded to our invitation, the attendance being augmented by quite a number of brethren who do not meet regularly with us, yet were able to sink their little differences and fellowship with us on this occasion. We rejoice to see this evidence of love on their part, and trust that it may be enlarged to our mutual benefit. Judging from comments all around, the efforts made, enabling their attendance, were well repaid through the ministrations of the, brethren just referred to. . Satisfaction was also expressed regarding the provision for physical needs, and the admirable service of those who had this end of the work in hand was highly commended.

It would impose upon your kindness to dwell in detail on the addresses, etc., of our convention, but we feel that we must say how kindly, and yet how pointedly were the exhortations we received. There could not be any doubt as to the purpose of each address, and the earnestness -of the speakers added to the value of the thoughts expressed. Each brother presented his thoughts in his own personal way, and we agree that this adds to the fulness of, the blessings accruing from these conventions. Summed up, the tenor of all the addresses might be covered by 1 John 3:1-3, and 2 Pet. 3:14.

The three closing words of the final address, "More like Jesus," will remain in our minds,- and we trust that, this, and other means of grace may bring to our hearts and minds that rest, that peace, and that joy in the Lord which is theirs who are daily looking- unto Jesus, daily seeking to be more like Him, and who have the full assurance that they are His. . .

May He keep you all and give to you wisdom and guidance that your efforts may bring fruit which shall bring honor and glory to His holy name. We thank you for the encouraging and comforting articles produced in the "HERALD," and commend you all to the Lord.' . . .

We are, by His grace, Your brethren in the Lord,
Associated Bible Students, Vancouver, B. C.

Dear Brethren

It is with greatest pleasure, brethren, and with sincerest gratefulness to Him "who is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think," and also as voicing the fervent expression of many of the about seventy dear ones who were able to be present from different places at our little convention at Waukesha, Wis., July 2 and 3, that we are writing you.

We are more than pleased to tell you that this seemed truly to be one of the most uplifting and helpful gatherings of its kind we have been privileged to attend . in years.' This is as it should be. ' "It is always to be better further on." Many said that nothing of the kind recently has reminded us so much of the old. sweet spirit of the glorious .Gospel and happy fellowship of the, Lord's children that was always so manifest in; all the larger gatherings when, Brother Russell was, with us. .

How truly we felt the force of the Apostle's words . in Rom. 11 :33-36 "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! . . . And His ways [until revealed] past finding out! . . To whom be glory for ever."

H., D. W.-Wis.