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## True Christian Character.

*"And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us -- ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power." -- Eph. 1:19.*

THE SCRIPTURES in a general way represent the Christian religion under three different classifications. First, as *a principle* it is, called *Faith*; and this faith is extolled as the essential thing for salvation. "By grace are ye saved through faith"; we "walk by faith"; and "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." -- Eph. 2:8; 2 Cor. 5:7; 1 John 5:4.

Second, as *a sentiment*, or emotional reaction to the revelation we are given of God, it is styled *Love*. Jesus taught that love to God and man was to be one of the very distinctive features of Christian deportment. God must be loved with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength, and the neighbor must be loved as oneself. The Apostles in their various epistles likewise represent such love to be the very essence of *the* Gospel of Christ, and the outstanding evidence of Christian character. "The end of the commandment," says Paul, "is love out of a pure heart." And to this Apostle, the greatest thing in the world is love. "And now abideth faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love," aside from which all other virtues are worthless. John likewise puts the emphasis on this quality of character, the possession or absence of which will determine the standing of the individual. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. -- 1 John 4:16, 12; 1 Cor. 13:13.

Third, as a law or rule of life the Bible defines true Christian character as sincere *obedience to the will of God*. Christ is the "Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Again we read, "If thou *wilt* enter into life, keep the commandments." "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." - John 14:21.

But in the general teaching of the Word of God all three of these aspects are united and beautifully blended. Thus the Apostles Paul and Peter could say that "the fruit of the spirit is love,

joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"; therefore "denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts" we should "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world," occupied with "whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report" and adding to our faith "fortitude, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love." All of these characteristics are embraced in the fundamental principle, the devotional response, and the law of the spirit under which new creatures in Christ attain his image and likeness.

## LOOKING UNTO JESUS

In a very concise way we believe the foregoing sets forth the facts of Christian experience and character. And we understand that the "complete supremacy of our entire being, all its interests, and all its possibilities of responding to God's power are involved in this. It is not the external conduct alone that concerns the spiritual man, but the principles from which he acts, the motives that govern him, and the fervency of the love of God which he must find unmistakably shed abroad in his heart. When these aforementioned things become facts in the character, the Christian will find himself possessed of a spiritual power pervading his being -- the evidence that he who raised Christ from the dead is now raising him up also into newness of life. Living thus with Christ within, he will be able to bear with equanimity the changes, trials, and perplexities of earth, and with confidence be able to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me," "according to the might of his power which he wrought in Christ."

The important question is, How may we receive these blessings into our lives? How may we attain these qualities, and show forth the loveliness of the Christlike character -- shining as lights in the world? Let us go to the perfect pattern -- "looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith." In him we see all the virtues exhibited which we desire to practise, all the love and obedience which gratitude constrains us to harp wrought out in our own lives. In him we find such a richness of character, that our receptive hearts are made to yearn for likeness to him., "In the dignity, and, the sweetness which characterize him, how strongly do we feel that there is much more than a display of external qualities, conformity to a prescribed rule, and graceful propriety of outward demeanor.; Nothing is more striking than the evident connection of everything which he said and did with something internal. The sentiment and disposition which reign within, are constantly visible through his exterior deportment; and we regard his words and deeds less as distinct outward things, than as expressions or representations of character. In contemplating the life of Jesus, we find ourselves perpetually looking beyond his mere actions, and fixing our thoughts on the qualities which they, indicate. His life is but the expressive countenance of his soul. We feel, that, though in the midst of present things, he is led by principles, wrapt in thoughts, pervaded by sentiments, which are above earth, unearthly; that he is walking in communion with another sphere; and that the objects around him are matters of interest to him, no further than as they afford materials for the exercise of his benevolence, and opportunities for doing his Father's will."

This, then, is the example set before us as we look unto Jesus. This is the model of true Christian character we are to seek to pattern ourselves by. And when we can be imbued with this same spirit of "God first in all our thoughts," when we become possessed of the same potent inward sentiments of heart devotion to God, so that all our words, actions, and life shall be of the same spontaneous expression of this "mind of Christ, then we will have attained a manifest degree of his character. We will be showing forth that fruitage of the spirit which will bear testimony that we are habitually "looking unto Jesus," and that his purity, his devotion, his peace, his delight in the Father's will have been imparted to us and display themselves in the manner and conduct of life.

## MORE LIKENESS TO THEE, O CHRIST

To attain and perfect this character, five have learned from the Word, is to be the real objective and business of life. Though the Christian life must be recognized as embracing many features, it must never be forgotten that in the last analysis there is but one real purpose before the individual, namely his own personal crystallization of character, in likeness to that of Jesus Christ. In the wisdom of God a number of things are made contributory to this end -- the preaching of the

Gospel to others as time and opportunity may permit, and the laying down of one's life for the brethren in whatever manner the Lord's providences may indicate. But with Paul, we too may well be exercised in mind to be fully assured that after having preached to others, we ourselves shall not be castaways. The great fact must never be lost sight of, that what God will look for in us when all of life is over, and its opportunities for attainment have, all passed away, will simply be, the image of his own dear Son.

In all that we are privileged to learn, then, as the light of truth shines on our pathway, in all that we think, and feel, and do, there must be a constant reference to this great end. Whatever will serve to forward this Divine purpose, we must learn to cherish and meditate upon. Whatever would in any way hinder this, or in any manner operate injuriously upon a character transformation that God has purposely determined shall be built up or destroyed by so small a thing as good or evil thought, we must learn to discountenance and positively shun. All that would give a wrong bias to passions and appetites, or make provision for our predisposition to questionable inclinations toward indulging these, must be judged as contrary to, the mind that was in Christ Jesus. "Whatsoever ye do," the Scriptures teach, "do all to the glory of God. Our attitude toward others, our opinion of ourselves, our use of time and means, eating and drinking, everything, is to be judged before the example furnished us by the life of Jesus.

Surely, then, nothing is of so great -- importance as true Christian character, and to attain it, its the greatest of all objectives. Whatever else may be done, nothing has really been done, if so be that Christ has not been formed in us, if it cannot be said of us because of our likeness to him that we are "unto God a sweet savor of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:15), because in heart and life we are constantly reflecting the same love and devotion exemplified in Jesus.

### **ESTABLISHED, STRENGTHENED, SETTLED**

"By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be," is the promise we delight to sing when "psalms and hymns and spiritual, songs" seem to best express our deepest longings. And it: is by looking to Jesus as the embodiment of all that pleases the Father, that we are filled with the desire to experience all the possible reproduction of his life in ours, that God has promised. But how little of this reproduction or manifestation of Christ in us there would be, if it were not for the fact that he himself has taken up his abode in our hearts for the very purpose of making us like himself. O how impossible such a transformation, unless he undertake it for us! Since it is a work which cannot be done in a short time, or by the spasmodic excitement of desire and feeling so' characteristic of most of us, how necessary it is that we be found constantly constraining him to abide with us and in us, assuring him by the fervency of our entreaty that we have learned so well that "unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it."

It is only by a surrender of our whole being, and of our entire life to him, that we could ever hope to awake, satisfied with his likeness. It is therefore imperative that we learn just what it means to acknowledge that we are not our own, and to learn to live in the moment by moment realization that mind and heart and tongue, and all the powers of our being are wholly his. And after all, this alone is consecration -- the surrender of the whole man and the entire life to the will of God, in faith, in unadulterated affection, and in action -- the life of action revealed in the example of Jesus: "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." (1 John 2:6) Keeping step with Jesus will mean our gaining more and more of his devout and humble temper of mind, more of the deep spirituality of his affections, more of the purity and loveliness of his daily life. Anything less than this, any partial, external conformity to a rule of "what would Jesus do" is wholly insufficient. It is only from his place of residence within the heart's deep affections that he can, work upon and mold us into true Christian characters. Only

then can we really experience the peace and joy which he has assured us may be ours, and which he has also taught us can be known in experience only by those who are daily seeking to be conformed to the Divine will.

This will mean on our part a moment by moment appropriation of the strength imparted to us by "looking unto Jesus" as the full and complete provision for all our needs. It will mean "always rejoicing" in our acceptance in the Beloved One, and in his all sufficient grace for every time of need. It will also mean a constant self-examination, a judging of oneself that will embrace alike the conduct of our external life and the habitual tenor of our inward condition of mind. As a result we will realize that sensitiveness toward sin which will keep our conscience awake and functioning in a faithful use of the "sword of the Spirit, the Word of God." It will, cause us to survey the habitual trend of our thoughts, the tempers *we sustain in* our deportment toward others, the examination of our habits of conversation, the impartial consideration of what motives may be guiding us in our decisions. We will be exercised to question the probable good or bad effect of our example *upon* others, the good to edification, or the undermining influences for evil, flowing out from our contact with others. Are they left by *us* with "roots of bitterness" ready to grow into words and actions whereby many may be defiled, or have we left them seeing "no man but Jesus only"? We *must* be habitually measuring our ways by the life of him who is "*our* life" and our example, if we would obey the laws of holy living, of true Christian character prescribed for us in the Gospel and life of Jesus.

### **NOT AS THOUGH WE HAD YET ATTAINED**

"Be on *your* guard, therefore, from the first, against setting your mark too low. Do *not* allow yourself to be persuaded that anything less is religion [true Christian character] or will answer for you, than its complete and highest measure. Remember that these things must be in you and abound. The higher you aim, the *higher* you will reach; but if you are content with a low aim you will forever fall short. The Scriptural word *is perfection*. Strive after that. Never be satisfied, while short of it, and then you will always *be improving*. [For God can work in us only as we continue to recognize the need, and the possibilities of his creative power in us.] But if you set *yourself* some definite measure of goodness, if you prescribe to yourself some limit in devotion and love, you will by and by fancy you have reached it, and thus remain stationary in a condition far *below* what you might have attained. Remember always that you are capable of being more devout, more charitable, more humble, more devoted and earnest in doing good, better acquainted with religious truth; and that, as it is impossible there should be any cessation to the progress of the human soul, so it is impossible that the endeavors of the soul should be too exalted. It is because men do not think this, or do not practically apply it, that so many even of those who intend to govern themselves by religious motives, remain so lamentably deficient in excellence. They adopt a low or a partial standard and strive after it sluggishly, and thus come to a period in religion before they arrive at the close of life. Happy they who are so filled with longings after spiritual good, that they go on improving to the end of their days."

'True Christian character is not *a* theory, it is not a dogma, it is not a theme around which we array our arguments, but it is an experience, an inheritance, a personal realization of relationship to God, and an individual consciousness within the heart, that God's creative, transforming, purifying, peace -- giving, and holiness -- producing work, is definitely going on in the life. It is a life so under the control of the Spirit of God, that the one possessing it can say with *Paul*, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. How much have we proved, any of us, the resources that lie within our reach in that mighty indwelling? How much are we experiencing in the fibers of our being, the penetrating influences actively at work in the Christian character? Do our fellows know that we "have been with Jesus"? Is our present character attainment mostly put on from without,

or a living evidence of God's work within? Are we properly receiving and reflecting the life of Christ, so that there shines from us a heartiness, an animation, a simple hearted eagerness which operates *so* irresistibly in bearing down *on* opposition and disarming prejudice, that other honest, inquiring hearts can affirm as they behold our *joy* and blessing: "This is reality -- this is *no* empty hallucination -- this *is* of God." Is this asking too much of *us* in our weakness? Yes indeed *in* our weakness, but not when his strength *is* made perfect in our weakness. God's way is to make the Christian religion infectious, to produce results in us whereby others will be led into the same experience of his grace. As "the salt of the earth" are *we* making others thirsty for more of Jesus, and for more of, his character-likeness?

-- *J. J. Blackburn.*

## "Afterwards"

*"Thou shalt follow me afterwards." -- John 13:36.*

LET us go back to that upper room at Jerusalem some 1920 years ago. The last supper had been partaken of, and Jesus had performed an act of humility, and in that act he had furnished a great example of perfect love, which, in its lowliness and dignity, could hardly be surpassed. After a few explanatory words, his heart being burdened with a great sorrow, he revealed that one of his disciples was to betray him. The traitor goes out to do his master's work, for, as we read, "Satan entered into him."

Realizing that the shades of "darkness" were fast enveloping him, and that his time of personal service to his brethren was near its end, Jesus speaks to his disciples' words which have no equal in all literature, words in which love is stressed to its utmost possible attainment. He knew that after he had gone they would be scattered, and, having doubts and fears, would be subject to many trials, temptations, and tests of faith; he knew their need of further light and power, and so, he speaks to them words of love, hope, and faith, in which is included the definite promise of a place with him in his Kingdom. From his gracious lips there came words which, in their power and Spirit, were eventually to rock the world to its foundations.

In those chapters of John 13 to 17 Jesus is revealed in his unspeakable depth of love, desire, and sanctification. Those few men of humble bearing were endeared to his great heart of love. And now, Jesus consoles, comforts, and exhorts them with a love that has no equal. O, what comfort and encouragement has been had from his words: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in 'God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were. not so, I would have told you. *I go to prepare a place for you.* And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where *I am, ye may be also.*" (John 14:1-3.) He spoke of sorrow, but he also spoke of joy and peace, which can be had only through the unity of the spirit, as he explained it in his perfect illustration in the vine and its branches. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: *he that abideth in me, and I inn him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*" -- John 15:5.

As he speaks, love assumes its highest and deepest form as those dear eyes look upon the bewildered and wondering disciples. Peter -- the indomitable Peter -- is anxious to know more about his Master's abode. He was undoubtedly concerned about the words, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now." He had learned to love this homeless, almost friendless man, who, notwithstanding his sinless life and gracious deeds, was the "despised and rejected of men, a man, of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And so, with "perhaps a sense of frustration, Peter asks, "Lord, whither goest thou?" The Master does not answer Peter's question to his entire satisfaction, but replies: "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me *afterwards.*" Peter's nature *was* revealed in his reply to his Lord: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay, down my life for thy sake." He had not learned that a far greater power than he yet possessed was essential to that following of which he speaks in 1 Peter 2:21-23. And even now it would seem that many who profess to "follow His steps lack the incentive which only the holy spirit can give. And so, like Peter, when the crucial test comes, the power unto victory is not there. And how glad we are to know that; while thus the Lord is denied, the same *love and grace* which lifted Peter up after his denial is available to all who, in the spirit of humility and contrition, are amenable to the influence of divine spiritual power! In love and grace our lives are extended, and every means provided for all that God's love entails, both for this present life and "*afterwards.*"

## AFTERWARDS, GLORY

"Afterwards"! What a theme of joyful contemplation. Perhaps there is no reference to this word that brings greater hope and joy to the believer than that of Psalm 73:24: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and *afterward* receive me to glory." "Afterward"! But what about the meantime! What was to precede this which was to be theirs "afterwards"?

Through the stillness of the evening shadows the Master's words seem to come with added force: "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." What is entailed in cross-bearing, and following "in his steps, we learn, little by little. From day to day added light is shed on the pathway, and experiences come which test the genuineness of our hearts when we sing or repeat

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,  
All to leave and follow thee;"

"Where He leads -- me I will follow,  
I'll go with Him, with Him all the way."

Brave words! but how do they work out *in practice*, for *practiced* Christianity is the only -- kind that has value. Jesus said, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if *ye do them*." The inference is plainly seen. As we examine ourselves we realize only too well that sin is ever present, within and without. 1 ' John' 1:8 and Romans 8:7 suggest that sin is always at hand to thwart our efforts toward a fully consecrated, sanctified life. Our Lord and his Apostles were -- subject to temptations, and met such temptations -- with a "thus saith the Lord," or a refusal to bend" -- to them. -- Luke 4:1-13; 1 Cor. 6:12; 9:27.

The test of discipleship has always been one of obedience. Not that we earn salvation out of obedience, for Paul shows plainly that our salvation is of grace, abounding grace. (Rom. 5:15.) And while this is so, all recipients of *his* grace are required to follow a well defined process. This is clearly stated in John 17:15-23 and Romans 12:1, 2, 21. Obedience is the fruit of faith, and John speaks very emphatically in respect to sin. "All unrighteousness is sin." (1 John 5:17.) Righteousness, imputed and imparted -- as this is seen in us -- may well be one of the greatest tests of discipleship; for if we *abide in Christ*; if the love of God dwell in us, our thoughts, words, purposes, and actions will be in harmony with the will of God as that will is expressed in his Word. Righteousness can be defined only by the divine standard as we find it in Holy Writ. Jesus kept the commandments (Matt. 5:17-20), and if we "follow" in "his steps," we will do likewise. "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." - 1 John 2:3-6 and 1 Peter 2:21.

The condition of attaining eternal life is what it always has been: perfect obedience to God, perfect righteousness. This may seem difficult to understand; but if that life were granted on any other condition, the happiness of all would be in danger. Adam failed to obey God's righteous law, and because of his sin our "natures" are fallen, and we are unable to make ourselves righteous; for, being sinful and unholy, we cannot perfectly obey a holy law. But a God of love has opened up "a new and living way," through the accepted merit of his dear Son, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 10:20.) He lived a sinless life, he died for us, and now, praise God, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." We are justified by faith in him; his righteousness is imputed to us, and we are thus made acceptable unto the Father as though we were sinless! Truly, wondrous love and grace!



Then, a new era dawns upon our lives. We leave behind the old carnal desires; the things we once loved, we now hate, and our affections are bent upward. We can say with Paul, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved *me*, and gave himself for me." Gal. 2:20.

*If* Christ has his abode in our hearts, we will manifest much of his spirit, and do the works of righteousness and obedience. Of ourselves, we have nothing of which to boast. Our only ground for hope is in Christ's imputed righteousness and that which is wrought by his spirit working in and through us. Some may feel that their imperfections are beyond removal, and perhaps doubt as to their standing before their Lord and Savior. To any such we would say, Do not give way to the Adversary's taunts. Even if we are overcome at times, we "are not cast off," not forsaken or rejected of God. Recall the precious promises, especially such as that of Isaiah 41:10: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." Reach out in a living faith and say with Paul, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, *who also maketh intercession for* its. (Rom. 8:34.) As we come closer to Jesus, our own weaknesses and faults appear more in contrast with his purity and perfection. This, however, may all be to the good, for in it is seen that the spirit is working with effect within us. No deep seated *love* for Jesus can dwell in the heart that fails to realize its innate sinfulness. The one who is being transformed by the love and grace of Christ will; of a sureness, admire his beauty and excellence, but if such a one does not see his or her own moral weaknesses, it is an unmistakable evidence that the perfection and glory of Jesus Christ has not been fully seen. One has said that "The less we see to esteem in ourselves, *the more we shall see to esteem in the infinite purity and loveliness of our Savior.* A view of our own sinfulness drives us, to him who can pardon, and when the soul, realizing its helplessness, reaches out after Christ, he will reveal himself in power. The more our sense of need drives us to him and to the Word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of his character, *and the, more fully we shall reflect his image.*" As followers of Jesus, some of his experiences will be ours: "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his lord." Those words imply a "life" in which negative forces will have their place and, part. Not all sunshine, nor yet all shade, but "all things working together" to the desired end, "that ye may be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." *The same mighty power which enabled Jesus to live a pure, holy life is available to us.* We do not see what lies in the upward, path, nor can we always see the purpose of "life's tangled maze, but "in the afterwards" we shall praise God for all that has, in any way or measure, been to us a means of grace.

"I cannot, always see the way that leads to heights above,  
I sometimes quite forget He leads me on with hands of dove:  
But yet I realize the path must lead me to Immanuel's land,  
And when I reach life's summit I shall know and understand.

"I cannot always trace the onward course my bark must take.  
But looking backward I behold afar, its shining wake  
Illumined with God's light of love, and so, I onward go,  
In perfect trust, that He who holds the helm *the course must know.*

"I cannot always see the plan on which He builds my life,  
For oft the sound of hammer, blow on blow -- the noise of strife  
Confuses me, till I quite forget *He knows and oversees*  
And that in all details with His great plan, my *life* agrees.

"I cannot always understand the Master's rule,  
I cannot always do the task He gives in life's hard school:

But I am learning by His help to solve them, one by one,  
And when I cannot understand, to say, *Thy will be done.*"

To so live that each day finds in us a greater purpose, a more ardent desire and effort concerning the things of God and our eternal salvation -- this *must be* the one concentrated object governing our lives. As "workers together with God" we are to go forward "in faith," "redeeming the time, walking "in the light," "patient in tribulation," "watching and praying," in short, being "steadfast in the faith," and thereby "*growing in grace and in the knowledge* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." To *know* him as Paul knew him -- this must be our daily purpose, our contemplation, and our joy.

Yes, we are to be "rejoicing" Christians. Can we not look back and see innumerable evidences of God's love and care over us? His promises and his provision for our every need have *never failed*; his mercy and grace have ever been manifest; and we remember David's words: "Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say *continually, The Lord be magnified.*" We have every cause to be "rejoicing in the Lord." Christians are not to be of a fearful, repining nature. We are to be cheerful, and by a confident trust reveal something of the Master's serenity and excellence of peace and joy.

Jesus was nearing the end. He 'spoke of things which related to his peace, his joy, and his victory. He desires that his disciples shall have those things. He holds out before them and us *a fulness* of joy which is, by far, too rare; for *even here and now* there may be possessed a joy which in its scope shall yield a foretaste of the more enduring joy of the "afterwards." And so we say, let us be "rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; *instant in prayer.*"

Prayer is mighty; it is one of our greatest means of grace; in prayer, heaven and earth are very close together, and as the believer reaches out with this mighty availing arm of prayer and faith, the heart can, and will, find a peace and rest beyond the reach of any evil source. Let none be indifferent to this privilege" of prayer. Note Jesus' words: "Men ought always to pray." Paul says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication *in the spirit, and watching thereunto* with all perseverance." "Praying *with the spirit, and with the understanding also.*"

"We need to praise God 'for his goodness and his wonderful works to the children of men. Our devotional exercises should not consist wholly in asking and receiving. *Let us not always be thinking of our wants*, and little of the daily benefits we receive. We do not pray any too much, and we are *too sparing* of giving thanks. We are the constant recipients of God's mercies, and yet how little gratitude we express -- how little we praise him for what he has done for us. He desires us to worship him, to *take* pleasure and comfort in his service: He desires that -- in the unity of his spirit with ours -- we shall enter into a fuller and richer life.... The soul may ascend nearer heaven on the wings of praise. God is worshiped with song and music in the courts above, and as we express our gratitude, we are approximating the worship of the heavenly hosts." "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth" God. (Psa. 50:23.) Let us with, reverent joy come before our Creator with "thanksgiving and the voice of melody." -- Isa. 51:3.

The years go by, and the falling shadows over a world of sin and unbelief are profoundly revealing in regard to the "end" of the Age in which we live. The attainment of -- our ." hope" is near at hand. The "afterwards" is assuming its definite shape. As yet, we do not know what is bound up in the "afterwards," but we are assured that it will hold for us blessings and transcendent joys, far beyond our most sanguine hopes. (1 Cor. 2:9.) Those hopes will mature if we "follow" the Master "*all the way.*" If the spirit has free scope, we shall be more and more

"conformed to his image," and, "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." - 1 Cor. 15:49.

### **"PLEASURES FOR EVERMORE"**

Soon life's day will end. But oh, the "afterwards"! What joys are to be ours when "our change comes! No more sorrow, pain, tears, partings, and no more death! Such is the vista which lies in the "afterwards." Love -- gracious, redeeming love -- shall "wipe the tear from every eye grace, unbounded grace, shall be at the disposal of all; faith will have been largely lost in sight, as our risen and glorified Lord, with his saints, assumes his rightful place as the "King of kings," "The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Then, in the glorious light of an endless -- day, we shall (find no greater joy than that in which the Father and Son are magnified. Freed, for all time, from the limitations of the flesh and its unrighteous tendencies, and "clothed with righteousness (Psa. 132:9), "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as *he* is." "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon *us* that *we* should be called the *sons of God*: . . . Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, *we shall be like him*; for we shall see' him as he is. And every man that bath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." - 1 John 3:1-3.

Let us remember that the Church of God has suffered more from weak, wavering, and compromising adherents than from any other cause. Let us not forget that many of God's victories have been accomplished by small numbers, and that "he is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency *in all things, may abound to every good work.*" -- 2 Cor. 9:8.

And now, what remains? A measure of the things to which flesh is heir?. Yes. Tests, and trials? Yes. But, thank God, in all these things "we are" made more than "conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom. 8:37.) "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; *but thou shalt follow me afterwards.*"

"I go not now to glory bright  
To dwell with Christ,, in robes of white  
To see my, Lord enthroned above  
To joy, in His eternal love:  
But afterwards, I shall be there,  
In His eternal bliss to share. '

"I go not now to understand  
The deep perfection love. has planned  
To see, life's problems all made plain,  
To know the need of pang and pain,  
But afterwards, I shall be there,  
Then perfect knowledge I shall share.

"O Master, afterwards, I come,  
Unto the mansions fair to home,  
When glory crowns Thy blessed grace,  
And I shall see Thee, 'face to face':  
But afterwards I shall be there,  
And in Thy glory I shall share."

-- John 1:3:36, 37.

Our concluding thoughts relate to those with which this meditation began -- the scene in the upper room, just prior to the betrayal of Jesus. The Master has opened his heart to his disciples; his closing words are words of hope and words of cheer: "These things I have Taken unto you, that *in me* ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." (John 16:33.) Next follows a prayer, a prayer in which love for his Father and for his followers is the theme. Who shall say what pain and sorrow were under control as those gracious words of prayer ascended to his Father's heart: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: . . . I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. . . . I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: . . . I have given them thy word; ... Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth, ... for their sakes I sanctify myself.. Neither pray I for these alone, but *for them also* which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, . . . Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be *with me where I am*; . . . *O* righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me *may be in them, and I in them.*" Truly words of love beyond compare!

And so, Christ commends his followers to the Father. As a consecrated High Priest, he intercedes for his "brethren." As a faithful Shepherd, he gathers his flock, "the everlasting arms" underneath, and urges confidence and trust. He was soon to suffer and to die for all mankind, for you and for me. But *afterwards!* "Love divine, all love excelling." Yes, and so we pray:

"Finish, Lord, thy New Creation;  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Show us all thy great salvation  
Thine shall all the glory be.  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till we see thine own dear face;  
Till we cast our crowns before thee  
Lost in wonder, love and praise."

- *W. Wainwright.*

## **Lessons from the Life of Joseph**

*Scripture Reading:* Psalm 105: 17-23; Genesis chapters 37, 39-50

THE LIGHT which shines from this story of Joseph ought to shine into a great many lives today with its beam of cheer and hope for those who are waiting amid discouraging circumstances.

At last came the time for Joseph's deliverance and exaltation. Pharaoh had a double dream. It was not an ordinary dream: it was God's way of revealing the future to the king, that he might be a true father to his people. Seven fat cows feeding in a meadow; seven lean and poor cows standing by the Nile. The seven fat cattle eaten up by the seven lean, which are lean as ever, afterwards. Seven rank, good ears of corn; seven thin, blasted ears. The thin ears devour the rank ears and are thin as ever.

The dream troubled the king. He sent for Egypt's famed wise men, dream-interpreters, but they gave him no light. Now, at last, after two years of ungrateful forgetting, the butler remembered his fault and told Pharaoh the story of the Hebrew slave in the prison who had interpreted his own dream. Swiftly runs the messenger to the prison, and Joseph is called into the presence of the king. He is thirty years old. He has been thirteen years in Egypt, as slave, and prisoner. This is the hour, and here the duty for which all his former life has been a preparation.

Pharaoh tells his dreams. A vain man would have had his head turned, and have spoken boastfully. But Joseph speaks with the humility of a child. "It is not in me; God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." They who teach others find a lesson here: None should seek to show his own wisdom, but should hide himself, and point to God as the source of whatever wisdom his lips shall speak. "It is not in me; God will give you an answer."

Then Joseph told the king what the dream meant. It was God's message to Pharaoh, a glimpse into the future. There would be seven years of great plenty in Egypt, and after these, seven years of sore famine. And the famine would be so grievous that it would eat up all the food of the abundant years. Joseph went on to advise the king what to do: to find a wise man and let him gather the extra food of the seven years of plenty and lay it up in great storehouses to meet the needs of the coming years of famine.

At once the king appointed Joseph himself to this place of honor and trust. He took off his signet ring and put it on Joseph's hand, thus giving him almost royal authority. He arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck-insignia of princely rank. He caused him to ride in a chariot next to the king's own, in a royal procession. He gave him a new name, Zaphnath-paaneah, which means "bread of life" -in allusion to Joseph's great service in saving the land from famine. He gave him also in marriage a daughter of one of Egypt's priests, thus elevating him into the priestly caste.

### **Let no One Grow Impatient in God's School**

All this honor came suddenly to Joseph. Was it not worth waiting for? The way seemed long from the pit at Dothan to the steps of Egypt's throne, yet in all these years God was training him for his work. The butler's dream came true in three days, but there was not much to it when it was fulfilled. It took thirteen years for Joseph's dreams to be realized. If a man's work is of small importance he can be prepared for it in a little while. But when he has a great mission to fulfil, it requires a long time to fit him for it. Let no one grow impatient in God's school, however slow the

advancement may be. The longer time God takes with your training, and the harder the discipline is, the larger may be your opportunity when the work is completed.

No doubt Joseph believed in God's providences in all those slow years when he was being prepared for his mission, and that this was the secret of his unconquerable hope and courage. He knew he was in God's school, and providence was a Bible to him. The same may become just as true in our life as it was in his. We may accept our condition as God's appointment for us, and if we do, we will accept it uncomplainingly. Then we may read God's will for us as clearly in each day's unfoldings as if the divine finger wrote it out for us on a sheet of paper under our eye. We shall cease then our restless struggling. We shall no longer fight for our own way, but will gladly take God's way.

Thus, and thus only, can any one be what God made him to be and do what God made him to do in this world. God has a plan for the life of every one of His children; but we can fulfill that plan only by reading daily the little page of God's Bible which He writes for us on the tablet of the day's providences. To be able to say always in disappointment, in sorrow, in loss, in the suffering of injuries at the hands of others, in the midst of pain and trial, "God is teaching me some new lesson, training me for some new duty, bringing out in me some new beauty of character," is to live as we should live. One incident left out in Joseph's career would have broken the chain and spoiled all. So it is in our lives: all the events are necessary to fit us for the place for which God is preparing us.

Joseph was an interpreter for God. In him we see shadowed forth God's purposes in Christ. Like our Lord, he was his father's beloved son. He was sent by his father to visit his brothers on an errand of love; so Jesus was sent. He was seized by his brothers and sold by them for silver; so was the Son of God. Through his bondage and humiliation he became the deliverer, the savior in an earthly sense, of his brothers and of the world; Jesus crucified became the Savior of the whole human family. Joseph as an interpreter for God was again typical of Christ, the great Interpreter. In the largest sense Jesus is the interpreter who alone has made plain the nature and the will of God. It is only in Christ that we can know God. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." As Jesus walked among men and was asked to reveal the Father, He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." He was the love of God made visible on the earth. Joseph interpreted men's dreams in which God's words were wrapped up. Jesus made plain and clear the meaning of the divine teachings. The mysteries are dispelled as we sit at Christ's feet. He is the great interpreter for God.

Joseph was an interpreter for God. Two instances are recorded in which he made known the meaning of dreams. The first was in the prison in Egypt -- that of the two officials from the king's palace, the butler and the baker. The other was that of Pharaoh. We know how important was the message of God that Joseph read in Pharaoh's dreams. He read the divine meaning that was enfolded in the dreams, and the king was enabled by gathering the surplus of the harvests in the years of plenty to feed his people and the starving people of other lands in the years of famine which followed.

## **There are Mysteries of God's Providence**

There is a sense in which we who know God's love, are called to be interpreters. When Joseph came to the cell of the prisoners from Pharaoh's palace, he saw a deep gloom on their faces. When he asked why they looked so sad, he learned that the cause was their uninterpreted dreams. They were sure that the dreams had a meaning which concerned their future, and they were burdened and anxious to know what the meaning was. So it is with people all about us. There is sadness in their faces. There are lines that tell of perplexed thought, of earnest questionings which get no answers; of deep cravings to know, which they cannot satisfy. It is the old story of these prisoners-unanswered questions, uninterpreted mysteries, unexplained trials, unsolved perplexities. Only a knowledge of the love of God and of His Plan of salvation for all -- the knowledge which He has entrusted to us as His ambassadors-can answer their perplexities and dispel their gloom.

Take another viewpoint: We all need an interpreter. We bend over the Bible and find texts we cannot understand. The Ethiopian treasurer sitting in his chariot, and reading the words of the ancient prophet-reading with deep interest, but not knowing what the words meant, illustrates the position of many. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" asked the interpreter who stood beside the chariot. "How can I, except some one shall guide me?" answered the, puzzled reader. Then the Evangelist sat beside him and showed him a blessed revelation of the Christ in the words which he had not been able to understand. Who of us has not bent over what seemed obscure Bible texts, unable to find out their sense, until some interpreter came and made the meaning plain?

But it is not alone for the words of God which are written in the Bible that we need interpreters. There are mysteries in providence; they come into every life at some time. There are dark days in which no light breaks through the clouds. There are nights in which no star shines. We sit with sad heart, and with gloom in our face. All things seem to be against us. We cry out with pain and fear. Yet in these very providences there are words of God hidden-good words, words of love, words of mercy. God gives His messages in many forms: in nature; in the lives of others; in His providences for us; in history; in circumstances. But how often does the writing baffle us! We need interpreters to read for us the mysterious handwriting.

## **Others Who have Interpreted God**

All of us in our turn are to be interpreters to others. Joseph found the two prisoners sad and his heart was touched with sympathy. He became eager to comfort them. That showed the noble spirit within him; he had a warm, gentle heart. No one can ever be greatly useful in this world who does not enter into the world's experiences. Christ was moved with compassion when He saw human pain, sorrow, sin. At once His love went out to the sufferer and He desired to help and to save.

Take the treasures of spiritual truth which we possess today, and see how they have come to us through God's interpreters. God took Moses up into the mount, and talked with him as a man talks with his friend, speaking to him great truths about Himself and His Son, and giving him statutes and laws for the guidance of men; then Moses became an interpreter to the world of the things God had shown him. David was an interpreter for God. God drew him close to His own heart and breathed heavenly songs into his soul; then David went forth, struck his harp, and sang, and the music is still cheering the world. John was an interpreter for God. He lay in Jesus' bosom and heard the beatings of that great heart of love, and learned the secrets of friendship with his Lord; then he passed out among men and told the world what he had heard and felt and seen; and

the air of the world has been warmer ever since and more of love has been beating in human hearts. Paul was an interpreter for God. Christ took him away from men and revealed Himself to him, opened to him the mystery of redemption as to no other man, and Paul wrote the thirteen or fourteen letters we have of his, which have been marvelous in their influence all these centuries. Another disciple in recent years, dissatisfied with the theories and creeds of men, set himself to discover, anew the truths of God's Plan of salvation hid away in the Bible, and by God's grace became an index finger pointing men to such a coordination and harmony of divine truth as had not appeared since the days of the Apostles. He too was an interpreter for God.

### **Must Live Near God to Interpret Him**

God gives to every one of us some message to speak out to others. , To every one of us, even the lowliest, God gives some secret of truth which He wants us to interpret in word or act to others. We cannot all make books, or write poems or hymns which shall bless men; but if we live close to Christ, there is not one to whom He will not give some revealing of grace or love; or to whom He will not give some experience of comfort in sorrow, some glimpse of light in darkness, some glimmering of heaven's glory in the midst of the world's care. That becomes your message, God's own peculiar word to you, to tell again to the world. Let each one speak out what God has given him to tell, that 'it may be a blessing in the earth.

It is the, interpretation of life that makes for most in blessing others. Our doctrines may be good, but unless we interpret their terms into sweet, beautiful living, our orthodoxy will count for little. If we would try to get men to know of the love of Christ, we never can do it in sermons and lessons alone; we must do it in deeds, in living, in ministry, in love that interprets itself in kindly helpfulness, and in truth that is wrought into honesty, integrity, uprightness and holiness. If we, like Joseph, are to be interpreters for God, we must live near to God, so as to hear what He has to say to us; we must study His truth that His words may become plain to us. Like Joseph, we must keep our heart gentle and warm, our hands clean, our faith strong, our character right, if we would be God's interpreters to others. Let us seek for the key to God's strange providences, that when we are beside those who are perplexed and in darkness, we may speak to them the interpreting word of divine peace. Let us get into our heart so much of the word, the spirit, and the love of Christ, that we may show in our daily life the beauty of Christ.

*(To be continued)*



## The Mystery of Godliness

*"Great is the mystery of godliness." - 1 Tim. 3:16.*

THE universe is mystery upon mystery. From the animalcule in the air and in the water, to the stars that burn in the firmament at inconceivably vast distances from the earth, there is mystery. And that is only another way of saying that we do not fully understand anything. The ancients believed in four elements -- earth, air, fire, and water. But today we have discovered one hundred three elements. For a long time it was believed that the atom was the smallest indivisible particle of matter, but we now talk of atoms being composed of electrons. The mysterious power of electricity that pervades the earth and water has been applied only during modern times. There is a mystery in a drop of water. What binds two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen together to form a molecule of water? We indeed give it a name, for we call it chemical affinity. But what causes that precise action to take place? And why are not the atoms combined in different proportions from what they are?

Why does a fly have eight thousand eyes? Why does a grasshopper have to have two hundred and seventy horny teeth in his body? Why does a codfish's eyes (formerly supposed to be simply a piece of jelly) have a crystalline lens composed of millions of microscopic fibers held together by millions of tiny hooks? Where does the earthworm get the power to grow a new head if his old one is cut off? Why is it that some plants eat insects and fully digest them? Why does a horse get up front feet first, and a cow hind feet first? Why? Well, we could just ask questions indefinitely, and about the only answer we would receive is, things are the way they are because they exist in obedience to the laws of their creation.

One of the greatest mysteries is that of germination. How do the biochemical elements that compose the embryo of the seed become invested with that wonderful property called life? A poet has expressed this thought in the words:

"Behold the mystery the brown earth shields,  
A little sowing, a swift touch of death,  
An unseen stirring of some quickening breath,  
And young grain covers all the barren fields."

And why does nature never make a mistake? Why do not oats forget that they are oats and come up barley or wheat? Verily, as the Bible says, God made everything after its own kind. Man may make mistakes, but not so the seeds of the earth. And after germination they unerringly grow upward and not downward for they seek the sunlight and must have its benefits in order to fructify in due time.

Great, then, is the mystery that is all around us. No one knows exactly what electricity is, what light is, or what life is. Man cannot create a single gnat and invest it with life. In the exercise of his powers he gets to a certain place divided off from the creation of life, and he has to be content with that.

## **SPIRITUAL THINGS**

Beyond the realm of material things are those things that belong to the domain of the spiritual. And godliness is one of these things, for it is connected with truth, with hope, and faith and love. So, then, it is easy to believe that if there is mystery in nature, there is the same element in godliness or godlikeness. In order to strive after this quality, one should know something about God. At least some of the mystery concerning him should be cleared up. When this is accomplished, there will still be much mystery left. To find out that God exists is the first great thing to learn about him. Next comes the great fact that he is love. The ascertaining of this fact gives our minds a big shove ahead. Then an elucidation of his plan and purpose helps to clarify the Bible and reduce its greatest mystery or secret, that is, "Christ in you the hope of glory," to comprehensible elements. But still we have some mystery left, and the Apostle refers to it when he says, "Great is the mystery of godliness." Paul says, "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." - 1 Timothy 3:16.

## **THE SON OF GOD**

Every age of the world has had its great characters, yet, Jesus seems to have been different from all of them. He had an individuality that was invested with mystery. To some of his disciples he said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Indeed, the world has not been able to bear them from that day to this. To the world the things that Jesus set forth in his teaching are incomprehensible. Our Lord was an exponent of the greatest law in the universe -- the law of love. Had the world received this law from him, what a world we should have had today!

The miracles of Jesus were invested with mystery. How could he feed five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes? This was not done in obedience to any known law. Neither was the healing of blind Bartimaeus, nor the raising of Lazarus, nor the walking upon the water. Could we have looked behind the scenes, we might have beheld a wonderful mechanism at work. Then we know, too, that angels can do things that men cannot do. The way of Jesus was shrouded in mystery. It was therefore a solitary way for the Master. None could enter into the great secret of his life.

There is mystery in the sacrifice of Jesus. No doubt millions have asked the question, Why did God not devise some other plan for the salvation of the human family? Why did it have to be true that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins"? And why were animals slain for hundreds of years to typify the greater sacrifices (Heb. 9:23) that were to come? Why were the first-born saved by the blood on the night of the Passover? Simply because of the fact that in due time the Lamb of God was to die on man's behalf. God arranged it to be that way. Could he have done differently? We do not know. He always does the best. We might ask, could he have made the bark of a tree to grow in the center of the tree instead of where it does grow? Probably he could, but it would not have been so good for the tree. The sacrificial death of Jesus has features of mystery about it, and that is equivalent to saying that we do not fully understand it. We believe that in the divine wisdom it was the best thing.

Then the resurrection of Jesus is something of a mystery. We know *why* he was raised up, but not *how*, except that it was by the power of God. It was hard for Thomas to accept the fact of our Lord's resurrection. It has been hard for others to accept it, and millions have rejected it. When the Apostle Paul preached to the people of Athens about the resurrection, we are informed that some mocked, and others said, "We will hear thee again on this matter." So dead was Jesus,

however, that he could do nothing toward raising himself to life. Peter said, "Him hath God raised up, to be a Prince and a Savior." It was a simple matter for the heavenly Father, the great Source of life, to give life to his beloved Son.

### **THE TRUTH THAT JESUS PROCLAIMED**

And think of the mystery which lay in the truth that Jesus proclaimed. It was mystery upon mystery. His disciples said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And his reply was, "Because to you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but to them that are without, it is not given.... Therefore I speak to them in parables, so that in seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; so that in them is fulfilled the prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah,... 'Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and I should heal them.'" What a strange thing to say! Did not our Lord want men to become converted? Apparently not. Had he wanted to draw great numbers to a state of conversion, he could have presented the truth in so simple a form and have backed it up with such power, that this purpose would have been accomplished. But Jesus never worked against the divine program. He knew that the time of the world's conversion had not come. So he said, "No man cometh unto me except the Father which sent me draw him." Here was another strange or mysterious thing. Why does God draw some, and not others? Why do some take up with the truth almost immediately, and others fail to grasp its import?

And the parables of our Lord seem simple enough, and yet there is a great depth of meaning in them. There is the parable of the Virgins and their lamps. Some think they know all about that parable. They know exactly when the midnight cry went forth, or will go forth. They know when the foolish virgins will say to the wise, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." They even know when the door will be shut. It is just wonderful how clear this entire matter is to them. They surely have been greatly favored of the Lord, that is, if they are right? But there comes the great question. Are they right?

It may be -- and this is what some Bible expositors think -- that every little point of this parable will not find fulfillment, and that the parable was chiefly set forth in order to *prepare us* for what is to come in a general way. The fact was that Jesus was to come back some time, and his followers were to be prepared for that event by having their lamps burning and by having oil in their vessels in order to keep their lamps supplied and thus prevent the flame from becoming extinguished.

Then there is the parable of the Unjust Steward. This man was accused of wasting his Lord's substance. He realized that he was to be put out of the stewardship. This was not a pleasant prospect. So he reduced the indebtedness of the people and thus secured their favor. In a worldly way it was a shrewd thing to do. And commenting on it the Master said, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Then our Lord went on to say, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." And how many are there who fully comprehend the meaning and the depth of this injunction?

It would seem that the parable of the Prodigal Son has a great wealth of meaning in it, as has also the parable of the Lost Sheep.

"There were ninety and nine that safely lay  
In the shelter of the fold;  
But one was out on the hills away,  
Far off from the gates of gold."

"And all thro' the mountains, thunder-riven,  
And up from the rocky steep,  
There arose a glad cry to the gate of heaven,  
'Rejoice! I have found My sheep!'  
And the angels echoed around the throne,  
'Rejoice! for the Lord brings back His own!'"

Oh, what a story! Oh, what a beautiful mystery is the mystery of divine love! We understand a little of it now, but we shall probably continue to explore its unfathomable depths throughout eternity.

### **MYSTERY UPON MYSTERY**

This coming of Jesus to the world was and is a complete mystery to men. The only ones who can understand it are those whose minds are enlightened by the divine spirit. Godliness was expressed in the life of Jesus in terms which said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Verily the Son of God was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

Nor does the world know his followers. Nor does the world understand them. To be in the world and not of it is certainly a mystery. To be sure, there is an explanation for it, but not an explanation that men in general can receive. Remarkable are the words of the Master where he said, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own. But ye are not of the world, for I have called you out of the world. Therefore the world hateth you, and ye know that it hated me before it hated you."

Just how does the divine spirit of truth operate in the heart and mind of the follower of the Lord? Is this all clear to us, or is there a mystery about it? Why is it that one person is spirit-begotten and another person is not, and yet they both have the same truth? Why is it that love is as a deep, crystal pure river flowing in the lives of some professed Christians, and like a small, muddy stream in the lives of others? Why do some persons operate in the power of the living God, and others, again, "have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof"?

One thing is plainly manifest, and that is that in order to impart something to others, we ourselves must have something to impart. And in order to rouse them up to godliness, we must possess this quality in our own hearts. Therein lay the power of Jesus. Whatever he asked others to do, he himself did. He did not say, "Go on," but, "Come on." He took the lead in all matters of godliness. He was humble, meek, pure, strong, fully consecrated to the divine will, reverent, peaceable, kind, active in service, possessed of a great vision of future glory. And if we, like He did, would preach love to others, we must be enriched by it in our own lives.

"Great is the mystery of godliness." In the beginning God made man in his own image, but where is that image today? If the race could be restored to that image, love would reign in the hearts of men. Ah, then there would be no wars, no inordinate striving after power, no worship of the god of gold, no breaking hearts in all the world, no, underpaid labor, no want, no care, no sin, no exploitation, no destruction of the world's produce to keep up the price, no gambling, no

robberies, no graft, no dishonesty, nothing to hurt nor to destroy in all God's holy mountain. And that is exactly what is to come in the eventuation of the eternal plan and purpose.

Godliness or godlikeness! Ah, that is what we need. It is simply to be like God in character. God is not the author of all the strife and confusion we find in the world today. Indeed he has not caused any of it. It has all come through a disregard of his laws. And he is permitting the world to reap the fruitage of its sowing. He does this in the confidence that he can and will make it all right in due time. The human family will enjoy the future all the more in contrast with the past. God is a god of peace and order, not one who favors strife and crime and fear. And likewise, God's people must be peacemakers if they are to be like him. And they must be true lovers of righteousness, and must always stand on its side.

"Great is the mystery of godliness." Yes, it is a heavenly mystery, and great is the mystery of heavenly things. The mighty orbs of space are invested with mystery. Who can gaze upon the starry heavens on a fine night and not realize this great fact? And who can gaze upon a real Christian-one who is strong to do and to dare in the cause of right, and who stands forth calm and serene in the midst of raging elements-and not be impressed with the thought that here is the highest form of true greatness, that here is one truly furnished unto all good works and fully clad in the complete panoply of the truth of the living God!

- *Walter Sargeant*

## The Question Box

### *Question:*

What is the meaning of St. Peter's statement that "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." - 2 Peter 1:20?

### *Answer:*

Strange as it may seem, this text is usually misunderstood to mean that any one presenting an exposition of Scripture different from that generally held by the Bible study group with which he associates must evidently be in error. His exposition, being at variance with that of the Class (or its leaders), is quite obviously a "private" interpretation. As such it must be rejected.

Such reasoning, of course, is quite wrong, but also, alas, quite common.

The right of private judgment -- private interpretation -- is claimed by all good Protestants. Unfortunately though, it is claimed by them as though it were their *exclusive* possession. Few of them ever, think of exercising the right for themselves, but too many deny it to their brethren. An exposition of Scripture comes their way which clashes with their preconceived ideas -- clashes with the ideas of their group. It is, therefore, unwelcome, and so, instead of investigating, and, if the circumstances warrant, embracing the new teaching, they reject it, rebuke the expositor, and refer to St. Peter's words in support of their position.

Let us turn to the text itself and seek to understand it in the light of its context.

In verses 16, 17, and 18, St. Peter had been speaking of our Lord's Transfiguration, and had insisted that he had been an eye-witness on that occasion, and had himself heard the voice from heaven which said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Nevertheless, sure as he was of these things which he had both seen and heard, there was something even "more sure." It was, he tells us, "The Word of Prophecy."

In a previous Question Box ("Herald," November 1949, page 159) we have been cautioned against a common misconception. Too often we conceive of "prophecy" as though it meant only "prediction." The "Word of Prophecy" is a term that includes all the moral teaching of the Bible, as well as its predictive utterances. Indeed the expression points rather to the moral than to the predictive element. And this body of moral teaching, broken only occasionally by predictions --the whole Bible indeed, insofar as it was known to him, the Apostle Peter affirms to be a safer guide to, faith than even that message from heaven which they who were eye-witnesses of the Transfiguration had made known. No doubt, as they stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and witnessed the honor and glory which Jesus received from the Father, the Apostles understood that the Son of Man was indeed the Son of God, but the very voice which pronounced him God's beloved Son bade them "*hear him.*" (Matt. 17:5.) The Transfiguration was a wonderful thing for them to have witnessed; indeed it was a miracle. And all, of our Lord's miracles are full of tender and wise instruction. Yet should we have learned their true meaning save for the words he spake?

Miracles are "wonders" that arrest our attention; but when our attention has been arrested, we still need to have it engaged and instructed. What the Apostles needed, what we all need, indeed, is not to see an occasional miracle, dazzling in its splendor, but a little light on the dark and troubled path we have to tread, a lamp that will burn steadfastly and helpfully over the work we have to do. Stars are more sublime, meteors more superb and dazzling, but the lamp shining in a dark place is infinitely closer to our practical needs. Plain rules of life that commend themselves to our conscience, in obedience to which we rise above "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and become better, happier mien-these, with some bright hope in the future to attract and draw us on, to assure us that if we do

God's will, we shall enter into God's rest -- these rules and this hope are worth far more to us in the conduct of our daily life than all the signs and wonders ever wrought. *These* are as the lamp by which we can walk and work; miracles are but as the distant stars or occasional flashing comets. And this lamp of rules for daily conduct is given us in the Word of Prophecy.

And here we come to the point of the question with which this discussion began. This wonderful "lamp," which shines so helpfully on the activities of our everyday lives, does so *because it has been lit and is fed by God himself*. Not one single statement in it is the private thought -- the best opinion or counsel -- of the Prophet uttering it. Those Ancient Worthies were no doubt capable of reaching sound conclusions as to the various problems of human life and conduct. Trained in the principles of truth and righteousness they might well be supposed to be able and willing to give wise and wholesome counsel. But the Word of Prophecy did not come that way, says St. Peter. It "came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the holy spirit."

No prophecy of Scripture is a private interpretation of the Prophet. That is to say, the Word of Prophecy is not a mere logical deduction from the facts of life and nature, by the Prophet uttering it; nor is it a mere guess at things to come, based on a knowledge of what has taken place in the past. A Prophet was not simply a man who, after studying a multitude of various facts, discovered the law which was common to them all, or inferred a maxim on which men would do well to act. Nor was he simply a man who, having studied the ethical forces which were at work in his age, arrived at a probable conjecture as to the results that would flow from them and give its form and pressure to the succeeding age. There was something higher than human wisdom in his utterances, something safer than the forecasts of human reason; for prophecy did not come from the will of man, but holy men, borne along by the holy spirit as the ship is borne before the wind, spake the words that were given them by God. Their prophecies -- their forthtellings -- were not their private interpretations of the moral facts and enigmas of human life; they were the authoritative interpretations of God, himself. There is a Divine Wisdom, therefore an infallible wisdom; -- there is a Divine Power, an Almighty Power in the inspired Word, even when it is most human and imperfect in outward form. And it is this Divine Wisdom and Power which make that Word a sure and certain guide to our feet. The lamp itself may be only an earthen vessel, unskillfully molded, by the hand of man; but else treasured splendor of the light, and the oil that feeds the light, are the gift of God.

The foregoing, we think, is the truth which St Peter is emphasizing. However, two other related truths should not be overlooked:

(1) The meaning of a Scripture cannot be clearly discerned except by such as are guided by the selfsame spirit as that which inspired the Prophet. - 1 Cor. 2:14.

(2) Since *all* Scripture given by inspiration of God is ;profitable (2 Tim. 3:16), it follows that any interpretation given to a single passage of Scripture, which conflicts with the general tenor of Scripture, cannot be the true interpretation.

In closing we submit a few translations of the Greek word translated in our Authorized Version "interpretation." According to the Diaglott a prophecy "is snot of its own solution." Rotherham translates: "No prophecy of Scripture becometh self-solving." As J. Rawson Lumby says, it is not of its own "untying." There are hard knots in 'the utterances which God puts in the mouths of his Prophets, which they themselves had not the power of untying. The same word appears in Mark 4:34, in reference to our Lord only in his case the power to "untie" was possessed. We quote: "When they were alone he expounded [literally, untied] all things to his disciples."

- P. L. Read.

## Encouraging Messages

Dear Friends:

Greetings. Please forward 15 leaflets of "God's Covenant People," which I hope to distribute among Hebrew people.

I consider the pamphlet very fine indeed. It gives a clear and concise word picture of the earthly phase of the coming Kingdom, especially as concerns the elect of the Hebrew race.

Sincerely, in the Lord's name,  
R. H. -- B. C.

Dear Brethren:

Greetings of love in Jesus' dear name.

I have been reading over again Brother Streeter's Volume on Daniel and Vol. I on the Revelation, and it has inspired in me a great sense of loving appreciation for such a godly book, so true and balanced in interpretation, which reveals so wonderfully the historical counterpart of the prophetic symbols. Amid all the interpretations I have read, I think it is the best balanced and reliable guide to a true understanding.

I think it was a very wise step for the "Herald" Editors to decide to have it published in book form. To have refrained from doing so, would have indeed been a great loss to prophetic students.

I was greatly moved by the account of the intervention of the Lord on behalf of his Church at a very critical time in her history, and the courage of Luther and other godly men to take their stand for the Truth against such odds, which inspires us of today to watch for any opportunity to carry on the warfare until the final victory is won.

I have always felt pained when some interpreters of Revelation have implicated such' godly reformers as Wesley and Calvin on the side of the forces of darkness, which I can now see was very wrong and unjust. It is good to see that the Truth vindicates them. It seems certain that the final phase of this battle of light against darkness, the true Church against the false, is now right in front of us, and it behooves us to watch and earnestly pray that we may be ready at any, time to take our stand in the battle for the Lord and his holy cause. It is good in these days, of waiting to go back over the fight of the past and note the faithful warriors of the Lord as they fought so bravely for the cause of their Lord and Master. The great Adversary can use the present time of patient waiting to take us off our guard, and weaken us for the fight to come. So let us afresh pledge ourselves to maintain the battle handed on to us by the warriors of by gone days. We have entered upon a year which may bring developments in the Plan of God for the removal of the present evil order to clear the way for the Kingdom and reign of Christ. But for, the people of God, the dark clouds now enveloping the earth are full of hope for the dawn of day.

I felt inspired to write and express to you these few thoughts, hoping they may be helpful. Love and best wishes in the Lord. - 1 Cor. 15:58.

Yours by His grace,  
F. W. F. -- Eng.



Dear Brethren:

Loving greetings in our Jesus' dear name.

Since November the Class has been carrying an advertisement every day in the personal column which reads as follows: "Any one interested in an informal Bible study, call; phone ... "

In response to the advertisement, we have had about seventy five phone calls, most of which were from very interested people asking questions about the group and from the Bible. They were very happy to hear we base our fellowship on the unity of spirit which we have through Jesus Christ.

From the phone calls thus far, six people came to visit the class, and two continue coming every week. One family, mother and daughter, we visit once a week and study with them at their home, for the mother is a shut in. The latter express great joy and praise to God for this opportunity to study the Bible. . .

God bless you. Our warmest Christian love to you and all the dear brethren.

Yours by his grace,  
C. V. -- N. Y.