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"Men Ought Always to Pray"

*And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought
always to pray, and not to faint. - Luke 18:1.*

PRAY without ceasing" is the exhortation of the Apostle Paul -- and how often have attempts been made to explain away those words, with an implication that they are not to be taken literally. Efforts have been made to show that the Apostle meant something different from what his words suggest, and such so-called "explanations" have eased the consciences of many who have found the subject of *Prayer* to be one of the hardest lessons to learn in the school of Christ. Such reasonings and explanations, however, are due to a misunderstanding of the whole subject, and failure to rightly appreciate the true meaning of prayer. This brief consideration of a subject so vast and important will not have been unprofitable to the reader if there can be established in the mind some of the fundamentals upon which all true prayer must be built.

Andrew Murray has written: "It is one of the terrible marks of the diseased state of the Christian life in these days, that there are so many that rest content without the distinct experience of answered prayer. They pray daily, but know little of direct, definite answer to prayer as the rule of their daily life." How many there are who must confess the truth of that statement in their own individual experiences.

Experience and observation would teach that there are few of the Lord's people who would claim to have reached the stage of Christian experience and development where they are *always* at rest in the Lord; when the experience is one of *unbroken* peace and quiet trust, be the days calm or stormy. Not many would claim that they have *never* an anxious thought or care. How sadly it must be confessed that "the inner life" -- the actual Christian experience, in contrast with its outward manifestation, is made up of "fits and starts," jerks and stops, zealous endeavor and lukewarmness. Yet, Paul the Apostle describes the *normal life* of one who is fully living up to his privileges as free from anxiety and care, content in *every* circumstance, and grateful *in every* experience. "Rejoice in the Lord *always*;" he writes, and "again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but *in everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." - Phil. 4:4-7, *R.S.V.*

We are living in critical days, not only in the history of the world, but also in Christian experience. The spirit of the time in which we live and the tempo of life is such, that almost unconsciously the child of God is carried along on the outer edge of the stream of worldliness and restlessness. There is so much to be done, so little time in which to do it! To many observers it would appear that the duties of life weigh upon God's people more heavily than upon those who make no profession of Christian experience. It may be that to many, the Christian life appears dull and empty, but little do *they* know that so often duties and cares and many activities so fill the passing hours that the vital and most essential things in the Christian life are often neglected or hurriedly performed.

Do we wonder why we are so frequently worried and fretful? We know that we ought to be "anxious for *nothing*," yet often there is anxiety concerning matters which have to do with the material comforts and well-being of ourselves or those with whom we are connected. Of course we know our Heavenly Father has promised to supply *every* need, but maybe his view of our real needs does not always conform to our conception; thus we find ourselves occupied with this thing, or with that matter, which we think *must receive our attention*, and which, when completed, has left little or no time for those spiritual exercises which ought to have had our first and foremost thoughts. How lovely are those sweet words of Jesus-never was there a time as today when it is so needful for the message to sink into our hearts:

"You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not *life* more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For *the Gentiles seek all these things*; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. *But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*" - Matt. 6:24-33, R.S.V.

Whether or not we are "seeking *first* the :Kingdom of God and his righteousness" must be judged by the intensity of our "prayer life."

What is prayer, and what are the conditions upon which all prayer must be based? How many and varied are the definitions which have been given in an endeavor to explain prayer. To the shallower mind, prayer is just asking for things that are desired. How many there are whose only approach to God is on the basis of their wants and wishes! How many there are who go to God when trouble comes into their lives, or when they have tried every other avenue of escape, seeming to think that God exists only to get them out of their "scrapes" and difficulties! Such, of course, know nothing whatever about true prayer.

Others will describe prayer in the words of the hymn-writer:

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire
Uttered or unexpressed."

But does that accurately define true prayer? Is prayer merely an earnest longing after something, whether expressed with words of the lips or not? How many desires one may have—longings of the heart, secret longings! Indeed, how many noble and good desires one may have which ought not to be included in our petitions to God! *Prayer is* much more than a "sincere desire," and the writer of those words did not intend that they should be used as a complete definition. Taken in their entirety the words of the hymn writer are a true and beautiful description of prayer:

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.

"Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.

"Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,
Returning from his ways;
While angels in their songs rejoice,
And cry: Behold he prays!

*"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gates of death;
He enters heaven with prayer.*

"O Thou by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way!
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod:
Lord, teach us how to pray!"

"THE CHRISTIAN'S VITAL BREATH"

"Prayer is *the Christian's vital breath, -- The Christians native air.*" If that is true, how many unhealthy Christians there must be! How few who breathe freely and deeply of their "native air"! Can we wonder that Paul exhorts us to "*pray without ceasing*"? One cannot live long without air, and a Christian cannot live properly without prayer. If breathing is not consistent and regular, if it is not ceaseless, can we wonder that we are sickly and weak? Can we wonder that we are subject to anxiety and care, fretfulness and discontent and restlessness? How evident it must be that *prayer is* something more than a few hurried words to God in the morning rush, or a few sleepy expressions as we retire to our rest at night.

Prayer is an atmosphere in which we must live, if we are to live the life to which God has invited us. It has been well said: "Prayer is the breath of the new nature within. Our breathing is a constant source of renewal to our bodies. We eat three or four times a day; but we breathe *all day long, all night too.*" We may miss a meal or two without any harmful effects, but the air we

breathe cannot be withheld from us for many moments without endangering the life. If we do not breathe freely and deeply, filling the lungs with fresh, clean air, we fail to enjoy the full blessing of health, vitality, and strength. Is there not a spiritual analogy? Quite rightly we ought to be particular about our spiritual food, partaking regularly of "our daily bread," *but more urgent than this is the need for deep and regular breathing -- for ceaseless prayer*, which will feed not only the mind, but the whole being, the new life which we now live in Christ Jesus. Yes, indeed,

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air."

(To be continued.)

- *Edwin Allbon, Eng.*

"Fearfully and Wonderfully Made"

Psalm 139:14,15

The following paragraphs appeared in a recent issue of Moody Monthly, and are reprinted here by permission. They are adapted from a sequence of "The Prior Claim," a gospel-science film produced by Dr. Irwin A. Moon in the Moody Institute of Science studios. - Ed. Com.

Of all the wonders of the world, the human brain is probably the most amazing -- and the most mystifying.

Men have ignored it, abused it, accomplished magnificent feats with it. Medical researchers have dissected it and psychiatrists have psychoanalyzed it. Still no one really understands what makes it tick. However, experts tell us that no man has ever used more than 0.2 per cent of his full mental capacity.

If men like Shakespeare, Beethoven and Einstein have used only 0.2 per cent of their mental capacities we ordinary folk must use such a minute part of our brains it's hardly noticeable!

And yet we are told that there are more electrical circuits and more electronic equivalent in a single brain than in all radio and television stations of the whole world put together! That's a lot of wires and machinery.

Here is another comparison which may give you a better idea of the staggering proportions of the human brain. If a man could build the electronic equivalent of the human brain, it would require a building three times the size of the Empire State building to house it, all the power generated by Niagara Falls to run it and all the water of Niagara Falls to cool it.

Only God could have put that much equipment into such a small space as the human head.

God has a claim on our lives through the undeniable right of creation. But He has an even stronger claim through the right of purchase. God says, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (Cor. 6:19,20).

God has bought us; not to enslave us, but to free us from our slavery to sin. The purchase price? The life of His own Son, freely given that we might live. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were *yet* sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Discipline

(Continued from last issue)

*"He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me,
I shall come forth as gold." - Job 23:10.*

GOD'S testimony at the first respecting Job was that he was "a perfect and an upright man," and we have Job's repeated declaration of his complete devotion to the will of God so far as he understood it. But how much he had yet to learn! God's discipline followed him to make of him a still nobler character. Just so it is with the Lord's children of this Gospel Age. They, too, are considered by him at the very beginning of their consecrated life as "perfect and upright"; they are "justified by faith," and the "righteousness of the Law [human perfection]" is reckoned as "fulfilled in them" because they are "walking after the spirit." Even beyond that, we are assured by the Lord that "the Father himself loveth you," and by St. John that even *"now* are we the *sons of God.*" Yet how much discipline has followed! and how impossible it would have been for these sons, *unaided* by the Father's disciplinary providences, to have made the necessary progress down through the years of their life toward their goal, "conformation to the image of God's dear Son," Jesus Christ, their pattern! Surely such can draw comfort, re-assurance, and courage from the implied declaration that there is *no son* whom the father chasteneth not; and that if we respond, we may, *with this assistance*, become "partakers of his holiness." - Heb. 12:5-10.

While enduring his grievous affliction, Job gave expression to many loyal and reverent testimonies, among them one oft-quoted, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," and the confident assurance that "He also shall be my salvation; for an hypocrite shall not come before him." (Job 13:15, 16.) But mixed with this confidence a note of complaint and questioning is apparent: Why? Why? -- is the undertone; defense of self; discouragement; undeserved hardships! We discern this in Job 23:1-10: conflicting thoughts and reasonings occupying his mind -- O that Thou wouldst come to me--or that I might come to Thee; and have the solution, understand the meaning of this sore trial, and have an assurance that all is well in my relationship to Thee, notwithstanding this experience!

Saints have similar experiences, and conflicting thoughts -- do they not? How often do they say "Why?" when apparent misfortune overtakes them or their dear ones. Sometimes they may have even been vehement and impatient in their reaction to a great and sore trial, and sometimes--with humble penitence we acknowledge it--in a comparatively small and unimportant disappointment or irritating situation. Such may gain encouragement and inspiration from Job's final conclusion in the foregoing passage: "But he knoweth the way that I take [even though I am not permitted to come to God and talk to him about my situation, and he does not come to me and explain]: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10.) And so it is with saints: Many things they are not able to explain or at once discern the value of, but they can *"learn,"* as St. Paul did, "to be *content*"; to *"count* it all *joy* when they fall into divers trials and temptations"; to *"glory* in tribulations also: *knowing*" the gains in character development, otherwise unobtainable, will insure them against being disappointed in the great hope which they entertain. -- Phil. 4:11; James 1:2; Rom. 5:3-5.

God did not answer Job's questions, but he let Elihu, the *godly* young man who was a deeply interested bystander and listener to the discussion between Job and his three friends, present the philosophy of chastening, or discipline; namely, that God was *speaking* to the afflicted Job, and to all of his servants likewise--in their affliction. Elihu's discourse occupies chapters 32 to 37, and

then we enter the final section of the Book in which Jehovah speaks to Job (chapters 38 to 41), and in chapter 42 -- the grand climax.

God introduces his majestic answer to Job by asking the question, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" Job does not answer this query at once, but does so later. First God reminds him of some of the wonders of creation: "Where *wast thou* when *I* laid the foundations of the earth? . . . Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? ... Who shut up the sea with doors when it brake forth ... and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed? Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the day-spring [the sun) to know his place? . . . Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? ... Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" And then, in chapters 38 and 39, God continues to remind Job of how little he knows of the wonders of nature and the infinite wisdom and power displayed therein; what does he know of the creation of darkness, the light, frost, ice, snow, lightning, thunder, the stars, etc., etc.? In Job 40:2, after thus reminding Job of how little he knows of the wisdom that designed and maintains the universe, God asks the searching question, "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it."

Job had come perilously near to "contending" with, and "instructing" the Almighty, and his answer is: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer; *yea*, twice; but I will proceed no further." But now God has some further message for Job -- and shall we not say for *us*, through him? "Then answered the LORD unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" (Job 40:6-8.) Following, in poetic language God suggests that if Job is able to determine what is desirable and necessary with respect to his eternal welfare, if he desires to substitute *his* wisdom in such matters rather than accept without question *God's providence* in his life, then he should be prepared to deal with the whole problem of sin and evil in high places. He says, You should be able to "Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together ..." Then, when and if you are able to do *this (!)* -- "Then will I confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee." And, in addition to the moral lesson in these words, what a glorious intimation of the eternal purpose of the Creator, that evil will be completely restrained and all evil-doers destroyed. "Wait for it; it will surely come: it will not tarry"!

JOB'S FINAL CONFESSION

In the latter part of chapter 40, and chapter 41, God calls to Job's attention the enormous size and strength of some of the larger animals and sea creatures -- evidently to further impress upon him the divine wisdom and power. And these revelations had their intended effect. In Job 42:1-6 Job replies, "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought of thine can be hindered [margin]." While we cannot doubt that Job had previously believed in God's almighty power, yet it seems that he had not fully realized the inconsistency of that conviction with the disposition to question or find fault with God's permission of his own misfortunes. Now he answers the query that God had voiced (Job 38:2): "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? *therefore have I* uttered what I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." - Job 42:3.

Here is an inspiring example of self judgment: "I am the one," says Job. Others -- his three "miserable comforters" -had been more guilty than he of this error, but Job's first thought is as to whether he, himself, had obscured the truth by speaking unadvisedly. Incidentally, how often has that same error been manifest even among those who, like Job, were God's servants or professed

to be such. What a valuable lesson we may draw from Job's prompt acknowledging of his mistake, even though still in his great affliction, and his humble repentance. He continues: "Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee [I am now fully attentive], and declare *thou unto me*, I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

The refreshing candor with which Job responded to God's reproof indicated an intelligent grasp of a principle which is too often overlooked; namely, that (as some one has well said) "The least fault in *self*, unjudged and unrepented of, is of *far more importance* than ten thousand grievous sins we may discern in *others*." God was preparing Job for a great service, both to his three presumptuous friends, as we shall see in the final act of this great drama, but also far beyond that; preparing him to be one of those "princes in all the earth," with an important part in the restoration of mankind to their normal and happy destiny as human sons of the Creator. His prompt judgment of self, advanced and shortened the period of his discipline, no doubt, even as it is with us: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor. 11:31.) May the illustration of this principle in Job sink deeply into our minds and hearts. Let us not be diverted from appropriate self judgment and self-reproof, so tremendously important to our destiny, by looking about and seeing others who, perhaps quite truly and obviously, are guilty of greater errors of word or conduct. Job's three erring friends were not being overlooked: but Job was being first tested and developed so that he could be the principal instrument for their reproof and their instruction through his exhibition of meekness, patience, and loving, priestly intercession on their behalf. And just so the Apostle says of the saints: God has "in a readiness to punish *all* disobedience, when *your* obedience is *fulfilled*." - 2 Cor. 10:6.

In chapter 42, the scene changes, and God addresses the three cynical friends of Job, who had impugned his sincerity, and insisted that his misfortunes were the judgment of God upon his hypocrisy and sin. They had, much more than Job, "hidden counsel [wisdom, truth] *by words* without knowledge"; and by claiming that they were speaking for God, they had misrepresented the divine purpose controlling in the life of Job. What astonishment it must have been to these self-appointed spokesmen for Jehovah, when they were told that "My wrath is kindled against thee ... for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath"! And then the humiliating instruction: "Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up *for yourselves* a burnt offering: and my servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly . . ." - Job 42:7, 8.

How inspiring the confidence God had in his servant Job! Job -- still suffering from his loathsome disease, an outcast from friends and family, still "sitting down among the ashes" (Job 2:8) -- yet now humbly submitted to the divine discipline; and with such an attainment of Godlike love that he was able to realize the far greater seriousness of the plight of these men now exposed to God's displeasure and wrath. He did not-as some might have been weak enough to say-"Well, you deserve to suffer God's displeasure; *I told* you over and over again, that you were doing wrong in maligning and condemning me!" Not a word of recrimination is in the record, but merely that "the LORD also accepted Job." But in that final test the results were not only of vital import for his friends, but it also marked the completion of Job's discipline-"And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before"! - Job 42:10.

"TRIBULATION WORKETH"

"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"! Why, we again ask, does God discipline-yes, scourge-every son whom he receiveth into that intimate relationship? And the correct answer unquestionably is, Because we are *capable* of greater development than we would attain otherwise. Undoubtedly we would fail to apply ourselves as completely as we could; we would fail to study God's Word and his will as therein expounded as diligently as we might; we would fail to "observe his ways to draw near in prayer and supplication, to fully feel the need of God's intimate fellowship, his love and assistance; we would be the more readily led away from our "first love" -- if our devoted and loving Father, the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort," did not help us through discipline, suffering, distress, to know him personally, experimentally -- so that we too can say, "But now mine eye seeth thee"!

Let us view this subject with the utmost candor and realism. Job's discipline was severe; so was that of Jesus, Peter, Paul, and other saints. But how worthwhile! How sublime were the results to them-and for eternity! The Lord's message comes to us (and comes with added force, when we remember that he sent it after he had passed his own great ordeal), "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." Thus far in the lives of some of us, God's discipline may have been in the *smaller matters*; but our reaction to each trying experience is important. It is an opportunity to "exercise ourselves unto godliness"; it will, if we respond with humble submission, add to our strength of character-to the "crystallization of a Christlike character" in us, as dear Brother Russell described it. (*Reprints*, R5080.) However, if God's necessary discipline, administered in infinite wisdom and love, has not yet touched our *dearest* possessions (or treasures of other kinds-health, comfort, activity) it may do so ere we finish our course. *The most searching tests* to which we could be safely subjected may be permitted; (although our Father "will not permit us to be tested *above* that we are able to bear").

As the days and years pass, let us endeavor, above all else, to be prepared *for these* tests: to "think it not strange concerning the fire that is to try us, as though some strange thing happened unto us, but to rejoice that we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed we may be glad also with exceeding joy." - 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Peter 4:12, 13.

How can we be prepared for this assured "discipline," this certain "scourging"? Only by viewing our consecration with the utmost seriousness. We need, dear brethren, to *live* (so to speak) in the Word of God: to "let the words of Christ *dwell in us richly*"; and to apply them with "simplicity and godly sincerity." Thus may we be prepared: "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience anal long-suffering with joyfulness." - Col. 1:11.

- W. J. Hollister

Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 16

"And though I have all faith . . . and have not love, I am nothing." -- 1 Cor. 13:2

THUS far in our consideration of "his" gospel theme, as it is summarized in the seventeenth verse of chapter one of our epistle, one point has stood out with marked emphasis: The Gospel is not a revised statement of what God requires from man but is the glorious news concerning what God has done and is doing and will do for man. On this point an able writer has remarked:

"I believe that the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian church has ever suffered has been the effort of men to earn rather than to receive their salvation. And the reason preaching is so ineffectual is that it calls on men oftener to work for God than to behold God working for them. If for every rebuke we utter of men's vices, we were to put forth a claim upon their hearts -- if for every assertion of Gods demands from them, we could substitute a display of his kindness to them -- if side by side with every warning of death, we could exhibit proofs and promises of . . . [eternal life] -- if in fine instead of assuming the being of an awful Deity (which men are always unwilling, sometimes unable to conceive, though they dare not deny) we were to show them a near, visible, inevitable but all beneficent Deity, whose presence makes the earth itself a heaven, I think there would be fewer deaf children sitting in the market place."

We have seen, too, that the faith which receives this gift from God is in the Apostles usage of that term not credulity nor superstition nor yet the blind acceptance of something contrary to reason but intelligent belief. "Faith is produced by testimony, [and] . . . as far as testimony goes, faith may go; but where the testimony stops, faith must and will stop.

The testimony concerning Jesus tells us that he was born of Mary in Bethlehem -- was baptized of John in Jordan and commenced his ministry in the hill country of Galilee -- was crucified on Calvary, and was buried in Joseph's new tomb. Now, suppose the testimony had stopped at this point. How much faith would any person have had today in his *resurrection, ascension, and glorification* ? Just none at all. As far as testimony goes, faith may go, but no further; all beyond is mere speculative opinion. Our faith may be strengthened or weakened by increasing or weakening the testimony. We have faith in the testimony of men, and we have faith in the testimony of God, . . . [and] our faith in the testimony of God is as much stronger than our faith in the testimony of men as we regard God superior to man and his testimony more reliable than that of man. This difference -- no more, no less. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. "

With the Heart Man Believeth

We have said that faith is belief, and indeed " *faith and belief* represent the same Greek and the same Hebrew word. Their meaning in the Bible is therefore absolutely the same." Yet none should make the mistake of supposing that faith, in St. Paul's mind, is "a bare holding either the atoning work of Christ or any other truths of revelation for true; it is a loving and soul constraining self surrender to them, so that they are grasped by the moral no less than by the intellectual man." "Faith is an act partly of the intelligence and partly of the will." "This faith must be in us, as something personal and living before we can bring forth the external fruits and works of righteousness.

Our faith may be in our creed, that half way house between the Bible and the heart; it may be in our intellect, that mid station between the mind of God and the will of man. But this is not enough. A creed religion is apt to be disputatious, busy with mere dogmatic moralities, defending nice distinctions, and hovering forever over sectarian issues. Intellectual religion is speculative, toiling at definitions and exhausting its energies on logical inferences. And if ones piety stops at either one of these stations -- at the intellect or the creed -- that mans religion is vain. If these things be *in you* . "Our faith must come to us through the brain indeed. But it cannot stop there. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The mind takes the truth from the Scriptures, weighs it, per chance, in the scales of some tried and standard confession and then distills it into the heart, its richest essence, its finest life, condensed and deposited there. And nothing can evolve from itself a holy, self denying, and truly benevolent life like this. A germ of faith will make a giant in activity. That faith be in us rather than external to us is of the very highest importance then.

You know the difference between an opinion and a conviction. The one is what we think; the other is what we are. Our opinions may sit lightly on us, but our convictions are the iron in our blood that make the very strength and stalwartness of our manhood. And faith as an active grace is simply Christian conviction.

It is what we believe and feel and are upon Divine questions and promises. And it is the only thing that can give a rooted strength and stability to our Christian life." The mere intellectual appreciation that is divorced from all will and love profits nothing (1 Cor. 13:2). No one will deny that the devils have a right belief in the existence of God. They believe but wish the facts were otherwise. Faith on the contrary is the substance of things " *hoped for*."

"If we believe that God is what his name implies, the Self existing One, the all powerful, all wise, all just and all loving Creator and if we believe that he is the rewarded of those who diligently seek him, the effect will be that we will *seek* him -- seek to know and to understand his Word. And knowing and understanding his Word we will have confidence in it. And having confidence in it we will direct our course in life accordingly."

What Is the Active Principle of Faith?

The question naturally arises as to the reason God has set such a premium on faith. Why does he justify by faith rather than by one of the other graces? Why not by fortitude, patience, meekness, gentleness, humility; above all, why not by love? What is there in faith that gives it such value in Gods sight? We answer that faith is the fertile soil in which all other graces must have their root if they are to grow to maturity. The wise man has said that as a man "thinketh [believeth] in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

If therefore in our hearts we have true faith, the manifestation of all the other graces will appear in our conduct. Our lives will be (or become) characterized by fortitude, patience, meekness, gentleness, humility, love, etc. If we have in our hearts a living faith, we have in us the root of all the other graces; we have in us that which is already pregnant with them and will in due time under the guidance and by the power of the holy spirit produce them all. Whereas, if it were possible for our Christian life to begin with any one of them, even love, or with all of them together, without their root of faith being in us they would be without hope of reaching maturity. They must inevitably wither when subjected to a sufficiently strong test.

Furnish In Your Faith . . . Love

The Apostle Peter brings this to our attention in his Second Epistle (2 Pet. 1:5-8). There he shows the rounded out, well balanced condition in which a true Christian character matures. We are not to first mature faith and then to our matured faith add fortitude and then to matured fortitude add knowledge, etc. Weymouth's translation shows that we are to manifest *along with* our faith fortitude and knowledge, etc. He also tells in a footnote that the word translated "along with" is literally "in." From this it would appear that these graces are none other than the very ingredients of faith. Another able writer observes in this connection: "It is not simply *add*."

The word is a much more vital one. Rather it is *furnish in* your faith virtue and in your virtue knowledge and *in* your knowledge temperance. *Let your faith be so prolific* that out of it may be evolved the whole continuous and unfolding system of spiritual virtues. If these things be in you and abound, they will make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The inner and ever expanding life of faith will appear in the outward fruits and actions of piety, thus advancing you towards the perfect knowledge of Christ and full conformity to his character."

As further bearing on the fact that faith is the root of the other graces, we note the "fine touch of spiritual wisdom that appears in the disciples answer to the Lord when he instructed them in regard to the duty of forgiveness: If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying I repent, thou shalt forgive him. Exceeding strain is this to put upon our patience [and to put upon our love] -- offense crowding on offense, and injury treading on injury, till it has grown to a sevenfold affront. Lord teach us *patience*, train us in the secret of thy Divine *forbearance*, do they ask? No! [Do they plead, Lord, in crease our *love*? No!] The Apostles said unto the Lord: Increase our *faith*. They asked that the *root* might be strengthened, to brace the tree for such trial and resistance." "Do we stop to think when we are taxed with some extraordinary service that the surest way to be fit for it is to have our *faith* strengthened; that we must *believe* more if we would be able to do more?" While therefore it is possible and doubtless for clarity of thought desirable to separate faith from love in our ideas, it should ever be remembered that they are inseparable in fact. If it were possible for one to have a living faith and not to have love, we would expect to see some examples in the Bible. We find on the contrary that the faith which justifies is never "represented as the ground of acceptance with God without the right conduct which is its natural sequence."

It was not faith as expounded and exemplified by his antinomian followers that St. James condemned as dead. While "it is faith alone which justifies yet the faith that justifies is not alone, just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth yet it is . . . always conjoined with light." The only faith recognized by St. Paul as worthy of the name is that in which love is its active principle, or to use his own words: "Faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6).

Works and Good Works Distinguished

St. Paul says we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28). St. James tells us that by works a man is justified and not by faith only (James 2:24). How are these apparently inconsistent statements to be reconciled? We say apparently inconsistent for we are persuaded and will endeavor to show that no real inconsistency exists.

First we inquire: When St. Paul says we are justified by faith without deeds or works, to what works does he refer? The answer, as all will agree, is works of or done under the Law, the Law of Moses. St. James, however, in speaking of works refers to works of faith, to good and acceptable

works. Now St. Paul "never calls those works which he says do not justify good works but simply works: works of the Law, deeds of the Law, dead works. "

These have nothing to do with the works of faith. Of these St. Paul elsewhere speaks, "and by a remarkable contrast he calls them again and again good works. For instance: By grace are ye saved through faith . . . not of *works*, lest any man should boast: for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto *good works*. This surely is a most pointed intimation that the works that do not justify and not good, or in other words are works *before* justification. As to whether works after that are good, whether they justify or not, he does not decide so expressly as St. James, the error he had to resist leading him another way. Against the Judaizing teachers he only says that our works must begin, continue, and end in faith.

"But to proceed: he speaks elsewhere of abounding in every *good* work, of being adorned with *good* works, of being well reported of for *good* works, diligently following every *good* work, of the *good* works of some being open beforehand, of being prepared unto every *good* work, of being thoroughly furnished unto all *good* works, of being a pattern of *good* works, of being zealous of *good* works, of being ready to every *good* work, of being careful to maintain *good* works, of providing unto love and *good* works, and of being made perfect in every *good* work. [See Eph 2:8-10; 2 Cor. 9:8; 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14; Heb 10:24; 13:21.]

Now surely this is very remarkable. St. James, though he means good works, drops the epithet and only says works! Why does St. Paul not do the same? Why is he always careful to add the word *good*, except that he had also to do with a sort of works with which St. James had not to do - - that the word *works* was already appropriated by him to those of the Law and therefore that the epithet *good* was necessary," lest works of faith should be confused with them? We see then that St. Paul, while conclusively showing that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the Law is far from asserting thereby that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the Gospel. He does not deny what St. James affirms: that by works (the good works by which faith is made perfect) a man is justified and not by faith only.

I Know Thy Works

"The world is full of works which have no root or nourishment in faith. They are useful and zealous and well directed, but they are not necessarily the outcome of a holy heart. Charity has come to be fashionable, and men and women conform to its demands to be in style. Good [?] works are the assessment society makes on those who are prosperous and many practice them to maintain their credit in polite circles.

Benevolence has assumed the character of a joint stock enterprise by which one part of the public relieves the needs of the other. So in fairs and concerts . . . people will eke out their shares and get their dividends of entertainment and pleasure. But there is nothing of humble, self denying, sanctified well doing in all this. These are the dead works spoken of in Scripture -- such as have no root in faith and love to God. For whatever is separated from its source becomes dead. Sunder a branch from the tree and it dies, though its form and substance remain unchanged.

Sunder the best and most approved Christian service from its relation to Christ and it becomes dead works.

It is equally true that apart from Christ we cannot be what God requires. Without Me -- that is, apart from and separated from Me -- ye can do nothing, says Christ. It is not the whole question,

then, whether our works are manly but whether they are also godly; whether they are human but whether they are also Divine; whether they command the praise of men but whether men beholding them shall glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Repentance from Dead Works

And, to show how radical these directions are, you remember that the scripture speaks of "*repentance* from dead works." We are to be sorry that we have sinned but also that we have been deceiving men and dishonoring God with the semblance of well doing when the enduring root and vital principle have been wanting. The works of righteousness cannot be taken on. The externals of Christianity are absolutely worthless . . . unless they are the outcome of what is radically and divinely internal. And if there is one thing we ought to be afraid of in these days of prevailing religious activity, it is that we may be overlaid with the outward forms of Christianity before we have been inlaid with its precious virtues. The danger is with us all, not so much that we shall become inactive as that our activity shall become uncoupled from our personal faith. By our associations and fellowships we may be so geared into the great prevailing movements that we shall move without our will; *our activity kept up while our spirituality declines; our public testimony growing loud while our closet cries are growing silent. "Whoso readeth let him understand."*

-- P. L. Read

My Companion

With me there walks a presence
Unseen to mortal view;
Hearing each word I utter:
Looking at all I do.
Watching to see what power
The truth to my life imparts,
Longing to see His image
Growing within my heart.
Oh! does my conduct please Him?
Can He my words approve?
Or do I daily grieve Him
By woeful lack of love?
How all my heart is yearning
More like my Lord to be;
Oh! Friend of unseen presence,
Help me to grow like Thee!

- R. F. Doney

A Study in Isaiah

Chapter 50

Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? - Isaiah 50:2.

GOD, in causing holy men of old to speak and write as they were moved by his spirit, has given us a storehouse of knowledge in the Old Testament Scriptures. And although the writers thereof sought earnestly to understand, yet they had to be content with knowing that not unto themselves but unto us did they minister the things of which they spoke. - 1 Pet. 1:10-12.

Jesus, in his revelation to John on the Isle of Patmos, reveals that these prophecies of old, which related to the hidden mystery of God and his great Plan of the Ages contingent thereon, could not be understood before he, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, had prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof. - Rev. 5:1-10.

In his boyhood days and up to the time that he was thirty years of age, Jesus was evidently a student of the Old Testament Scriptures; nevertheless, we read that it was following his baptism of the holy spirit at Jordan that "the heavens were opened unto him." Likewise, it was after the pouring out of the holy spirit at Pentecost, that the disciples began to understand the hidden mystery. No man knoweth the things of God save by the spirit of God. - 1 Cor. 2:10-14.

Who would have thought that the story of Abraham, his wives and children was intended to picture the Plan of God with respect to the salvation of mankind, did not the holy spirit, operating through the New Testament writers reveal its typical significance? It is evident, therefore, that God is his own interpreter, and that only those whose minds and hearts come under the operation of his holy spirit, can understand the hidden things of salvation. It is as we come to comprehend the significance of these Old Testament prophecies, that we begin to realize that the New Testament is largely a revealing of things already written. As some one has said: "As the New is in the Old concealed, so the Old is in the New revealed."

In verse 1 of this chapter (Isa. 50:1) we read -- "Thus saith the LORD [Jehovah], Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your own iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for *your* transgressions is your mother put away."

It is manifest that Jehovah God is prophetically addressing natural Israel at the time of their rejection and dispersion among the nations, for he not only cites their iniquities and transgressions, but in the next verse tells of the power he exhibited on their behalf in the land of Egypt; and he asks them two questions-questions that would appear very strange were it not for the holy spirit's revelation through the New Testament writings: "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?"

In the first question, natural Israel is represented as having had a mother whom Jehovah God, at one time recognized as being his wife. We can perceive at once that this is not a literal statement, but that the Prophet is using highly figurative language. And so we ask, Who or what could be the mother of Israel that once bore a wifely relationship to Jehovah, but was now put away, divorced?

Turning to Galatians, Gal. 4:21-31, we find that Paul gives us the answer. There he shows that Abraham in his relationship to his wives pictured God, and that the wife of whom Isaiah here speaks, was represented by the bondmaid Hagar, who pictured the Law Covenant; and that

Ishmael, Hagar's son, pictured the nation of Israel. Hagar, it will be recalled, was not the wedded wife of Abraham, but was the bondmaid of his true wife, Sarah, who, because- of her seeming inability to give birth, presented Hagar to Abraham as wife in order that she might have a seed by her. God had promised Abraham a seed, presumably through his wife, Sarah, but it seemed as though that promise would be of none effect, for Sarah passed the fertile stage of her life without giving birth to a child. No doubt the providence of God arranged these conditions in order that he might give us a true picture of the operation of his covenants.

It was not the time for God's original promise to become operative in bringing forth the seed; and so Paul tells us that 430 years following the promise of seed, the Law Covenant was added, which proved to be ineffective. Paul makes it very clear that natural Israel, being the child of the Law, could not be the seed of promise. He says: "The Covenant [original], that was confirmed *before* of God in Christ, the Law, which was 430 years after, *cannot disannul*, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the Law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." - Gal. 3:17-19.

The picture, we find, is true to the facts, for Abraham put Hagar and Ishmael away from him, just as God did with Israel and the Law Covenant, and the record is that it grieved him to do this. The reason given for this divorcement was that Ishmael, Hagar's child, persecuted Isaac, the child of promise; and the promise God had made, pictured by Sarah, demanded that the bondwoman and her child be cast out - Gen. 21:9-12.

In this prophecy God asks or demands of Israel, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?" The implication is clear: There was no bill of divorcement given, for there was no fault with the mother. The Law itself was good, but in the form of a bilateral covenant, could bring forth seed only through the works of the flesh, as Hagar, the bond-servant, could bring forth seed only in accordance with the course of nature, and not as a result of the promise.

The children of the Law, being bondservants of sin, were unable to gain the rewards of life and inheritance which the Law promised to those who would *keep* it, for no child of Adam could keep the perfect Law of God. Therefore, the Law was of none effect; it only served, to bring forth unto bondage. "If there had been a Law which could have given life," says Paul, "then verily righteousness would; have been by the Law." Since God foreknew the Law would prove ineffective in bringing forth seed unto life, why did he give it? It was given says Paul, "*because of transgressions* [i. e., to manifest their sinfulness and inability to keep God's perfect Law], till the Seed should come [the Christ, Head and Body - Gal. 3:16, 29] to whom the promise was made."

The Law, pictured in Hagar, being perfect, offered no excuse for divorcement. Therefore, God puts a second question to Israel: "Which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?" God was rich. As pictured in Abraham, he had no creditors. A provision of the Law shows that it was customary, when a man became involved in debt, to meet his obligation by selling his children into bondage until the debt was paid. (2 Kings 4:1; Lev. 25:39; Matt. 18:25.) But it is recorded that Abraham was a rich man, and had no obligations that he could not meet. Likewise, God needed not to enslave Israel, for he had no creditors. Therefore, he says: "Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away."

The record of natural Israel's history shows them to have been persecutors of the Lord's representatives all the way down, just as Ishmael persecuted the seed of promise; and when our Lord, the true Seed of promise came, antitypical Ishmael would not tolerate him. It was Israel's

own transgressions that brought about their rejection and made the Law Covenant of none effect.
- Rom. 7:12.

When Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was about to be stoned, he said:

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the holy spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the Prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before the coming of the just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the Law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." - Acts 7:51-53.

Jesus, knowing that he would be rejected and persecuted even unto death, lamented over Israel and said: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." - Matt. 23:37-39.

There are those who think the Law Covenant is still operative, but through the Prophet here, God shows that the Law Covenant would be put away, divorced at the time the nation of Israel was cast off from favor. It is true that Hagar, who pictured the Law, did not die immediately when she was cast off, but it must be remembered that it was not as a woman, but as the wife of Abraham that she came into the picture to represent a covenant. And when she was no longer recognized by Abraham as his wife, then she no longer pictured a covenant in operation, for she could not any more be a mother to children by Abraham.

In Isa. 50:2 we find God asking four additional questions of Israel. "Wherefore [why], when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?"

These questions have to do both collectively and individually with Israel's failure to measure up to the requirements of their covenant. Had their hearts been right, it would have been a different story. God through Moses had told them that if *they* would be obedient and walk in his statutes to keep his commandments, that they would be his peculiar treasure, and be granted life; but not one was able to claim that promise. Then God asks: "Is my hand shortened?" In other words, Is it that I am incompetent and have I no power? Is it my fault that you have not lived up to *your* agreement and have failed of the blessings promised? The reason no man could be found who could give to God a ransom for his brother was that it required a perfect man to be a corresponding price for Adam, and there were none. But had Israel believed God, and been faithful to the extent of their ability, the opportunity of becoming the Seed of Abraham that would be used to bless all the families of the earth, would doubtless have been confined to that nation. God, foreknowing their rebellious heart, foretold their loss of his special grace of being a called-out class in this Age, and warned them that his favor would go to believing Gentiles. He also recalls to their minds the great demonstrations of his power exercised on their behalf in Egypt, as the evidence that his hand was not shortened, for his own Arm brought salvation when there was no human arm that could save.

(To be concluded in the November issue.)

- J. T. Read

"What is Truth?"

This question is one which every sincere Christian should ask and seek to answer. We should learn to love and value truth for its own sake; to respect and honor it by owning and acknowledging it wherever we find it and by whomsoever presented. *A truth* presented by Satan himself is just *as true* as *a truth* stated by God.

Perhaps no class of people are more apt to overlook this fact than the Christian. How often do they in controversy overlook and ignore *truth* presented by their opponents. This is particularly the case when arguing with an *infidel*. *They* feel at perfect liberty to dispute everything he says on religious subjects. This is not the correct principle. Many infidels are *honest* -- as anxious to speak and believe the truth as are Christians--and if in converse with them we ignore truths which they may advance, we not only fail to convince them of our *truths*, but put an end to all hope of reaching them; for our failure to admit the evident truth which they advance begets in them contempt for the one who is not honest enough to admit one truth because he does not see how it can be reconciled to another. Accept truth wherever you find it, no matter what it contradicts, and rely for ability to afterwards harmonize it with others upon "the spirit of truth, which shall guide you into all truth," as Jesus promised, Truth, like a modest little flower in the wilderness of life, is surrounded and *almost* choked by the luxuriant growth of the weeds of error. If you would find it, you must be ever on the lookout. If you would see its beauty, you must brush aside the weeds of error and the brambles of bigotry. If you would possess it, you must stoop to get it.

Be not content with *one* flower of truth. Had one been sufficient, there would have been no more. Gather ever, seek for more.

Weave them together as a garland-"Bind them on thee as a bride doeth." "Bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of Chine heart; *so* shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man." - Proverbs 3:3, 4.

-Reprints, pp. R8, R9.

The Purport of the Revelation Messages

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." - Revelation 2:7.

IN THE messages of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, Christ is represented as judging the professing church. With "eyes as a flame of fire," he searches out what is the true spiritual condition, whether good or bad, and unerringly exposes that which is false and contrary to himself, as well as commends that which is true.

To many students of the Bible, the prevailing thought is that these seven epistles outline in brief seven historical stages of the Church; but all are not agreed as to the segment of time to be allotted to each division. Looking back from the vantage point of today, we may trace the progression of the visible Church as thus outlined, for we have available to us the works of many godly men who have studied history in connection with these epistles and have pointed out to us the analogy.

But be that as it may, we are missing the whole purport of these messages if history beforehand is all we see in them; for, judging as we do that we are living in the Laodicean period, we are concerned almost entirely with this last message to the exclusion of the others, and the exhortation to "hear what the spirit saith to the churches" (plural), so often repeated, falls on deaf ears. If all that was intended was to outline the changing conditions in the historical church, then it can be only a matter of historical interest as to what were the conditions in the so-called Ephesus period, Smyrna period, etc.; and those of the early periods could hardly be benefited by the messages to the later churches, for they could not know the future, nor that these letters outlined the future.

These messages are much more than pre-outlined history. In them is depicted seven general conditions, one of which might characterize any church at any time. It should be the part of all who have "ears to hear" to study these letters to see which defines the church of his fellowship, and be directed both in personal and church matters by the rebukes, corrections, warnings, encouragements, promises, set forth therein.

As is true of the whole Divine oracle, there is a depth of meaning in these epistles which will be heard and understood only by those whose ears have been attuned to hearing the Spirit of God speaking in the Word. In the preface to Chapter One we read: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." This is often taken to mean that there is a special blessing to those who hear this prophecy read, as well as to those who read it. But this is not the thought expressed. Rather it is, blessed is he that readeth and they that heed. It is the same thought expressed by Jesus in Mark 4:23-25: "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you. And to you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath [heard and heeded], to him shall be given: and he that hath not [heard and heeded], from him shall be taken away that which he hath." That is, the understanding of it will be lost to him; or as Luke records it, "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever bath [heeded], to him shall be given; and whosoever bath not [heeded], from him shall be taken that which he seemeth to have." (Luke 8:18.) Holding the truth in unrighteousness darkens the understanding. - Rom. 1:18-21.

Now, "hearing" (within the compass of the meaning of the word in the exhortation) does not come by just hearing the word read, for "hearing" implies obedient faith; and certainly we all

know many who even believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and who often hear it read in clear audible tones, but who manifest no response to its authority -no faith. To illustrate: In Romans 10:17 we read: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." It does not say that faith comes by hearing the word of God: it reads that "faith *cometh by hearing*, and *hearing* comes by the word of God" -- a far different thing. This can be seen by two totally different reactions to Jesus' teachings as recorded in John's sixth chapter, where, after having heard Jesus' wonderful discourses on "the bread of life," and after having heard him declare, "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood bath eternal life," some said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it," and "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" whereas Peter's reply was, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." All had heard the discourse, but some only heard Jesus say that they had to eat his (literal) flesh and drink his (literal) blood, while Peter and the rest of the twelve heard Jesus say "words of eternal life. Why the difference? Peter had been responding to Jesus' word, and God had opened his ears to hear the meaning of Jesus' discourse: for be it noted that on this occasion, as well as that recorded in Matthew 16:16, 17, Peter confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God;" and in the recorded reply of Jesus in Matthew 16:17, Peter is assured that he did not of himself recognize Jesus to be Christ, but that it was a revelation from the Father. It was because he was attuned to the message that Peter was given the understanding-he had "an ear to hear."

The seven letters are addressed to the angels of the various churches. In the *Authorized Version* it reads: *Unto* the angel of the Church of Ephesus, Smyrna, etc., write; while in the *Diaglott* we note that he was to "write *by* the messenger of the congregation." It has been suggested that there were seven messengers from the seven Churches who had come to visit John on Patmos; and that he was to send the seven messages by these seven men. However, there is no historical evidence that the Apocalyptic vision came while he had visitors; nor that he had visitors at all; thus there is no basis for this supposition- a supposition which gives rise to the interpretation that these seven messengers (seven stars of Rev. 1:16) represent seven particular men whose ministries were directed to the seven historical periods of the Church. If the seven stars represent seven individual ministries, we should be able to see in history seven clearly defined ministries that would contain these messages, and these messages alone. We cannot so find; for although many ministers or servants of God called attention to the true condition of the professing church of their day, there are none, the burden of whose message could be outlined by one of these letters, and this one letter alone; which must necessarily be the case if we are to accept the seven stars as representing seven distinct individuals.

For instance, the claim is made by some that Luther was the angel or messenger to the Philadelphia period, yet he did not especially call attention to this Philadelphia message, nor does the letter to Philadelphia outline Luther's ministry, or that of any other of the reformers. Many of the "present truth" people often refer to Pastor Russell as "the Laodicean messenger"; but although Brother Russell did call attention to the Laodicean message, we have found that other faithful pastors, unrelated to him in the ministry, have also pointed out that the message is especially applicable to our day. True, Brother Russell did proclaim the second presence of Christ, and Revelation 3:20 is thought to represent that fact; but the thought of the second presence has to be read into the passage, for on a careful study it will be seen that this depicts a *condition* in the professing church-not an occurrence; a condition where there is much religion with Christ shut out, (a Christian religion without Christ!). Although the professing church has closed the door to him, yet the promise of the Lord is, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to *him*, and will sup with *him* and he with me."

Here we will but briefly note that the Laodiceans to whom the letter was first directed, certainly were not to understand that Christ's Second Advent was already an accomplished fact.

The following quotations are from "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*" by Brother R. E. Streeter, pages 107-110:

"Again we urge the reader to observe that these Divine messages were addressed to the 'stars' or 'angels' of the seven Churches, and that the form of address to each of the symbolical messengers was the same. The *Common Version* renders it, 'Unto the angel of the Church . . . write.' The *Diaglott* translation, which in some instances is preferable to that of the *King James Version*, renders these words: 'By the messenger . . . write,' etc., instead of 'unto' or 'to the messenger . . . write,' as all other translations render them. Some who accept the *Diaglott* as the correct translation, when applying the messages to seven distinct periods of the Church's history, have interpreted the text as teaching that the messengers are to do the writing for these several periods -- a single individual writer for each period. This is manifestly not the correct interpretation of this passage as seen from verses 10, 11, and 19, where it is very plainly stated that St. John, himself, and not the angel is to do the writing. 'And I, [John] heard behind me a loud voice as of a trumpet, saying, What thou [John] seest write in a scroll, and send to those seven Congregations,' etc. 'Write therefore the things thou sawest, even those which are, and the things which are about to transpire after these.' These utterances comprehend everything contained in the Book of Revelation; therefore, St. John was the writer. St. John was also the sender, and the messages we are about to consider are the translations of the same into the English language, and the 'stars,' 'angels,' or messengers, primarily, were the representative bishops or pastors of the seven local Churches to whom they were sent. In view of the foregoing we *accept* the rendering as given by nearly all translations: 'To the angel . . . write' . . .

"We find that as the history of the Church has unfolded, the light has increased, and therefore more and more clearly do we see that these seven messages have been applicable to all of the Church throughout its entire history. There can be no doubt of the fact that there is contained in each and all of these messages very important matters that were intended by Christ to apply to all of God's consecrated ones throughout the entire Gospel Age. This is plainly implied, indeed, it is stated in the words of the Savior addressed to each Church: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith *unto the Churches*.' The vital importance of this exhortation is emphasized by the fact that these words are repeated seven times; and in each instance reference is made to *all* the Churches. (Rev. 2: 7,11,17,29; 3:6, 13,22.) Not to understand the matter thus would be to deprive the Church throughout the Age of the most edifying exhortations and warnings to be found in all the volume of Divine inspiration. . . .

"As one has well said: 'In dealing with these epistles, every man, of every age, has a Divine thermometer whereby to tell exactly where he or his church stands in Christ's judgment, and one constructed and delivered to him by Christ himself for this specific purpose. They tell what Christ's judgment of each of us is, and what we may expect in the great Day of his coming. In every age, and in every congregation, Christ is walking among his Churches, with open, flaming eyes; and these epistles give us his opinion of what his all-revealing glance discovers.'"

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

- F. A. Essler

The Question Box

THE BARREN FIG-TREE

Question:

Will you please discuss the Barren Fig-tree incident - Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-25?

In your discussion kindly answer the following questions:

1. Mark 11:13 states that "the time of figs was not yet." Notwithstanding this, its condemnation was evidently because it had no fruit. Please explain.
2. Did this barren fig-tree represent the Jewish nation?
3. If this fig-tree did represent the Jewish nation, how are we to reconcile the words of our Lord in Matthew 21:19 and Mark 11:14 that no fruit should grow on it henceforth *for ever*, with the general teaching of the Scriptures that Israel is yet to be restored?
4. When the disciples noted the withering effect of our Lord's condemnation of the tree, and called his attention to it, he replied: "Have faith in God." While we realize it is always proper to have faith in God, what was there in the circumstances which made his counsel especially appropriate to the disciples then?

Answer:

The first question certainly calls for an answer. On its surface this incident represents our Lord as acting unjustly. On the one hand it was not the time of the year when figs should be expected; while, on the other hand, the tree is condemned for not having any.

To avoid this difficulty which all admit, most scholars conclude that Mark meant something it is quite certain he did not say. They interpret his statement that "it was not the time of figs" to mean that it was not the season for gathering figs, or that the season for gathering figs had not yet passed. This view is advanced by Barnes in his New Testament Notes. A similar view, given by Pearce, is quoted approvingly by Wilson in the Emphatic Diaglott, in an elaborate footnote on Mark 11:13.

This view, as we see it, simply reverses what Mark says. He says the time of figs was not yet; they say, in effect, that it was. And, of course, if it was, the question as to the conduct of our Lord is solved.

Such a viewpoint, however, is certainly not supported in the word-for-word translation of the Emphatic Diaglott, nor even in the translation given in the right hand margin. Moreover, none of the other translations we have consulted differ in meaning from that given in the Authorized Version. The American Revised Version puts it in these words: "It was not the season of figs."

Furthermore, the context proves the accuracy of Mark's statement, for when our Lord came to this fig-tree, it was just before the Passover -- that is to say; in the spring of the year. According to competent testimony it would not be until late May or early June that the season for ripe figs would begin.

In view of these considerations it seems clear that the solution of the problem must be sought in another direction.

To begin with it will be helpful, if we have not already done so, to acquaint ourselves with the manner in which figs grow. According to an article in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, the branches of the fig-tree are straggled and naked in winter, but when the rains are nearly or quite over, small green knobs appear at the ends of the twigs. These are the young fruits -- the green figs. They are thus named in Canticles 2:13. The fruit, then, appears first, before the leaves appear. (This point, by the way, is correctly noted in the Diaglott footnote, previously mentioned.) Next the leaf-bud expands and the new pale green leaves soon more or less overshadow the little figs. When this occurs it is a sign that summer is not far away. To this familiar sign our Lord referred in Matthew 24:32, when he said:

"Now learn a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh."

With these facts before us let us return to the Barren Fig-tree incident. "It was not the season of figs" Mark tells us. It was also *too early for fig-leaves*, and that is the point generally overlooked. At that time of year neither leaves nor fruit were naturally to be looked for on a fig tree. This particular tree, however, unlike all the other fig-trees did have leaves, *and therefore*, should have had fruit. Jesus, hungry, saw in the distance a surprising thing-surprising at that time of year -- a fig-tree in full leaf, as Weymouth renders it. (Mark 11:13.) Since he was hungry, and since, notwithstanding the time of year, this fig-tree was so advanced, he went to see, to quote once more from Weymouth, "whether perhaps he could find some figs on it. When however he came to it, he found *nothing but leaves*."

It was not the season for figs, but this tree, by putting forth leaves, claimed, so to speak, to be something more than other fig-trees; claimed, indeed, (since we have seen that in the fig-tree the fruit appears before the leaves) to have fruit on it. This remarkable fig-tree, in the attitude of false pride, may we say, vaunted itself, claimed to be in advance of other fig-trees, and challenged the passer-by that he should come and refresh himself with its fruit. Yet, when the Lord accepted the challenge, and drew near, it proved to be but as the others, without fruit. It was, in fact, in a far worse state than the others; for they doubtless had young fruits which needed only the heat of the summer to ripen them, whereas this one had *nothing but leaves*.

The fault of this tree, then, was not that in the spring of the year it had no ripe fruit, but that, having none, not even green figs, it had clothed itself abundantly with leaves, with the foliage which, according to the natural order of the tree's development, gave a pledge and a promise that fruit would be found *on* it, if sought. In the circumstances our Lord's conduct is vindicated; the tree was justly condemned.

2. We come now to the second question: "Did this barren fig-tree represent the Jewish nation? To our understanding it did, and this is the view held by most scholars.

In support of this view we offer three considerations:

(1) The fig-tree is used in the Old Testament as representing Israel. - Joel 1:7.

(2) The parable of the fig-tree given by Jesus in Luke 13:6-9 undoubtedly was intended to apply to Israel.

(3) It accurately symbolized Israel's condition. In itself the fig-tree was neither good nor bad, morally. When, therefore, Christ condemned it for its deception, he did not attribute moral responsibilities to it, but he did attribute to it a fitness for representing moral qualities. And the sin of Israel was exactly that which the tree symbolized. The true fruit of that people, prior to our Lord's first advent, would have been to admit its absolute inability to produce fruit apart from their coming Messiah, to have presented itself before God bare and naked and empty altogether. But this was exactly what Israel refused to do. Other nations might have nothing' to boast of, but for themselves they claimed much. And yet, on close inspection, the substance of righteousness was as much lacking in their case as in that of the Gentiles, as Paul so abundantly demonstrates in the second chapter of Romans. Since the characteristics of the barren fig-tree so faithfully represented those of Israel, we think we are justified in believing they were intended to do so.

3. Our third question is answered by reference to better translations. While the fig-tree itself was withered "for ever," this was not to be in the case of Israel. The word translated "for ever" really means "to the end of the age," and is so rendered in the Diaglott and other translations. As St. Paul explains, it is only until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, that blindness in part is happened to Israel-thereafter there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and thus all Israel shall be saved. (Isa. 59:20; Rom. 11:2.5, 26.) A day will come, indeed, when Israel which now says, "I am a dry tree" (Isa. 56:3), shall consent to that word of its true Lord, which of old it denied: "From Me is thy fruit found." (Hos. 14:8.) It shall then be arrayed with the richest foliage and fruit of all the trees of the field. That time is near, very near, we think. May we once again quote our Lord's words: "Now learn a parable" (it is more accurately translated "the" parable); "Now learn *the* parable of the fig-tree. When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." (Matt. 24:32, 33.) If this be true for Israel, what message has it for the Church?

4. We come now to the fourth and last question. The explanation of our Lord's words, "Have faith in God" is to be found in the astonishment which the disciples manifested at the rapidity with which the Lord's sentence was executed. From the account in Matthew it appears that the withering began almost as soon as the Lord spoke. It was, however, on the following morning, as we learn from Mark, that the disciples specially noticed its condition. "Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst *is* withered away." It was as though they had said one to another: "Did you notice the instant effect yesterday, just when our Lord spoke? The leaves seemed to droop in a moment. But who would have thought that the withering would have been so complete in a single day? Verily, he speaks and it is done. How great, how thorough, how marvelous is his power!"

He will not let the occasion go without its further lesson. What he had done, they might do, and more. "Have faith in God." Faith in God would place them in relation with the same power which he wielded, so that they might do mightier things even than this at which they marveled so much. Listen to his words in the next verse:

"Verily I say unto you: Whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe, that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it."

Faith has already removed greater mountains than the Mount of Olives on which our Lord and his disciples were then standing; and many more shall it yet lift aloft and fling far out of sight *in* the depths of the sea. What mountains of obstacles and obstructions! what mountains of prejudices! what mountains of accumulated evil habits! what "hills of *difficulty*," apparently insurmountable -

inner, outer, social, political, spiritual, has faith tossed, and is faith still tossing, away! It is the Almighty God in whom our faith is to rest. If the removal of Olivet itself is needed, or of any other mountain, material or spiritual, he *is* still ready and able to put his finger on its summit, when it will leap from its very socket.

Of course this marvelous promise is conditional. But it is not too large for God to perform. It has always been fulfilled and always will be, if the conditions are met. If our wills are truly, immersed into *the* will of God, so that his will becomes truly our will, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. (John 15:7.) And greater works than Jesus did (including the miracle of withering the fig-tree) shall we do. - John 14:12.

This lesson was for the disciples then; it has been *for* the whole Church since; it belongs to us today. "Have faith in God."

- P. L. Read

Full Consecration

"O Sacred union with the Perfect Mind!
Transcendent bliss, which Thou alone canst give,
How blest are they this Pearl of price who find,
And, dead to earth, have learned in Thee to live!

"And thus, while dead to human hopes
I lie, Lost, and forever lost, to all but Thee,
My happy soul, since it has learned to die,
Has found new life in Thine infinity.

"With joy we learn this lesson of the cross,
And tread the toilsome way which Jesus trod;
And counting present life and all things loss,
We find in death to self the life of God."

- *Poems of Dawn*

A Prayer

Lord make mesa channel of thy peace
That where there is hatred I may bring love,
That where there is wrong
I may bring the spirit of forgiveness,
That were there is discord I may bring harmony,
That where there is error I may bring truth,
That where there is doubt

I may bring faith,
That where there is despair I may bring hope,
That where there are shadows I may bring thy light,
That where there is sadness I may bring joy.

Lord, grant that I may seek rather
To comfort, than to be comforted;
To understand, than to be understood;
To love, than to be loved;

For
It is by giving, that one receives;
It is by self-forgetting, that one finds;
It is by forgiving, that one is forgiven;
It is by dying, that one awakens to eternal life.

- St. Francis of Assisi

Recently Deceased

Bro. J. W. Carrington, Leeds, Eng. - (May)
Sr. A. Church, Woronoco, Mass. - (Sept.)
Bro. C. E. Dickinson, Lincoln, Eng. - (Aug.)
Bro. W. W. Moore, Binghamton, N. Y. - (Aug.)
Sr. Ruselink, Sheboygan Falls, Wis. - (Aug.)
Bro. H. Stokes, Ilford, Essex, Eng. - (Aug.)