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God's Fulfilling Purpose

"Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." - Matt. 6:10.

1. PURPOSE OF THE AGES

One of the greatest discoveries of the nineteenth century has been the fact that God is working to a plan. We call the realization of that outstanding truth a discovery because that is precisely what it is. In a century which opened an era of invention and knowledge such as the world had never previously known, that stands out as a most important achievement, full of tremendous meaning for the future of mankind.

Christianity had been left with a sad legacy of inadequate understanding of God from the time of intellectual decline that we call the Dark Ages. During the slow progress of nearly a thousand years the clear faith and fervent hope that had inspired the Apostles and the early Church became obscured, and in large measure was lost in the chaos and confusion that followed the break-up of Roman civilization in Europe. The rise of Latin institutional Christianity, adulterated as it was with the ritual and the doctrines of the pagan religions it superseded, did little to preserve the plain and simple faith of Jesus, but much to darken His teachings and those of the prophets His predecessors. The hosts of the Moslem world, sweeping across Europe in the eighth century; the Asiatic hordes that succeeded them; and the feudal serfdom into which all of Europe was plunged during those dark times, all but blotted out from the minds of men any real understanding of Christianity, despite the persistence of religious observances and church worship.

Only in a few monasteries and abbeys did any kind of learning survive. A few saintly men of God in such institutions endeavored to preserve the sacred books which they realized contained the word of life. A few understanding individuals among the people outside passed down from father to son stories of Jesus and of His life. But for the most part Christianity and superstition were inextricably mingled. Anything like an orderly conception of God's ways was unknown. At a time when nearly every monastery or other center of ordered life was subject to despoliation by robber barons and unscrupulous kings, it is not surprising that the emphasis fell upon spiritual contemplation of the next world in the endeavor to escape from the wickedness in this. Those times fostered the idea that the only purpose of the Christian life was to gain ultimate entrance to heaven, inherit white garments and golden harps, and witness the utter destruction of this world too wicked to endure.

All this is out of date. We now see that God is ceaselessly working and creating. We inhabit a world that is made for a purpose; we ourselves are creatures of purpose yet unfulfilled. But God is working towards its achievement and it will be consummated at length. The increasing light which has illumined the Bible in these latter days enables us to see more clearly where we as individuals fit into that purpose, what place God has for us, and what He means us to do. The greatest thing in this life is to find one's place in the present purpose of God, for then we are coworkers with Him in its accomplishment. There can be no higher level of service than that!

The modern understanding of God's fulfilling purpose has come only within the last four centuries, since the time of the Protestant Reformation. It has come in stages, each one a foundation and preparation for the next. The first work of this time of increasing enlightenment was the restoration and illumination of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity; the principles governing the Divine relationship to man, the fact of man's fallen sinful condition, the necessity of the redemptive work of Christ, and of personal holiness and dedication of life to God's service. The work of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of our era was the period of Bible translation and of the publication of the Authorized Version, the opening of the Scriptures to ordinary people. The time of Christian thinkers and leaders like John Bunyan and George Fox, whose influence has been so profound from their own day to ours.

The second stage was the great increase of scientific knowledge at the beginning of the eighteenth century in the work of pioneers like Sir Isaac Newton and William Whiston; a knowledge which led directly to a more accurate understanding of the facts behind Scripture history. Stories such as that of the Creation began to be examined in a new light and understood much more clearly. The relation of the Scriptural narratives, dealing mainly with the nation of Israel, to the secular records of other nations was established. A much more definite view of God's actions on the stage of history was the result. A great deal of superstitious belief was expunged from the faith as men's minds were prepared for the realization that the Divine purpose includes all of mankind, and that all recorded history shows evidence of His overruling power. This second stage covering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, culminated in a flood of archaeological investigation which, commenting with the work of Layard, Rawlinson and Oppert in the early part of the nineteenth century at Nineveh and elsewhere, still continues, and to an ever increasing degree illustrates and confirms the accuracy of the Bible. It is not only that the ethics of the Bible have been clarified and proved unassailable; its historical narratives have had their veracity demonstrated. In all these things the conclusion has been driven home that not only is the Bible a Book upon which one may absolutely rely; it is also a Book with a message which at this present time is of supreme importance.

The third stage of Christian understanding came with the rise of Bible Societies at the commencement of the nineteenth century and the tremendous impetus given to Christian thought by the very general expectation of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. There was much intensive study of the Scriptures. Almost every theologian had his contribution regarding the manner, or the time, or the purpose, of that great event. Evangelists like Dwight Moody found ready audiences waiting upon their words. Christian writers and commentators found an eager demand for their books. It was an age of open enquiry and increasing enlightenment. On the crest of this wave rode the realization that God has a Plan; that history as we know it is but the operation of this Plan in the past, and prophecy as we have it is the operation of that Plan in the future. The Bible was explored and studied from a new viewpoint and in consequence yielded hitherto unsuspected secrets, opening a prospect almost undreamed of since the days of the Apostles. God has a Plan! We now have a tolerably detailed map of the entire scheme, with

comparatively few gaps, and even these are being closed as our studies continue and our perception brightens.

In this present dark day when there is so much to discourage and induce apprehension, when the world we know is falling to pieces and all the endeavors of the best of men are insufficient to restore it, and the prospect before mankind is one of unrelieved gloom and despair, this knowledge of God's fulfilling purpose shines like a beacon light in the heavens, a golden star of hope whose radiance leads us onward toward the fulfillment of that which God has promised. God grant that it lead all of us to the feet of the Saviour Himself, for there indeed shall we find that evidence of coming peace and goodwill to all men for which serious thinking people are longing.

The evidence for God's fulfilling purpose is strong today, adequate for all who will examine it with impartial mind. But that evidence cannot be appreciated nor the outcome to which it points be accepted as logical until we have commenced where the Bible commences, and traced its outworking step by step as the Bible does. Neither may we expect to understand it unless we master the principles of Divine government, those laws that define God's relationship to man, and man's relationship to his environment, the earth. If we are to appreciate the nature of mankind's everlasting destiny we must become familiar with the laws by which that destiny is to be achieved. So we must go right back to the story of Creation in the Book of Genesis.

This is not the place in which to discuss the theories of evolution and their connection with the origin of the earth and of mankind. Suffice it that the Bible need not be thought to dispute the findings of scientists respecting the immense age of the earth, the slow development of this ordered planet from primeval chaos, and the emergence upon this planet of life. The Divine principle is, as expressed in the Gospel of Mark, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The principle is well exemplified in the formation and consolidation of the materials which compose the earth's structure from the first primitive elements; in the wealth of trees, plants, grasses and seaweeds which have sprung from the first few varieties of plant life traceable in the fossil remains; in the marvellous variety of animal, bird, fish and insect life which had its origin in a few well-defined typical forms which appear at certain periods in the history of the rocks.

But when we come to consider man we have to realize that here is another case where God made a fresh start. Just as there are factors in the living thing which mark it as separate and distinct from the nonliving mineral with a boundary line that cannot be crossed; just as the same separateness distinguishes non-sentient vegetable from sentient animal; so there is a gulf between animal and man which has never been and can never be bridged. Man possesses certain qualities and potentialities which make him a fitting candidate for everlasting life; he has powers inbreathed by God which are shared with no other terrestrial creature. When God made man an expression was used which is used in no other connection: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). In this creation God made something new; an instance of direct Divine intervention in a new order in creation which in its turn was to progress and develop through the "blade", the "ear", and "full corn in the ear", stages.

Man started therefore complete and perfect in his own sphere, admirably fitted to his environment. Not emerging or developing from the brute beasts but on the contrary being placed among them as the lord and head of all things terrestrial. The animal creation was part of man's environment, made to occupy its own place in the Divine scheme of things, to minister to man's needs and his pleasure, but constituted inferior to man and in no sense progenitor of man.

Man as originally created was physically and mentally perfect, in possession of the ability to live continuously and for ever while he remained in harmony with Nature's laws, which are the laws of God. But he was not yet ready for God's ultimate purpose. Those splendid beings who first opened wondering eyes upon the fair garden of God's planting represented the beginning and not the end of God's work with man. A long period of growth and development lay between that beginning and the ultimate goal of God's purpose. Neither had the earth as yet progressed to the point at which it could be said, as it will one day be said: "I will make the place of My feet [the earth] glorious." That is the inner meaning of the story of Eden. The earth must be adequately populated and brought into subjection to man. Man must be educated and trained and qualified not only by reception of theory, but in the hard school of practice and experience to know how he must live his life and administer his inheritance. And that involves a thorough and adequate knowledge of the difference between good and evil.

2. THE PERMISSION OF EVIL

The mystery of the permission of evil is still a mystery. All of our explanations are inadequate; they all leave something unexplained. But that the permission of evil is for a wise purpose and has been foreseen and provided for in the Plan of God no one can gainsay. It is no mystery that the endurance of suffering and experience of evil has beneficial results in the long run. It is a true saying that is found in the New Testament: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; yet afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11). Of Jesus Himself it is said that He was made perfect through suffering and that He became a merciful and sympathetic High Priest by reason of the things which He suffered. There is evidently something in the endurance of suffering and evil which has a direct effect on the development of man in the direction of the Divine ideal. It must be accepted that suffering is the result of sin, and that sin came into the world, not by any action of God, but by the deliberate choice of man. At the same time we have to admit that in some wonderful manner which we do not at present understand, God is using this suffering in the accomplishment of His purpose.

It is here that we must enter upon the subject of human free will. It is essential that man enjoy the exercise of free will if he is to be a responsible unit in God's creation. This is one of the respects in which man differs from the animals. They have their own orbit in which they live and move and have their being, an orbit out of which they cannot move, circumscribed as they are by the limitations imposed upon them by their instinct. They have no option but to obey the rules of their own life cycle and no one would dream of imputing any kind of moral responsibility to an animal for its actions. With man it is different; he has the ability, within certain limits, to please himself whether he will follow laws of righteousness or laws of evil; intelligently and knowingly cooperate with God or fight against God, as he will. God made the first man with that ability to choose between good and evil in order that he might be the lord of all earthly creation; living in harmony with the laws of God and discharging his obligations as a citizen of earth not blindly nor of constraint, but willingly and because of full sympathy with, and endorsement of, God's laws of righteousness. So man embarked on his new life of experience, having the power to choose between good and evil. He chose evil, and fell.

We need not be dogmatic as to the precise nature of man's first lapse into sin. In the story of Eden it is represented as the eating of forbidden fruit, the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We may be tolerably sure that the story intends us to know that man committed a fundamental breach of Divine Law. The action, whatever its nature, involved violation of the very law of his being. The result of his act was that death entered into his physical and mental

structure. Because his posterity were as yet unborn the same process of death passed upon them. "Thus," says Paul, "death passed upon all men, for that all were sinners."

Humanity was thus committed to sin and consequent suffering the while it multiplied and spread over the face of the earth. Sin was destined progressively to devitalize the human race and obliterate the knowledge of God from men's minds. But always there remained an inherent goodness of human character, implanted in man at creation, urging to better things. It was in this soil, after the first shock of the Fall had passed, that the search for the way back to God could take root and discover real values.

Here came the first lesson for human learning. Man cannot exist without God. "In him we live, and move, and have our being," said Paul to the Athenians. That may be much more literally true than our finite human minds are capable of comprehending just yet. But a truth that men must learn is that life everlasting and life in perfection can only be attained and enjoyed when the life is brought closely in tune with God's law. "He that believeth on Me," said Jesus, "hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). During the first few millenniums after the Fall, the opposite was true; the practice and power of sin increased, the span of human life shortened, the physical vitality of man decreased, and his mental powers and intelligence declined. To this period belongs the degeneration of human types, from the splendid physique of the first men, to these miserable, almost sub-human creatures, which have been found in various parts of the earth. Among the groups that did not descend to savagery but retained some semblance of culture and civilization, there arose mythological religions to supersede what was left of true knowledge of God. By the time of Abraham, two thousand years before Christ, there was very little real understanding of God and His ways in the world.

3. THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

It was with Abraham that the first indication of a change became apparent. Abraham comes just within the historical period of man's history. Back to Abraham our knowledge of world history is fairly complete and detailed; prior to his day we pass into the mythical period, the age of tradition and legend. All that we really know of the world before Abraham is summed up in the burning words of Genesis: "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). But it must not be thought that there were none who strove for better things, nor that none of Adam's race had inherited sufficient of the primal uprightness to seek some better knowledge of God. Some of the old Sumerian penitential psalms, going back half a millennium before Abraham, breathe a fervent longing for reconciliation with God, for a way whereby the consciousness of sin might be erased and the sinner given peace of mind and rest of body. It was crude, but it was there; and no doubt can exist that when at last God spoke to Abraham and revealed that the tide of affairs was about to turn, it was more than an arbitrary decision on His part that He would now do something for mankind. Much more apparent it is that men were about ready for the first step in the Divine scheme of salvation, and God responded by calling the man best fitted for His immediate purpose.

Here is something that appears for the first time in the written records of human history -the story of a man who is utterly and continuously devoted to the service of God. It is related of the famous revivalist Dwight L. Moody that upon one occasion in his youth, he sat in a meeting and heard the preacher say: "The world has yet to see what God can do in, and through, and by, a man who is utterly consecrated to Him and His service." "God helping me," said Moody to himself, "I will be that man." The achievements of his later life showed how thoroughly he fulfilled that resolve. But he was not the first. Here in the story of Abraham we have a similar record, and it is easy to see

why in after days the famous patriarch and progenitor of the children of Israel was call "the father of the faithful."

It was to this man, citizen of the oldest and in many respects the finest civilization of the ancient world, that of Sumer, that the next fundamental principle of the Divine Plan was revealed and through whom it was exemplified. The first, demonstrated in Eden, was "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), and for several millenniums that principle had been in operation amongst mankind. Now came its complement: "The gift of God is eternal life." Abraham heard the Divine promise that in him and in his seed all families of the earth were ultimately to be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). There was no intimation at the time how it was to be done. But there was the assurance that a future of happiness was planned for all men and that Abraham and his descendants were to be the Divine instruments in that purpose. Such a promise could only be realized if sin and evil were at the same time abolished. For while these scourges persist, happiness can be neither complete nor lasting. Hence this promise, made to Abraham four thousand years ago, is the first clear intimation in history that God does plan to abolish sin and evil.

From this point, almost half-way through the span of human history as we know it, the apparently hopeless course of humanity was checked and an upward trend, the infusion of some hope of better things, is discernible. It is true that the evil propensities of human character still had free range, and in many respects the wickedness and cruelty of men continued to increase. But there was a new spirit and a new incentive in the hearts of some, even though only a few; a spirit that was destined to extend its influence and capture the hearts and inspire the lives of an increasing number as the pears passed by. For a long time, so far as one can gather from the Bible record, which is the only detailed history of those days extant, this consistent seeking for the knowledge of God's plans and this intelligent giving of the heart and the life to God in full consecration of purpose and endeavor, which had been so characteristic of Abraham, was limited principally to his own direct line of descendants-and not all of them. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brethren, were men of faith. Their faith was a simple one; their lives built around little more than a complete and unreserved acceptance of the absolute supremacy of God in the world and affairs of men. But that was an important advance, a very necessary foundation for the more detailed knowledge of God and of His plans that was soon to follow. To the peoples before Abraham, God was known as *El Elyon -- the Most High*. To Abraham and the patriarchs, He was *El Shaddai -- the Almighty*. To Moses and the Israelites, He was *Yahweh -- the Eterna --*; but that last conception required the attainment of a stage of development which had not been possible in the patriarchal age.

It was when the descendants of Jacob in the fourth generation, grown to a community of several millions of people, were ready to be welded into a nation, that the next stage of the Divine plan was revealed. Moses led from Egypt to Sinai, a mixed collection of tribes having little sense of unity and none of purpose, and only a very dubious belief in God. They had been born in Egypt, their fathers and grandfathers and great grandfathers had been born in Egypt, and they knew of no other condition of life than that which was traditional to them in Egypt. They came out with Moses not because they perceived a Divine leading and a Divine purpose in their coming out, but because life in Egypt had become intolerable, and the opportunity of flight under Moses' leadership offered a prospect of release. But there in the desert of Sinai something happened!

Moses led from the historic mountain toward the Promised Land, a people, a nation, welded together by the bond of a common ideal, a common purpose. "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant," the Voice had said out of the darkness that covered the mountain, "then ye shall be a chosen treasure unto me -- for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exod. 19:5,6). To that the people had enthusiastically

responded: "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." The nation of Israel never really forgot that momentous beginning to their nationhood. They never really repudiated the contract, although they violated its provisions scores of times. To this day the lineal descendants of the hosts that once surrounded Sinai, the Jews, in their saner moments claim the ancient privileges and proclaim themselves the "people of the Book"-(a phrase invented by Mahomet, the prophet of Islam, in the seventh century A.D.) -- and look forward to the day when God will fulfill His word and make use of them to be a light to the nations, to declare His salvation to the ends of the earth.

The period between Moses and Christ was a training time having that end in view. It was necessary that some clear-cut definition of God's law be given to the world, but at that comparatively early time in human history it was not possible to reveal that law in its entirety; none would have been found able to comprehend it. Even today, after two thousand years of Christianity, comparatively few really do understand it. The Divine method, therefore, was to select one nation-Israel-already measurably prepared for God's use, and by imposing upon that nation a code of laws and a rule of life based upon strict adherence to certain well defined principles; to begin to accustom men's minds to the main outlines of that world which is yet to be when God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. The nation of Israel with all its affairs, was intended to illustrate as far as imperfect men could illustrate, the Kingdom of God which will eventually be set up on earth to consummate the Divine Plan for mankind.

There was one salient difference. The Kingdom of the future is to be a world of free men, serving God and living the life that has His approval willingly, voluntarily, in the light of a full understanding of His laws and a full acquiescence therewith. That aspect of the future state could not be exemplified in Israel because they were by no means wholly converted to God, and sin working in their members rendered it impossible for them to keep the Law in its entirety even if they had perfectly sincere intentions; and for the most part they had not even that. It follows therefore that the most pronounced feature of Israel's national life was its perpetual obligation to a law principally expressed in the negative, the prohibitory, sense; "Thou shalt *not*." In their then state of development, that was the only way in which the law of God could be understood or appreciated by them.

At the same time this same law did accustom them to the idea that they had become a separated people unto God, called out from the world in general to occupy a special place of responsibility toward Him, and to assume particular obligations with respect to His work amongst mankind. They regarded themselves as the peculiar instruments of God's purpose in a much more intense sense than did the nations around them with respect to *their* gods. That made them a better and a nobler people than their neighbors, although it bred in them an egotism and self-complacency, a spirit of haughtiness and exclusiveness, which the later prophets never wearied in denouncing.

Viewed against the wider canvas of God's all-comprehensive Plan, this period of the life of Israel shows up many grave defects. There was here no general appreciation that God is love. The Hebrew deity was one of stern unbending justice, demanding an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and exact retribution for every wrong committed. "He that despiseth Moses' law, that man shall die," was the epitome of the theology of the day, and any idea that God had created man for a purpose, and was steadily working out the details of that purpose, was still very far away. To this period belong the Old Testament stories of the "wars of the Lord," of the pitiless slaughter and destruction of the "Lord's enemies," of swift and unmerciful judgment upon apparently trivial acts of transgression. It is easy to see that the histories written by men who, however sincere and God-fearing, were nevertheless men of their times, reflect very faithfully the spirit and temper of their Age. The day was still far distant when a sublimely authoritative voice, as to say: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time ... hate . . . but I say unto you . . . love! . . . (Matt.

5:43,44). Jesus removed His own disciples for manifesting the spirit of, and desiring to emulate, men who in an earlier age were but acting up to the limit of the light they had and in fact were already far in advance of those who had been before them.

Another fundamental principle which emerged from the semi-light of this Israelitish Age was the great truth that the supreme purpose of human life is to serve God; that human beings have been called into existence by the will and power of God that they might occupy a definite place in His scheme of creation and fulfill the destiny that He has planned for them, in full and comprehensive acknowledgment of His omnipotent power. It was not until after Christ, that the details of that future destiny were made plain, but the effect of the Law of Sinai was certainly to clarify the question of man's intended relationship to God. God is the center of all life and colors every affair of life. To the extent that any man leaves God out of his life, to that extent he is deficient in purpose and vitality in life, and must one day be brought face to face with the alternative of accepting continued life on the basis of this principle, or losing what he has of life altogether. Israel never lost that understanding, once they had attained it. They always built their national policy around the consciousness and realization of their special responsibility towards God. Even in this present materialist phase of modern civilization, the chiefly agnostic and unbelieving immigrants who are building the new land of Israel have a nucleus, a core, which is calling attention to the old standards of Israel and creating a factor in the government and administration of that rapidly growing land which is not to be found in other of earth's sovereign peoples.

(To be continued)

- A. O. Hudson

Reason for Hope

"Sanctify the Lord God in our hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." - 1 Peter 3:15.

(In tribute to our beloved Brother Heitland who recently "finished his course," herewith his final message.)

AS WE read the text above, two words stand out. These are "hope" and "reason." Hope, the dictionary tells us, means to desire some good, with the expectation of getting it, or at least with a belief that it is obtainable. Also, the word "hope" in itself implies that there is dissatisfaction with present conditions or environment.

THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD

It is certainly plain to every one that the condition of the world society, and also the condition in which man finds himself today, is *not* one which it would be desirable to have continued forever. When men look about them and see the pain and suffering, the misery and starvation of other men, the separation of families all over the earth, it is any wonder that they find good and sufficient reasons for dissatisfaction and unrest? It is any wonder when individuals hate and distrust each other, when nations push each other about for the most favorable military or trade positions, that those who observe all these things should be perplexed and should have their hearts failing them "for fear of the things coming upon the earth"?

Men in general do not want to see their cherished social organization falling apart, and so they try to tie it together with "peace" treaties. They sew up the holes with patches called agreements of various kinds, only to have the seams rip wider somewhere else. They are still trying, with their eyes anxiously on the future, to hold the old garment together by any means possible. They are not hopeful, but anxious and worried about the kind of world in which their children and grandchildren must live.

WISFUL THINKING NO BASIS FOR HOPE

If we look around us, we can see many thousands who pin their faith on a general idea or system of evolution, by which all men will go from a human condition to something higher, morality being the condition of progress. Morality is fine, certainly, but if they would observe the output of the medical schools, and the intake of hospitals and similar institutions, they would see, if they looked with unbiased eyes, that man is not getting any better, but is in fact getting worse in every way, and that there is no evolution, either mental or physical, actually taking place. Then there are other thousands who hang their expectations on great ritualistic systems, thinking that by much repetition of certain forms, which have been approved by their leaders, they might better their condition, here and hereafter. There are others with confused and much mistaken ideas of who they are, where they came from, and where they are going.

Do we as Christians have any better ground or foundation for a hope regarding the future? Is it clear in our minds just what our hope is, and do we have convincing reasons for it? Are we ready at all times to give to every one who asks, a reason for the hope that is in us?

In order to explain to another such an intangible thing as a hope, and to make clear the basis upon which it is established in our minds, we must have reasons that will assure our hearers as well as ourselves of the solid foundation of truth on which our explanation is to be based. What, then, is our hope as Christians, and what are the reasons for that hope?

THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

When we look about us and see how selfish men are without the knowledge of God; when we see human beings born with physical and moral weaknesses due to the sin of Adam; when we see them in this unarmed and unprotected condition born into a world now ruled by Satan and under the influence of his evil works; when we see men finally sink under the load of sin and sorrow and go down into death—we still have hope. When not only individuals, but nations and governments totter and fall, and when complete ruin of all the work of centuries by the hands of men appears certain and inevitable -- our hope is still strong.

Our hope is that the curse of sin will be removed, and that the rule of Satan and all his evil doings will at long last come to an end. Our hope is that the governments now under the control of the prince of darkness, will ultimately be brought under the sceptre of the Prince of Peace, and that where evil and sin in all its many forms now holds high carnival and runs wild, there righteousness and peace shall govern. Our hope is that not only our hearts, but *all* hearts shall be made happy and light, that all tears shall be wiped forever from all eyes, and that all rough places shall be made smooth. Our hope is that not only the living of this Age shall see and rejoice for these things, but that all who have ever lived shall see them together, being set free from death. Our hope is that even the earth itself shall be made perfect; that thorns, thistles, and poisonous plants, shall be replaced by healthful produce and life-giving fruits. Finally, our hope is, that to insure the permanence of these wonderful conditions, God will establish a government to rule over his creation, and that this government shall so thoroughly control every element which had previously been evil that men will have no use at all for instruments of death, but shall convert them to useful tools for farming and other peaceful arts.

We believe that, even now, the ministers of that perfect government are being educated and disciplined for this important work, and that it is the principal work being accomplished by God in this present period or Age. This special work we think is nearly complete, and when it is, the new order and arrangement of world affairs will begin. Then all men will know what is their duty,

and not only know it but also be able to perform it, for all the sidetracks and hindrances will have been removed. With their hereditary taint and their evil surroundings gone, men will be free-gloriously free-to do the will of God; and, from their experience with the "exceeding sinfulness of sin," be willing to do it. We believe that the government under which these very desirable conditions will obtain will be headed by those once human, but who through sanctification of God's holy spirit, and knowledge and faith in the truths of God's Word, received the privilege to become sons of God-a New Creation. These, with their Head and Lord, Jesus Christ, through whose sacrificial death all these things have become possible, will be the instruments with which God will accomplish all of his glorious plans for the race of men in the ages to come.

We have touched on only some of the high points of our hope as Christians, but it is a very grand and wonderful hope, is it not? As previously mentioned, a hope in order to be called a hope, must necessarily be built on a more confidence inspiring basis than just wishful thinking. Upon what is our hope based? What are the reasons that have woven these high and marvelous hopes into our minds and hearts so that nearly everything we do is affected by them?

REASONS FOR CHRISTIAN HOPE

There are a number of reasons why the hopes for the future that we have, now occupy such an important place in our thinking and in our lives. The basis of our acceptance of these ideas as reasons for our hope is our belief that the Bible is the Word of God. Some one will ask, "What convinced you that the Bible is true and that it is the only means by which the Father, the Creator of life, has communicated his plans to his chief creation on earth, men? For upon our conviction of this fact rest all of the reasons for our hope for the future."

Certain Hebrews called prophets, without knowing what was in the future, undertook to tell a long time beforehand, and at God's direction, what was going to happen. If they had wanted to gratify a selfish or ambitious feeling (supposing that they could prophesy at all with such a nature) then their prophecies would have foretold events which *they wished* would come to pass. Actually much of prophecy was of such a nature that it was summarily rejected by Israel when it reached the point of fulfillment, though history proves that many of these ancient prophecies were very strikingly fulfilled. We believe that the character of these men was good -- that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the holy spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). But God, knowing how liable human nature was to distort things to conform to its own understanding, did not permit them to see the full significance of their utterances.

Daniel, the Prophet, was an example of this; for we read in Daniel 12:8 that, "I heard, but I understood not." The Prophet was referring here to his visions concerning the time of the end which he had been told were to be sealed up, and which the Apostle tells us in 1 Peter 1:12 were not for the edification of those to whom they were given, but were intended for the ministry of Christ's Church at this end of the Age. The fact that Christ would be rejected by the Jews as a nation, which was foretold by Jewish Prophets many, many years before he was born, we read in Isaiah 53:2, 3. This rejection was despite the indications on every hand that he was the answer to every question in their hearts as to their coming Messiah. That this prophecy could have come only from God we find proved in the perfection of detail with which it was carried out in the birth of Jesus "in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king."

Secular history and tradition in other parts of the civilized world of that day confirm Christ's existence, and agree that he did fulfill the predictions made hundreds of years before concerning such a person. The many prophecies concerning Israel which have been and are still being fulfilled, verify further the truth of God's Word; that it is worthy of full acceptance by a

reasonable mind. In additional proof, there is the remarkable harmony not only of the books of the Old Testament with each other, but also the agreement of the books of the New Testament with them. Little of this is apparent by just a casual glance at the Bible, or even by reading the entire set of its books. Only by earnest and prayerful study, using such helps as marginal references, concordances, other translations, and works which point to the plans which God has printed in his Word, can the searcher find that which he seeks. The Savior's words point out plainly that such thoroughness *must* be used when he says: "Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you."

If we have gone so far as to accept the Bible as God's Word and as the Truth; if we are convinced that "neither is there salvation in any other" than Jesus Christ; then we have gone as far our human minds can go, and it is here that faith in God's Word begins to take over our minds and hearts. Let us go on now and examine some of the hopes we mentioned, and see if we have reasons for them, reasons firmly established on the sure promises of the Father by whose power all things were created, including even our faith.

One of our hopes is that the curse of sin will be removed from the world. Do we have any promise of God that he will accomplish such a wonderful thing? Most thinking people are beginning to realize now that sin and its effects are about all that is the matter with the world. Was not the removal of sin and its terrible results in the lives of men the main reason why our Savior gave up his glory with the Father and came to earth? What was the message of the angel at his birth? Was it not that a Savior was born who should *save his people from their sins*? Our Lord confirmed this message many times during his teaching of the Gospel. In Mark 10:45 he says: "For the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many." And again in Matt. 18:11: "For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost." We all know many more verses which convey the same grand promise.

Another of our hopes is that Satan, as well as all of the evil he started, will one day come to an end. Where do we find God's promise of such a thing? In the prophecy of our risen Lord to John (Rev. 20:10), we read, ". . . the Devil that deceived them [men] was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone." Can one picture a more complete destruction than this for the prince of this world, who with the lie told in Eden, started all the train of sin, misery, and sorrow that has been man's burden ever since?

Another of our hopes is that the government of earth, now under the control of Satan and his followers, shall be taken from them and turned over to the Prince of Peace, and those who are to be associated with him. Has God said that he intends to make such a transfer? We know that Satan is now being permitted to rule, for we read in Ephesians 6:12 that "we wrestle . . . against the rulers of the darkness of this world"; and we read also in Ephesians 2:2 where the Apostle reminds the Church at Ephesus that they, too, had once been under the control of "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Isaiah 9:6 is only one of the promises of the Father to transfer the rulership of the nations: "The government shall be upon his [Christ's] shoulder," and he is to reign as the "Prince of Peace." The transfer of authority reads in Daniel 2:44: "In those days [time of the end] shall God set up a Kingdom, . . . and it shall stand forever." Also in Isaiah 32:1 the Prophet tells of the Kingdom of Christ: "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment." The princes referred to have been identified by many Scriptures as the footstep followers of the Lord, who are now being trained for positions in the Kingdom, as body members of the Christ.

We are never asked to take only one isolated verse, which may possibly be mistranslated or misinterpreted, as a basis for our hope; but on each of the fundamental points of God's Plan we

find, not one, but many Scripture texts, each of which contributes its portion to the rounding out of a glorious, and best of all, a true picture of the Father's arrangements for man.

It is this hope of obtaining perfection of being in Christ; the wonderful privilege of being made partakers of the spirit nature of our risen Lord, which is the highest hope of all. We must, however, before we can come into possession of the fruition of this hope, gladly endure trial and discipline, suffering and dying daily with Christ. One good way of testing ourselves to see if this is the hope we have in us is by 1 John 3:3: "Every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Also (1 Pet. 3:15): "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." That is, set Him apart in our hearts and make Him the means of our purity and holiness. Let Him be the sacred Presence to whom we shall bring all our cares; the One to whom our lives and our characters conform. "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

- *Frank R. Heitland*

"My times are in Thy Hand." - Psalm 31:15.

"How oft, O God, when we have wept in vain
O'er Thy decrees and blurred with fretful tears
The heavenward window of the soul, appears
Thy purpose sweet and wise, in after years,
Like sunshine streaming through the veils of rain!

"If we had had our way-if Thou hadst given
The lesser good in our impleading hands,
Withholding larger; if the small demands
Of human choice, that sees nor understands
Life's broader issues, had prevailed with heaven;

"If we had never wept, nor known the keen,
Pure, cleansing pain of sorrow's sacred fire --
The broken tie, the unfulfilled desire --
Our sluggish lives had never risen higher,
But fixed in self, had ever selfish been.

"But Thou has led us out of self, hast shown
How love's great circle rounds from soul to soul,
How sorrow makes us quick to others' dole
And binds each unit in the larger whole
Of life and love, complete in Thee alone.

"O God, Thy thought infolds us all! the days
Ev'n of this brief, imperfect life attest,
Ere they are spent, Thy will is ever best.
Oh, may we in Thy love and wisdom rest,
For Thou dost know the end of all our days!"

The Christlike Character

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." - Heb. 5:8.

OUR Lord's unhesitating obedience to the will of God characterized every action and statement of his life. His mission was the expression of God's purpose. It was his "meat to do the will of him that sent him," as he said, and "to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). His whole being was under the constant pressure of his willing obedience. When the multitude in the desert near Capernaum begged him to stay with them, he replied, "I must preach the good tidings of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also" (Luke 4:42, 43). In short, even when the people responded to his teaching, he was still under the pressure of a Divine plan and timetable which urged him on.

OBEDIENT TO THE PROPHETIC WORD

Nevertheless, lest the drive and power he revealed be misinterpreted, he lost no opportunity of reminding his hearers, "I can of myself do nothing: . . . I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 5:30). Our Lord's obedience was evidence of his faith in God's declared purpose, and in some instances this was particularly noteworthy. When he rode into Jerusalem on an ass, he demonstrated his obedience to, and his faith in the reality of, a prophecy given many years before, just as though he were responding to an instruction given to him the previous day. When the Pharisees urged him to rebuke his disciples for proclaiming him as King, he showed by his reply how strong was his obedience to the declared and foretold purpose of God, and how obedience itself derived its strength from his faith in the prophetic Word. It was the prophetic Word which foretold his suffering and death, and so throughout the Gospels we discern his resolute walk toward the Cross. That stern resolution was the crowning evidence of his submissive obedience to the will of God.

OBEDIENT TO GOD'S PROGRAM

Obedience implies strict self discipline. This was never so clearly shown as in those cases when Jesus held back from conveying God's blessings to the Gentiles in deference to the Divine program. In compassion, and in acknowledgement of the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman, he freed her daughter from the demon which possessed her, but in disciplined obedience refrained from extending his Gospel mission at that stage, even to this one individual Gentile. Again, when the disciples told him that certain Greeks wanted to see him, he avoided a direct reply. (John 12:20). Another aspect of his obedience to God's Plan was illustrated in his words to those who told him that his mother and his brethren wished to speak to him. "Who is my mother and who are my brethren?" he asked, and then answered his own question: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:50). It seems to us, perhaps, a strange way of replying, but how forcefully it put human and Divine relationships into perspective.

OBEDIENT TO EARTHLY AUTHORITIES

On the other hand, Jesus revealed his obedience to God's earthly arrangements by acknowledging the authority of the secular power. As Daniel's prophecies show, God had taken account of the need to avoid anarchy by allowing certain forms of government to take shape, each one suited to the current stage of man's political and social development. This meant, in Jesus' day, that the Holy Land and God's chosen people were under the dominance of pagan rulers, but Jesus was obedient to the Divinely ordained arrangements and scrupulously avoided clashes with the Roman authorities. His attitude and advice-by-example to us is summed up in the words: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Thus Jesus taught his followers that they were to follow a middle course, not of compromise or of consent to the wickedness and injustice of the world, but of reverent obedience to God's plan and program, knowing that in his good time all the fruits of sin would be destroyed and replaced by righteousness. How often we have seen earnest Christians drawn step by step into active political work, because they anted to work faster than God and did not wait in patient obedience or him. Jesus could have done the same with much more justification, and because he did not do so, many Jews lost faith in him. Their example alone emphasizes the profound importance of obedience.

OBEDIENT IN MIRACLE WORKING

Our Lord's obedience to the Divine will was also evident when he performed his miracles. In Mark 6:5, 6 we read that a could do no mighty works in a certain place because of their unbelief. (See also Matt. 13:58). If we understand this merely to mean that our Lord's miracles were in some respect, at least, dependent on the faith of the recipient, we deny the independent reality of Jesus' power. This was shown, however, on such occasions as when he walked on the sea, and when he fed the 5,000. The Devil had no doubts about it, and our Lord's reply to his temptations in the wilderness showed that he placed a voluntary restraint n the exercise of his power. By refusing to obey Satan, Jesus affirmed his obedience to God. The reality of the decision depended on the reality of his power to perform the miracles suggested to him by the Devil. Jesus' decision illustrated his obedience.

OBEDIENT IN REVERENCE

Jesus' life of submission to the Heavenly Father carried with it, of course, a deep sense of reverence. When he expelled the traders and the money changers from the Temple, Jesus was dealing with a situation in which irreverent disobedience of others could no longer be tolerated. Surely it was his own deep sense of reverent obedience which motivated his action. In doing what was necessary to cleanse God's holy Temple he also reminded the offenders and those who tolerated them of the sin of living contrary to the holy will of God.

OBEDIENCE AND COURAGE

Obedience gave our Lord his courage, just as it can give us courage too. A life dedicated to God and lived in humble submission to him, is a life which trusts in his power and wisdom to protect and care for it. The soldier who has confidence in his commander obeys him, and this confidence gives him courage. So it is with the followers of Jesus, who see from Jesus' life that confidence and obedience go hand-in-hand and together produce courage.

LEARNING OBEDIENCE

The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. (Heb. 5:8). At first sight this seems a strange statement, but earlier we read that Jesus "advanced in wisdom." Progress gained through experience does not imply that Jesus was originally imperfect, but only that experience added to his maturity, just, in fact, as it does with all those who are rightly exercised by experience. Humanly speaking, it would have been understandable if our Lord's sufferings had caused him to react in self-defense. We would not blame any one who did so when he was clearly innocent, but Jesus used suffering as part of his training in obedience, knowing that obedience is a quality which cannot be learned in theory alone; it must be taught by experience.

OBEDIENCE TO THE END

At the end of our Lord's mission and on the threshold of his final agony and death, his obedience shone forth, not as an effortless quality which might have removed his example far beyond our comprehension, but as his greatest personal contribution to God's purpose, something to be preserved at all costs. The reality of that struggle inspires us. "Father," Jesus prayed when his obedience was being tested to its limits, "if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). In that spirit of obedience Jesus went to his death.

Perhaps we might properly regard this, the climax and the pinnacle of the triumph of obedience, as the last of his lessons along that line, but they were still being presented even after his resurrection. "Touch me not," he said to Mary, "for I am not yet ascended unto the Father" (John 20:17). His mission would not be completed until he had presented himself to the Father. In strict obedient reverence, therefore, he kept a dearly loved follower from an affectionate act of worship until he himself had paid formal homage to the Heavenly Father.

Finally, on the road to Emmaus, he recapitulated to the two disciples how he had lived in obedience to all that God had laid down for him throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

Jesus began his mission by an act of submission when he was immersed in the waters of the River Jordan. He ended his life by submission unto death. He urges us to do the same.

- L. H. Bunker

Consecrated Thinking

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." - Phil. 4:8.

THOUGHT is the beginning of all things; therefore, fore, it is of great importance. Sometimes we hear the remark, "Oh, a thought isn't very much-just a little thought, what does that amount to?" But this afternoon we will try to magnify, or exalt, the power of thought. We are going to show that the little thought is more important than the word we speak, or the act we perform; that the place we will have in the Kingdom will depend on the thoughts we think. We want to recognize that the ease with which we will gain the victory will depend upon our thoughts; whether we have a place in the Little Flock or in the Great Company is merely a matter of our thinking. The possibility of our being ultimately lost will depend on the thoughts we think.

We might say that thoughts are seeds which are planted to make things grow. In a sense each person is like a farm. We are growing a crop on our farm, and that crop we call character. That is the reason Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church: "Ye are God's husbandry." The real thought is, "You are God's farm." As with natural farms there is great diversity; so with individuals. One, has a character like a nicely cultivated farm-there is patience, love, zeal, godliness, earnestness, and other grand qualities growing in his character. Another has a character like a farm overgrown with weeds. In such we see envy, jealousy, malice, strife, and all kinds of evil fruitage.

Just as seed has to be planted to raise a crop on a farm, so thought is required to develop the character desired. The seed is a very little thing, yet it produces a large plant. So a thought is a very little thing, yet much grows from it. We find the idea expressed in the Bible that the seeds we plant are the thoughts we think. The Apostle Paul refers to this when he says, in Galatians 6:7: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." When the Apostle referred to sowing, he referred to thought. The same Apostle says again, "I have sown, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase." Here again he referred to thought.

Parable of the Sower

We find the same thing brought to our attention in the parable of the sower who went forth to sow. Some seed fell by the wayside, some upon stony ground, some among thorns, and some fell on good ground. Then the Lord explained what the seed is. He said the good seed is the Word of God. And what is the Word of God? It is simply a statement of God's thoughts -- a collection of thoughts which God has put in a book for our advantage and help. Other books record the thoughts of men, whereas the Bible gives us God's thoughts. This is shown in Isaiah 55, where the Prophet says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My thoughts higher than your thoughts." We need to plant more of these thoughts in our hearts and minds, that they may spring up and bear fruit to the glory of God.

There are two kinds of seeds-seeds that produce things helpful, like the grain and flowers, and seeds that produce injurious, hurtful plants, such as thistles and weeds. Even so there are two kinds of thoughts-good and bad, helpful and evil. As the good seeds produce grain and flowers, correspondingly good thoughts produce patience, godliness, humility, gentleness, meekness, and

faith. And as the bad seeds produce weeds, correspondingly bad thoughts produce jealousy, malice, hatred, envy, strife, ungodliness, and all sorts of evil things.

Another thing about the two kinds of seed—a good seed requires much attention and fertilizing or it will not amount to anything. That is the way with a good thought. We must work it over, cultivate it, water it, and give it attention if we expect it to grow. It is different with bad seed that produce weeds. They do not have to be worked over and cared for to make them grow. So with bad thoughts. The great trouble is to keep them from growing. The work of the successful farmer or gardener is to make the good seed grow, and to discourage the bad seed from growing. So the work of the Christian is to encourage the good thoughts to grow, and to discourage the bad thoughts so they will not grow.

Seeds Reproduce Themselves

There is another important thought here. Seeds produce more seeds like themselves. The plant grows, and if allowed to continue far enough, by and by that plant will go to seed, and there will be more seed of like kind to the first. If in the corner of the lawn there is a little dandelion plant and it is not plucked up, by and by that dandelion plant will go to seed, and there will soon be not a lawn, but only a dandelion patch. So if a good thought is planted and it is encouraged, watered, and cultivated, that good thought will grow and produce a prolific harvest of good thoughts. On the other hand, if a bad thought is planted, it will by and by go to seed, and there will be an abundant reaping of bad thoughts. So we see how necessary it is that the Christian start with right thoughts, for so much will grow out of his thoughts.

Another point which we believe very essential: A good seed will never do any good unless it is planted. The bad seed will never do any harm unless it is planted. A good thought will never amount to anything unless you think it; and a bad thought will never do any harm unless you think it. Most people do not distinguish between a thought and thinking the thought, but there is a vast difference. To plant a seed, you must bury it; you must cover it up. So a thought is one thing, and to think a thought—to welcome, to encourage, to harbor it—is another.

An Important Distinction

Let us note the distinction between thought, and the thinking of a thought. You remember the account of Jesus being baptized of John in Jordan, and how immediately He went out into the wilderness. He was without food forty days, and finally He hungered. Satan came to tempt Him—not visibly—he doubtless suggested a thought to His mind: "Command these stones to be turned into bread; You have the power; You are hungry, why not use Your power, making some bread out of these stones." He refused to entertain that thought; He would not plant it. He said, "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." He refused to plant the seed—to think the thought. We are glad He was proof against the temptation. The seed was handed to Him by the Evil One, but He did not plant it.

Thoughts and Thinking

There is a lesson for us here. We are not to blame for our thoughts, but we are to blame for what we think. We are not always to blame for bad thoughts. If some one puts a thought into my mind by a statement which he makes, I am not to blame. But I am to blame if I harbor it, if I welcome it, if I think the thought. The Scriptures say: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." It is not, "As a man's thoughts are, so is he."

So in our text the Apostle says: "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." This is the idea expressed by the Apostle in Galatians 6: "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." When he says, "He that soweth to the flesh," he means he that thinks thoughts out of harmony with God's will-thoughts altogether in keeping with the spirit of the flesh. If he entertains such thoughts, he is sowing to the flesh. The Apostle says he shall reap corruption. In our text, Paul tells us what the thoughts are that we should think. Let us take these "things" and analyze them.

First, "Whatsoever things are true." If any thought comes to our mind, therefore, that is not true, we should crush it, put it down, not entertain it, not harbor it. Exaggeration is simply the result of entertaining untruthful thoughts until an untruthful disposition is developed.

Untrue Thoughts Concerning God

As we do not want to entertain untrue thoughts of any one or anything, let us be careful not to entertain untrue thoughts about God. He has stated "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." He says that "He will supply all of our needs, according to the riches of His grace." He says, "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." These are only a few of the passages the Christian has to rest his faith on. If you and I entertain the thought that God is going to desert us, we are entertaining an untrue thought. As we entertain that thought, it will begin to develop the weeds of doubt. When a thought of this kind comes to our mind, let us reason that it is impossible for God to forget His promises; it is impossible for Him to go back on His word: it is as impossible for Him to desert His child as it would be for us to do the most impossible thing imaginable. In one Scripture the Lord says: "If you walk contrary to Me, I will walk contrary to you." What did the Lord mean by that? He is walking with us, and we with Him. He says: "If the time ever comes when you walk contrary to Me -- if you turn around and walk in another direction, I will go right on, but it will be walking contrary to you. I will not turn around and walk the other way to keep with you. I will go straight ahead and walk contrary to you." Why? Because we have turned around and are walking the other way. We want the faith that will not entertain a thought that God will be untrue to what He has said. Whatsoever things are true, think on these things, and do not for one moment think of the untrue things.

Whatsoever - Things are Honest

Then he says, "Whatsoever things are honest, think on these things." A child of God has a very different conception of honesty from the people of the world. The man of the world considers every one as honest that would not rob another man of money, or property, or anything that belongs to him. The Christian has a higher conception of honesty, for everything he has belongs to the Lord. His eyes, his ears, his tongue, his hands, his feet, all are the Lord's; all of the money in his pocketbook, all -of his money in the bank, and all of his interests are the Lord's. The Christian considers that it would be dishonest to take that which he has given to the Lord and use it selfishly. It would be dishonest to let these hands engage in anything that would be displeasing to the Lord; it would be dishonest to let my feet take me to any place that I could not go with the Lord's endorsement. The dishonesty, however, is not merely in doing a thing, but it is in allowing oneself to entertain the thought.

Usually, when the time comes to do a dishonest thing, the Christian, if he has permitted himself to entertain the thought, has persuaded himself that it is honest. If you entertain a dishonest thought -- if you do not crush it, you will come to the place where you find yourself overcome. If a thought comes

to us that is not quite honest, let us say, "Here is a thought that is not honest-help me, Lord, to crush it." Then we have gained the victory. "Whatsoever things are honest, think on these things."

The Just Things

Then, "whatsoever things are just, think on these things." This would mean that a Christian has no right to do what God would not approve of, he has no right to endorse an unjust thought -- to entertain any thought that would be inconsistent with the principles of justice. For instance, it would be unjust to entertain a thought of some other brother that you would not like that brother to entertain about you. It is unjust for you to think that God will make allowance for your imperfection and weaknesses, but that He will not do the same for others. It is unjust to think that others should not be harsh in judging you, while you are harsh in your treatment of them. The Scripture says: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure you mete it shall be measured unto you again." This is like saying, "Lord, You just give me exactly what I am giving others. Lord, I do not make much allowance for others; do not make much allowance for me." Or, as we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," which is equivalent to saying, "Lord, do not forgive my trespasses, because I do not forgive those who trespass against me"; or, "Lord, only make believe that you forgive me, as I make believe that I forgive them"; or, "forgive me today, but tomorrow and the next day bring my weaknesses up a-gain with interest, for that is the way I do." If we truly realize that God measures to us as we measure to others, what allowances we would make for others!

When Peter asked the Lord: "How often shall I forgive my brother; unto seven times?" the Lord replied, "Peter, forgive your brother seventy times seven," or four hundred and ninety times. Suppose Peter had said: "Lord, if I do forgive my brother four hundred and ninety times, and he sins against me the four hundred and ninety-first time, I will not have to forgive him that time, will I?" I imagine the Lord saying, "Peter, it will not be so hard for you to forgive the four hundred and ninety first time, after you have forgiven four hundred and ninety times. By the time you have reached the place where you can forgive four hundred and ninety times, you can start over and forgive as many times more." We should think just thoughts. Let us be careful in this particular. As we are just in our thoughts of others, the Lord will think similar thoughts of us. It will be an evidence that there is a place for us at the Lord's side in the Kingdom.

The Pure Things

Again the text says, "Whatsoever things are pure, think on these things." Here again the child of God has a higher standard than the man of the world. A man of the world would think that any thought was pure that was not terribly immoral, but that is not the way with the child of God. The child of God recognizes that any thought is impure if there is any selfishness or any pride in it; or if there is any envy, jealousy, or malice in it. It does not have to be immoral to be impure from the Christian's standpoint. If a thought comes to us and we realize there is selfishness in it, we should crush it; if there is envy in the thought, we should seek to put that thought down. We cannot afford to entertain a thought that is impure, or a thought that is adulterated-a thought that is mixed with the spirit of the world. As has been said, it is only as we do this that we can properly understand just what kind of character the Lord wants us to have, because the more impure thoughts we entertain, whether they are impure along the lines of selfishness or pride, or some other line, the more they are dominating our heart and we are less qualified to judge what is right and what is wrong. Let us be careful that we think only on "whatsoever things are pure."

Lovely Things and of Good Report

Then the text says, "Whatsoever things are lovely, think on these things." If any thought comes to our mind that is so unlovely that we would not like others to know about it, do not entertain it. I have often thought how careful we would be about what we think if God had made us so others could look through and read our thoughts. Though we cannot read the thoughts of one another, God can look through, and read them, and the angels and the Devil can also. So the Devil tempts us. He looks into our heads and sees what thoughts we are entertaining, and knows where we are weak. Let us be careful whenever anything unlovely suggests itself, that we do not think on these things.

"Whatsoever things are of good report, think on these things." We are not to think on whatever the neighbors may say, but on what God has given a good report on. If there is any thought we do not find a good report on in the Bible, we should not entertain it.

If There be any Virtue

Then the text says, "If there be any virtue"-that seems to suggest to think thoughts that will help to make us better men and women, or better Christians. Do not think any thoughts that will not have that effect. If a wrong thought tries to come in, put a good thought in its place. Call some passage of Scripture to mind, sing some helpful hymn, put good thoughts in place of bad ones. Out of the simplest events of life we can extract blessings; we can get helpful lessons and draw closer to the Lord. "Whatsoever things are virtuous [if there is anything helpful], think on these things." The word virtue is not used here in the sense we use it, as opposed to vice. It means having something helpful in it -- that which would strengthen and fortify for our Christian battles.

Things Praiseworthy

Then, "If there be any praise, think on these things." If we find that God would praise us for thinking certain things, "think on these things." If you find you can praise God better as a result of them, "think on such things."- If there are things that would not meet with His approval; if there are things that would not enable you to praise and glorify God better, do not think on such things.

In these words, we have the rule for attaining skill and success as a Christian. Whether or not we have a place in the Kingdom, the rapidity or slowness with which we make progress, the degree to which we will be helpful to our brethren-all will depend on our thinking on these things. While this seems to be simple and easy, few want to do it; yet there is nothing more important to impress on our minds than the lesson of this passage, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things," and thus bring "every thought into obedience to Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5).

- B. H. Barton

Earnest Watchfulness

I want a principle within,
Of jealous, godly fear;
A sensibility of sin,
A pain to feel it near;
I want the first approach to feel
Of pride or fond desire;
To catch the wandering of my will,
And quench the kindling fire.

From thee that I no more may part,
No more thy goodness grieve;
The filial awe, the loving heart,
The tender conscience, give.
Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make;
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake.

If to the right or left I stray,
That moment, Lord reprove;
And let thy goodness chase away
All hindrance to thy love.
O! may the least omission pain
My well-instructed soul;
And send me to the blood again,
Which makes and keeps me whole.

Entered Into Rest

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