

# THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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## Thankfulness, the True Sacrifice

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living; sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." - Romans 12:1*

Not even the prophetic visions of the Apostle John look quite so far into the future as does the Epistle to the Romans from which we quote our theme text. This text is extracted from the Apostle Paul's history of man from beginning to end. The apostle first looks back in history, noticing the hollow splendor which resulted from the original sin. He holds up for our view the world of failure which we have inherited. Then his attention darts ahead to the time when there shall be no more sin and death. He gives us a glimpse of the glorious liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8:21) which the creation shall then share. Looking to Israel, he demonstrates how their stubborn unbelief shall one day assist in God's purpose of extending mercy upon all men.

Then the apostle bursts into a triumphant song: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!... I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, by God's compassions -- by the tender mercies he has shown to them of old, and by the mighty salvation he has raised *up* now for us and all men -- that you offer your bodies, by means of which all your works are done both good and bad, as a living sacrifice - - living and therefore holy and well pleasing to God -- for just this is the worship reasonably to be expected from men redeemed like you (cf. Rom. 11:33; 12:1)

You may have noticed one phrase in Paul's appeal, "living sacrifice." What is a *living sacrifice*? Our initial idea of sacrifice is the killing of victims; and in fact the Jewish temple was a great slaughterhouse of sheep and oxen; the smoke of the offerings for sin went up to heaven continually from the altar of burnt offering. The temple was more like a butcher's shop than a church. But if those sacrifices for sin were the most conspicuous of the offerings, there were also others where no blood was shed. These were not offerings for sin, and could not be, for without shedding of blood is no remission. They were offerings of thanksgiving. A living sacrifice is a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Everything turns on this point, and so we will offer another proof. Whatever might have been the meaning of the Jewish sacrifices, they came to an end when the veil of the temple was torn in half. The gospel knows only one offering for sin -- the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the

sin of the whole world which our Lord has offered once for all. We have no altar but the cross of Christ, no sacrifice for sin but the one true sacrifice on Golgotha. There are no sacrifices left for sinners like us to offer but the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. The Lord has made us priests to offer, these.

It follows that the Christian life is essentially a life of thanksgiving. True, it is a sacrifice. We have to offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be used and consumed according to our Father's loving will; not our way but his, whether he lift us to the throne or on the cross. Be this world's trials what they may, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Be our sins and failures what they may, we are not to brood over them with morbid remorse but to thank God and take courage and go forward in the spirit of hope. Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Christian life is not the melancholy thing which men so often make it. The gifts of God are not traps to catch us in. "Touch not, taste not, handle not..." are commandments of men which appear to be wise, but they have no value in the subduing of our carnal nature. All things are ours, if we are Christ's. All things are given us for enjoyment if only they are sanctified with prayer and thanksgiving. We are not called to, any specific form of abstinence or fasting -- except from murmuring (Phil. 2:14 and sin (1 Thess. 4:3). Every pleasure we can find in life is freely ours, if only we can be thankful for it to our heavenly Father.

Does this sound strange? It is the apostle's teaching. There were Colossians and Ephesians contemporary with Paul who thought it dangerous, and some think so today. Must we not have laws and rules to tell us what is right and wrong and act according to them? Laws have their use, but we shall not use them properly unless the spirit of thankfulness precedes them. Pharisees of all ages have tried to live their lives by rules and laws. We have seen what such attempts bring.

When we advocate a spirit of thankfulness we do not mean the thankfulness of the Pharisees. They gave thanks that they were not like other men. Nor do we advocate a swindler's thankfulness who thanks God for his wealth and the opportunity to do godly deeds with goods that have been gotten through ungodly means. Such "thanksgiving" is selfishness. Thankfulness originates in heaven. It lights our lives with righteousness and peace and joy and fills our hearts with the love of God and of the sons of God for whom Christ's blood was shed.

### **Faithful Guidance**

Consider what a guide this characteristic provides for our life. Those who do not look to the laws and rules which Christ followed know little, either of their own heart or of our Lords. The spirit of thankfulness is the sword of God, dividing right and wrong laws and rules may guide our outward actions (although more likely they will not even do that), but the spirit of thankfulness is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

If you doubt this point try a personal experiment. Take something which you know to be wrong, or something which you are pretending is right some unfair advantage over your neighbor or something which is doing him harm; or something which is perfectly innocent but for which you have too great a fondness. Take one of these, and test yourself as to whether you can receive it as a gift from God. Test whether you can truly thank God for such a thing. You will find that thankfulness is a test which searches far beyond the reaches of any laws or rules.

Of course, it is possible for the believer to deal deceitfully, but if one is truly thankful then- the rest of our duty will make itself evident. How can a person not be pure, true, and loving if his heart overflows with thankfulness for the gift of life in Christ?

This is what the Christian life is. It is a sacrifice which is just as completely devoted to God as any burnt offering; but it is a living sacrifice. This is true communion with God. There was always some wrath and torment in those typical sacrifices for sin which witnessed to our broken peace with God, but thanksgiving is the sacrifice of perfect love, the sacrifice which is holy and well pleasing to God. The Lord humbled himself to offer a sacrifice for sin; it is our work to rejoice and be thankful for it evermore. Even the rabbis could rise above their beggarly elements when they said all sacrifice has an end in the world to come but the sacrifice of thanksgiving has no end. This is the proper sacrifice of the triumphant church; and the meanest of us here is called of God to offer it along with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven. It is our duty that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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The World has adopted a new saying: "I am doing my own thing

There is no such thing as "doing your own thing."

Men must ultimately recognize that they are either doing God's thing, or else they are doing Satan's thing.

Whose "thing" are you doing?

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## Jesus, the Joy of the Desolate

Alone in the night-time,  
Alone through the day,  
Alone when I go, and  
Alone if I stay;  
For the silence that holds me,  
None other can break;  
And I'm lonely no matter  
What pathway I take.

Yes, lonely, as here  
In life's twilight I wait  
For the sound of your step,  
When the day has grown late;  
For your greeting to fall  
On my listening ear,  
I'm lonely, so lonely,  
Without you, my dear!

But shall I go mourning  
Because you now sleep,  
Where no storms ever come,  
And the eyes never weep?  
Where your heart no more yearns.  
For those now lying still  
In the vale, and away  
On the slope of a hill.

And would I recall you  
To live as before,  
Where the shadows of death  
Cast its gloom evermore?  
Where there's sorrow and sighing,  
And pain and decay;  
And the battle for life  
Grows more weary each day?

Ah, no! let me suffer,  
In silence, the dart  
That strikes when is stilled  
A beloved one's heart;  
And patiently wait  
For the dawn of the day,  
When the curse will be lifted,  
And the clouds rolled away.

For the morning will break,  
And the dead shall arise,  
And songs of redemption  
Reach up to the skies;  
For then will be banished  
Earth's sorrow and gloom,  
When Christ from her bosom  
Removes every tomb.

Oh, the comfort in knowing  
That you are at rest,  
With your head safely pillowed  
Upon Jesus's breast;  
That his watch he will keep  
Till the dark night is gone,  
And will call you forth early  
To greet the new dawn.

Then with joy all unmingled,  
We'll again clasp your hand;  
And through ages eternal,  
In life with you stand;  
For Jesus his promise  
To "make all things new,"  
Has sealed with his life-blood --  
The "faithful and true."

Oh, the glory that waits  
For the children of men,  
When he comes and restores  
Them to life once again!  
For his kingdom shall last  
Till the victory won;  
And God's will on the earth,  
As in heaven, is done.

- M.H. Black

## **Ministry in Song - John T. Read**

We once again have copies of John T. Read's recorded "Ministry in Song." These are newly re-mastered audio cassettes (with Dolby noise reduction) and they include fifty seven minutes of such familiar hymns as: He Shall Give His Angels Charge, The Holy City, By the Waters of Babylon, and As Day by Day.

The cassettes are available for \$2.00 U.S. (shipping included).

## Two Men Went to Pray

"God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." Luke 18:11

"God, be merciful to me a sinner." Luke 18:13

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray..." A story so well known that it needs no repetition. Yet how often do we stop to consider whether we have become like the man who, fasting twice in the week and giving tithes of all he possessed, found cause for glory, not in his separateness to God but *in* his separateness from his fellow men.

"I thank thee that I am not as other men are." What a miserable confession to make. In looking upon his fellows he saw nothing to emulate, no characteristics or virtues which he could desire for himself, but only the sordid evidences of evil. The reign of sin and death was very real to this Pharisee; and with an exquisite nicety he dissociated himself from it all and explained to the Almighty that, living by necessity in an evil world and among sinful men, he was neither of them nor with them. He, at least, was one to whom had come the superior inward knowledge which, separating him forever from the plebian multitude, rendered him a fit companion for the One who dwelt in the inner sanctuary.

We read the story, smiling with pity at the vivid picture of this pompous Israelite, and mentally place ourselves with the publican standing afar off, as we continue our reading. But what of the lesson behind the parable? Is it not true that many times -- *in* the individual Christian life -- we find ourselves thanking God that we are not *as* other men? Does it happen that this wonderful separateness to God which we call "consecration" degenerates into a smug, self-satisfied separateness from the world?

Or worse still, at times the suggestion is made that at this late date, when the purpose of God in calling from the nations a people for his name seems to be on the brink of completion, a still more exclusive and narrow minded outlook is called for -- to wit, that our age-old mission as witnesses of Jesus and as ministers one to the other must be forsaken in favor of an individual contemplation of the sacred mysteries and that we must refuse to extend the privilege of fellowship and the Word of Life to *all* but the favored few *who* are accepted as being likewise the "sealed of God.

Alas, that the fruit of a one-time zealous response not to be conformed to this world should be, not *a* transforming by the renewing of the mind, with all the marvelous light of spiritual understanding that transformation can bring, but a gravitation to the lowest depths- of bigotry, of self-delusion, of utter spiritual blindness, which' separation from our fellows must *mean* when we are not separated *to* God.

The spirit of exclusiveness is among us -- we must fight it. It is within our hearts -- *we* must root it out. No matter how discouraging *our* experiences with those to whom we bear the Word of life no matter how disappointing our efforts to serve and strengthen our brethren -- we must not become narrow or bigoted. The glorious truth of God is too precious a heritage to be made the tool of personal theories and party politics. Our mission is not to evolve novel expositions and ordered theologies from the Sixty-six Books and demand acceptance of these man-made creations as the way to God. It is not to build a creed wall behind which is defined the only hope of salvation. We are exhorted to be sure of our foundation and to have a reason for the hope that is in us.

We are expected to be rooted and grounded in the knowledge which has come our way and we are warned not to compromise our understanding of divine truth for the sake of outward harmony. But above all things we are impressed, time and again, with the necessity for continual advancement in our personal understanding of truth -- and it is in recognizing this basic principle that we shall be able to take our stand in the Temple, with open face and open heart worshiping the Father who dispenses his blessings upon all who come to him in spirit and in truth.

There may be many things -- there must of, necessity be many things -- upon which various disciples do not see eye to eye. Because of the differences of thought there must, upon occasion, be a physical separation into groups for orderly worship and service.. But that mystic communion which binds together all who truly name the name of Christ transcends such temporary divisions and triumphantly demonstrates the fulfillment of the Savior's prayer "*I will ... that they may be one.*" Stand then upon this sure foundation, and we shall have cause to rejoice, not in the work of righteousness which we have done, but in that common standing in Christ which is our privilege and seal of divine sonship.

- Bible Stud Monthly, England

## Fellowship and Eldership

*"Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord..." - Acts 20:28, RSV*

[The following article has appeared on previous occasions. Because of recent correspondence from readers on this subject we present it again at this time, in condensed form. -Ed. Com.]

Considering the troubles which have come upon this world and the fact that many of our brethren are engulfed in those same trials, we feel a great timidity to occupy the space of this small journal with a discussion of such elementary matters as the title of this article indicates. There are, however, indications that these are issues which continue to be of concern to our brethren. It is hoped that all may find some profit in the thoughts which follow.

Two questions-will be considered:

1. What is the basis of our fellowship as brethren?
2. What are the qualifications and ministries of elders?

Under the second heading, a few comments will be offered on the subjects of three doctrines which are frequently made the tests of eldership by many ecclesias, namely:

The Covenants

The Sin-offering

Our Lord's Second Presence

It may be well to be reminded that the spirit and attitude in which we attempt to discuss these perplexing questions are most important. We must prevent any feelings of bitterness or ill will from arising. Moreso, these considerations should serve rather to encourage our kinship with others who have been bought with the precious blood of our Master, and to develop in us that proper spirit of Christian love which is our final test. The attitude of being easily entreated along scriptural lines should rule our minds. And our familiarity with the Word of God should make *us* increasingly aware of the insufficiency of our own understanding and should bring us to the throne of grace for wisdom from above that God, who giveth liberally, promised to give to those, who should ask.

The basis of our fellowship is simply told. It consists of a belief in the existence of the one only, true God and in a firm conviction that Christ Jesus is his son. It consists, further, in the acceptance of the ransom price (his human life) Jesus sacrificed for us and of his resurrection from the dead by the Father's power. Further, it includes the confession that this risen Jesus has become our Lord; that is, that we individually have asked him to exercise Lordship over our lives and that he has graciously consented to *such*. And finally, it involves a life lived so as to make these confessions of faith visible to all who come in contact with us; a life motivated and beliefs acted upon sincerely according to our understanding.

"... if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).



This is our glad confession of faith and we recognize as brethren in Christ all who share it. It is an honor and satisfaction to know that they, likewise, hold those same reciprocal feelings for us. Whatever other affiliations persons may have, if they share these beliefs and actions with us we may nevertheless be able to meet, worship, praise, pray, and fellowship wholeheartedly with one another. We have a common ground of dedication to our heavenly Father and to his dear Son. And remembering that we all have one Master, even Christ, we are all therefore brethren.

### **All Elders Not teachers**

This point easily out of the way, we pass now to our second question: the ministry and qualification of elders.

Periodically, we come into contact with friends who feel that all elders should be qualified as teachers. The Scriptures, however, do not support this view. The Apostle Paul, after telling us that when the Lord ascended on high, he led captivity captive and received gifts for men, goes on to enumerate these gifts.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastor and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11,12).

"All who attend to the spiritual ministries of the truth are properly described by the term "elders," whether otherwise they are doing the service of an apostle, or prophet [*that is to say, public speaker*], or evangelist, or pastor, or teacher To fill any of these positions of service properly, one must be recognized as an elder in the church" (The New Creation, pp. F243, F244).

In another place the same author says:

"As elders of the church are all overseers ... so also each, according to his talent and ability, might serve the flock, one as an evangelist, whose qualifications fitted him and those conditions permitted him to go about preaching the truth to beginners -- ...another serving the flock as a pastor (or shepherd) because of special qualifications of a social kind, enabling him to look after the interests of the Lord's people personally, individually, -- visiting them at their homes ... Prophets [*that is, public speakers*] also had their special qualifications for service."

And one more time we quote:

"Others of the elders, perhaps not so apt to teach [*note the expression carefully*], may be just in their element in prayer and testimony meetings, which should be a feature amongst the various gatherings of the Lord's people. He who finds himself possessed of a good talent of exhorting should exercise that talent rather than let it lie dormant while endeavoring to exercise a talent which he does not possess. ... "*He that exhorteth, let him wait on exhortation,*" that is, let him give his ability and service in that direction; "*him that teacheth*" [*that is, who has a talent for exposition, for making the truth plain*], "*let him give attention to teaching.*"

It would be appropriate to distinguish a clarity in one's understanding of the truth from an aptness to teach. One might, personally, have a very clear understanding of the Bible teachings and yet possess little or no ability to impart that knowledge to others. Another person who has relatively little understanding himself may be very apt to teach others what little he does know.

## **Elder Qualifications**

The primary qualifications of an elder, which some have called "real" qualifications are:

"...that he be sound on the basic doctrines of the Gospel, namely, the atonement, that is, redemption through the precious blood of Christ, and full consecration to him, his message, his brethren, his service" (The New Creation, pg. F247).

It can easily be seen why these things qualify a person as an elder in the church. These apply whether we consider the elder in the works of ministering, exhorting, or other forms of service. What is the grand objective *of* being an elder?

Remember that the principle thing is love in all; and, while not neglecting doctrine, give special heed to the development of the Lord's spirit amongst the various members of his body, that they may become 'meet for the inheritance of the saints in light' ('Z. R4346).

It is important to notice that we are not to overlook doctrine, but that we are to give first place to the development of Christlike love.

## **Teaching Elders**

What of the special qualifications of elders who teach?

"Of course, a teacher should be apt to teach; he should have the ability to make plain the matters which he understands. It is still more important that if he have the ability to teach, he shall be clear in the truth, and so the truth, not error, may be set forth with clearness. Humility and piety should be considered paramount and primary qualifications for eldership. However able a teacher, however doctrinally clear, no one is properly fitted for this position except he have humility and piety and unless his words, and deeds have manifested his love for the brethren. For, as the Scriptures set forth, these are qualities of great value in God's sight" ('Z. R4503, Editor's emphasis).

## **Drawing Fine Lines**

Is agreement with certain views on the covenants of God, the teachings concerning a Sin-offering, or the Second Presence of Christ essential to a person's qualification as an elder? It may be that some readers may say that they have agreed with us, thus far, in the matters of fellowshipping with brethren, but that when it comes to selecting a person as an elder we should expect them to agree to certain doctrinal standards -- beyond the basic teachings of consecration and faith. The three teachings mentioned previously are those most often included in such discussions.

Is there support for such a position? This question is, we think a very proper one.

"This should be the spirit [*that is to say, this zealous spirit of St. Paul should be the spirit*] not only of the pilgrims, of the elders of the church of Christ, but the spirit of every member of it; for in a large sense each one of us is privileged to be a minister or servant in writing the message of God's grace in the hearts of others. But let us not forget that we shall of all know how to write in the hearts of others what we have not already written in our own hearts."

"Hence the propriety of great caution in choosing elders -- to find those who already have the writing of the Lord in their hearts and who therefore will be competent assistant, under the guidance of the holy Spirit, for the writing of the Lord's character likeness in the hearts of the younger brethren. And what is the message what is the epistle, that is written in our hearts by the holy Spirit through various agencies? Is it the knowledge of chronology? Is it the unraveling of types and shadows? Is it the cracking of hard theological nuts in respect to differently understood passages of Scripture? Is it the knowledge of the history of the Jews, the history of the world, the history of the Church? Is it the understanding and appreciation of the different covenants, is past, present, and to come? No, it is none of these."

"All of these subjects have more or less value, and are more or less used of the Lord in connection with this writing that is to be done in the hearts of his people -- his meekness, his gentleness, his patience, his long suffering, his brotherly kindness, his love, his joy, his peace ... With these characteristics of the Master deeply engraved upon our hearts, we shall be granted an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:8,11) ('Z. R5968).

Note that in these words of a faithful pastor all of the issues we have mentioned are held up for our examination. None has been forgotten, none has been neglected. But, each in their turn is set aside in contrast to the importance of the writing of the Lord's character likeness in our hearts. These words have stood the test of time since they were penned October 1, 1916.

### **Practical Examples**

The question is only half answered. We have discussed the matter of teaching. But what of history? Do we have precedent for such restrictive attitudes in the history of Bible students of days gone by? There has been, of course, a history of separations. That is a matter of history. Many suppose that separations occurred because of doctrinal differences.

But dear brethren, where Christ is, the spirit of brotherly love prevails and those who are lead by this spirit do not separate for any reason. Doctrinal differences among those calling themselves Bible students, except upon the fundamental items of our faith, have never in and of themselves brought about a division. But bitter spirits have brought about divisions. We look to one historical example for an illustration. In the days of C. T. Russell the subject of the Bible teaching concerning a sin-offering became a hotly discussed issue. During that time there was no pilgrim brother retired from the ministry on account of their intellectual differences on this subject. Not only so, many of those who remained with him were as divergent in their thinking as those who separated. As a practical example of how to handle such differences note the wisdom of the advice given on this subject:

"In our judgment many err in attaching too much value to the Church's sacrifice; whereas other dear brethren err, we think, in that they do not see any value in the Church's sacrifice, nor that she is permitted a share in the Master's sacrifice at all. To us this seems like the swing of the pendulum from one extreme to the other ... If after fully considering these matters, a class finds that it cannot agree, and would make better progress as two classes, we would concur in that conclusion as a wise one, as much as we would deplore the necessity of a division. Such a separation' would not necessarily alienate either class from the Lord's people ... because both acknowledge Jesus as their Redeemer, and both acknowledge that his blood is primarily efficacious" ('Z R5285).

Note the wisdom here applied. We are not encouraged to say that because of such differences we will serve, or associate, with one and not with the other group. Nor are we encouraged to question the two factions to discover which of them is most in agreement with our own opinion so that we can associate exclusively with that one. In such a broad approach we find an underlying acceptance of one reality: that whatever reasons given, the true cause of separation was something other than the doctrinal issues themselves.

Many of the brethren associated with the ministry of this Journal over the years have been greatly assisted by the expositions offered by Brother Russell. It is noted with appreciation that he, himself, did not make agreement with his views the criteria for service. Nor have we.

### **The Word: the Final Answer**

In presenting the foregoing discussion we have quoted repeatedly from the writings of C. T. Russell. We do so because many of our readers hold the nature of his ministry as dearly as do we. But neither the writer nor our readers would be advised to be satisfied with anything less than a "*Thus saith the Lord*" on any and all questions of faith and practice. We are sure that even he would not have approved anything less.

It is therefore appropriate to note the clearly defined scriptural qualifications of an elder. Any organization, ecclesia, or individual who sets down qualifications which differ from those listed in the Word' is adding to or taking away from the Word of God (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11; 1 Peter 5:1-3). The infallible Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, are the only test that we are entitled to use in deciding matters of doctrine, faith, and life.

ANY set of doctrines imposed upon a church or imposed by a church, no matter how apparently well meaning, actually take away from an appeal to Scripture. They become, themselves, the only permissible appeal. If there should be an error in such a creed, that error will have to be maintained as carefully as the truth which may be in it. If there be a defect in the creed, the Scriptures cannot be allowed to even supplement it. They are thus completely displaced from their rightful supremacy over men.

History provides us an excellent lesson. From the days of the great Reformation, every revival of the study of God's Word has resulted in a breaking down of the barriers of sectarianism and the liberating of the people of God. At times this process has involved evangelizing, at others the clarion cry has been one of brotherly love. But whatever the mode the direction was the same.

Alas, history has also shown us the fruitage of the tares those imitation believers which have accompanied the true church through this age. Wherever there has been true wheat -- true followers of the Lamb -- there have been also tares. From the bold moves towards Christian liberty and freedom there have also developed new sects -- dominated by the same partisan feeling of bondage which has resulted in the taking away of the personal liberties in Christ which had just been realized.

These reform movements have originated, generally, outside denominationalism. The most important movement of this kind since the great Reformation has occurred in this current period. But like all other movements of the past it ended in sectarianism and having accomplished its purpose, the usual testings and siftings have followed. They are present today in still more subtle forms. (*He that readeth, let him understand.*) These tests are designed by the Lord, at least in one particular, to manifest those who possess the spirit of brotherly love and loyalty to Christ and his word.

## **In Summary**

1. Brethren may be satisfactory elders who are not; teachers.
2. Clearness in the Bible truths is one thing, but agreement with any particular view of scriptural proposition which may be differently understood is quite another.
3. Clearness in the truth is one thing; aptness to teach is another.
4. Both these latter qualifications are important, but are not the most important.
5. The most important question to be answered concerning a brother who is nominated as an elder and who is sound on the basic teachings of faith and consecration is this: Is his character and disposition such that the effect of his ministry will be to develop in our hearts a greater character likeness to the Master? Will his ministry tend to make us more like our Lord?

If he should be taken from us, will we be able to say, "Thank God that we were privileged to have him here. We have grown a little meeker than we were, since we learned to know him. We are more gentle than we used to be, because of his gracious example. His word of cheerful exhortation, his encouraging testimony in our assemblies, his loving sympathy and noble support in times of difficulty, his helpful word in our studies, his promptness to confess error when mistaken, his willingness to admit wrong when overtaken, as he sometimes was, in a fault -- if that is what we can confidently expect from his share of the oversight of our ecclesia, then he shall have our vote. And not only our vote, but our wholehearted support as well -- even if his views differ from ours.

On the other hand, if he lacked these qualifications and it was quite evident he was not striving to attain them, we would not vote for him no matter how well he agreed with us in matters of doctrine.

And so we conclude, commending "...you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

- P. L. Read

## Wait My Soul upon the Lord

The expression, "Wait on the Lord," does not mean so much a rendering of service to the Lord, as a waiting for the Lord, a waiting before him to see what is his will for us. We do not understand the thought to be one of ministering to the Lord, as a servant would wait on his master, but of patient watching until we learn what our Lord would have us do.

Each child of God should wait to be guided by him, not running before him careless of what the Lord's purpose might be. *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths,"* (Prov. 3:5,6) is wise counsel.

Many of the children of God have erred along this line. Having committed our ways to the Lord, we should proceed only as he leads us. If we are not clear as to his will, let us not be in too great a *hurry*, nor try to guide ourselves. Present the matter to the Lord in prayer, asking that we may have no will of our own, but may be guided as he wills. Then, let us watch for the indication of his providence and follow as he seems to lead, leaving the results with him. We are not to follow our own choice, without evidence that it is God's will.

The question may be asked, "Are you going to do this or that? Are you going here or there?" Our reply, if we have not as yet determined the Lord's will in the matter, should be, "I am not yet decided.

I will consider the Word of the Lord to see how his instructions apply in this case." Or, "I am watching to see what the Lord's providences indicate and am praying over the matter for proper guidance." The poet expressed the thought:

I am afraid to touch  
Things that involved too much.

Those who wait on the Lord do not always seem to prosper best, from outward appearances. But the psalmist declares that we should be of good courage as we wait on God. We are pursuing the right course and shall have *his* blessing. We make no mistake when we wait upon him. Others may seem to be getting ahead of us, but we are to wait on the Lord.

Take no step unless you feel sure that the Lord is directing. Watch for *his* providences. Study his Word. Do not let your faith depart from its moorings. *"Be of good courage!"* "Good" courage is courage of a good degree, not merely a little courage. Be of strong courage; "...and *he shall strengthen thin heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.*" The word "heart" may be understood to mean the soul, the being -- especially the intelligence. The Lord will support us, he will fortify us and make us strong to bear, strong to do his will as it is made known to us. They that wait upon the Lord shall not want any good thing.

Courage, fortitude, and persistency in the service of the Lord are necessary to the child of God. Such traits are needful even to the world. Whoever lacks these qualities of character is pretty sure to fare poorly. Lack of courage or hope is one of the chief causes of failure.

Our text speaks, not to the world, but to those who belong to the Lord. The promises of God's Word, which are only for his people, those who are wholly his, give these every reason for hope. They have full authority to be strong and very courageous. The children of God will have trials

and experiences similar to those of the world besides those experiences and trials peculiar to them as followers of Christ. These do not come upon us in a haphazard way; as they do to unbelievers. They are under the supervision of the Lord.

Those who are new in the Master's service might think that their lives should run smoothly, that they should not have the troubles so common to the world; that because they are God's children he will protect them from afflictions and mistreatment. But as they study the Lord's Word they see that this is not true. They are to walk by faith and not by sight. They are not to expect outward manifestations of his favor, but are to suffer with Christ. It is to this that we were called (1 Pet. 2:20,2; Acts 14:22). They learn that they must be obedient, and they come to see what obedience means.

## **The Birth of Jesus**

### **A Christmas Lesson**

*"There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." - Luke 2:11*

Christmas is generally celebrated on December twenty-fifth. Its commemoration is not commanded by Scripture, but is a voluntary remembrance of a historical fact rather than of a particular date. We do well, therefore, to celebrate it at the same time as others; notwithstanding the fact that we disagree with the date of its common observation. According to evidence, our Lord was in fact born around October first. The December date, being nine months earlier, was probably the date of the announcement by the angels (Luke 1:30,31).

We are not returning to that time of God's creation at which Christ (as a spirit) became the firstborn of every creature (Col. 1:15). He was the same "Word" that was with God from the beginning of creation and by whom all things were made (John 1:1-3,10). Our Master was at *that* time the beginning of God's creation, through whom all other creatures were made (Rev. 1:22; 3:14).

Instead, we look to the time when he became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9) by leaving the position he had long enjoyed with God (John 17:5). At that time our Master underwent a change of nature, humbling himself (Phil. 2:8) by being made flesh (John 1:14). He, who had been preeminent in heaven, took on the form of a servant and was found in the form of man (Phil. 2:7). Then he humbled himself further, suffering the shame of dying on the cross -- as though he had been a criminal, a sinner (Heb. 2:9,16).

### **Jesus: The Redeemer**

Our confidence that Jesus was the Redeemer, the Messiah, does not rest solely upon the testimony of the apostles in the New Testament. These are wonderful testimonies, but they gain much of their importance because they speak of the fulfillment of promises and prophecies recorded by the servants of the Lord over a span of four thousand years. To accept Jesus without seeing the place which he enjoys in an overall plan of salvation designed by God is to miss much of the God given foundation for faith.

Note the first promise of a Savior. It was given shortly after sin had wounded our first parents and brought them under the divine sentence of condemnation (Gen. 3:15). Note the promise to Abra-

ham respecting Messiah, that he should be of his posterity (Gen. 22:18). Notice the same to Jacob (Gen. 28:14). To David (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Through Isaiah, his coming and greatness are foretold (Isa. 9:6,7; Isa. 11:1-9). Daniel refers to the importance of his work in ending sin and in bringing everlasting righteousness to the people -- thus sealing the visions and prophecies which the Lord had given to him (Dan. 9:24). Jesus was pictured in Isaac, who was not only the heir of the Abrahamic promise, but who was also *figuratively* put to death and received again from the dead. God's use of Moses also represented Jesus, particularly in that Moses was declared to be like the greater prophet to come after him.

Had Israel's hopes been designed by some human mind there surely would have been a clearly superior genealogy. But this was not done. The weaknesses of our Lord's ancestors are scrupulously recorded. Judah, through whose family our Lord arose, was not beyond reproach -- his errors were fearlessly noted. Phares, through whom our Lord's lineage runs, was an illegitimate son. Rahab the harlot of Jericho was a proselyte, and she too is recorded among his ancestors, as was Ruth, the Moabitess. Even upon reaching David we find that Jesus' heritage was compromised, having come from the union of Bathsheba (the widow of Uriah the Hittite). The New Testament writers are just as candid in recording our Lord's genealogy. And all of the above does not remove anything from our Lord's virtue, his sinlessness, his separateness from sinners, because these did not come through his mother but through his Father, God.

That Jesus belonged to the seed of Abraham is "nice." That he was directly related to God is so "interesting" But these facts are comparatively insignificant when viewed alongside another. He was a Jew. Born under the Law Covenant. And yet God had arranged that he should not only redeem those who were under the Law but also that he would be acceptable as a propitiation *"...for the sins of the whole world"* (1 John 2:2).

Jesus died for Adam and on account of Adam's sin. Thus he purchased Adam from his condemnation -- along with all of Adam's posterity who were as yet unborn and in his "loins." It is upon such conditions that the apostle points out *"...he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him..."* (Heb. 7:25). Not only so, because our Lord's humble birth and life upon this earth, his comparative poverty as a working man, impresses us with the reality that he is indeed able to sympathize with mankind on every plane of life. He passed from the glory of the Father to the lowest of conditions among men and back again. He is surely able to appreciate and to sympathize with all conditions and with all classes.

### **Good Tidings of Great Joy**

What was the message which God sent to men through his angels? *"Fear not."* The angel could understand why men became fearful in the presence of spirit beings. This was the result of man's contact with sin and degradation. They had reason to fear; an apprehension of further condemnation or punishment. Man's experience with other men, those in authority, also leads him to a fear of the greater power of the Almighty.

It is the true Christian who recognizes the angel's message. Such have understanding and appreciation for the extent of God's love which is based upon an intimate knowledge of God's word. It is this love which casts out fear (1 John 4:18). This is something which is still unrecognized by most men. Isaiah's words still apply, even late in 1987, *"...their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men ..."* (Isa. 29:13). And so the angel's opening words illustrate how God would have his people (those who revere his name) to be free of fear.



".. *I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.* How slow men (including God's own people) have been to believe this message and to accept the Savior! Some suppose that he is merely the savior of the Jews. Others think he is the savior of only a special class. A great number hypothesize that he is only the savior of those who manifest a special love for righteousness while under the present darkness and devilish influences. But consider how broad the angel's statement was -- great joy for all people! It would be hard to expand our conception of these words beyond their true meaning, and we are not doing so when we confess that God has arranged for the blessing of every member of the human family. All shall come to see their own imperfections, of course. But they shall also come to recognize the great redemptive price which Jesus paid and they shall share in the opportunity to return to full harmony with God and to full blessings and everlasting life.

The angels did not declare a message of universal salvation. They, did, however, declare a message of universal opportunity: a good message of joy, of privilege, love, and of hope extended to all men. The Savior had been born. He was to be the deliverer of the weak, the helpless, the dying. He was able to nourish all who would come to God through him. He had the power to open blind eyes, to unstop deaf ears. Through him all may come to appreciate the goodness of God which shone upon them in the face of the Lord Jesus.

In the Syriac language, the word Savior means "life-giver." (It is elsewhere translated "deliverer.") And what is it that our poor, dying race needs? It needs deliverance from the sentence of death. It needs deliverance from death itself into complete, abundant everlasting life. Our Lord has already become our deliverer. He has completed the work of purchasing our race by giving his precious life. It was that act which settled, forever, the debt of Adam at the bar of universal judgment. But the delivering work has only partly been accomplished, and that among only a few men. The church, his body, has followed in Jesus footsteps and has nearly filled up that which remained of the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24). During the sounding of the Seventh Trumpet of God the mystery of God will be finished (Rev. 10:7). Then the atonement for the sins of the world shall be proclaimed to all people. That announcement shall surely be good tidings of great joy unto all men! For within God's atonement plan lies the opportunities to know him, to be restored to the perfection in which man was created, to live a life of godly obedience, and by these to achieve everlasting life.

### **Glory to God!**

No wonder God sent an angel chorus to serenade men! They not only had an announcement to make, but they also had a prophecy of the great work of redemption to deliver. And in this light, how proper that their words should begin with praise to him who sitteth upon the heavenly throne. He devised the plan. He found its willing participant. He sent his Son, our willing Redeemer, to earth to live and then to die.

### **Peace**

What a simple summary of the consequences of God's plan: Peace! The angels did not mean that temporary illusion that sometimes exists among men. Oh, no! This is the peace which comes from atonement with God, from the restoration of man to the condition of favor before God. Was it not because Adam lost this condition of harmony with God that we have experienced death. God could not excuse the guilty, and the sentence of death, "the curse," has pressed upon, every member of Adam's posterity. Our race has been physically, mentally, and morally impoverished. Selfishness rules man's heart, and as a result the ambitious pride and the striving for glory and money have been the cause of many of man's troubles.

## **Glory To God In the Highest!**

Peace has been established upon a firm foundation -- the curse shall be lifted because God arranged to have the payment for our penalty made by his own Son. When the Body of Christ is completed the true day of atonement will begin. Then complete peace between God and man shall be established. As a consequence of this condition the Redeemer shall take to himself the power which God has given him and reign among men for the purpose of perfecting those whom he purchased with his own blood.

It is to man's benefit that this kingdom begin from a firm foundation. So it will come that the old institutions and governments will be cleared away by our Lord's "iron rod" (Rev. 19:15). These old ways will be crushed like the inconsequential clay pots which they are (Ps. 2:9). In their stead the Lord will establish his kingdom. He will wound in order to heal and bring in true peace upon the basis of everlasting righteousness. All will be given an opportunity to serve God and the understanding of what he requires. If any persons continue to love unrighteousness God will destroy them. He will not act in anger but in justice for the peace and harmony of all and so that nothing which is out of accord with God could mar that relationship between man and God any longer.

The story of God's redeeming love has been sadly confused. Yet, even thus, it has carried a blessing with it. Even those who are neglectful of their faith have been blessed by it, as well as those *who* chose to hear without acting upon their knowledge. However, the greatest blessings must have come to the little flock, the royal priesthood of God. These have mentally entered into the spirit of God's plans. They have realized the justification through faith in the precious blood of Jesus. And feeling this harmony with God within them they have presented "themselves" as offerings to God so that they might have fellowship with Christ: 'in the sufferings of this present life and in the kingdom glories which shall follow. And it is these who rejoice most as the extent of God's plan becomes evident to others.

Such as have these hopes can only rejoice that the message of recovery, the message of divine love, is being heard by men and that others shall soon learn the love of righteousness and the hatred of iniquity.

*"May thy kingdom come..."*

- P.E. Thomson

## The Mystery of Godliness

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

The universe is mystery upon mystery. From the minutest animals in the air and in the water, to the stars that shine at light years' distance from the earth, there is mystery. -- That is merely another way of saying that we do not fully understand anything.

The ancients believed in four elements -- earth, air, fire, and water.

Today we have discovered over one hundred elements, including those which are considered man-made and which exist for only the briefest periods of time.

It was long believed that the atom was the smallest indivisible particle of matter.

Science has looked far beyond atoms. Today they peer into the realm of subatomic particles through means of the almost unbelievable technology called splitting the atom. There, in worlds hitherto unknown there seems to be as great a challenge of continual discovery as is found at the opposite end of the creative spectrum, astronomy.

The smaller the worlds into which men delve with their microscopes, the more vast do the realms as yet uncharted seem.

There *is* a mystery in a drop of water. What binds two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen together to form a molecule of water? We give this unknown a name: chemical affinity. But what causes this action to take place? And why are not the atoms combined in different proportions?

Why does a fly have eight thousand eyes?

Why does a grasshopper need two hundred and seventy horny teeth?

Why does a codfish's eyes (formerly *supposed* to be simply a piece of jelly) have a crystalline lens composed of millions of microscopic fibers held together by millions of tiny hooks?

Where does the earthworm get the power to grow a new head if his old one is cut off?

Why do some plants eat insects and fully digest them?

Why does *a* horse get up front feet first and a cow hind feet' first?

### Why?

We could ask questions indefinitely, but only one answer seems sure: Things are as they are because they obey the laws of their creation.

Germination is a great mystery. How do the biochemical elements of an embryo become invested with that property called life? This study fascinates great minds of this present day. Yes, they even seek to create their own forms of life. Some even dream of creating a life-form not subject to death. A poet has expressed this mystery in words:

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

Why does nature never err? Oats never forget that they are oats and come up barley or wheat. The Bible says, God made everything after its own kind (Gen. 1). Man may make mistakes, but not so the seeds of the earth. After germination they unerringly grow upward and not downward. They seek the sunlight and must have its benefits in order to bear their fruit in due time.

Great mysteries surround us. No one understands electricity or light or life. Man cannot create a single gnat, bringing it to life. He reaches a point, just short of creation, at which he must stop.

### **Spiritual Things**

There are mysteries beyond the material world that belong to another realm, the spiritual. Godliness is one of these things. It *is* committed with truth, hope, faith, and love. If there is mystery in nature, it is easy to believe that there is also mystery in godliness, or godlikeness. Some of the mystery concerning him may be cleared *up*, but when this is accomplished or any mysteries still remain.

To discover that God exists is the first truth to learn about him. A detailing of his plan and purpose helps *us* to clarify the Bible. By it the greatest mystery or secret, that is, "*.. Christ in you, the hope of glory...*" (Col. 1:27), may be reduced to comprehensible elements. But more mystery remains, and the Apostle refers to it when he says:

"...great is the mystery of godliness ...God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:16).

### **The Son of God**

Every age has had its great characters. Of them all, Jesus seems to have been the most different. He had an individuality that *was* shrouded in mystery. To some of his disciples had said, "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now*" (John 16:12). Today, the world has not yet been able to bear them. The things that Jesus set forth in his teaching are incomprehensible to them. Our Lord taught the greatest law in the universe -- the law of love. Had the world received this law from him, what a world we should have had today!

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

The sacrifice of Jesus' life, was mysterious. Millions may have asked: Why did God not devise some other plan for the salvation of the human family? Why did it have to be true that "*...without shedding of blood is no remission*" (Heb. 9:22) of sins? Why were animals slain for hundreds of

years to typify the greater sacrifices (cf. vs. 23) that were to come? Why were the firstborns saved by blood on the night of the Passover? God arranged it to be that way. In due time the Lamb of God was to die on man's behalf. Could he have done differently? We do not know. He always does the best. The sacrificial death of Jesus remains mysterious in certain points, and that is to say that we do not fully understand it.

Jesus' resurrection was mysterious. We know why he was raised but not how -- except that it was by the power of God. Thomas could hardly accept the fact of our Lord's resurrection. It has been hard for others to accept too, and millions have rejected it. When the apostle Paul preached the resurrection to the people of Athens, we are informed that some mocked and others said, "...We will hear thee again of this matter" (Acts 17:32). Yet, so dead was Jesus that he could do nothing toward raising himself to life. Peter said that God raised him up to be a prince and a savior (Acts 5:31). It was a simple matter for the heavenly Father, the great source of life, to give life to his beloved Son, but it is a mystery to man.

### **Jesus Proclaimed the Truth**

Consider the mystery of Jesus' teaching. This was mystery upon mystery. His disciples asked: Why do you speak to them in parables? He replied:

"... to you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to them that are without, it is not given. Therefore I speak to them in parables, so that in seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; so that in them is fulfilled the prophecy of the prophet *Isaiah*, '*Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and I should heal them.*'" (cf. Mark 4:11-12).

What a strange thing to say! Did not our Lord want men to become converted? Apparently not. Had Jesus wanted to convert great numbers he could have presented the truth simply and backed it up with such power that his purpose would have been accomplished. But Jesus never worked against the divine program. He knew that the time of the world's conversion had not come. So he said, "*No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him...*" (John 6:44). Here was another mysterious thing. Why does God draw some and not others? Why do some take up the truth immediately, and others fail to grasp its importance?

Jesus' parables seem simple enough, yet there are great depths of meaning in them. Some think they know all about the parable of the virgins and their lamps. They know exactly when the midnight cry went forth, or will go forth. They know when the foolish virgins will say to the wise, "... *Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out*" (Matt. 25:8). They even know when the door will be shut. It is wonderful how clear the interpretation is to them. They have been greatly favored by the Lord that is, if they are right! But there comes the question: Are they right?

It may be -- as some Bible expositors suggest -- that every detailed point of this parable will not find fulfillment; that the parable was primarily set forth in order to prepare us for what was to come in a general way. Jesus was to return. That was prophesied. His followers needed preparation for that event. They must keep their lamps burning and be supplied with oil to prevent the flame from becoming extinguished.

Consider another parable: the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-12). This man was accused of wasting his Lord's substance. He realized that he was to be put out of his stewardship. This was not a pleasant prospect, so he reduced the debts of the people and thus secures their favor. In a worldly

way it was a shrewd thing to do. Commenting upon it, the Master said, "...The *children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*" (Luke 16:8). Our Lord went on to say (Luke 16:9), "*Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*" How many *fully* comprehend the meaning of this injunction?

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

There were ninety and nine that safely lay  
In the shelter of the fold;  
But one was out on the hills away,  
Far off from the gates of gold.  
And all thro' the mountains, thunder-riven,  
And up from the rocky steep,  
There arose a glad cry to the gate of heaven,  
Rejoice! I have found my sheep!  
And the angels echoed around the throne,  
'Rejoice! for *the* Lord brings back his own!'

What a beautiful mystery is the mystery of divine love! We understand some of it now, but we shall probably continue to explore its depths throughout eternity (cf. John 17:3).

### **Mystery Upon Mystery**

The advent of Jesus was and is a mystery to man. It is only understood by those whose minds are enlightened by the divine spirit. Godliness was expressed in Jesus' life. "...He *that hath seen Me hath seen the Father...*" (John 14:9). Truly, the Son of God was in the world and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not (John 1:10).

Nor does the world know his followers or understand them. To be in the world and not of it is certainly a mystery. There is an explanation for it, but not an explanation that men in general can receive:

"Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world .... If ye were of the world, the world would love its own .... But ye are not of the world, for I have called you out of the world. Therefore the world hateth you, and ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18-19 paraphrased).

How does the divine spirit of truth operate in the heart and mind of the follower of the Lord? Is this clear to us, or is there yet another mystery remaining? Why is one person spirit begotten and another person not -- they both may have the same truth. Why is the love of one Christian like a deep, crystal-pure river flowing through their life, and in other Christians it is like a small, muddy stream? Why do some persons operate in the power of the living God, and others have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5)?

To give to another we must have something to impart. To rouse another to godliness we must possess this quality in our own hearts. This was the power of Jesus. What he asked others to do, he himself did. He did not say, "Go on," but, "Come on." He lead the way in matters of godliness. He was humble, meek, pure, strong, fully consecrated to the divine will, reverent, peaceable,

kind, active in service, and possessed of a great vision of future glory. If we would preach love to others like he did, we must be enriched by it in our own lives.

### **The Great Mystery of Godliness**

God created man in his own image, but where is that image today? If the race could be restored to that image, love would reign in the heart of men. There would be no wars, no inordinate striving after power, no worship of the god of gold, no breaking hearts in all the world, no underpaid labor, no want, no care, no sin, no exploitation, no destruction of the world's produce to keep up the price, no gambling, no robberies, no graft, no dishonesty, nothing to hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain. That is what is to come in the eventual working out of the eternal plan and purpose.

Godliness or godlikeness! That is what we need. It is simply to be like God in character. God is not the author of the strife and confusion we find in the world.

He has not caused any of it. These have resulted from a disregard of his laws. God is permitting the world to reap the fruitage of its sowing. He does this confidently, knowing that he can and will make it all right in due time. Humanity will enjoy the future all the more in contrast with the past. God is a god of peace and order, not one who favors strife and crime and fear. Likewise, God's people must be peacemakers if they are to be like him. They must be lovers of righteousness and must always uphold it.

*"Great is the mystery of godliness."* Yes, it is a heavenly mystery, and the mysteries of heavenly things are great. Who can look into the heavens and not realize this great act? But more than this, who can look at a Christian and not recognize the highest potential for greatness. A believer who is strong to do and to dare in the cause of right; one who stands forth calm and serene in the midst of raging elements is a person furnished unto all good works. He is fully clad with the mystery of godliness, the knowledge of the living God

- W. A. Sargeant

## Another Day

Lord thank you for another day  
Within this life of mine,  
Give me the strength to live it well,  
Whatever I may find.  
Bestow from your abundance  
Whatever I may lack,  
To use the hours wisely,  
For I cannot have them back.

Lord thank you for another day  
In which to make amends  
For little slights or petty words  
Inflicted on my friends.  
For sometimes losing patience  
With problems that I find,

For seeing faults in other's lives  
But not the ones in mine.  
Lord thank you for another chance  
In which to try to be  
A little more deserving  
Of the gifts you've given me.  
For yesterday is over,  
And tomorrow's far away,  
And I remain committed  
To the good I do today!

- Grace E. Easley



## Effectual Prayer

"If my People, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven..." - 2 Chronicles 7:14

Of all the duties Christians are to perform, none is more essential or more neglected than prayer. How few there are who truly pray! How few really wish for the true riches: humility, renunciation of self, the reign of God upon the ruins of their self-love. These things must be sincerely desired in all aspects of our lives. Without this desire, our prayers are merely an illusion, like a pleasant dream to one who is suffering intense pain.

For many, prayer is viewed as a fatiguing ceremony and they feel justified in shortening their time in prayer as much as possible. For others prayer is a mere custom -- done by rote and repeated in form and frequency just as they had first been taught. Many pray when they are afraid, and still others pray only in times of tribulation. For effective prayer we need to examine our motives and our attitudes.

We might ask ourselves these questions: Do we honor God with our lips while our hearts are far from him? Do we feel a chilling indifference when we approach him who is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29)? Is our prayer missing a zeal for God's glory? If our answer to any of these questions is yes, then there is little hope that we will be blessed in our prayers. To be blessed in prayer requires that our approach to God be accompanied by a sincere hatred for sin and a thirst for righteousness.

### Concentration

Those who resort to prayer because of the things which they have been taught or because of their own fears do so with laxity and a wandering mind. But all earthly objects must disappear from our minds when we approach the Almighty. To whom do we speak with such concentration if not to God? Can he demand less of us than that we should think about what we say to him? Dare we to hope that he will listen to us, that he will think of us, when we forget the subject of our own prayer while we are still praying? We must pray attentively! The result of our fearful prayers and of those which arise from an insincere profession is not blessing. Such prayers result, rather, in the drawing down of condemnation from God (Isa. 29:13,14; Matt. 15:8,9).

To pray is to lift one's heart to God saying, "Let thy will be done." The pronouncing of words is not prayer. God listens to our heart and not to our lips. Our heart must be engaged in prayer, fastened upon the subject of its prayer. Prayer is the desire to do, or to submit to, the will of God; and not that alone, but also to do so to God's glory.

We must seek counsel at the feet of the creator, laying our plans before God, for only he can make them successful. Without him our designs are only a delusion, however good they may appear to us. Only God can aid us. Often the help which we receive from others is empty, but God's blessing results in an abundance -- even when it is brought forth through our meager exertions and poor planning.

## Quiet

Reserve a portion of your time for meditating upon eternity rather than devoting all of your time to action. Jesus invited his disciples into a desert place of periodic rest when they returned from proclaiming his message in the cities of Israel. How much more necessary it is for us to approach the Source of all virtue to revive our faith and love when we have been discouraged and weakened by conversation with men who act and speak as if they had never known of God.

Asking in faith is another step to effective prayer. We need that internal, heartfelt confidence that God will not reject those who bring their all to him and who rest their all upon his goodness. Must we confess that this childlike confidence is lacking in our prayer? Do we approach God confidently and without hesitation as one who is longing for a companion, or do we approach him each time anew, as though this were the first benefit we have ever asked or received from him? We need to ask in faith, knowing that God will love the heart that trusts in him and rests its all upon his goodness.

## A Last Resort?

Do we resort to prayer only after all other efforts have failed? To find this to be the case would be to recognize our own infidelity to God, an infidelity which would render us unworthy of his grace. One who prays as a last resort and without faith cannot hope that his prayer will be answered. Our faith must be firm enough not to hesitate, for God will love the heart of one who trusts in him.

What is paramount in prayer? Prayer does not require one to quit what he is doing. The best of all prayers is to act with pure intention. And we must be persuaded that the simplest, most humble prayer is best. The most acceptable prayer will be that which most conforms to the words of the Son of God and his Apostles. Let us pray so as to learn from God what we are and what we ought to be so that we may meekly fulfill our duty wherever we may find ourselves.

This union with God in prayer must be the result of obedience to his will. Only in this way may we measure our love to him. Our meditations ought to become more profound and intimate. Divine truths should enter the substance of our lives to nourish us and cause us to grow.

## Entered Into Rest

Helen Dostal, WI  
M. Shepherd, ENGLAND  
David Walton, ENGLAND  
Sophie Wnorowski, FL Bessie Yank, NY