

Grow in Grace

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia"—1 Peter 1:1

THESE WERE the ecclesias of Asia Minor which were the scene of Paul's earliest labors. Peter was the "apostle to the circumcision"—to the Jews. These brethren and sisters whom he wrote were Paul's first Gentile converts. What then were the purpose and circumstances that would cause Peter to write to these?

We know from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians that there was a tendency among believers to identify themselves with one particular apostle or leader to the detriment of unity and balanced growth in the Truth. The appointment of Paul to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews would have a tendency among the undiscerning to encourage this.

The Body of Christ is a unity; its unity is a vital First Principle. Anything that detracts from that unity is evil.

Paul's teaching inculcated a very high degree of holiness and selfless devotion, which he manifested in his own life. The natural tendency of the flesh is to question the authority of such, and to seek an authority which seems less restrictive, or to try to create an appearance of conflict between authorities, to escape their force.

We know from Paul's remarks to the Corinthians that because some were seeking an easier way, Paul was discounted as an extremist and a fanatic. And we know too, from the epistle to the Galatians (in the same area) that the ecclesias here which Paul had founded had turned aside to teachers who desired to lead them back to the Law of Moses and the old Jewish customs (Gal. 1:7; 3:2).

We know further that on one occasion (Gal. 2:11-13) Paul had to take public issue with Peter regarding a mistaken course of conduct that would have restricted the freedom of the Gospel from Mosaic bondage; and that Paul's own companion Barnabas had for a time been influenced by Peter's action.

So we can see the wisdom and necessity of something on record from Peter to those among the converts of Paul who might be inclined to question Paul's authority in relation to that of Peter and the original apostles.

In his second epistle, Peter speaks very highly of "our beloved brother Paul," and classes his writings as among the "Scriptures."

The more we think of the early chapter of Galatians. where Paul strives to illustrate and convince them of his direct divine authority and appointment to preach the Gospel, and look behind these chapters to visualize the conditions he was combating, the more we appreciate the fittingness of these epistles of Peter to these same brethren.

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CONCERNING the subject of these epistles, we know the dangers that assailed the Truth in the early years and they are the same today, because the flesh is still the same. The differences are only in detail.

There was the tendency to fall back into the Jewish reliance on external ritual and external regulation of conduct—feeling that all righteousness was fulfilled in a technical compliance with "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not," failing to realize that the great battle is deep down within each heart. This shallow external view leads to self-satisfaction and self-glorification—a gradual, fatal, building-up of a conception of a personal accomplishment in righteousness.

Another danger was, and is, glorification of, and reliance upon, the wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God. The simplicity of Christ and the depths of the Spirit's wisdom are all refreshingly independent of any worldly attainments or qualifications, and are equally attainable and available to all. Worldly education, if anything, is a detriment, swelling the conceit and filling the mind with rubbish.

Then there was the constant pull of all the desires and pleasures and enticements of the flesh. As long as we are in this tabernacle, the flesh never ceases to constantly demand attention and satisfaction.

Above all, there was the tendency for zeal and enthusiasm to weaken with the passage of time. In his first epistle it is this that Peter seems particularly concerned with.

He labors to impress them again with the greatness and wonderfulness of their calling in Christ—how its joy, when fully apprehended, completely transforms the mind and glorifies every moment with the wonder of divine love.

It is this divine joy that is the mainspring of all holiness and godliness. If this can be kept strong, and constantly built up and increased, all else will come, all other problems will be solved.

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"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ"—a simple but all-inclusive introduction—an apostle—an appointed messenger of the Anointed Savior—a messenger from him who was at once the King of Kings and the Elder Brother—the Lamb of God, the central figure of mankind, around whom all revolves, the personal manifestation among men of all the power, wisdom and love of God. Peter had a message for them and us direct from him.

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"To the strangers"—to those sojourning in a strange place, pilgrims, living, like the patriarchs, in tabernacles, having no continuing city, no fixed ties to this present order of things—a strange, separate, consecrated people—

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life that he may please him who hath chosen him."

How easy it is to forget this!—to begin to "hew us out sepulchres on high" as if the things of this life had any importance or value. But as the Scriptures so vividly present it, all we can ever have out of this life is a "sepulchre on high" a monumental gravestone to commemorate our folly and lost opportunity.

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"Scattered"—literally, "of a dispersion." The primary figure is the worldwide, homeless dispersion of Israel all through the Gentile times, but the real, deeper thought is—

"THE CHILDREN OF GOD SCATTERED ABROAD."

—whom John in his gospel declares it was the purpose of Christ's sacrifice to "gather together in one" (John 11:52). This is, and must ever be, the condition of his people in his absence—scattered abroad. It is a day of small things—a day of individual things.

The tendency, in religion, as in all else, is to build organizations, but the Truth is essentially a matter of individuals. Our strength or weakness lies solely in the degree of godliness and spiritual knowledge in the individual brethren and sisters. We must constantly force ourselves to think in terms of individuals, considering each separately, never in masses.

Ecclesial organization, the ability of leaders, numerical strength—these things mean nothing in the ultimate—all this will be sifted out as chaff and all will stand forth as individuals—one by one—"the children of God scattered abroad."

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"Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia"—that is, Asia Minor, the present Turkey—scene of Paul's earliest labors in proclaiming the Truth to the Gentiles. As such, as the foundation, this area is typical of all. It is the land brother Thomas always preferred to speak of by its name of Anatolia—"the land of the sun's rising"—the land of the earliest proclamation to the Gentiles of the Sun of Righteousness. It was the area also in which lay the ecclesias to whom Jesus' last great prophetic message was addressed—the Revelation. Here again its representative and typical character is illustrated.

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"Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." "Elect" simply means "chosen"—nothing more nor less. It is the same word for both—elect and chosen—throughout the New Testament. Peter uses the same word three other times in this epistle, all in chapter two. Of Christ—

"Chosen of God, and precious."

"A chief corner stone, elect, precious."

And of his people—

"Ye are a chosen generation . . . that ye should show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

The full description of the Redeemed is given in Rev. 17:14,

"He is Lord of Lords, and King of Kings, and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful."

Paul expresses the same marvellous and beautiful truth when he says in his greeting to the Ephesians (1:4)—

"According as God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love."

God's choice is upon eternal and unrespecting principles—

“SEEK, and ye SHALL find."

"Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you."

"Ye shall find Me WHEN ye shall seek for Me with all your heart."

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"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God." Here again we have the assurance that God's choice is on the basis of what He foresees. It is not arbitrary or capricious—

"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of THEM WHOSE HEART IS PERFECT TOWARD Him"" (2 Chr. 16:9).

The foreknowledge of God, and its relationship to the freewill of the individual, has caused much confusion and perplexity, but it need not. We know that both are basic and simple truths, yea, they are essential truths, in the very nature of things. We trouble ourselves needlessly when we in any way set one against the other, because of the limitations of our own minds.

It is not just a matter of being asked to accept an incomprehensible contradiction like the unscriptural doctrine of the Trinity. It is simply a matter of accepting obvious, and inescapable, and simple divinely testified truths.

The limitless foreknowledge of God is essential to His character as the eternal, all-wise, all-powerful Creator of all. God is essentially limitless in power, and knowledge, and goodness and love, for He is perfection and completeness in all these things.

"God is light, and in Him is NO DARKNESS at all."

—declared the Spirit through John. Any limitation of His knowledge would be darkness.

Even though we find difficulty in adjusting our puny minds to these vast conceptions, all concern is removed from the subject by the revelation that He is not only all-wise and all-powerful, but all-good.

We can calmly leave the matter of free will and predestination in His hands with the assurance—not only of perfect fairness—but limitless help, mercy and love to those who seek Him wholeheartedly in the way His love prescribes.

This is contained in the title Peter here uses—"God the Father." This manifestation of Himself to us as "The Father" draws us to Him in affectionate faith and confidence, and takes away all the strangeness and terror that would attach to so great a Being to whom we had no kinship or likeness. Is not the revelation of Jesus Christ, the perfect man, as His Own Son, a powerful source of strength and fellowship in this respect? The Fatherhood of God is one of His most beautiful truths toward us.

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"Through sanctification of the Spirit." "Sanctification" means "making holy" which in turn means cleansing from all that is evil and ungodly, and bringing into full harmony with the pure perfection of God. The whole epistle is a stirring up unto holiness.

Paul expresses the same glorious thought of divine choice and sanctification in writing to the Thessalonians (II:2:13)—

"God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the Truth."

Both are essential to salvation: (1) belief of the Truth—the gospel of the Kingdom and Name—and (2) being made holy—purified—transformed—"sanctified of (by) the Spirit."

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"Unto obedience." Obedience is the great lesson to be learned, not as a matter of force and necessity, but of love and wisdom (Rom. 5:16)—

"By one man's disobedience many were made sinners."

What a long train of evil came from that first foolish act of disobedience! Disobedience is always foolish and self-destructive. God, for all His love and mercy, cannot tolerate disobedience. He would cease to be truly loving and merciful if He did tolerate this principle, for it is evil and destructive, and if tolerated, would destroy all good.

"So by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

"He learned obedience by the things that he suffered."

Paul speaks of—

"The course of this world . . . the spirit that now worketh in the CHILDREN OF DISOBEDIENCE" (Eph. 2:2)

These verses illustrate the fundamental nature of this matter of obedience. It must be recognized and accepted as a basic principle. The spirit of obedience is the key to life—a desire to obey—a PLEASURE in obeying—in getting as CLOSE to God's requirements as possible. Saul was told—

"To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Nothing that we can do, however self-sacrificing or worthy or laborious, can take the place of simple obedience to the commands of God.

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"Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Obedience of itself is not enough, essential as it is. There must be the sprinkling, covering, atoning blood—the God-provided way of life, humbly and thankfully accepted. There is no other way of cleansing.

Paul, writing to the Hebrews concerning the typical sprinklings of the Law, speaks of the fulness of the divine purpose in Christ—

"How much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:14).

And again (Heb. 10:22)—

"Let us draw near, having our hearts SPRINKLED FROM AN EVIL CONSCIENCE."

What does it mean to have the heart "sprinkled (or purged) from an evil conscience" by the blood of Christ?

Paul explains the evil conscience that is cleansed when he speaks of coming to a recognition of the indwelling law of sin which tended to pull him down to death. This was the "evil conscience"—the consciousness of inner, inborn evil that caused him to exclaim—

"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

As we come back to the seventh chapter of Romans from time to time, we increasingly realize that it describes a stage through which all must pass—a great awakening—a great turning point. Thenceforth, the realization of the deliverance—the thankfulness and relief—becomes stronger and stronger the more we realize and are oppressed by this consciousness of the evil of the flesh (Rom. 7:21)—

"When I would do good, evil is present with me."

Only the blood of Christ, and all it stands for in love, and mercy, and reconciliation and forgiveness, can lift the weight of this oppression of the evil of the flesh, and give strength and hope to press on in the way of righteousness.

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"Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (I Peter 1:2).

THE PEACE he prays for for them is the "Peace of God that passeth understanding." It is a condition of heart and mind—settled—not disturbed—not anxious—not discouraged—but quiet joyfulness, confidence in the goodness of God regardless of anything else.

It is a recognition that all trials are passing and for a purpose, that God is good, that we shall not be tried above what we are able to bear, that nothing matters but the maintenance of a close communion with God, that everything else in life but this is just the passing scenery of a brief dream.

Peace is a quiet determination to do our best each day—cheerfully, patiently and thankfully, and leave things each night without anxiety in the hands of God. Peace is not the blankness or numbness of stagnation, but a living, active thing—a keen, joyful, absorbing intensesness in the unchanging eternal beauties to which we are by faith and hope related. Peace is stability of mind, built upon the stability of God.

Grace is usually linked with peace, as here, and rightly so, for there can be no true peace apart from the grace and blessing of God. Grace is a word of great depth of meaning. It combines the thoughts of favor, benevolence, kindness, gentleness, charm, beauty, sweetness of disposition, balanced and mature cheerfulness—but none of these

comprehend it in its fulness. It carries the sense of heavenliness of character, freedom from the ugliness of all the natural evil reactions of the flesh.

This word is used in two related ways—of God's attitude and action toward man—infinately forgiving and patient; and of man's own manifestation of the same godliness and beauty of character. Of Jesus it was recorded—

"He increased in favor—grace—(same word)—with God and man." And when he began his ministry, it was this beautiful heavenliness of deportment that struck his hearers—

"They wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke 4:22).

John said (John 1:14-16)—

"We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

"And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

"Grace for grace"—grace from God, that grace may be begotten in us. He goes on to say (v. 17)—

"The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Moses, the great lawgiver, could say like John, in the thankfulness of wisdom and humility—

"He must increase and I must decrease." All are absorbed in Christ.

Peter uses this word "grace" twelve times. He defines it beautifully by illustration in 2:19-21—

"THIS is grace—if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully . . .

"If, when ye do well and suffer for it ye take it patiently, THIS is grace with God."

When we have learned the Divine patience of complete peace and kindness and self-control in the face of the most unjust and flesh-provoking of circumstances, we have learned the beautiful characteristic of grace. Grace is true, unmarred beauty of thought, word and action toward good and bad alike.

Peter concludes his epistles with the admonition—

"GROW in grace, and in knowledge" (2 Pet. 3:18).

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THE NEXT few verses speak of the greatness of God's purpose in His elect, and their transcendent joy even in the midst of the trials which they know to be for the purging and beautifying of their characters.

It is against God's law to be anything else but joyful— intensely, overwhelmingly joyful in Faith, Hope and Love. Any other frame of mind is an unfaithful reflection on His goodness and providence and glorious eternal purpose. He has assured us, as His beloved children, that (Rom. 8:28)—

"All things—ALL things—work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

Everything that happens to us is lovingly designed to develop and test our comprehension of this glorious promise—to teach us that nothing is able to obscure this eternal joy or to separate us from the glorious power of the love of God. Paul assures us (Rom. 8:38-39) that—

"Neither death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God."

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"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3).

"Blessed be God" should be our continual frame of mind. It is a sound and healthy frame of mind. It recognizes the true facts of eternity and is in harmony with them.

There are many unhealthy and self-destructive frames of mind, but this line of thought has the power to drive them all away. If we can keep this uppermost, it will set the pattern for the growth of grace and godliness.

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"According to His abundant mercy." Mercy is sympathetic forbearance towards weakness and guilt—unearned goodness. God's mercy is limitless, as are all His attributes of goodness, but it is not shapeless and haphazard, it only runs in a certain specified channel, in harmony with His righteousness and justice. The Psalmist says (103:17-18)—

"The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon THEM THAT FEAR HIM . . .

"To such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them."

The universal tendency of the flesh is to presume on God's mercy, to take His endless longsuffering for granted, to be always thinking of mercy in terms of its future manifestation; but our continual thought should be upon what His abundant mercy has already done for us in the past, and the great obligation of love that we are under because of it.

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"Hath begotten us again"—that is, He has caused us to be born again—He hath brought us through the travail and wonderfulness of a new birth. There is much comfort and inspiration in this picture of a complete new birth unto a life of goodness.

Natural man is dead in trespasses and sins, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, driven by selfish, destructive, never-satisfied lusts and urges—"by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3).

But God desires a holy family for Himself, and out of this dead mass of corrupt humanity He is calling some, through a new birth, to a life of beauty and purity unto Him.

This new birth, this passing from death to life, is inseparably connected by both Peter and John, with LOVE. The new birth is the adoption of the motive of divine love as the rule of life, in place of the old way of fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. John says (1 John 3:14):

“We KNOW that we have passed from death unto life, BECAUSE WE LOVE THE BRETHREN. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”

Peter expresses the same thought in v. 22 of this chapter, to which we hope to come later.

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"Unto a lively hope"—that is a living hope, or as many render it, "a life of hope."

God hath begotten us unto a life of hope. Hope, Paul tells us, is one of the three basic qualities of the Christlike character—Faith, Hope and Love—beautiful, spiritual qualities. We can often get a more vivid picture when we contrast a word with its opposite. Hope is the opposite of hopeless, "without hope"—our natural Gentile state, as Paul describes it (Eph. 2:12)—

"Without Christ . . . aliens from the commonwealth of Israel . . . strangers from the covenants of promise, having NO HOPE, and WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD."

—nothing to look forward to but death and oblivion. The alternatives are: a "life of hope"—or a hopeless life.

A "life of hope" is a life of cheerful, confident assurance, joyful anticipation, a constant looking forward toward that which is promised. A life of hope contrasts with a life devoted to the present. It is a life whose interests are all in the future.

Peter says later in the chapter, "hope perfectly"—completely, exclusively—entertain no thought that does not shine with hope.

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"By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The resurrection of Christ is the basis of all hope. But it must be more—it must be the basis of all love.

"Greater love hath no man than this—that a man lay down his life for his friends." —and the whole purpose of love is to beget love.

God did not beget us to a living hope simply by deciding that it should be so. He did it by the precious blood of His only begotten Son. We may not fully understand the necessity of these things, but we MUST fully realize their necessity. We must fully realize the suffering and the sacrifice that was required to lay the foundations of the way of life to which we have been invited. The precious blood of Christ must be an ever-present reality with us—a subject of continual meditation—for these are the thoughts that soften and purify the heart and create the gentle power of godliness.

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"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (v. 4).

The figure of inheritance is a prominent one in Scripture. We will readily call to mind many references to heirs, joint heirs, fellow-heirs, inheriting and inheritance. Paul expresses this principle very wonderfully in writing to the Romans—

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

"Heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" speaks of the infinite glory of the inheritance, far beyond our mortal comprehension. "HEIRS OF GOD"!—consider what is involved in the thought!

We note that Paul connects the inheritance and the glory with the "fellowship of the suffering" (Phil 3:10). That is the same thought that Peter is leading into in the next few verses—the deep purpose of suffering in the development of the characters of God's children, and their thankful, Christlike attitude toward it.

Natural Israel murmured at the loving, chastening of God—AND WERE DESTROYED. This is one of the biggest lessons of Israel's history—that complaining, murmuring, dissatisfaction, is not only dishonoring to God, but indicates a complete lack of comprehension and appreciation of the operation of His love.

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Peter says the inheritance is "incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading." It is incorruptible—endless—continuing for ever—can never be destroyed or taken away. It is undefiled—there is nothing to detract from this infinite perfection of its goodness and joy. It is "altogether lovely." It is free from all the problems and sorrows and weaknesses and limitations of this sad present vale of tears. It is perfection.

It is unfading—this is perhaps its most wonderful aspect. The word means that it never withers, wastes, or loses strength. To our natural weak minds, the conception of endlessness in anything—even infinite joy—is a little frightening. All our thinking is adjusted to the limits of human nature. The greatest of joys, the keenest of excitements, the deepest of emotions, soon give way to fatigue and monotony. But if we by any means attain unto the resurrection of the dead, all human limitations will have been forever left behind—we shall have entered a timeless joy that will never lose any part of its intensity and fresh vigor.

Let us remember that God's infinite wisdom and power has given us all the capacity for enjoyment of things as we are at present. Whatever pleasure we experience, God's wisdom has designed and created the capacity for it in us.

All at present is on a low, brief, mortal level. Surely we can leave it to God to fulfil His marvellous promise to recreate our powers of pleasure on a vastly greater, spiritual and eternal plane. The Psalmist said, by the mind of the Spirit (Psa. 16:11)—

"In Thy presence is fulness of joy: at Thy right hand there are pleasures forever more."

We have not the mental capacity to even conceive the eternal joys prepared for THOSE THAT LOVE GOD.

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"You who are kept by the power of God unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:5).

In what way are the children of God preserved by this power unto salvation ? To the Thessalonians Paul said—

"I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:8)—

"God shall confirm—sustain—preserve—you unto the end that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus."

This "preserving blameless" is "by the power of God unto salvation." But upon what principle? Who is preserved blameless, and who is not? What of those who "for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away?" What of those who are "choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring forth no fruit to perfection?" They enter the race—why are they not "Kept by the power of God blameless unto salvation"? Peter says—

'You are kept by the power of God THROUGH FAITH unto salvation."

"Through faith" is the key—

"Chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and BELIEF OF THE TRUTH" (2 Thess. 2:13).

"Belief" and "Faith" are synonymous words in Scripture. It is always exactly the same word in the original for both. Belief is faith and faith is belief—always. John declares—

"He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave."

Paul says that there is One Faith—One Belief—that is, one body of Truth to be believed, and that body of Truth is called THE GOSPEL, for the apostle says to the Romans—

"The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

Belief of the Gospel, then, is the connecting link—the ONLY connecting link—between the power of God and the believer's salvation—"Kept by the power of God—through faith—unto salvation." Paul emphasises this when he says to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:2)—

"Ye are saved by the Gospel IF ye keep in memory— (margin & RV: hold fast)—what I preached unto you."

So although Peter speaks of the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God"—being "kept by the power of God unto salvation," he is neither minimizing the essential

necessity of belief of the Gospel, nor is he lessening the force of the basic truth that salvation depends upon faithful personal effort sustained unto the end, and is only for those who of their own free will, choose to submit to—and be transformed by—the purifying power and will of God—

"NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE, be done."

Peter continues (v. 5) by saying that this salvation is—

"READY to be revealed in the last time."

In what way was the salvation "ready"? We get the picture in relation to this when we consider the parable of the marriage feast, and we get a beautiful new insight into the mercy and forbearance and patience of God, to Whom a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day.

In this parable of Jesus, recorded in Matt. 22, a certain king made a marriage feast for his son, and he sent his servants to tell the bidden guests (but they made light of it):

"All things are ready: come unto the marriage."

"All things are ready." This was the invitation to the Jews in the days of Jesus—

"Behold thy King cometh!"—"The Kingdom is at hand!"

Six days before he was crucified, Jesus stood upon the Mount of Olives and looked down upon the city of Jerusalem, and wept. And he said unto it—

"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! . . . but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:42).

"This thy day" . . . "He came unto his own and his own received him not." "All things are ready."

"When the King heard thereof, he was wroth and he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city."

Thus the Jewish commonwealth was overthrown and their city destroyed by the Romans who were used as God's sword:

"Then saith the King to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy."

"Go out into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage."

Here is the extension of the invitation to the Gentiles. Here is where the grace of God was sent forth unto us. He said, when this invitation began—

"The wedding is ready, but the guests were not worthy."

He had done His part—

"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law to redeem them that were under the Law."

God, in His patience, is still waiting.

"The wedding is ready, but the guests were not worthy."

We get the same thought in Paul's words to the Corinthians:

"Eye hath not seen nor ear heard neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared—hath made ready—for them that love Him."

God is ready and is waiting for us. Does not this picture of divine graciousness and patience add great force to the words we read in the Revelation—

"The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

And Jesus' words—

"The bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut."

And the warning that he utters—

"Be ye therefore ready also, for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not."

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"Wherein ye greatly rejoice," Peter continues (v. 6)—

"Though now for a season—for a little while if need be, ye are in heaviness—sorrow—through manifold temptations.

"Ye greatly rejoice . . . though ye are in sorrow." It is a strange and beautiful truth that earthly sorrow can be mixed with heavenly joy and that the bitterness of the sorrow can intensify the joy. How fearfully and wonderfully we are made! How little we know of the marvelous ways of God! How great our puny darkness to His infinite light! Who are we to question?—we can but accept His wisdom with awe.

"Ye greatly rejoice." Other versions have "exult," "full of exultation," "rejoice triumphantly," and the same word is rendered elsewhere "exceeding joy," and is applied to the mental condition of those who in the last day stand accepted in the presence of the Lord—

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

He is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless—will He DO it? He will if we let Him—if we will get everything else cleared out of the way so that He can. It is clear from Peter's words that the exceeding joy is a part of the future which we can have right now, IF WE WILL ACCEPT IT.

There is one very clear fact that we can all easily observe, and that is that it is not those that have the most, and suffer the least, that are the happiest and most contented.

We can easily learn by observation that happiness, contentment, peace of mind and rejoicing do not stand in any direct proportion to outward circumstances—the greatest sufferer can be the happiest; the most fortunate can be the most miserable.

On what, then, does joy depend? Purely on the inner state of the mind. Now although this is true even in the natural, we are not concerned with any joy except the

true, sound, unchanging spiritual joy that is based on the Faith, Hope and Love which come from a wholehearted embracing of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

There the intense inward joy exists, not only in spite of outward sorrow, but actually because of it. It is recorded of the early disciples, when they were beaten by the Jewish authorities—(and these public beatings, whippings by strong men with lashes, were cruel and vicious; the intent was to inflict as much pain as possible that would continue a long time after)—when they were beaten, they departed—

"Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his Name" (Acts 5:41).

—not just patiently bearing it, but rejoicing! How close are WE to the mind of Christ? James exhorts—

“Count it ALL JOY when ye fall into manifold trials.”

Paul said, "I take pleasure—(a powerful word translated "well pleased" in the occasions where God speaks of Christ: "In whom I am well pleased")—

"I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches—insults, abuses—in necessities—need, hardship, deprivation, in persecution, in distresses—grievous difficulties, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

Do we even understand what this spiritual joy in suffering is all about? How are we ever going to break up our smug, comfortable little self-centered existences and cast ourselves fully into this glorious spiritual joy? Peter himself says—

"Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings: that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

The testimony is (2 Tim. 2:12)—

"IF we suffer (with him); we shall also reign with him."

* * *

"Though now for a season—"for a short time"—"for a little while." This is an important aspect. The trial is short, the results are eternal. Sometimes 70, 80 or 90 years do not seem short, when they are filled with difficulties and struggles and sorrows and bereavement and long lonely waiting. But that is just the natural fleshly point of view. We must get the spiritual point of view. Paul says—

"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17)

Because Paul had the true point of view, he was joyful and contented and continuously thankful through the most terrible of trials; therefore he could look forward to a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Similarly Peter continues—

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth (though it be tried with fire), might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7).

"The trial of your faith"—How is our faith tried? We are apt to think in our thoughtlessness, that as long as we do not openly abandon the Truth, our faith is holding firm. But there is far more to it than that. Paul tells us—

"If any provide not for his own relatives, he hath denied the Faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).

"He hath denied the Faith"—This illustration shows that anything that is contrary to the commands of God is "denying the Faith." Denying the Faith is not just denying the doctrine. The purging, purifying, perfecting of our faith is the process of putting us through a long series of adverse experiences wherein, by practice and self-control, we gradually develop a godly character. Of Jesus it was said—

"He learned obedience by the things that he suffered."

How could Jesus, who was from the first perfect in obedience—never disobedient—how could he "learn obedience"?

He, too, like his brethren, had to build and strengthen the mental character of joyful enlightened obedience and faithfulness to Divine principles of conduct under great trial. He never failed, never disobeyed, but still he, too, grew in grace and knowledge and spiritual strength and stature.

This is why the theory of his preexistence as a divine person is so utterly contrary to Scripture and subversive of the true picture of salvation.

* * *

"Much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire." Though gold is unaffected by fire, and is one of the most unchanging and uncorruptible substances we know, still "it perisheth," as compared to the spiritual things of eternity. Gold like all the worldly things it stands for, is perishing and corruptible, though it seems so lasting and dependable.

The tried character of faith is of infinitely more value and durability. Gold is the treasure on earth—all the things men desire and strive for—better houses, better positions and possessions—all the tangible, perishing things.

But faith is the treasure in heaven. The Scripture always presents earthly treasures and heavenly treasures as opposites—incompatibles—God and Mammon. It always presents the faithful as pilgrims and strangers—the simple, humble, suffering Lazarus class. To the rich man it was said—

"Remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

Naturally, we desire to have the good things of both lives, but that is not the way the children of God are being prepared for their eternal glory. Who are we, that we should selfishly seek the luxuries of this life, when most of the world is underfed, and Christ our Master whom we profess to love and follow, in devoting his life to mankind, had not where to lay his head? Who are we to say to the great suffering multitude—

"Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled?"

Let us remember that Jesus said—

"The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord . . . He that taketh not his cross and FOLLOWETH AFTER ME is not worthy of me."

"IF we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." Paul, given by Christ as an example of the life and character and labor he expects, said that for Christ he had—

“. . . suffered the loss of ALL THINGS, and counted them but dung, that he might win Christ, and might BY ANY MEANS attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

To him the attaining of the resurrection of life was no easy matter, no foregone conclusion by just "being in the Truth." He recognized the greatness and the fulness and the all-embracing nature of the call to "Come out, take up the cross, and follow the Master."

* * *

"Praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

Are we interested in "praise and honor and glory?" Is this the motive of our obedience, or is it selfless love? The praise and honor and glory of which the Scriptures speak are different entirely from the praise, honor and glory of the world, for they are based on truth and reality and are an essential part of the goodness and joy when all things will be in harmony with God.

Good will be triumphant, and all the upright will rejoice in that fact, not personally and selfishly, but because it is for universal good. Those who have sought the good and made God their portion will be in the ruling places of the earth, with the wisdom and power to teach and enforce the ways of God in all the earth, and they will glory that they are taking a leading part in the universal goodness.

Praise and honor and glory are empty things in themselves, but when they are related to the triumph of righteousness and victory over sin and evil, they are wholesome and beautiful and sound and desirable.

* * *

"At the appearing of Jesus Christ." All hope and expectation is centered on that event. For that glorious appearing all creation waits. How infinitely sad that the religious systems of the world have confused and obscured this great central truth—"Until he come."

* * *

"Whom, having not seen, ye love" (v. 8). Why do we love him? John says (1 John 4:19)—

"We love . . . because he first loved US."

The love of which the Scriptures speak is not a natural thing. We should be very clear on this. The term "love" is applied to many things. This love is the first of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), which Paul very distinctly contrasts with the "works of the flesh." It is something, therefore, entirely outside the realm and comprehension of the natural mind, for Paul again clearly says (1 Cor. 2:14)—

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither CAN he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

The Bride says of Christ in the Song of Solomon that he is "altogether lovely." He stands before us as the perfect manifestation of all that is good and desirable, with no fleshly weakness or changeableness to mar the beauty of the picture. Only perfect goodness can inspire perfect love.

And it is not a dead, mechanical goodness. The essence of the way of salvation is its living, personal nature. We are not asked just to love and strive toward goodness in the abstract. It is all intensely personal—a personal Father, and a personal Elder Brother who seeks, by the inspiration of a loving self-sacrifice and a perfect example, to raise us up, through love, to the fulness of eternal glory and joy.

* * *

"In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory" (v. 8).

THIS WE MUST HAVE—"Joy unspeakable, and full of glory." IT IS THE ONLY POWER THAT CAN OVERCOME SIN. It is the only power that can hold an ecclesia or a fellowship together in soundness and truth. We MUST be sufficiently deep in the Truth to lead us into this fixed and consistent state of "rejoicing in Christ with joy unspeakable and full of glory." As Nehemiah told weeping and repentant Israel—

"Mourn not, nor weep . . . for the joy of the Lord is your strength!" (Neh 8:9-10).

* * *

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (v. 9).

"Receiving" salvation is a process—parallel to "working out your salvation"—ye rejoice that ye are in the way of, and on the way to, salvation.

"The salvation of your souls." The word here translated "soul" occurs about 100 times in the New Testament. It is translated about forty times as "life" and about sixty times as "soul." The following are examples of its use—

"I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15).

"He that loveth his life shall lose it" (John 12:25).

"To give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28).

"He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16)

It is clear from these passages that the word "soul" (here translated "life") really means LIFE, and does not mean some "immortal essence" within us. We cannot lay down an "immortal soul" for our brethren. The "salvation of your souls" is well illustrated by Jesus' words (Matt. 16:25)—

"Whosoever will save his life (psuche—soul—same word) shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life (soul) for my sake shall find it.

How can we lose our life, or "soul," for Christ's sake? Understood as an immortal essence within us, it is an absurdity, but understood according to the scriptural meaning of soul, it is quite clear. Jesus explains it at the same time

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me, FOR whosoever shall save his life (soul) shall lose it, etc . . ."

If we try to keep our life for ourselves, we lose it; but if we give up our life for Christ—denying ourselves—denying our own natural desires and pleasures—yielding our life even unto death if need be, we save it. The unscriptural orthodox idea of an immortal soul confuses all this.

"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you" (v. 10).

For 4,000 years the children of God looked forward with keen anticipation to the manifestation of the woman's seed who should bruise the Serpent and destroy the power of sin.

Much was written concerning this glorious coming personage. In type, figure and prophecy he was the theme of all the Scriptures. Many prophecies were clear, but much, too, was strange and obscure. Majestic prophecies of royal power and universal dominion were strangely intertwined with those of suffering, humiliation, rejection and death.

Little wonder that God's faithful prophets sought to comprehend these hidden mysteries of godliness—the Seed of the Woman, a Light to the Gentiles, a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, a Prophet like unto Moses, a Lamb led to the slaughter, a King on Zion's royal hill, a Servant of the people, a Ruler of all nations of the earth, the Root of David, and his Offspring—at once David's son and David's Lord.

* * *

"Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (v. 11).

"The Spirit of Christ which was in them." John records in Rev. 19:10 that—

"The Testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The spirit—life, meaning, power—of all prophecy is the Testimony of Jesus. All centers in, and radiates from, him—

"He is the Head of the Body (the Ecclesia)—the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead: that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.

"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:18-19).

How keenly the prophets would desire to know the time, and the manner of the time, of this great manifestation of godliness! Truly, as Paul wrote to Timothy, great was its mystery—

"God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels . . ."

What is the significance of that—"seen of angels"? Paul, in the majestic opening chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, portrays how much greater in honor and glory the

Son of God was than any of the hosts of immortal angels that surround the throne of God and fulfil His will throughout the vast universe.

And Peter continues, in the next verse (12) of this chapter we are considering, by revealing that not only all the prophets and faithful of old, but the angels themselves earnestly desired to look into the revelation and consummation of this great mystery—the Son of God, the Word made flesh!

As we think upon this aspect that Peter reveals of the keen angelic interest in the fulfilment of the purposes of God, we are given a striking insight into the glories of the future that await the redeemed, who shall be equal unto the angels in endless immortal vigor and interest and joy— working with God in all His future purposes.

"Which things"—the glories enfolded in Christ—"the angels desire to look into," says Peter. "Wherefore," he continues—in view of the infinite and universal greatness and magnitude of your calling to be part of this God-manifestation that the angels long to see—

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind!"

What a fitting and expressive form of words! The "girding up of the loins" was the gathering together of all the loose folds and ends of the flowing eastern garments— drawing them all up together compactly between the legs and into the waistband, so as to leave the legs free and untrammelled for traveling or strenuous work.

Workmen, pilgrims, runners, wrestlers, soldiers—all "girded their loins," and all are used as types of Christ's brethren. The Israelites were to eat the Passover with "loins girded" (Exo. 12:11 vigilant and intent upon their salvation, partaking with alertness, ready to go instantly at the given signal. Jesus said (Luke 12:35-36)—

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord."

"Gird up the loins of your mind." This is what we have to KEEP ON DOING, if we hope to make any accomplishment in the way of godliness. Our minds naturally are loose and undisciplined, wandering according to passing fancy or interest, always seeking pleasure, entertainment, diversion.

Particularly in these days of the subtle, demoralizing, stupefying, mentally-degenerating influences of such worldly things as television, we need this stirring exhortation to keep our minds firmly and tightly girded and applied to the things of godliness—not as a matter of enforced and reluctant duty and suppressed desire, but with a spiritually-enlightened, sensible, thankful realization of the stupidity of this creeping form of mental slavery and debasement, and relief that we have been called out of such hopeless darkness into the glorious, purposeful light of eternal reality and godliness.

"Gird up the loins of your mind—AND BE SOBER."

Be sober. Other versions render it "Be vigilant," "With strictest self-control," "Self-restraint." The meaning is a personal, watchful vigilance against the wandering of the mind and interests to things that have no profit as regards salvation. No empty, frothy, shallow lightness, but a serious, intent directing of the mind into profitable and eternally-satisfying channels. There is no real satisfaction and peace in the ways of the flesh, no

matter how desirable and appealing they may seem to be. There is just a constant, frustrating, elusive seeking for satisfaction—"Seeking rest, and finding none."

"Be not deceived, God is not mocked." He has planned life a certain way. We must do it His way if we hope for satisfaction and success. How stupid of us to think that we can outwit Him—prove Him wrong—find satisfaction and peace where He says there is none!

Men of the world spend years of self denial to obtain a corruptible crown that soon ends in the grave. Peter exhorts the brethren and sisters to constantly keep their minds centered on the eternal, incorruptible joys of their great destiny of God-manifestation throughout eternity. Foolishness, fleshliness, worldliness, are a degrading of that which was made in the image of God—a debasing and prostituting of the high calling to which we are called—a mockery of God's great and holy purpose of forming a pure spiritual Temple to His everlasting honor and glory. Therefore, intensely and prayerfully—

"Gird up the loins of your mind!"

"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" (1 Pet. 1:13).

"And hope to the end"—rather, "hope perfectly"—it is the same word translated "perfect" in the verse (Matt. 5:48)—

"Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

"Hope perfectly"—completely, exclusively, all your heart and effort and attention given to it. Paul told the Colossians that Jesus would present them holy and unblamable and unprovable before God, provided they were not—

"Moved away from the HOPE OF THE GOSPEL."

—that is, provided they kept their minds girded and vigilant, centered fully upon the One Hope.

* * *

"Hope to the end for the grace that is to be BROUGHT UNTO YOU at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

"Brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ" corresponds with the "reserved in heaven for you" of verse 4, showing Paul had no thought of their going to heaven to receive it. He says similarly to the Philippians (3:20)—

"Our citizenship—our commonwealth—is in heaven, FROM WHENCE we look for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ."

"As obedient children." Peter comes back to the thought of obedience. Their whole calling was, as he has told them—

"UNTO OBEDIENCE and sprinkling" (v. 2).

Everything fails if they do not lovingly perceive that as the great purpose of their calling—to "MAKE READY a people PREPARED for the Lord"—prepared by obedience and sprinkling. What is involved in this "preparing"—this "making ready?"

What has to happen to the natural, rough, coarse, earthy mind of the flesh—and is it happening to us?

Obedience is such a simple, easy thing! God requires no great accomplishments—just a yielding, a submitting—just the simple love and obedience of an intelligent child to a wise and affectionate Father.

* * *

“As obedient children.” We can do God no greater honor, give Him no greater pleasure, than simple obedience—leave alone what He says to leave alone, readily and unhesitatingly, without any selfwilled quibbling or temporizing; act in the spirit and manner He desires us to act; occupy ourselves in the way He desires us to occupy ourselves. What could be simpler or more reasonable? No sorrow, no remorse, no regrets. We know it is the only sensible way. Then why ever do anything else? But, says Paul (Rom. 7:14-21)—

“When I would do good, evil is present with me. I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind.

“The Law of God is spiritual, but I am carnal—fleshly—sold under sin.”

A recognition of this is the greatest half of the battle. That is what the blood of sprinkling is for—

“Having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience . . .”

—a consciousness of natural evil and corruption. God knows the problem and has provided the remedy—

“We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

“Let us therefore come **BOLDLY**—confidently, trustfully—unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

“Grace to help in time of need.” That is the answer to all our problems. We must come to realize that. The whole purpose of the Law of Moses was to teach man his weakness and need and to point to the source of help and strength. God asks nothing that He does not freely offer the power to accomplish.

* * *

“Not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” Fashion is an outward, shallow, passing thing. Paul says, “The fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:31), and the point he is making is that those who follow it are to pass away with it. The following of passing fashions is a mark of shallowness and emptiness of mind, especially in those who have taken on the Name of Christ and are related to infinitely greater things. The children of God must examine everything they do from the perspective of their holy and eternal calling.

* * *

“The former lusts in your ignorance.” Ignorance is the opposite of knowledge. We are ignorant just to the extent and measure of our limitation of divine knowledge. If we do not have scriptural knowledge, we are IGNORANT—there is no other word for it.

Surveying God’s revealed Word as a whole—its wonderful 66 books of glorious, spiritual revelation—what word describes our accomplishments of learning best—knowledge, or ignorance?

The more ignorant we are, the more our lives will be directed by the “lusts of our ignorance;” the more knowledge we have (if we USE it), the more we shall conform to the image of Christ. Therefore Peter earnestly concludes his epistles with the exhortation—

“GROW in grace, and in KNOWLEDGE.”

We must grow, and keep on growing, as long as we have life and opportunity. Otherwise there is no hope at all of acceptance and salvation.

* * *

“As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation (that is: conduct, living).” (v. 15).

When the Spirit, in giving these commands, frames them upon the basis of a comparison with God Himself, it is setting a high standard indeed—

“Be ye holy, as GOD is holy.”

“Be ye perfect as GOD is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

“Forgive, even as GOD hath forgiven” (Eph. 4:32).

“Love one another, as GOD hath loved” (John 15:9-12).

What does it mean to “be holy?” It is a word that we do not make sufficiently a part of our everyday pattern of thought and activity. Do we make a point of stopping to think throughout the day as to whether what we are doing is holy or unholy?—for if it is not the one, it is the other; there is no neutral ground.

WE SHOULD. Peter has just emphasized again the issues of obedience as the key to life or death, and the FIRST COMMAND that follows is—

“BE YE HOLY in all your conduct, even as God is holy.”

It is profitable to note once again the infinite repetition of that little word all—“in ALL your conversation (conduct).” In the very essence of it, it must be all-inclusive, or it is not true holiness at all.

“Be ye holy”—that is, Be ye separated, set apart, sacred, devoted. Paul declares (Heb. 12:14)—

“Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

To be holy is to be separate from all that is fleshly and worldly, to be devoted to God, to act always in a spirit of self-restraint and reverence, as befitting the presence of God. The greatest incentive to holiness is a strong, vivid, living consciousness of the closeness of God.

We must all freely confess that we fail miserably in this matter of holiness, when measured by the divine standard. We so easily forget, and drift into the natural, thoughtless, unholy way of the flesh (for all that is natural and thoughtless is unholy and unclean).

We so easily sink down to the level of mere animal interest and existence, like all the rest of the world that knows not God. How clearly stands out the need for the constant repetition of the exhortation to "Gird up the loins of your mind!"

"And if ye call upon the Father, Who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

SINCE YOU call Him "Father"—since you have taken it upon you to claim such a close relationship with the Eternal Creator of the universe—since you have recognized His authority and discipline and jurisdiction and claim on you as His children—"pass the time of your sojourning in fear."

We note first Peter's reference to this present life as a "time of sojourning." To keep it before our minds in this light is a great help toward holiness.

To "sojourn" is to dwell at a place temporarily as a stranger—not a native, not a citizen, not a part of the community. The literal meaning is even more striking and applicable: it means "to dwell from day to day"—just a day at a time: no roots, no connections, no fixed abode.

We must constantly fight the tendency to get entrenched in the present, to lay up treasure on earth, to build ourselves "sepulchres on high" (for all we can build in this life is a sepulchre, and if we are not constantly on guard against the trends of the flesh that is exactly what we shall in the end find that we have done—merely erected a magnificent tombstone of folly and failure.)

We must live in the constant recognition that ours is a day-to-day pilgrimage, that the Master's call—"Leave all and follow me"—is still the narrow, and only, way to life. "Here we have no continuing city"—no ties to the present—one day at a time.

"Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

John declares, and he describes an intensely beautiful ideal—

"Perfect love CASTETH OUT FEAR . . . He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

Are we, then, like some who would make man's obedience to God merely a matter of human option and choice, to deprecate the aspect of fear in our mental regard of the Great Creator of all? We are told by the Spirit through Solomon (Eccl. 12:13) that to—

"Fear God and keep His commandments is the WHOLE DUTY of man (literally the WHOLE MAN)."

Nor is this an isolated passage. Nor is its lesson confined to the Old Testament. Many are the New Testament exhortations to a healthy, constructive, reverential fear—

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God ”

"Be not high-minded, but fear."

Our fear must be a deep awesome reverence for the greatness and majesty of God's holiness—a careful, vigilant caution to ever strive against falling short—a realization of constant danger, constant weakness and constant need. This aspect of our salvation is apt to receive too little consideration in these democratic days of human exaltation and self-sufficient presumption. If we are not very careful, we are unconsciously and inevitably influenced in our outlook by the atmosphere of the times, especially when it is so pleasing to the flesh. A deep, inner, inherent, subconscious pride of the flesh is our greatest enemy and peril. That is why enlightened humility works in "fear and trembling."

But fear must NEVER dominate. It must always be subordinate to the great and comforting realization that God is infinitely merciful and compassionate toward the distressing weaknesses of those who truly give Him ALL their heart.

"Perfect love casteth out fear," and our lives should be a gradual transition, step by step, ever upward, from the immaturity (though primary necessity) of the one to the full and fearless maturity of the other—"Perfect love casteth out fear." But let us, every step of the way, face with fear and reverence the full reality of the imperfection of our love at its highest and best, and the constant danger of mortal weakness and fleshly deception till the last day's record is made.

* * *

". . . the Father Who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work" (v. 17).

IT IS HARD for us to get the true picture in respect to this matter of "without respect of persons." Our thinking is almost inevitably tinged with the assumption that God will make a special exemption in our case—that He will tolerantly overlook things in us which He would not in ordinary people. We each are so important to ourselves that it is very difficult to regard ourselves as just one more among millions in God's sight. This was the Jews' great and fatal self-delusion—let it not be ours. The only thing that will mark us out as anything different in God's sight from the rest of the nameless, forgotten, perishing millions is to BE different, very different, in the way He specifies.

There are many in the world who are different from the general run—many who differ strikingly in a devoted, religious way—marvellous examples of utter dedication and self-discipline. Men have given their whole lives—sometimes unto terrible deaths—in devotion to God, in study and translation of the Scriptures, in compiling books of reference, in missionary labors, in works of charity and self-sacrifice.

What is it that will make God look to US, and not to them—confer the eternal divine nature upon us, and allow them to pass into endless oblivion? Certainly it must be something very exceptional.

There is no respect of persons with God. No one has any special consideration because of relationship, or because they happen to be in an ecclesia, or to be brought up in the Truth.

Each of the chosen in the end will be there because of just one reason—because he has manifested something that God desires that He has not found in those vast numbers that are not chosen.

How can this fundamental difference between the way of life and the way of death best be defined? We know, of course, that none will be among the accepted apart from a knowledge and belief of the things that comprise the One True Gospel of salvation—the Scriptures are very clear on that. But—all the rejected will have a sufficient knowledge of God's way to make them responsible, or else they would not be called to judgment at all.

Many, therefore, who believe will be rejected. So a belief of the Truth, while essential to salvation, is not the deciding factor between acceptance and rejection (unless we think of the term "believe" in its fullest scriptural sense which means a belief which is harmoniously and consistently manifested in every aspect of life and conduct—a belief which takes over the entire will and desires.

In the very nature of things, there is no intermediate between salvation and rejection. The judged are divided into two classes, just as sharply as the distinction between black and white—the sheep and the goats, the right hand and the left—"Come, ye blessed . . . depart, ye cursed."

How can such a sharp line of cleavage be cut? Are there no degrees of effort and accomplishment? As to salvation itself, clearly there are no degrees—it is all or nothing.

There must therefore be one basic factor of distinction, and that basic deciding factor is defined perhaps most clearly by Paul in the 8th chapter of Romans—

"To be fleshly-minded is death: but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace.

All mankind, therefore, as God looks down upon them, are either carnally-minded or spiritually-minded. There is no in-between. Each of us here today are either fleshly (or natural) minded, and in the way of death; or we are spiritually minded, and in the way of life. What do we think of naturally? What things interest us? Where is our heart? Where is your treasure?

The apostle, in this same place, in further defining the distinction, declares—

"They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit the things of the Spirit . . .

"If ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do MORTIFY—put to death—THE DEEDS OF THE BODY, ye .shall live."

Here, then, are the two classes—those whose motives spring from the flesh, who manifest the "works of the flesh": impatience, selfishness, anger, indifference to others' welfare, interest in and desire for present things; and those whose motives spring from the guidance and teaching and transforming power of the Word of God: Love, gentleness, calmness, patience, peace of mind, joyfulness, serene and untroubled faith in the care and goodness of God, no thought of self-pleasing or self-advantage, devotion to the good of others and the glory of God through the beauty of holiness, thinking no evil, bearing all things, seeking not their own—not their own desires, not their own ideas of righteousness, but God's. It is very possible to be wholly absorbed in scriptural things

without being "spiritual-minded," for the latter goes to the very roots of character and disposition.

We can see that there can be no halfway between the two ways of life, for they deal with the central motivating power of all actions, and a man can only serve one master. In scriptural terms, the one group are alive, the others dead. No greater difference could be expressed. It is not a difference of degree, but of a complete opposite.

This is not to say that there will not be repeated failures on the part of those who are dedicated to spiritual-mindedness, but the big distinction is that they are dedicated to this way, that they intelligently recognize and joyfully accept it, that they discern and repudiate the way of the flesh, that they recognize its evil and ugliness, that they experience heartfelt sorrow—not only for failures—but for the puny limitations of their highest and best efforts of holiness and spiritual-mindedness.

"With God there is no respect of persons"—no arbitrary favorites, no special cases, no exceptions to the rules of supreme and loving wisdom, but all is according to an undeviating divine rule—

"To be fleshly-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace."

* * *

"The Father Who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work" (I Peter 1:17).

THERE ARE many passages that speak of everyone being rewarded according to his work. The Bible closes with this warning (Rev. 22:12)—

"Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be."

This is a firmly established scriptural principle. Then there is another class of passages, represented by Eph. 2:8—

"By GRACE are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves—it is the gift of God: NOT OF WORKS, lest any man should boast."

Here is illustrated the necessity of "rightly dividing the Word of Truth"—of taking the time and trouble to be sure we get the true, harmonious meaning. Many close the book here, slumbering under the sad delusion that they can leave all to the grace of God.

Such apparently contradictory passages emphasize the fact that only those who are willing to give their whole heart and attention to the Truth will ever comprehend it in a living and saving way. Millions are wrong—only the God-guided few will be right. What do the Scriptures tell us is necessary to obtain this guidance?—entire devotion.

The answer and harmony lie in such passages as these—

"Not by the works of the LAW"- (Gal. 2:16).

"Not by works of righteousness which WE, have done."

"We are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

"It is GOD that worketh in you" (Phil. 2:13).

"May GOD make you perfect in every good work" (Heb.).

Putting all these teachings together, we learn the following facts which are all harmonious with each other, and which explain the apparent discrepancy between "not of works" and "judged according to works"—

1. "By the works of the Law (of Moses or of any law) shall no flesh be justified in God's sight," because the Law was given for the very purpose of manifesting to man that it is impossible for him in his fleshly weakness to render the perfect obedience that the righteousness of God requires. Man has to learn his own weakness and helplessness, that he is by nature and constitution a helpless slave of sin, that of himself it is impossible to earn or merit salvation by ANY amount of "work" he may do. Salvation to eternal life is purely of the grace and love and mercy of God.

2. Still, there cannot be salvation without works—

"Faith without works is DEAD . . . Ye see then how that by WORKS a man is justified, and not by faith ONLY" (James).

"Every man shall be rewarded according to his deeds . . . eternal life . . . (or) . . . indignation and wrath" (Rom. 2:6-8).

3. God will guide and strengthen us to accomplish these necessary works IF (and only if) we will completely give ourselves to Him, recognizing our own helplessness, and recognizing further that any good we may ever do is entirely of God and to the glory of God—never to our own glory and accomplishment. Here again, it is all or nothing. We cannot go half into it and have half a salvation. If we give ourselves ENTIRELY to God's Word, God will work in us and we shall attain salvation. If we do not give it our whole life, He will not help us, and then we have absolutely no hope of attaining it. Let us have the wisdom to face this fact.

4. WE MUST DO OUR PART, and we shall be held responsible for doing our part. The command: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" clearly shows that although all is of God, still there must be real and consistent effort and striving on our part to overcome. This aspect—the most important aspect as far as we are concerned, from a practical point of view—is constantly emphasized in the Scriptures; never minimized or obscured. This is the big lesson that the general religious viewpoint of the world misses—the vital urgency that is necessary in constant prayer and study and striving to comprehend and manifest more and more perfectly the mind of God as revealed in His Holy Word and portrayed in His Glorious Son.

* * *

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers.

"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18).

The blood of Christ is incorruptible, where silver and gold are not, because it is related to heavenly, eternal things. And it is related to these things because it represents a PERFECT LIFE—a life of perfect obedience and godliness—"a Lamb without blemish

and without spot." Only perfection is incorruptible. Everything to do with God is perfect. The foundation of any true fellowship MUST be a mutual recognition that the only acceptable aim and standard is perfection—divine perfection.

We must be united in this aim and desire, or we are not truly united at all.

* * *

"Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (v. 20).

Peter is showing the greatness of Christ, and the oneness of God's purpose from the beginning. It is one of the great blessings of the Truth that we are led to discern the continuity of God's purpose, and the relation to that purpose of all that has happened from Eden.

All scriptural history, and much of other history, is given an interest and a meaning because of the workings out of this purpose. Consider particularly our viewpoint of current events compared to the view of the people of the world.

To us the activities of Russia, of the Arabs, of Israel, and so forth, are all seen as relating to a great divine plan—a plan soon to be consummated in a wonderful fulfilment, solving all problems, banishing all fears, and bringing worldwide benefits beyond the dreams of any of the world's troubled statesmen.

But to the world there is just the building up of evil forces, the violence of ancient hatreds, terrible and increasing powers of mutual destruction, constant and increasing fear of a world-wide Pearl Harbor when the growing northern aggressor is finally ready to strike—endless, meaningless negotiations for disarmament while more and more fearful weapons are developed.

(The word here translated "foreordained" is everywhere else translated "foreknown." The latter is much better, in that it does not convey the sense of arbitrary predestination.)

* * *

"But was manifested in these last times FOR YOU" (v. 20).

The power of God's purpose is in its personal application. All was done, says Peter, "for you." It is true that we are told that all things were created for God's pleasure, but we must not interpret this in an arbitrary and an impersonal and discouraging way, as if all flesh were mere cattle in His sight.

It is God's pleasure to be the compassionate Father of a great multitude of beautiful and glorified sons and daughters. All the individual personalities that make up that vast host are elements of God's pleasure. "God so loved the world" is a thought of great power, always to be kept in the foreground, even though the world has made it the watchword of a false system of belief.

* * *

"You who BY HIM do believe in God that raised him from the dead and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God" (v. 21).

Jesus said, in speaking of his sacrifice—

"I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

"You who BY HIM do believe in God." We see another aspect of the glorious mediatorship of Christ. By him we believe in God. He is the visible manifestation, the historic manifestation, of God among men. Let us remember that in Christ God drew near unto men, and dwelt among them—

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

The great meaning of Christ is that God was drawing near unto men, and drawing men unto Himself. We must get increasingly nearer and nearer to Him for love to work its beautiful, eternal, perfect work.

* * *

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the Truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another with a pure heart fervently"—v. 22

"YE HAVE purified your souls in obeying the Truth through the Spirit." Ye have purified your souls—your lives—your hearts—your inward selves—by obeying the Truth, because thereby you have repudiated all the evils of the flesh, all its selfish motives and motions, all its carnal and godless desires, all its ugly characteristics of greed and hate and pride and malice and bitterness, and have dedicated yourselves wholly to LOVE and the GUIDANCE OF GOD, for all your thoughts and actions.

Ye were unclean, but "ye have purified yourselves" by accepting and submitting to the cleansing of the blood of Christ, the condemnation of the natural, fleshly way of sin, the repentance of and disassociation from that way, the exaltation of holiness, the covenanted allegiance to godliness. Have we purified ourselves? These things are not rituals and technicalities and outward forms; to have any power or meaning or value in the sight of God they must be strong and living realities—glorious realities of spiritual transformation.

It is as Paul tells the Romans, "Ye were the slaves of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that was delivered you, and have become slaves of righteousness."

"Ye were slaves of sin . . . ye are now slaves of righteousness." The word indicates the all-comprehensiveness of the service, the completeness of the dedication and ownership. And so it must be. There can be no partial, calculated, limited, reserved service to righteousness.

This principle of total slavery—ALL our time and efforts and interests and energies belonging to God—is the very life and essence of the Truth. In response to an inquiry about the extensive participation in worldly amusements by a prominent brother in another group (which had been listed with evident approval in the brother's obituary in the group's magazine), I received the following reply from the chief spokesman of that group—

"I am not aware that these activities have ever interfered in any way with bro. 's service to the Truth . . . I have never known him in the least way remiss in any duty . . .

"I do not think that a brother who was working during the day would justly have time to engage in the interests that occupied our brother, and I think that therefore IT WOULD BE WRONG IN THEIR CASES to devote time which ought to be given to the Truth, but this, as I have said, does not apply in this case."

The cramped and partial viewpoint of the responsibilities of the Truth herein expressed, and the justification, on the basis of it, of worldly activities for brethren who are sufficiently well-off not to have to work for their living, AND FOR THEM ALONE—NOT FOR WORKING BRETHERN, was, I believe, one of the most fundamental and convincing of the many similar expressions of viewpoint that, over the years, forced upon me the unshakable conviction that the spirit and meaning of the Truth as I had learned it, and as the Berean Fellowship has endeavored to present it, on the basis of the example and teachings of brethren Thomas and Roberts, is entirely different from that conception of it held at present by the majority Christadelphian groups.

It was not the action of the one individual that made the incident so affecting. We cannot judge a group by the acts of any particular individual, even though he be very prominent. What was so revealing was the approving publicity officially given to the action, the labored official defense of it, and the assurance that "no criticism" of the action or of its approving official publicity had been received from any member of the entire group.

Let us, therefore, hold aloft the old Christadelphian banner of complete and unreserved dedication—ALL the heart and soul and mind and strength—the joy and satisfaction of ENTIRE devotion, realizing, that even if we did many times more than we ever do do, we would still be "unprofitable servants," entirely dependent upon God's mercy and kindness.

* * *

"Unto unfeigned love of the brethren."

HERE IS the acid test of the reality of our transformation. And let us never forget for a moment that the "love" of which he speaks is a vast and heavenly thing. It is a quality of devotion that strains the capacities of our puny, fleshly minds to even comprehend, let alone to fully manifest. It is something far above and beyond anything the natural mind of itself can conceive. Paul tells us this.

The natural mind has an almost irresistible tendency to cut down its definitions of scriptural conceptions to fit its own cramped range of understanding. Let us recognize this tendency and do our utmost to guard against it. Otherwise we shall never rise to the true and full conception of the glorious way of godliness which Paul describes as being "changed into the image of Christ, from glory to glory."

Jesus said (John 13:35), on the eve of his laying down his life for his friends—

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, IF YE HAVE LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER."

Now there are many manifestations of deep affection in the world, so it is evident that the love among his disciples of which he speaks here must be something very unique and exceptional and noticeable to others—"By this shall all men know . . ." It is the love

of which Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 13, not a common, shallow, superficial affection, but a devotion whose unshakable roots sink deep into Faith, and Hope, and Wisdom, and—above all—Patience. It is the love that caused him to lay down his life for us while we were yet sinners—looking, hoping, believing right through all present appearances and disappointments to the glorious end.

Peter's exhortation here is that—seeing that pure and devoted love of the brethren is the agreed distinguishing characteristic of the children of God—they MUST, above all things, take care to manifest and build up that love.

John likewise said that love of the brethren was the distinguishing evidence between life and death—

"We know that we have passed from death to life, BECAUSE WE LOVE THE BRETHREN. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John 3:14).

Seeing (says Peter) that the acceptance of this principle was the basis and the actual means of your entrance into the purified family of God, take care than you live up to your solemn undertaking. You were admitted freely by God into His family upon the basis of your professed acceptance of a new, unnatural, unearthy, unfleshly way of life—LOVE. Do not betray that trust, for God is not mocked.

Peter's reference to unfeigned love emphasizes the great danger of failing to comprehend and manifest the true divine affection in its fulness. It is SO EASY to accept a form of words—so easy to talk glowingly and gushingly about "love" without even beginning to realize what is meant and what is involved in this tremendous conception of Christlike, self-sacrificing godliness.

If there is one aspect of the Truth above all others in which we can be said to fall short, it is this aspect of "loving one another with a pure heart fervently."

When God speaks of love, He speaks of no light or common thing. He speaks of supreme sacrifice, of a cheerful readiness to lay down the life. The great sacrifice for sin which we have met together to remember manifests God's conception of the magnitude of love.

It is not natural. It is the very opposite of everything that is natural. It is the mark of godlikeness.

The natural, fleshly way is irritation, impatience, self-justification, retaliation, petty criticism, imputing wrong motives, thoughtlessness of others. How quick we are to resent a slight, to snarl viciously back at opposition or contradiction, to find fault, to expose and belittle, to repeat anything that is unfavorable, to gossip. We never call it gossip. We never think of what we say as gossip, but much of our conversation to and about one another is nothing else.

Whenever anything unfavorable has to be said, we must be sure it is necessary for the accomplishment of good, and that its overall purpose and motive is love—to warn, to correct, to build up in love.

* * *

"See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."

IS THIS love the deep and controlling feeling of our heart toward all our brethren and sisters? We must constantly ask ourselves about everything we do: "Is this reaction Spirit-guided, or is it just the natural reaction of the flesh? Is our motive truly love? Peter says again, later on in this epistle—

"Above all things—ABOVE ALL THINGS—have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall cover the multitude of sins" (4:8).

And there are a multitude of sins that must be covered— both our own and others. Again, the Spirit saith (1 Cor. 13)—

"Love is longsuffering and kind, is not easily provoked thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

If we could, as a Body, get closer to this beautiful, divine ideal, most ecclesial problems would solve themselves.

This divine love does not depend upon the lovingness or loveliness of the recipient. It is in its essence universal and unrestricted in its radiation and warmth like the life-giving light of the sun. To plead unloveliness as an excuse for not loving is to miss the whole meaning of scriptural love. It is the least lovable that are the most in need of love. Jesus said:

"If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? For SINNERS also love those that love them" (Luke 6:32).

What is the virtue in such a cheap, common, natural thing as that? To be nice, and kind, and friendly, and cheerful, when things suit and please us, means absolutely nothing. It is how we react when things do not please us that counts. It is so easy to think we are a kind, sweet character because most of the time we do not show our teeth and temper. But our reaction under provocation and annoying circumstances is the real test of our character, however we may attempt to justify and belittle and rationalize and treat as "exceptions" these evil outbursts. They manifest the ugly rottenness that lies beneath the artificial surface. **THEY ARE THE REAL, NAKED "US,"** and unless we face this mortifying fact and bend every effort and prayer toward doing something about it, that is the "us" that will stand shivering and exposed and ashamed at the judgment-seat of Christ.

When Jesus said here, "If you just love those that love you, what thank have ye?" he used that same beautiful word that Peter used in a similar expression—grace. "What grace have you if your so-called "love" is restricted to just those that please you?" That is just a pleased animal reaction, like the purring of a cat.

* * *

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible—the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever"—v. 23

This he gives as the basis of his exhortation to love. Ye have been reborn. Ye are new creatures. Your natural birth was of the defiled and corruptible seed of Adam. Through him you inherit sin and corruption, mortality and death—evil desires and evil reactions.

But you have been reborn by the power of the Word of God, and the Word of God is incorruptible and ever-living. It is pure and wholesome and life-giving. It teaches the

greatness and beauty of the power of love. To illustrate the contrast between the natural and spiritual births, Peter quotes a very appropriate passage from Isaiah—

"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass.

"The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the Word of the Lord endureth forever."

The Word of the Lord—the wonderful revelation of Himself which He has given us; the Word of salvation which He has "magnified—made great—above all His Name."

What did the Psalmist mean when he said that God had magnified His Word above all His Name? God's Name is all His works and attributes. His Word is His purpose in Christ Jesus. Christ is the Word made flesh—

"He hath magnified His Word above all His Name."

This statement occurs in Psa. 138, a psalm of intense praise and thanksgiving to God for His manifestation to man of His infinite goodness—

"I will praise Thee with my whole heart for Thy lovingkindness and for Thy truth, for THOU HAST MAGNIFIED THY WORD ABOVE ALL THY NAME.

"In the day when I cried Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with STRENGTH IN MY SOUL."

We must realize the value of this living Word of Truth that we have in our hands, that is able to transform us to the mind of the Spirit, and give us an inheritance with the saints in light—

"This is the Word"—says Peter, v. 25—

"which by the Gospel is preached unto you." —G.V.G 83