

Days of Praise

A lit white candle with a flame, surrounded by red berries and pine needles, set against a warm, textured background. The candle is the central focus, with a small sprig of red berries tucked into its base. The background is a soft-focus, warm-toned surface, possibly wood or stone, with more red berries scattered throughout. The overall mood is cozy and festive.

December 2017 • January • February 2018

Days of Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

December 2017 • January • February 2018

*“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour
and power: for thou hast created all things, and for
thy pleasure they are and were created.”*
(Revelation 4:11)

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8)

Dear Christian friend,

Micah, like many Old Testament prophets and leaders, seemed to be constantly “swimming upstream” against the current of a rebellious Israel and Judah. God had showed them for centuries “what is good.”

God’s good was manifest in the creation itself—but man had rejected that. The cycle of rebellion, repentance, and rescue was repeated often. God wooed, pleaded, and sent prophet, priest, and king to bring His people to their senses, yet they rejected the promised Messiah even when He came demonstrating the power and purity of the Creator.

The good is obvious. “The way, the truth, and the life” are clear (John 14:6). All that remains for us is “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with [our] God.”

Many of these devotionals bring to our attention the great sacrifice the triune Godhead made so you and I might have life. We have profited by preparing them for you. May your own heart and mind be encouraged as you read them each day.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

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Friday, December 1

Did He Really Die?

“And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.” (Mark 15:44-45)

The absolute and total physical death of Christ is essential to the gospel. Certain liberals and detractors have for years tried to obscure or deny this vital teaching, claiming that Christ merely “swooned” on the cross and later revived in the tomb, then appeared to His followers who falsely claimed His resurrection.

But to the Christian, the death of Christ is not an option. The Bible teaches that sin had separated each man from God, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” being declared righteous only “through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:23, 25) that was shed on the cross. “Without shedding of blood is no remission” of sin (Hebrews 9:22). There can be no Christianity without the real death of the real, sinless Son of God.

It seems that the gospel writers, in recounting the events of the crucifixion, go to great lengths to make sure no one misunderstands. In Mark 15, for example, nearly 20 people are mentioned who no doubt would testify to His death. Consider the likely testimony of the Roman guards who had tortured Him to the point of death (vv. 15-23), nailed Him on the cross (v. 24), and watched Him die. The executioner (v. 25) and the centurion (vv. 39, 44-45) were trained in killing. They knew how to recognize death. The thieves (v. 27), the mocking passersby (v. 29), the chief priests and scribes (v. 31), the grave keepers (v. 46), all would have had no doubt. Pilate was convinced (vv. 44-45), as were His many friends who watched (vv. 40-41, 47).

There can be no doubt Christ surely died, and He died “to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). JDM

The Urgency of Christ's Work

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." (John 9:4)

It is striking how often the Lord Jesus used the term "must" in connection with the different aspects of the work He came to do. Since He is our example, we also must be serious and urgent about our Father's work. Even as a boy in the temple, He told His parents, "I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49).

Then early in His ministry, as He went from place to place, He said, "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43). Toward the end of His earthly ministry, He said one day, "I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33). He also said to His disciples that "he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matthew 16:21).

He had told the great teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." To explain how this could be, He then said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:7, 14-15). Before we could ever be born again to everlasting life, therefore, Christ must be lifted up on the cross to die for our sins.

Still, all "the scriptures must be fulfilled" (Mark 14:49), and accordingly, "he must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9). Yet, even this did not fully complete "the works of him that sent me," for Christ had said that "the gospel must first be published among all nations" (Mark 13:10). Therefore, we also must work the works of Him who sent us, before our days of opportunity are gone. HMM

Sunday, December 3

The Divine Designer

“Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?” (Isaiah 40:12)

The answer to this rhetorical question can only be God, the divine Designer of all the intricate interrelationships of His great creation. Four of the disciplines of natural science are implied here, and in each case a key principle of that science is anticipated.

The emphasis is on the precision of the divinely allocated quantities of each component. First, there is the precise balance of the waters of the earth between the oceans, rivers, groundwater, and atmospheric waters. Hydrology is the science of Earth’s waters, and life on Earth is dependent on the fine-tuning of the components of the hydrologic cycle. “He looketh to the ends of the earth. . . . To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure” (Job 28:24-25).

The atmospheric heaven also has been carefully dimensioned in size and composition to make life possible, as formulated in the science of meteorology.

The “dust of the earth” is nothing less than the basic chemical elements out of which all things are made. The accuracy with which elements combine with each other is based on their valences, and all of this is involved in the study of chemistry. The principle of isostasy (“equal weights”) is the fundamental principle of the science of geophysics, involving the weights of mountains and hills, continents, and ocean basins.

God does not deal in chance and caprice, even with inanimate physical systems such as mountains and waters. Not even a sparrow can “fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29). HMM

Monday, December 4

Believing God

“Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.” (Acts 27:25)

Most people believe in God—some kind of god—but it’s a different thing altogether to believe God! And our text makes it clear that believing God simply means believing what He says, “that it shall be even as it was told me.” Paul spoke these words at the height of a terrible storm at sea, when it appeared certain that “all hope that we should be saved was then taken away” (v. 20). But God had spoken otherwise, and Paul believed God rather than adopting the fears of those around him. Abraham, “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11), had set the example. “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Romans 4:20-21).

God does not speak to us audibly today as He did to Abraham and Paul, but He does speak far more comprehensively to us through His written Word, and we have even less excuse for unbelief than they might have had. It is a terrible offense against our Creator to question His Word. This, indeed, was the very sin of pride that led to Satan’s fall and then to the fall of Adam and Eve. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God [literally, ‘is God-breathed’]” (2 Timothy 3:16) and thus should be fully believed and explicitly obeyed, for “he that believeth not God hath made him a liar” (1 John 5:10).

But what about those Scriptures that modern scientists claim to be wrong? “Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:3-4). “For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth” (Psalm 33:4). HMM

Tuesday, December 5

Forget Not His Commandments

“My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments.” (Proverbs 3:1)

It is vitally important that even though we are saved by grace and not by the works of the law, we never forget that God’s law is essentially a statement of God’s holiness. We should desire to know and follow God’s commandments simply because they are “holy, and just, and good” (Romans 7:12), not because we seek salvation through them.

It is noteworthy that the anonymous writer of the longest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 119), in which practically every verse refers to the Scriptures, stressed seven times that he would never forget the laws and commandments of his Lord. May the Lord teach us to share the same determination. Note:

“I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word” (v. 16).

“For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes” (v. 83).

“I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me” (v. 93).

“My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law” (v. 109).

“I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts” (v. 141).

“Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law” (v. 153).

“I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments” (v. 176).

This seventh reference is actually the closing verse of this remarkable 119th Psalm. It beautifully points up the urgency of not forgetting the commandments of God. He will seek us when we stray and bring us back home to Him, for we remember and love His law. HMM

Wednesday, December 6

Get Your Mind Ready

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:13)

We have been born again (1 Peter 1:3), Peter tells us, to an incorruptible inheritance in heaven (v. 4), which is secure (v. 5) even though the intervening time is difficult (vv. 6-7). Such a salvation as we have is both mysterious and hard to understand, pondered by both the saints of old (v. 10) and angels (v. 12). Yet, we have it with more complete understanding and fulfillment than even the prophets ever dreamed possible.

Our rightful response to this knowledge and experience is given in today’s verse. We are to “gird up the loins of [our] mind.” Just as the flowing robes worn by the men of New Testament times had to be bundled up and tied at the waist to allow for rapid, unencumbered movement, so the Christian is expected to be ready to be on the move, to discipline his or her mind by the renouncing of all sinful and/or confining habits and attitudes.

To do so we must “be sober,” be clear-headed, calm, and in control. We must “hope to the end,” or more explicitly, “hope to the utmost degree” in our ultimate glorification at the return of Christ. The construction of “hope” implies a command to “fix our hope” on Him, a sure hope, not a wishful hope. This is the “grace that is brought [present tense] to the believer.”

Furthermore, we must renounce “the former lusts in [our] ignorance” (v. 14), being “obedient children” of our Father.

It is not enough simply to eliminate sinful patterns from our lives. “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy” (v. 15).

A mind that is disciplined and purified is ready for action and victory. JDM

Thursday, December 7

Be Diligent

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge.” (2 Peter 1:5)

The importance of diligence is urged by Peter as basic in the development of the seven other virtues listed by him—that is, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity—as vital additions to our faith. Diligence is seldom considered as a particular Christian attribute, but it is essential if we really desire to develop the other Christian virtues in our lives. They do not come by wishing or hoping. Peter also exhorts us to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (v. 10), and then to “be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (3:14).

Essentially the same Greek word is also translated “study” and “labor” and “endeavor.” Paul commands, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). He beseeches us always to be “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). We are even told to “labour therefore to enter into that rest” (Hebrews 4:11).

There are many other such exhortations in which Christian diligence is urged or shown in reference to other Christian virtues. There is one key verse, however, in which diligence itself is commanded as a Christian duty: “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). Here the word “business” is the same as “diligence.” That is, each Christian is commanded to “be diligent in diligence!”

Christian salvation is received solely by grace through faith. The Christian life, however, demands diligence. Can we not, as today’s verse commands, give all diligence in our service to the Lord who gave His life for us? HMM

Mt. Ararat and the Resurrection

*“And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.”
(Genesis 8:4)*

The story of Noah’s preservation through the awful Flood has been recognized by all Bible students as a beautiful picture of the resurrection. It is, of course, a true story that actually happened the way the Bible describes, but it is also a beautiful analogy.

The Flood was sent as a judgment upon the sinful world of Noah’s day (Genesis 6:5-7, 11-13, 17). The “wages of sin” (Romans 6:23) has always been death. But God provided a way of salvation (i.e., the Ark that Noah built) to those eight souls who believed, Noah and his family (Genesis 6:8-9, 14-16, 18-22).

Although the analogy is not perfect, it does beautifully illustrate the fact that the punishment for sin is still death and that God has provided a perfect way of salvation to those who believe in His Son Jesus Christ and in His death on the cross.

In that light, it is interesting to note the date in today’s verse, which has great significance. The calendar was changed by God at the time of the Passover, another beautiful prefigure of Christ’s work. The seventh month became the first month (Exodus 12:2), and the Passover was to be observed on the fourteenth day of that month (v. 6) each year following. “Christ our passover” (1 Corinthians 5:7) was sacrificed for us on that day (John 19:14) and rose again the third day, the seventeenth day of the first (formerly the seventh) month.

This was the anniversary of the landing of Noah’s Ark on the mountains of Ararat, providing its inhabitants new life following judgment of the world and its destruction because of sin. What a blessed picture of our new resurrection life based on Christ’s death for our sins. JDM

Saturday, December 9

Faint Not

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Hebrews 12:3)

The Christian life and ministry can grow wearisome and hard at times, but with Christ Himself as our example, the Lord admonishes us not to faint but always to press on.

If our prayers seem to go unanswered, He reminds us that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). When we grow tired and are tempted to quit, the Scriptures assure us that “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9).

When God has entrusted us with a certain ministry, we need to learn to say, as with Paul, “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not” (2 Corinthians 4:1). As we see God’s mercy-drops of blessing begin to fall, we then can say, as he did, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). We can even encourage others to faint not, as he did: “Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory” (Ephesians 3:13).

The same Greek word is translated “weary” in 2 Thesalonians 3:13: “Be not weary in well doing.” Finally, even when God has to rebuke us, we must learn to take it patiently. “Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him” (Hebrews 12:5).

But with all these strong exhortations to faint not, we also need to know just how we can obtain the needed strength to keep on keeping on. The answer is in God’s great counsel to Isaiah: “They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31). HMM

Sunday, December 10

Blessed Is He

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity.” (Psalm 32:1-2)

What true believer is there who is not eternally thankful for the truths found in today’s verse? Sins of omission, sins of commission, sins of deliberate action, sins of the heart, youthful sins, covert sins, “big” sins, “little” sins, etc. What a thrill to know that the penalty for our sins has been paid in full if we but accept His free gift. What rejoicing and freedom forgiveness brings.

Note that there are three different expressions for wrongdoing in today’s verse—transgression, sin, and iniquity. The differences in these words are not insignificant, but precise differentiation is beyond the scope of this discussion. Suffice it to say that they can be understood to mean the whole gamut of sinful activity.

Likewise, there are three separate aspects of God’s forgiving grace mentioned: “forgiven . . . covered . . . not imputed.” In every way possible, our sin is removed from us, and no more payment is necessary.

However, God’s forgiveness must be conditioned on the individual’s action. A lack of action results in the bearing of the sin, the guilt, and the consequences, again specified in a threefold manner. “My bones waxed old . . . my roaring . . . thy hand was heavy upon me” (vv. 3-4).

In keeping with the pattern of the psalm, three such actions are mentioned. “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD” (v. 5). The result? “And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”

Because of all this, we should have a threefold response: “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart” (v. 11). JDM

Monday, December 11

Without Natural Affection

“Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.” (Romans 1:31)

The phrase “without natural affection” is the translation of one Greek word, *astergeo*. It was a characteristic of many pagans of the ancient world. Significantly, it is also prophesied to be a characteristic of the humanistic pagans of the end-times. “In the last days . . . men shall be . . . without natural affection” (2 Timothy 3:1-3). These are the only two occurrences of this word in the New Testament.

The word *stergeo* (“natural affection”) is one of four Greek words for “love,” but it is never used at all in the New Testament. It refers to the natural love that members of the same family have for each other. It is such a common characteristic of all peoples that there was apparently no occasion to refer to it at all—*except* when it is not present, when people lose their instinctive love for their own parents and children and thus are “*without* natural affection.” One thinks of the widespread abortion of these last days, as well as the modern breakdown of the family in general.

Another Greek word for “love” is *eros*, referring to romantic love, or passion. Like *stergeo*, *eros* also is never used in the New Testament. The other two words, however, are used frequently. *Phileo*, referring to “brotherly love,” occurs over 30 times. It indicates fondness, based on a community of interest with the person or persons so loved.

The fourth “love” word, of course, is *agape*, which is used over 300 times. This is the type of love called out of one’s heart by the preciousness of the object loved, the love that impels one to sacrifice his own interests for the benefit of the person loved. This is the love of Christ, who “loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). And this is the love generated by the Holy Spirit in the believer, for “the fruit of the Spirit is love” (Galatians 5:22). HMM

Tuesday, December 12

A New Name

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Revelation 2:17)

This intriguing promise is one of seven promises in Christ’s letters to seven representative churches—promises made “to him that overcometh.” Although there are various opinions as to who constitute these overcomers, 1 John 5:4 would indicate that “whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

On this assumption, all who have been truly born again through faith in Christ will someday be given a new name by their Lord. No one will know what his new name will be until he receives it, and even then it may remain unknown to everyone else.

It would be reasonable to assume, however, that each new name will reflect the Lord’s evaluation of the character and service of the one who receives it. We have the primitive examples of Abram, Sarai, and Jacob being given new names by God, perhaps to serve as types of this coming investiture. Abram became “Abraham” (meaning “Father of Multitudes”), Sarai became “Sarah” (meaning “Princess”), and Jacob became “Israel” (meaning “Prevailing Prince with God”). See Genesis 17:5, 15; 32:28.

Whatever each of our new names will turn out to be, our Savior will also know them, of course, and this will perhaps be how we will be addressed by Him from then on in the new earth. This should be a great incentive to godly living and faithful service here on this present earth, for we surely desire to receive a good name there from our Lord on the future earth. HMM

Wednesday, December 13

Seek Ye First

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33)

This has become a favorite memory verse for millions and has even been set to music by a number of artists. Indeed, its truth is of foundational importance. Let us look with care at what it says.

First, notice that the tense of the verb “seek” in Greek implies a command to establish an ongoing habit or lifestyle of “seeking” the things of the kingdom. We are commanded to put first things first on a continual basis and watch Him take care of the items of secondary interest.

We should strive to make His priorities our priorities—to so mold our thinking by the Word of God that we think as He does on every issue. Our lives should exhibit the purity and righteousness that He exhibited when on Earth. While it is true that we will never fully achieve such perfection this side of heaven, we should be striving, i.e., “seeking,” to do so by the power of His Spirit living in us.

The chapter surrounding today’s verse is permeated by the concept of proper priorities in relation to pride (vv. 5-8, 16-18), treasures on Earth (vv. 19-21), singleness of purpose (vv. 22-23), serving two masters (v. 24), or anxious thoughts about the future (vv. 25-32, 34). Remember, “your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (v. 32).

If we reverse the proper order, not only will we not attain kingdom priorities and His righteousness, but we will probably miss the secondary “things” as well. The word “added,” a mathematical word, implies the prior existence of something to which other things can be added.

Surely in our “seeking” we should also adopt the prayer Jesus taught His disciples: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (v. 10). JDM

Thursday, December 14

What Paul Knew

“And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” (1 Corinthians 8:2)

There are many things that none of us can know—not even the apostle Paul. Yet even with his realistic modesty, there are certain key truths that Paul could affirm with certainty, and so can we on the same grounds as he.

One essential thing each of us should know first of all is this: “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18). A person needs to know that he is a lost and hopeless sinner before he will ever really come to Christ for salvation.

Once a lost sinner does receive Christ as Savior, however, he then should be able to declare with Paul the certainty of his own salvation. “For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

The Christian life, once begun, is not necessarily easy. With Paul, in fact, it involved “labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, . . . In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Corinthians 11:23, 27). Yet he could say with confidence, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Because of such an assurance, he could also say, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound” (Philippians 4:11-12). Whatever life might bring, it could never shake his certainty of the life to come. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). HMM

Friday, December 15

Old Testament Prophecy

“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.” (1 Peter 1:10)

Our verse today and the verses that follow tell us a good deal about Old Testament prophecy and, rightly understood, answer many of the questions raised by modern “scholars” who scoff at the divine authorship of Scripture.

First, we can see that much prophecy was devoted to the theme of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (v. 11), long before the events took (or will take) place. That these prophecies were not mere human contrivances is seen in the claim that they were due to “the Spirit of Christ which was in them.”

Furthermore, the prophets themselves didn’t fully understand what they were writing. For instance, Isaiah wrote both of the glory of the coming Messiah (chapter 11) and His sufferings and death (chapter 53) with no indication that he knew how to put the two together. Peter claims the prophets “enquired and searched diligently” (1 Peter 1:10) “what, or what manner of time” (v. 11) these things would come to pass. Indeed, even “the angels desire to look into” (v. 12) these mysterious passages and doctrines.

Finally, the prophets evidently knew that the mysterious prophecies were not for them to understand but for us to understand (v. 12). Much of what so puzzled them has been revealed to us “by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (v. 12).

Because of the ultimate authorship by the Holy Spirit, and the eventual explanation by the same Spirit, these prophecies have never failed. They provide irrefutable evidence for the inspiration of Scripture, clear reasons to trust in the message of Scripture, and a grounded faith in the consummation of God’s plan for the ages. JDM

Saturday, December 16

God Is Faithful

“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:9)

When we place our trust in Jesus Christ as omnipotent Creator and gracious Redeemer, He then faithfully undertakes to provide everything we need to live an effective, fruitful, victorious Christian life.

For example, when we are tempted to sin or are tested in any other way, “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). In this connection, He undertakes to ground us firmly in His truth and to keep us from moral and spiritual harm. “The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil” (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

When we do sin, however, He assures us that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). With all our failings, He has undertaken to eventually perfect us in Christ, and He faithfully will continue this until it is done. “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; . . . Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

All that He has promised, He will do. Even when we are unfaithful to Him, He remains faithful to us. “If we believe not [that is, ‘are unfaithful’], yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

Today’s verse above, assuring us of God’s faithfulness, follows the promise that He will “confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:8). Therefore, we seek also to be faithful. “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)” (Hebrews 10:23). HMM

Sunday, December 17

Our Inheritance

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:4)

Our heavenly inheritance, among other things, is an “eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15), held jointly with Christ (Romans 8:17) and “all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). We who are born again “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” and “kept by the power of God” (1 Peter 1:3, 5) find such an inheritance described in today’s verse.

First, we notice that our inheritance is *incorruptible*, or undecaying, immortal. Note how the same word is used in verse 23: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of *incorruptible*, by the word of God.” Therefore, “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt” (Matthew 6:20).

Second, it is *undefiled*, pure, uncontaminated by sin. Remember, Christ is “holy, harmless, *undefiled*, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26), and so, evidently, is our inheritance.

Third, it *fadeth not away*. “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that *fadeth not away*” (1 Peter 5:4).

Lastly, our inheritance is *reserved* in heaven. Christ prayed, “Holy Father, *keep* [same word] through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11). Surely our inheritance is as secure as we are, guarded by none other than the all-powerful guard.

So, we see that our inheritance cannot die, cannot be tainted by sin, will never fade, and cannot be lost. “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). JDM

An Answer in Suffering

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”
(1 Peter 3:15)

The words of this verse have much to say concerning a ministry such as ICR’s and have been oft-discussed in these pages. In short, they consist of a mandate to be always prepared to give a systematic, logical (scientific, if necessary) defense of one’s faith, with the proper motives and attitudes, of course. Let us today place the verse in its immediate context, verses 13 through 17.

Normally one would not expect opposition for doing good, but such a situation must be expected, particularly if a person is a *zealous* follower of good (as in v. 13). Such a person is enthusiastic about his cause, not in an irrational way, but a wholehearted way. This intimidates and infuriates those who “loved darkness . . . because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

“But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye” (1 Peter 3:14). Our natural response of fear need not overtake us, for Peter warns us to be prepared, and he gives several commands. First, “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (v. 15). He must occupy the supreme position in our hearts. Next, we must “be ready always” with our defense. This implies forethought, study, and preparation. Lastly, he insists we must maintain “a good conscience” (v. 16), a lifestyle so pure and blameless that any accusations will be to the shame of the accusers.

It may be, however, that in spite of our walk with the Lord, our preparation, and lifestyle, unjust persecution may come. It may be in “the will of God” (v. 17) for us. If so, so be it, “for it is better . . . that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing.” JDM

Tuesday, December 19

The Divine/Human Word

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.” (Hebrews 1:1-2)

The title of the Word of God is given both to Jesus Christ as the living Word (John 1:1-3; Revelation 19:13) and to the Holy Scriptures as the written Word (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; etc.). They are so perfectly synchronous that what is said of one can usually be applied also to the other.

Both are human, yet without error; both are divine, yet can be comprehended by man. “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). “In him is no sin” (1 John 3:5), “the Scripture cannot be broken,” and “all Scripture . . . is profitable” (John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:16).

Furthermore, each is eternal. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8). “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

Each brings regeneration and everlasting life to all those who believe. “He saved us, by the washing of regeneration . . . through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:5-6). “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). “Being born again . . . by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23). “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

Finally, judgment comes by both Christ and the Scriptures. “The Father . . . hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). “The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12). Both Christ and the Bible are vitally important to each Christian and must be studied, understood, known, loved, trusted, and relied upon in every human endeavor. HMM

Paradoxes of Scripture

*“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.”
(Proverbs 11:24)*

“To get, we must give.” This is not the world’s method for attaining prosperity, but it is the paradoxical message of today’s verse, as well as that of Christianity in general.

Note some of the many other paradoxes in the Bible related to this basic truth.

1. To really live, we must die. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20).
2. To save one’s life, he or she must lose it. “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it” (Luke 17:33).
3. To be wise, we must become fools. “If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1 Corinthians 3:18).
4. To reign, we must serve. “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things” (Matthew 25:21).
5. To be exalted, we must become humble. “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).
6. To be first, we must be last. “So the last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16).

Finally, note the ninefold paradox of a truly Christian ministry: “In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God. . . . By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:4, 8-10). HMM

Thursday, December 21

A Spring of Water

“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:13-14)

Water is necessary for life, and no one can live for long without it. Jesus, when talking to the Samaritan woman at the well, used this simple and well-known fact to teach timeless truth, both to her and to us.

The two occurrences of the word “drinketh” in today’s verse are actually in two different forms. The construction used in Greek implies a continual, habitual drinking in the first case but a one-time action in the second.

Likewise, while the woman referred to a “well” (v. 12) (literally “a hole in the ground”), Christ referred to a “flowing well,” or “spring,” using a different word.

Furthermore, when He said one who drinks from His spring shall “never thirst,” He said so in a very emphatic way. Not only is “thirst” emphasized by the sentence structure, but it is compiled of two negatives preceding the verb “thirst,” which is further strengthened by the word “forever,” i.e., “shall not, shall not thirst, forever.”

One who drinks from the wells of the world will thirst again, for sinful pleasures never satisfy. But just a single drink from the springs of “living water” (4:10; 7:38) of which Christ spoke eliminates spiritual thirst forever.

That one drink is a drink of eternal life, and it becomes in the believer a veritable spring, inexhaustible in its quantity and unsurpassed in its quality. The water is a reference to the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus to minister to His followers in His absence. One day we’ll be with Him, and then, as well as now, He completely satisfies. JDM

Death Before Sin?

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Modern evangelicals have found it fashionable to accommodate Scripture to the concept of a very old earth. These views all do serious harm to Scripture, including the current compromise of choice, the “framework hypothesis,” which holds that the passages that seem to deal with science and early history contain only “spiritual” truth but not factual content. Each such attempt to accept vast ages before the appearance of man has many flaws, but perhaps the most damaging to the Christian faith is the problem of death before sin.

The Bible plainly teaches that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Before Adam and Eve rebelled, animals ate only plants (Genesis 1:30). Death came as a result of sin and the curse: “For in the day that thou eatest thereof [the forbidden tree] thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). The first death in all of creation occurred when God provided Adam and Eve animal skins for clothing. Sin always brings death. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). Indeed, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22). That this is not referring to spiritual death only is clear from today’s verse, which deals with physical resurrection from the dead. Just as Adam’s sin brought death on all creation, so Christ’s resurrection brings victory over death.

But here is the problem. If death existed before Adam, then death is not the penalty for sin. How, then, did Christ’s death pay the penalty for our sin? If death is not tied to Adam’s sin, then life is not tied to Christ’s death and resurrection, and the Christian faith is all in vain. JDM

Saturday, December 23

We Can Know That We Know Him

“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” (1 John 2:3)

The apostle John’s vocabulary in his gospel, epistles, and even in Revelation is quite distinctive. The verb “know,” for example, occurs more in John than in any other gospel, and more in 1 John than in any other epistle. He emphasizes by this that the Christian life is based on knowledge. In the words of today’s verse, for example, we can test the genuineness of our knowledge of Christ as Savior by whether or not we keep His commandments. Note some of the other tests listed in John in his first epistle.

“Ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1 John 2:29). “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (3:14). “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (3:24). “But whoso keepeth [i.e., ‘guards’] his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (2:5). “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (5:13).

There are other similar “tests of life,” but these make the point. A person who has been really born again through faith in Christ and His saving work can have assurance of his salvation if he truly believes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; if he guards and honors God’s Word; if he manifests the presence of the guiding, purifying Holy Spirit in his life; if he keeps His commandments and lives righteously, and if he manifests real love for his Christian brethren.

This is not to say that if he fails one or more of these tests he is necessarily unsaved. There are, however, no grounds for real assurance of salvation without them. Therefore, as Paul suggests, “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5). HMM

Garments for the King

“All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.”
(Psalm 45:8)

One of the most beautiful of the Christmas hymns (though rarely sung at Christmas) is “Out of the Ivory Palaces,” telling how the King of heaven left His heavenly home and laid aside His perfumed, royal clothing to enter “a world of woe.” That this 45th Psalm is symbolic in part is obvious, but that it refers to Christ is also obvious from its use in Hebrews 1:8: “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom,” quoting Psalm 45:6.

That the eternal King left heaven to come to Earth is not symbolic, however, but very real; nor did He have royal robes in which to be arrayed, for they “wrapped [Him] in swaddling clothes” and laid Him “in a manger” (Luke 2:12).

Then, as He later walked the dusty roads of Judea, we know little of what He wore, but we do know that on one notable occasion, He “laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. . . and began to wash the disciples’ feet” (John 13:4-5). A strange garment, and stranger action, for the King of glory!

Yet, stranger still that men whom He had created later “took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat. . . but cast lots for it” (John 19:23-24), leaving Him naked to die a painful death spiked to a tree. Finally, His little remnant of friends took “the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes” (John 19:40) for His burial.

Now, however, in glory, He once again is arrayed in kingly apparel, “clothed with a garment down to the foot, and . . . with a golden girdle” (Revelation 1:13), and one day, all His redeemed shall see Him—in His beauty—the King in whose law we delight! HMM

Monday, December 25

Thanks for the Greatest Gift

“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” (2 Corinthians 9:15)

We who have known and sought to follow the Lord for many years have received many, many blessings for which to thank Him. “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits” (Psalm 68:19), we can pray again and again.

But there is one blessing that is so great that it cannot even be put into words—it is *unspeakable*! That gift is so great that when we try to comprehend it, the sense of awe and gratitude becomes so overwhelming (or at least *should* become so overwhelming) that our joy is also unspeakable—indescribable! That gift, of course, is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Redeemer and Savior, “whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, . . . ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

It is significant that the Greek word translated “unspeakable” occurs only these two times in the entire New Testament. God’s unspeakable gift to us produces unspeakable joy in us. We who deserve nothing but eternal separation from God in hell, instead will enjoy eternal life *with* God in heaven, and all because of that amazing and truly inexpressible gift!

To think that the mighty Creator, God the Son, would not only humble Himself to become His own creature, man, but then also suffer the unimaginable agony of the cross and separation from God the Father in order to deliver us from the just penalty of sin! This act speaks of such love and grace that all we can do is whisper softly, “Thank you, Lord, for this unspeakable gift,” and then shout it over and over again in our hearts wherever we go and share its unspeakable joy and blessing with whomever will listen to its message. “The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad” (Psalm 126:3). Thank you, Lord! HMM

Tuesday, December 26

Never Ashamed

“For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” (Romans 10:11)

Just where does the Scripture say this? Paul is apparently quoting here from Isaiah 28:16, which is the following: “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”

The question is: Why did Paul change the Hebrew word for “make haste” to the Greek word for “be ashamed”? He did the same thing in Romans 9:33. “As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.” This verse makes the question even more involved because here Paul combines the quote with Isaiah 8:14: “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence.” Note also 1 Peter 2:6-8, which combines both verses with Psalm 118:22: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”

The Greek Septuagint translation apparently rendered “make haste” (which is the correct meaning of the Hebrew word, as confirmed by all its other uses in the Old Testament) by a Greek word meaning something like “put to shame.” More importantly, however, these passages illustrate the truth that the Holy Spirit (the *real* Author of the Bible) has a perfect right to interpret His writing however He will. And *He* interpreted “make haste” to mean “be ashamed.”

That is, when we believe on Christ, we never need to flee in haste from His enemies, for we can never be put to shame when anchored on this sure foundation. As the Lord said in another passage: “They shall not be ashamed that wait for me” (Isaiah 49:23). HMM

Wednesday, December 27

Jesus Christ: Creator

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” (Colossians 1:16)

The Old Testament uses several names for the One who created. For example: “For thus saith the LORD [i.e., *Jehovah*] that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it” (Isaiah 45:18). But the New Testament leaves no doubt as to who the Creator is.

Today’s verse states it clearly. The “him” in context is the Father’s “dear Son” (v. 13) who shed “his blood” (v. 14). Similarly, the favorite passage in John 1:3 identifies Christ as the Creator: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” “He was in the world, and the world was made by him” (v. 10). “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (v. 14). No member of the human race nor member of the Trinity fits this description except Jesus Christ. “God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Jesus Christ is the Creator, and once He put on human form, His creative abilities continued to find application. Several of His miracles involved creation out of nothing. Note the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:10-11), the transformation of water into wine (John 2:9-11), and bringing life from non-life—the raising of Lazarus (John 11:43-44), just to name a few.

Perhaps the most important creative act of Christ is one He performs on repentant sinners every day. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). JDM

Thursday, December 28

The Name of the Lord Jesus

*“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21)*

This is the first of 144 references to the name of Christ in the New Testament. The word “name” (Greek *noma*) occurs only about 95 times when referring to any or all other names. This fact is itself a sort of commentary on Philippians 2:9: “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.”

In biblical times, a person’s name expressed the character or attributes desired for a child by his or her parents. The reason for the name “JESUS,” which means “Jehovah saves” or simply “salvation,” was given by the angel: “He shall save his people from their sins.”

There is only one Savior, “for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12); but *His* name does save! “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

Those who do receive Christ are thenceforth associated with His name—and therefore with His person and work. First, they are to be baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). They are then to order their lives in a way that honors His name. “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Timothy 2:19).

He has given many gracious promises of answered prayer if we pray in His name, “that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16). The final use of “name” in the Bible stresses our eternal identification with His name, for “his name shall be in their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4) as we are united with Him in the age to come. HMM

Friday, December 29

Faithful and Just

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

All too often when we read or quote a favorite verse of Scripture, its familiarity gets in the way of our complete understanding of the verse. Such may be the case with today’s verse, one of the most beloved and oft-quoted passages of Scripture. To begin with, we must remember that the topic is sinful behavior. The Bible says that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), therefore sin cannot go unpunished. A faithful and just judge must punish such behavior; to forgive it is neither faithful nor just. “Without shedding of blood is no remission” of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

But the Bible also says, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father. . . . Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 2:1; 1:7).

Jesus Christ fully paid the penalty for our sins. He died so that we don’t have to die, for God “hath made him to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). God has further promised that “whoso confesseth and forsaketh [his sins] shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

God in His mercy and grace has declared it to be so. What was once devised as merciful and gracious is now “faithful and just.”

Because He is just, He cannot allow the punishment for our sin to be inflicted twice. Because He is faithful and has promised to forgive a penitent and confessing sinner, He will not only “forgive us our sins,” but “cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” thereby restoring the sweet fellowship broken by our rebellion.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). JDM

Firstfruits

“Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.” (Proverbs 3:9)

There are seven New Testament references to “firstfruits,” all of which are metaphorical applications of the Old Testament commandment to offer the firstfruits of one’s increase to the Lord. We now have to give our own firstfruits to the government in the form of “withheld” amounts from our wages. It is still good, nonetheless, to honor the Lord with the “firstfruits” equivalent of our increase, regardless of the government.

The New Testament references are all beautiful spiritual applications of this concept. At His resurrection, Christ Himself has “become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). When we receive Christ, we receive our eternal salvation first of all in terms of “the firstfruits of the Spirit” (Romans 8:23). Furthermore, we ourselves are, to Him, a sort of firstfruits pledge of future growth. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18).

This thought is also applied to the first converts of a new mission field. Paul speaks of “the firstfruits of Asia” (the western part of Asia Minor) and “the firstfruits of Achaia” (southern Greece) in Romans 16:5 and 1 Corinthians 16:15, respectively. He also speaks of believing Jews as having preceded Gentiles into the kingdom as a holy firstfruit (Romans 11:16) to the Lord.

The last of the New Testament references to firstfruits relates to the 144,000 Israelite witnesses in the coming great tribulation. “These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb” (Revelation 14:4). Beautiful and pointed though these metaphors may be, however, they in no wise lessen our responsibility to honor God with our own firstfruits. HMM

Sunday, December 31

Glorifying God Through Praise

*“Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.”
(Psalm 50:23)*

The great summarizing commandment of the apostle Paul was, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). That is, every aspect of our lives should be so ordered as to glorify God in whatever we say and do.

This is a difficult rule to follow, for how do we determine whether such and such an action glorifies God or not? Nevertheless, there is one thing we can do that we can be absolutely certain does glorify Him—that is, offering to Him our praise and our thanks. We should offer praise for His person and work in general, thanks for what He is and does for us in particular. “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me!”

This is His assurance and our incentive to praise Him in all things. “In every thing give thanks,” says the apostle, “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

On this last day of the year, especially, praise and thanks should pour from our hearts and lips if we would “ordereth our conversation aright.” “Bless the LORD, O my soul,” says the psalmist, “and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2). Most of us all too commonly tend to forget all His benefits and fret over our troubles and burdens.

If we desire to glorify God, on the other hand, we should recount all our blessings and leave our burdens with Him. In the words of the old hymn: “Count your many blessings, see what God hath done!” Then will “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) fill our hearts and minds, enabling the indwelling Holy Spirit to “shew the salvation of God” not only to us, but in us and through us to others. HMM

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Monday, January 1

All Things New

“And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.” (Revelation 21:5)

The coming of a new year is a good time to consider that glorious time to come when Christ will make everything new again. In the present age, all things “shall wax old as doth a garment” (Hebrews 1:11) under the bondage of the universal law of decay and death; indeed “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22).

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). There, in the “new Jerusalem,” we shall each have “a new name” and sing “a new song” (Revelation 21:2; 2:17; 5:9). We shall have new bodies, “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21), and a new dwelling place, prepared by Christ Himself among the “many mansions” in His “Father’s house” (John 14:2).

And all the old and dying things will be completely and forever gone. “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4). “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10).

What a “Happy New Year” that will be! In the meantime, we have His “new covenant” and have each been made “a new creature” in Christ (Hebrews 12:24; Galatians 6:15). Since all His words “are true and faithful,” we know His promises are sure. Therefore, already, “old things are passed away; behold all things are become new” through faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). HMM

Tuesday, January 2

Seeking Worshippers

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” (John 4:23)

Here is an amazing revelation—that the omnipotent God of creation should actually be seeking those among His creatures who would freely come to love and worship Him! How could He possibly have to seek anything?

Yet, Jesus said He does! In some inscrutable way, it satisfies the infinite heart of God when we respond to His sacrificial love in gratitude and worship.

We see this also in the experience of the 10 lepers. All 10 had been cleansed of their leprosy, but only one, a Samaritan, returned to give thanks to Jesus. Note the wistfulness in Jesus’ reply to the cleansed leper: “Were there not ten cleansed?” He asked, “But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger” (Luke 17:17-18). The Lord indeed takes note both of the few who truly appreciate Him and also of the many who take His blessings for granted.

In the house of Simon the Pharisee, for example, the Lord Jesus took special note of the woman who washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair, anointing them with the precious ointment in her alabaster box. But He also noted that self-righteous, critical Simon had provided no such services at all. Then He said, “Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little” (Luke 7:47).

Whether or not we fully understand, the Lord does seek those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Therefore, “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). HMM

Wednesday, January 3

Infallible Proofs

“To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”
(Acts 1:3)

To the first Christians, faith in the deity of Christ was not a blind leap into the dark. Only God could defeat death, and they knew—beyond all doubt—that Jesus Christ had risen bodily from the tomb. They had seen Him, touched Him, and eaten with Him, alone and in crowds, in closed rooms, and out in the open.

The term “infallible proofs” translates a Greek word used only this one time, meaning literally “many criteria of certainty,” and it is significant that the inspired Word of God applies it only to the resurrection of Christ. It is not too much to say that Christ’s resurrection is the most certain fact in all history, and many large volumes have been published setting forth the evidences thereof. No wonder the apostle Peter could say, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

The apostle John testified thus: “The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us” (1 John 1:2). John not only saw Him in His resurrection body, but also in His glorified body, hearing Him say, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore” (Revelation 1:18).

It is true that we, like the first Christians, must believe on Christ to receive salvation, but this faith is not a credulous faith, a leap into the dark. It is a reasonable faith, based on many infallible proofs, and we can, therefore, trust Him with our eternal souls. HMM

True Deliverance

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” (Matthew 6:13)

Certain Christian workers practice what they call a “deliverance ministry,” but true biblical deliverance is better defined in terms of today’s verse, which, of course, is the last petition in the prayer that Christ taught His disciples to pray. True deliverance is deliverance from evil, whatever form that evil might take, and preservation until God’s kingdom comes. Let us observe several scriptural accounts of true deliverance.

Note that the Greek word for deliverance has the connotation of “rescue,” and this is its first occurrence in the New Testament; that makes its usage here especially significant. That the Lord will indeed provide such deliverance, if we pray for it in sincerity, is affirmed in many testimonies and promises. Burdened with the problems of his old sin nature, Paul cried out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But then the answer comes: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24-25). Even as his anticipated martyrdom was approaching, Paul could still testify, “The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18).

Peter also assures us that “the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2:9). He is able to deliver His people from all the evils of this present evil world, to keep them and prepare them for the glory and the power of His coming kingdom, for He Himself is the Deliverance. “As it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer [same word], and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Romans 11:26). HMM

Friday, January 5

The Earth Made New Again

“And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever.” (Psalm 78:69)

There are a number of passages in the Bible that state unequivocally that the earth, in some form, is going to continue eternally. “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever” (Ecclesiastes 1:4).

However, this present earth and its atmospheric heavens must first be purged of all the age-long effects of sin and the curse, which now affect the very elements (or “dust of the earth”). Therefore, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

Evidently, this fiery cataclysm is not an annihilation of the earth and its atmosphere but rather a great exchange of energies. The earth’s very elements will probably be converted into sound and heat energies by mass-energy nuclear-conversion processes, in order to burn out the great fossil beds and all other relics of sin and the curse. Then, however, God will reverse the process, converting these and other energies back into matter, thus “renewing” the primeval earth, which originally had been “very good” (Genesis 1:31). “We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

It is this new earth (that is, the earth made new) that will then continue forever. “For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain” (Isaiah 66:22). “Because the [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). Then we shall forever “be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). HMM

Saturday, January 6

The Raging Seas

“Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.” (Psalm 89:9)

There are few things in nature more fearsome or more uncontrollable by man than a mighty storm at sea. Only the One who created the waters of the sea can really control them. But *He* can! “For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof . . . He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still” (Psalm 107:25, 29).

One of the most striking demonstrations of the deity of Christ was in a storm on the Sea of Galilee when “he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm” (Luke 8:24). Note also the experience of the mariners sailing to Tarshish when they realized that the storm that was about to destroy them had been sent by the God of heaven because of Jonah. “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging” (Jonah 1:15).

The Scriptures also compare opponents of the gospel to a raging sea. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isaiah 57:20). Similarly, Jude says that apostate teachers are like “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame” (Jude 1:13).

Christ used this same figure to prophesy the turmoil of the ungodly nations of the world in the last days. “There shall be . . . upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring” (Luke 21:25). But just as God the Creator can calm the raging waves of the ocean, so God our Savior can speak peace to the nations and calm each troubled soul. As our text assures us, He rules the ragings of every sea and stills them when the waves arise. HMM

Sunday, January 7

God Remembers

“And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged.” (Genesis 8:1)

This verse contains the first mention of the beautiful word “remember” in the Bible, and it tells us that God remembers! During the awful cataclysm of the Flood, the most devastating event thus far in the history of the world, God still remembered the faithful obedience of Noah, and He even remembered every living thing!

We may forget many things, but God remembers: “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name” (Hebrews 6:10). Nor does He ever forget a promise. The first mention of “remember” in the New Testament is the Spirit-inspired testimony of Zacharias: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people . . . to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:68, 72-73). That promise had been made 2,000 years before, but God remembered.

God even remembers the sparrows: “Not one of them is forgotten before God” (Luke 12:6). And He certainly remembers His own children: “For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14).

Even after the children of Israel had gone deeply into idolatry, He could still say, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness” (Jeremiah 2:2).

God remembers the evil as well as the good, of course. The one thing He chooses not to remember is the sinful past of those who have come to Christ for forgiveness. “And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 10:17). HMM

Monday, January 8

If by Any Means

“If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (Philippians 3:11)

The usage of this seemingly insignificant phrase, “if by any means” (Greek *ei pos*), follows a significant order of development in the New Testament. Occurring only four times, it is used to express the urgency of an object sought and the background needs and means for its attainment.

The context of the first occurrence is the presumed need for physical comfort and security. “Because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter” (Acts 27:12). This particular goal, however, was never attained.

The second is a more noble object, that of reaching an area of spiritual ministry. “Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,” Paul said. “Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you . . . that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift” (Romans 1:9-11).

The next occurrence speaks in even greater urgency, the object being the conversion of Paul’s Jewish brethren. “For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles. . . . If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them” (Romans 11:13-14).

The final occurrence is in today’s verse, speaking of the supreme importance of a Christ-centered life: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). By all means, therefore, we should, like Paul, seek to live for Christ, minister to others, and win souls for Him. HMM

Tuesday, January 9

The Heart of Our Understanding

“Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.” (1 Corinthians 14:20)

The wise man wrote long ago, “With all thy getting get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). However, we need to be sure that the understanding we acquire is not perverted by the spirit of this world. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he emphasized the contrast between a darkened understanding and a spiritually illuminated understanding.

“Walk not as other Gentiles walk,” he exhorted, “in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:17-18). A blinded heart produces a darkened understanding.

Paul prayed, rather, that God would give them “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (Ephesians 1:17-18). We need an understanding enlightened by the Holy Spirit, not darkened by a hardened heart.

By the same token, as today’s verse commands, we should seek to attain a mature understanding of the things of God, not remaining stagnant at the elementary level of understanding. It is dishonoring to the Lord who called us into His family to remain spiritual children. We should exhibit the faith of a little child, and be as free from malice as a little child, but in understanding we must grow! “For when . . . ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again . . . the first principles of the oracles of God . . . who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12, 14). “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). HMM

Justification

“And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” (Genesis 7:1)

This is the first mention of the great doctrine of justification in the Bible—that is, being seen as “righteous” by God. The same Hebrew word is translated “just” in Genesis 6:9: “Noah was a just man.” The reason why Noah was seen as righteous and therefore as just, or justified before God, was that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8). This is the first mention of “grace” in the Bible. The first mention of “faith” or “belief” is also associated with justification. “[Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Thus, justification is by grace through faith in the Old Testament and certainly in the New. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” and also “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:24; 5:1).

Justification—that is, being seen and proclaimed as perfectly righteous, even in spite of past sins—must of course be authorized by God the Creator. “It is God that justifieth” (Romans 8:33). That God can indeed be both “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26) is based entirely on the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Christ, who conquered death. “Being now justified by his blood,” the Lord Jesus Christ “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 5:9; 4:25).

Now, although we are freely justified by grace through faith, such justification inevitably generates good works also, for “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). HMM

Thursday, January 11

The Battle Is the Lord's

“And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands.” (1 Samuel 17:47)

These were the ringing words of faith uttered by young David as he faced the Philistine giant, Goliath. Without armor, or spear, or shield, and with only a sling and five smooth stones, David confronted the nine-foot champion of the pagan army in the name of the true God, and soon the giant lay dead with his face to the ground.

The battle must always be the Lord's. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against . . . the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). Spiritual battles are not won by bullets, nor by ballots, nor by any human means. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7). “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. . . . Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy” (Psalm 33:16, 18).

We even have a mandate to attack the enemy in His stronghold. Christ taught, “Upon this rock [of faith in Christ as divine Savior] I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18)

It is easy, in trying to do a work for God, to rely on human abilities and devices, but these will fail, for the battle is the Lord's. When the battle is going well, we must not boast, for the battle is the Lord's. When the battle is going hard, we must not despair, for the battle is the Lord's.

He is our strength. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds)” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). HMM

Friday, January 12

Things We Know

“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” (1 Peter 5:4)

In these days of relativism, situational ethics, and changing mores, it does a Christian good to note the many things in Scripture we can know, things we can count on, things that do not change. Following is a sampling of such truths, with little comment, intended to encourage the reader to extend the list, perhaps as an ongoing project.

We can know that Christ is God: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

We can know that we are saved: “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47).

We can know we are His dear children: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God” (1 John 3:2).

We can know His protection: “And they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

We can know He answers prayer: “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

We can know He will help us through temptation: “In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

We can know how we should act: “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done” (John 13:15).

We can know He desires us to speak on His behalf: “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

We can know that He will come again: “I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

We can know of our eternal rewards, as in today’s verse: “An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). JDM

Saturday, January 13

If So Be

“If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” (1 Peter 2:3)

The little phrase “if so be” (Greek *ei per*) is used four times in the New Testament, each time setting forth a vital spiritual result established on the basis of a vital spiritual premise. The premise in today’s verse is that a new Christian has truly experienced the saving grace of Christ. The result will be that these “newborn babes” will truly “desire the sincere milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2). The “word” (Greek *logikos*) is always both pure and reasonable.

Then, “ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Romans 8:9). When a person truly receives Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells his body, and the result is that he will henceforth live in the guidance of the Spirit instead of the flesh.

But this life in the Spirit will necessarily entail suffering for the sake of Christ, and this is the premise that assures our future inheritance and glorification. The indwelling Spirit bears witness that we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17).

Finally, our future resurrection is assured by the certainty of the bodily resurrection of Christ. “We have testified of God,” Paul says, “that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not” (1 Corinthians 15:15). Christ’s resurrection is proved as well as any historical fact has ever been proved, so the dead surely rise also.

These “if so be’s” of Scripture, although seemingly expressed in the form of conditions, actually speak great assurances. The true Christian life is one of thirst for the logical words of God, guidance by the indwelling Spirit of God, certainty of future resurrection, and anticipation of a glorious inheritance in Christ. HMM

Sunday, January 14

Heavenly Calling

“As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.”
(1 Corinthians 15:48)

In a wonderful sense, Christians are just passing through this world on their way to the permanent home awaiting them in heaven. “For our conversation [or ‘our citizenship’] is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). Christ has prepared a “place” for us there (John 14:2), and it is there that we have “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4).

In view of such a glorious future, we ought to live not as those who are “earthy” but, as our verse says, as “they also that are heavenly.” We have, indeed, been made “partakers of the heavenly calling,” and so should always, in all we do, “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1), for He represents us even now in the heavenly places. He has gone “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24), and we have, in effect, already been made to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

We may not appear to be very heavenly now, in these poor bodies made of Earth’s dust, but “as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:49). As Paul vividly expresses it, the Lord Jesus Christ “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). “The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Christians, indeed, constitute a heavenly people with a heavenly calling, even while still on Earth. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). HMM

Monday, January 15

What Jesus Said about Hell

“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”
(Matthew 5:29)

People do not like to think about hell—especially those who are headed there! But that doesn’t mean it isn’t real.

We need to know that the Lord Jesus Himself often warned about the reality of hell. Today’s verse is in His Sermon on the Mount, a message often quoted because of its wonderful promises. Hell is also mentioned in the same sermon in Matthew 5:22 and 5:30. Jesus also stressed in that sermon that “broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Matthew 7:13). He later warned that we should “fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

The religious leaders of the day were not exempt. To them, speaking of their religious hypocrisy, He said, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:33).

Hell is also a place of fire or possibly of some fearful environment that could only be described adequately under the metaphor of fire. “Depart from me,” He will say to the lost souls at His coming judgment, “into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Hell is called a “lake of fire” by Christ in John’s vision of Him on His great white throne, where He will have to say, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, . . . and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Hell will indeed be very real—eternally real! Since Christ is both our Creator and our Savior, who died for our sins and defeated death by His resurrection, it is foolish for anyone to reject His revelation about hell. HMM

Tuesday, January 16

The Honest Use of Scripture

“Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.” (Mark 7:13)

Jesus uttered these sharp words of rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees, who had encumbered the plain teachings of Scripture with numerous “interpretations” that enabled them to ignore whatever teachings they found inconvenient. The Lord Jesus Himself always took the Scriptures literally and as of divine authority, and so should we.

Furthermore, He taught that every word was true and authoritative: “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). He also said that “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

Skeptics may pose certain difficulties in the Bible, evolutionists may ridicule its account of creation, and sinners in general may try to wriggle away from its moral constraints, but the Scripture cannot be broken! Jesus said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). He Himself is the living Word of God, and we dare not tamper with the written Word inspired by the Holy Spirit. Christ, of course, could and did in some cases extend and apply the Old Testament Scriptures, because He Himself was their Author, but He never questioned their factuality or literal accuracy, and neither should we.

Nevertheless, many modern “Christian” intellectuals and cultists are following in the example of the Pharisees rather than that of Christ, “wresting” the Scriptures for their gain but “unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16). God has spoken plainly in His Word. It is our responsibility to believe and do what He says. HMM

Wednesday, January 17

The Mighty Hand of God

“That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.” (Joshua 4:24)

The testimony of Joshua to the children of Israel as they entered the promised land reminded them of the tremendous strength in the mighty hand of God whom they were to fear and trust forever. This is only one of about 20 references in the Scriptures to God’s mighty hand. Moses had often recalled how “the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:8).

The first reference to God’s *mighty* hand is in Jacob’s dying prophecy concerning Joseph. “His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob” (Genesis 49:24).

Like those of Joseph, our hands also can be strong when they are placed in the mighty hands of God. Some may note that this is only a figure of speech, for God is Spirit and has no physical hands. Yes, but “he that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?” (Psalm 94:9). God indeed is God of the mighty hand!

The final reference to God’s mighty hand and the only specific reference in the New Testament is in the apostle Peter’s exhortation to humility. “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6). Our human might is only a vapor, but “in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength” (Isaiah 26:4).

Jesus said concerning His followers, “They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28). HMM

Teaching Stones

“Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.”
(Habakkuk 2:19)

How foolish are those who worship idols—objects of wood and stone with no life in them, not even when they are adorned in silver and gold. Can inanimate objects come to life and even become teachers? A child knows better.

But not college professors! All over the land, these proud purveyors of “science falsely so called” are indoctrinating young minds with the absurd belief that inorganic substances can somehow first become simple living substances and then eventually organize themselves all the way up to being people. They would not, of course, suggest that sticks and stones could suddenly become human (neither did the ancient idolaters, for that matter). They just believe that time—lots of it—can magically develop people out of much simpler substances than even these ancient philosophers ever imagined. “In the beginning, hydrogen” is their arrogant notion.

But God will not be mocked in this way forever. Life can only come from life—ultimately from the living God! The wooden idol of the pagan is every bit as scientific as the evolutionary models of the modern intellectual; neither one can create life. “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: . . . They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psalm 115:4-5, 8).

Only God can create life, and He can even cause stones to teach. “Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: . . . Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?” (Job 12:8-9). HMM

Friday, January 19

Walk by Faith

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Although today’s verse appears in parentheses in the King James Bible, it is a most important concept in Scripture and is the summary of an extensive passage that precedes it. Beginning with 2 Corinthians 4:8, Paul continually contrasts the seen and the unseen, finishing up with the admonition to “walk by faith.”

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (vv. 8-9). Though we have trials on the outside, through faith we have inward triumph.

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus . . . that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (vv. 10-11). Even though “death worketh in us,” that same persecution results in “life in you” (v. 12). Through faith we know “that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus” (v. 14).

“Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (vv. 16-17).

“If our earthly house [i.e., body] of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (5:1) “that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (v. 4). The death and decay of this life will ultimately be eradicated. We know this to be fact, for He “hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (v. 5) as a guarantee of our resurrection, if indeed we have been born again by faith, the same faith by which we walk.

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). JDM

Saturday, January 20

Let Them Alone

“Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” (Hosea 4:17)

The Lord is long-suffering, and those who speak in His name should be also. There do come times, however, when further witness becomes useless or even harmful, or when continued interaction merely invites contamination with ungodliness. In such cases, we must simply leave such people alone, following them with prayer and trusting God alone to deal with them.

Such was the 10-tribe nation of Israel, led by the tribe of Ephraim, just before God sent them into Assyrian captivity. God, through the prophet Hosea, told Judah henceforth to let them alone—they were hopelessly given over to pagan evolutionist idolatry. The words “joined to” in today’s verse mean literally “under the spell of.”

The Lord Jesus used similarly harsh language in reference to the hypocritical Pharisees of His own day: “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matthew 15:14).

There are other similar warnings. Of those who come “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,” Paul says, “From such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:5). He has also warned us to “shun profane and vain babblings [that is, the empty philosophizing of those who reject God]: for they will increase unto more ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:16). “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11).

Most, if not all, such warnings seem in context to apply especially to people who once knew and understood the truth, perhaps even professing to accept it for a time and then knowingly rejected it. When such men oppose our testimony, God says to let them alone; He can deal with them better than we. HMM

Sunday, January 21

Hear, O My People

“Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me. . . . open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” (Psalm 81:8, 10)

This psalm was evidently used as an introduction to one of Israel’s feasts and begins on a note of joy (vv. 1-4) and a reflection on God’s sovereign provision for the people (vv. 5-7). But then it merges into a warning not to leave the God of their fathers, sternly reminding them of the commandment “There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god” (v. 9).

Such rebellion grieves God. “So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels” (v. 12). When we will not go His way, He does not abandon us but does allow us to go our way. He permits us to learn hard lessons by our own folly, lessons that He would rather have taught us gently while in fellowship with Him.

“Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries” (vv. 13-14).

He reminds us that He is capable of meeting all our needs, of every sort. “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it” (v. 10). The imagery used here is that of a mother bird feeding her otherwise helpless young. They are dependent on her for all their needs, even life itself.

Jehovah invites us to wholeheartedly trust Him for all our needs. His reservoir is boundless; how much He gives to any one individual depends only on how much we allow Him to give. He adjures us to open our mouths wide so that He can abundantly fill them.

May God develop in us not only “wide mouths” but also the faith to trust Him for abundant provision. JDM

Monday, January 22

The Fire of Hell

“The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” (James 3:6)

The word for “hell” in this verse is *gehenna*, and this is the only one of its 11 occurrences in the New Testament that is not a direct quote from the lips of Christ. Since the tongue is not a literal fire and since its misuse can in effect make it a “world of iniquity,” this passage suggests that hell itself is the ultimate world of iniquity that has made the uncontrolled tongue an extension of itself.

The Bible speaks of this future hell as a place of “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). However, if these were fires such as we have here on Earth, it is difficult to see how, as Jesus said, God will “destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Fire would destroy the body, but what about the soul?

The fire of hell may include some kind of spiritual fire or environment whose destructive nature can only be characterized by the metaphor of fire. The “lake of fire” cannot be on Earth, of course, because the Beast, the False Prophet, and Satan will all be sent there *before* the disintegration of Earth in its present form, whereas all lost human souls will be sent there *after* that event (Revelation 19:20; 20:10-11, 15). The awful lake probably is somewhere far out in the “outer darkness” (Matthew 25:30; Jude 1:13).

And it will be “a world of iniquity” where “he that is unjust [will] be unjust still: and he which is filthy [will] be filthy still” (Revelation 22:11). Those who have opted not to be with Christ will be given their chosen status forever. That means no light, no peace, no rest, no joy, nothing at all associated with the Lord. One should certainly “flee from the wrath to come” (Matthew 3:7) while he can. HMM

Tuesday, January 23

Loquacity

“He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.” (Proverbs 17:27)

The sin of loquacity (that is, talkativeness or chattering) is one of those “little foxes” that can “spoil the vines” of an otherwise godly lifestyle (Song of Solomon 2:15), and the Scriptures frequently caution us against it. For example, Solomon in his God-given wisdom warned as follows: “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise” (Proverbs 10:19). In fact, Solomon frequently returns to this theme. “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

The apostles in the New Testament also stress how important it is for Christians to control their tongues. Too much talk can easily lead to gossiping or criticizing or even coarseness in speech. James reminds us to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,” for he says, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity . . . set on fire of hell” (James 1:19; 3:6).

“Study [that is, diligently strive] to be quiet,” Paul says (1 Thessalonians 4:11), and avoid “foolish talking” (Ephesians 5:4). When we do speak, our words should center on “that which is good to the use of edifying,” “always with grace, seasoned with salt” (Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself warned against this sin of talkativeness. “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). Such standards may seem impossible to meet, but we should always strive to meet them, for Christ is our example, and “hereunto were ye called . . . that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). HMM

Wednesday, January 24

The Face of Jesus Christ

“And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.” (Revelation 22:4)

This is the last reference in the Bible to the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, and a glorious promise it is, with its assurance that all His servants will finally see Him face to face! Although they give us no specific description of His physical appearance (the only description of His appearance is in Revelation 1:13-16), the gospel writers do frequently mention His face.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw how “his face did shine as the sun” (Matthew 17:2) as He spoke of His forthcoming death. Shortly after this, “he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) to meet His death.

A few days after His entrance into Jerusalem, He was delivered into the hands of wicked men who took delight in desecrating that face which, in loving grief, had just wept over the city and its indifference to God. But first, in the garden just before His arrest, He “fell on his face” in agonizing prayer (Matthew 26:39).

Then the Roman soldiers began “to cover his face” (Mark 14:65) and to “spit in his face” (Matthew 26:67), and finally “they struck him on the face” (Luke 22:64). In fact, they abused Him so severely that “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men” (Isaiah 52:14).

But when He comes again, the Christ-rejecting world will cry out to the mountains to “fall on us, and hide us from the face . . . of the Lamb . . . from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away” (Revelation 6:16; 20:11). All the redeemed, on the other hand, will rejoice forever in “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). HMM

Thursday, January 25

The Fire of God

“For our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29)

Fire was considered by certain of the ancient pantheistic philosophers to have been the primeval element out of which all things had evolved, and this same myth is promulgated today by evolutionary cosmogonists in the form of their “Big Bang” theory. The fact is, however, that fire is a creation of God used both actually and symbolically as God’s vehicle of judgment on sin.

It is significant that both the first and last references to fire in the Bible mention both fire and brimstone used in flaming judgment on human rebellion against God. First, “the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24). And finally, “the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Today’s verse is a reference to Moses’ words to the tribes as they were preparing to enter the promised land after his death. Warning them against corrupting their faith through idolatry, he said: “For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24). Its New Testament context is a grave warning against rejecting God’s Word: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Hebrews 12:25).

In a sense, God’s Word is also God’s fire. “His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jeremiah 20:9). It is better to be refined with the fire of God’s Word than to be consumed by His judgment fire. HMM

The Summary of Divine Grace

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever; because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.” (Micah 7:18-20)

The lengthy passage above is quoted in its entirety because, coming as it does at the end of Micah’s dual prophecy of imminent judgment of the sinful, rebellious nation of Judah and of the coming glorious reign of the Lord, it sums up the work of God’s grace in dealing with iniquity. Each of the three verses quoted describe a part. Such grace:

Pardons iniquity (v. 18). As sinners, we have the assurance of mercy instead of judgment. God pardons our iniquity, passes by our transgressions, and retains not His anger. Why? “Because he delighteth in mercy.”

Subdues iniquity (v. 19). As forgiven sinners who have tasted of His grace and mercy, we have assurance of deliverance in time of temptation. Why? Because “he will have compassion upon us.”

Performs what it promises (v. 20). When circumstances surround and difficulties discourage, we have confidence in the inheritance of covenant promise, just as Jacob and Abraham did. Why? Because “thou hast sworn,” and God’s own reputation is at stake.

Israel refused to respond to the warnings of the prophets to turn from their sinful ways. In doing so, they missed God’s great blessing and reaped His wrath. May God grant us the wisdom and conviction to accept His mercy and compassion and to believe He is still trustworthy regarding His promises. JDM

Saturday, January 27

Everlasting Contempt

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2)

Some claim that the Old Testament knows nothing of a resurrection, but this promise of God clearly refutes such a notion. Not only will some be raised to everlasting life, but some to everlasting shame and contempt!

What a bitter end this will be for those who now look with contempt upon the Bible. The Hebrew word translated “contempt” is used only one other time, in the very last verse of Isaiah, but is there translated “abhorring.” “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh” (Isaiah 66:24).

There is probably no doctrine of the Bible more hated by unbelievers than the doctrine of everlasting punishment. It was this teaching (not the imaginary evidence for evolution) that turned Charles Darwin away from God. Nevertheless, it was verified by Christ Himself. “It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where . . . the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47-48). Christ will say to the “goats” on His left hand, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: . . . these shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:41, 46). Paul also warned that those who “obey not the gospel . . . shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Everlasting contempt, everlasting fire, everlasting punishment, everlasting destruction—these await all who reject God and His saving word, through Christ. How much better to “awake to everlasting life”! HMM

Sunday, January 28

Incorruptible Things

“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.” (1 Peter 1:18)

Not all the wealth of the world can redeem a single soul, for gold and silver are merely corruptible elements in a world under “the bondage of corruption” (Romans 8:21). Everything in the physical creation is decaying and dying. In fact, one day all these “elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). Even the very seeds that transmit life are “corruptible seed” (1 Peter 1:23), and all mankind is “corruptible man” (Romans 1:23). Modern science recognizes this universal principle of decay as one of its most basic laws—the law of increasing entropy.

Even in this corruptible world, however, some things are incorruptible. There is the “incorruptible . . . word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23). Even though “heaven and earth shall pass away,” the words of Christ “shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

We are redeemed, not by silver and gold, but “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19). God Himself is the “uncorruptible God” (Romans 1:23), and He has “begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 1:3-4). We work, not as others “to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Finally, these dying bodies will themselves be redeemed, “for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52-53). HMM

Monday, January 29

Cities of Refuge

“Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge.” (Numbers 35:14)

When the Israelites entered the promised land, God told Joshua to provide six “cities of refuge” into which those who had slain someone could flee for refuge until a trial could ascertain the facts and render a proper verdict. As such, these cities are a type of Christ, through whom “we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:18).

The names of the six cities are given in Joshua 20:7-8 as Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan. The meanings of these names seem planned especially to foreshadow this spiritual application.

Kedesh means “holy place,” and Christ in the New Jerusalem is the ultimate refuge, for “the Lamb [is] the temple of it” (Revelation 21:22). Shechem means “strong shoulder,” which answers to the “strong consolation” we have in Christ when we flee to Him for refuge.

Hebron means “fellowship,” and we who have come to Christ have been “called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). Bezer means “strong hiding place.” The Scripture assures the believer that “your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).

Ramoth means “high place,” and when we are hidden in Christ, God also has “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). Finally, Golan apparently means “enclosure for captives,” and this would speak of our being set free from sin and death to become captive to Christ. “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive” (Ephesians 4:8). Thus, the cities are appropriately named both for their immediate purpose and as a picture of Christ as the Savior of sinners. HMM

Tuesday, January 30

Jesus and the Flood

“For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matthew 24:38-39)

The Lord Jesus Christ not only believed in the special, recent creation of all things by God (note Mark 10:6-8), but also in the worldwide Flood of Noah’s day, including the special preservation of life on the Ark. The Flood in which He believed was obviously not a “local flood,” for He compared it to the worldwide future impact of His Second Coming.

Neither was it a “tranquil flood,” nor a “selective flood,” for Jesus said, “The flood came, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27). It is clear that He was referring to—and that He believed—the Genesis record of the great Flood! There it says that the whole earth was “filled with violence” (Genesis 6:13), having first been filled with people, and that the resulting world-cleansing deluge was so cataclysmic that “every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth” (Genesis 7:23). Indeed, “the flood came, and took [literally ‘lifted’] them all away.”

This is what Jesus said, and what He believed, and therefore, those who are truly His disciples must also believe this. The destructive effects of the Flood can still be seen today not only in the biblical record, but also in the abundant evidences of cataclysmic destruction in the rocks and fossil graveyards all over the world. To refuse this evidence, as do many modern intellectuals, can only be because they “willingly are ignorant,” as Peter said in referring to this testimony (2 Peter 3:5). HMM

Wednesday, January 31

God's Everlasting Covenants

“And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.”
(Genesis 17:7)

The phrase “everlasting covenant” (or “perpetual covenant”) is used no less than 16 times in the Old Testament, plus once in the New Testament. It always refers to a covenant promise of God to man, made in grace, for only He can make an everlasting promise.

The first everlasting covenant was made with Noah (Genesis 9:16), a promise never to send a worldwide flood again, sealed with the sign of the rainbow.

The second is recorded in today's verse and was God's promise to Abraham and his descendants. The promise was to give them “the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8), and the seal was to be the rite of circumcision.

Many of the “everlasting covenant” promises have to do with Israel. Some were stated unconditionally, but others were “broken” because of man's rebellion against God's covenant terms. One of the latter was the covenant of the Sabbath. “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath . . . for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:16-17).

The last reference is the most important of all: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20-21). HMM

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Thursday, February 1

The Indwelling Christ

“And they glorified God in me.” (Galatians 1:24)

One of the greatest doctrines of the Christian faith is the amazing truth that the Lord Jesus Christ indwells each believer through His Holy Spirit. “Christ liveth in me,” said the apostle Paul (Galatians 2:20), and, since that was true experientially as well as doctrinally, he could invite people to see Christ and hear Christ and follow Christ by seeing and hearing and following him. This might seem incredibly arrogant if it were not real.

He could say, for example, that “it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me” (Galatians 1:15-16). And he could say, as in today’s verse, that those who heard him “glorified God in me.” He also commanded, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:9).

The Lord could say to His disciples, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9), and no one thinks it inappropriate because He fully manifested the heavenly Father in word and deed. Similarly, Paul said that “the truth of Christ is in me” and referred to “Christ speaking in me” (2 Corinthians 11:10; 13:3), noting that Christ was “mighty in me toward the Gentiles” (Galatians 2:8).

This was not boasting, for Paul acknowledged that “in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18). Still, he was bold to exhort, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Now the same Spirit of Christ who dwelled in Paul also indwells all true Christians, for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9). We should be able to say with Paul, in practice as well as theory, that “Christ liveth in me.” HMM

Friday, February 2

Holy Conversation

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.” (2 Peter 3:11)

The picturesque phrase “holy conversation” occurs only twice in the New Testament, both in Peter’s epistles; one in his very first chapter, 1 Peter 1:15, the other in today’s verse. The other is, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.” This distinctive King James rendering does not really mean “clean speech” but assumes the older, more precise meaning of “conversation,” namely “behavior,” especially behavior that involves other people. The Greek word translated “holy” primarily implies “dedicated to God.” Thus, holy conversation simply means living in such a way that our entire manner of life is oriented to honor God and to influence other people to honor Him.

These two exhortations of Peter tell us why we should live this way. The first incentive is simply the holiness of God Himself: “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). We have become children of God through faith in Christ, and we should therefore behave “as obedient children, not fashioning [ourselves] according to the former lusts in [our] ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14).

The second incentive given just before the words of today’s verse is the ever-imminent return of Christ, following which, eventually, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Peter 3:10). Incentives, both past and future, are thus given for holy living in the present!

Eight of the 13 occurrences of “conversation” (Greek *anastrophe*) are in Peter’s epistles, stressing his vital concern that Christians ought to demonstrate “all holy conversation and godliness” in their lives. HMM

Saturday, February 3

Wrong on Two Counts

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29)

When the Sadducees, who were the theological, philosophical, and scientific elite of the day, came to Jesus with a trick question in an attempt to discredit Him, He responded with the stinging rebuke in today’s verse. While His response dealt specifically with the fact of resurrection and the nature of the afterlife, His twofold evaluation of self-reliant scholars still fits today, particularly in regard to evolutionary speculations.

By the time Darwin had published his book *Origin of Species* attributing evolutionary progression to natural selection, he had probably become an atheist and so set about to ascribe creation to natural causes. He attributed to nature abilities that clearly belong to God alone. He knew something of the Scriptures, but his memoirs show that he had little understanding of basic biblical teaching. He felt that if there was a God, He had little power or had not been involved in the affairs of this earth. Most atheistic evolutionists today follow Darwin’s intellectual footsteps.

But what of Christian intellectuals, theistic evolutionists, progressive creationists, or advocates of the framework hypothesis, who claim to know God but yet deny His awesome power in creation? They too reject the clear teaching of Scripture regarding creation, relegating God to the mundane task of overseeing the evolutionary process, reducing His power to something man can accomplish. Peter aptly describes this attitude when he calls it willful ignorance (2 Peter 3:5).

It has been suggested by some that all human error can be traced to one or both of these categories: not knowing (and/or believing) the Scriptures, and underestimating the power of God. JDM

Sunday, February 4

“Cataclysmed” with Water

“Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.” (2 Peter 3:6)

In comparing the intensity and global extent of the coming judgment of sinful mankind, “in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (v. 10), to the intensity of the historic judgment of sinful man at the time of the Flood (the denial of which constitutes willful ignorance, v. 5), Peter uses extraordinary language. The word “overflowed” in today’s verse translates the mighty Greek word *kataklyzo*, from which we get our word “cataclysm.”

In the Greek New Testament, this word is only used to refer to Noah’s Flood (see Matthew 24:38-39; Luke 17:27; 2 Peter 2:5); other words were used for other, local floods (see Luke 6:48 and Revelation 12:15). Such a distinction is likewise borne out in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for “flood” used over and over again in Genesis 6–11 is *mabul* (see also Psalm 29:10) and stands as qualitatively distinct from other lesser floods, both of water and figuratively of invading armies, or the Red Sea crossing.

As a matter of fact, God promised that Noah’s Flood would be different from all other water floods (Genesis 9:11) in that it was a display of God’s awful wrath on sinful mankind and the world infected by that sin.

And that is the point. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). It always has been, always will be. God is not the sort of God who will allow sin to go unpunished. His holy nature demands the punishment of death for sin.

But just as “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8), so do believers of today. The penalty for sin is indeed death, but “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). JDM

Monday, February 5

From Darkness to Light

“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.” (Genesis 1:3-4)

The initial aspect of God’s newly created world was one of darkness in the presence of the all-pervading waters. Since “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), the darkness had to be specially created (Isaiah 45:7) before God could then call for the light to appear in the darkness.

This would later serve as a striking picture of the entrance of light into the darkness of a soul born in sin. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). The light enters our soul by His Word. “The entrance of thy words giveth light” (Psalm 119:130).

This great theme, contrasting the darkness of the soul without Christ to the glorious light He brings when that soul receives Him by faith, is found often in Scripture. “[Christ] hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth” (1 John 2:8). Jesus even called Himself that true light that divided the light from the darkness. “I am the light of the world,” He claimed. “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

And because we have received the true light, we should henceforth live in the light of His truth. “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Romans 13:12). God’s light is good. In the Holy City, “there shall be no night there” (Revelation 22:5). HMM

Tuesday, February 6

Tithes and Offerings

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” (Malachi 3:10)

Today there is much talk of financial security. The biblical formula in today’s verse, given to Israel but applied to all, begins with a scathing indictment. “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings” (v. 8). What a terrible thing, to rob God. The result of their thievery, in God’s eyes: “Ye are cursed with a curse” (v. 9) such that their financial state was much worse than it would have been had they been obedient. This teaching and promise has not been rescinded (Luke 6:38; 1 Corinthians 16:2; etc.).

God’s charge to us as given in today’s verse is in three steps. First, we are told to obey; i.e., “bring ye.” This cannot be considered an option. Secondly, God proposes a test. “Prove me,” He says, give and see if He lives up to His promises. Thirdly, trust His promise to meet our needs.

Note that His promise is also threefold. It abundantly covers present needs, for He promises to “pour you out a blessing” unmeasurable in quality or quantity. Likewise, it covers the threat of future loss. “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field” (v. 11). Most precious is His promise to reward obedience and trust with a special relationship: “All nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land” (v. 12).

Thus, we see that with less than 100 percent of our income at our disposal, we will have greater financial security than if we had kept it all to ourselves, thereby robbing God. JDM

Wednesday, February 7

Hating Knowledge

“How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?” (Proverbs 1:22)

This ancient question by the wise man Solomon was posed almost 3,000 years ago and is still relevant today. “How long?” he asked. How long will men continue to scoff at true knowledge? “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

The answer to your question, Solomon, would have been 3,000 years at least! Peter prophesied “that there shall come in the last days scoffers . . . saying, Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:3-4); and Paul said “that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be . . . boasters, proud, blasphemers. . . Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:1-2, 7).

Throughout history men have scorned the true knowledge of God and His creation. Peter says they “willingly are ignorant,” and Paul says they are “without excuse” (2 Peter 3:5; Romans 1:20), but they “delight in their scorning” nonetheless.

It is remarkable that their hatred of God’s true knowledge is cloaked in a robe of scientism and evolutionary pseudoknowledge that even deceives many professing Christians. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22), despising the true wisdom and instruction of God’s Word.

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Those who scorn God’s Word have no light of their own, despite their scientific pretensions. “Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction” (Proverbs 10:14). HMM

Thursday, February 8

The “I Wills” of Christ

*“And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.”
(Mark 1:41)*

When the Lord Jesus makes a promise, that promise is sure to be fulfilled. When He made the above promise to the leper, “immediately the leprosy departed from him” (Mark 1:42). The promise may not always be carried out as rapidly as this, but it will come.

Look at some of the wonderful “I wills” of Christ. “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19) is His promise to all His true disciples (that is, those who follow Him). But first they must come to Him, and to those who come He promises, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Another gracious promise to all who come: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He also promises special love to those who obey Him. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, . . . shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

There is a tremendous promise in John 14:13: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” He even emphasized it in the next verse: “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

He has also promised to come back again, and we can be certain He will do as He said: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3). But probably the greatest of all His promises was given in His intercessory prayer. “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (John 17:24). HMM

Friday, February 9

Greetings from Peter

“Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” (2 Peter 1:1-2)

All too often we skip over the introductory verses of greeting in a Bible book, but many times these verses contain rich information. Such is the case in today’s verse.

We first notice the strange paradox in Peter’s identification of himself. He is both the authoritative “apostle,” the officially commissioned ambassador of Jesus Christ, as well as His “servant,” or bondsman. Historically, we know that Peter was one of the inner circle of disciples in whom Christ placed great responsibility, but he was also the one who denied Christ at His trial. Christ had bought him with His blood as a slave would be bought, forgiven him much, and had sent him out on a lifelong mission.

The letter is written to those “that have obtained like precious faith,” i.e., the same kind of precious faith possessed by the apostles, implying equal standing and privilege before God, obtained through His righteousness.

Peter uses two descriptive names for Christ, calling Him both “God and our Savior,” referring to His dual divine/human nature and role. Peter’s prayer for us (possessors of like precious faith) is moving. He desires the sanctifying and sustaining grace of God for us, the peace of God that brings joy even in the face of adversity, and that both would be multiplied. These traits would come “through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus, our Lord” (today’s verse). Much of the rest of the book deals with false teachers and false knowledge, but Peter would have us grow into “full knowledge” (literal translation; see also vv. 3, 8) of God through the walk of grace and peace. JDM

Saturday, February 10

Not Yet

“These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come.” (John 8:20)

This is the last of seven times in the gospel of John that the phrase “not yet” is used in reference to the forthcoming death of Christ. Although this was the very reason He came into the world, the event itself could not be hurried.

When His mother wanted Him to provide wine for the wedding, He said, “Mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:4). When His brothers urged Him to show His mighty works in Jerusalem, His answer was “My time is not yet come” (John 7:6, 8). When His enemies tried to take Him at the feast of tabernacles, “no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come” (John 7:30). Even when He preached His great promise of living water, John noted parenthetically that “the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

But His hour did come, and they did lay hands on Him and put Him to death. Then He was glorified, and the Holy Spirit was given. And now we await another great time that has not yet come. John speaks of this also: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but . . . we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

In that great time to come, all things will be made subject to Christ. “But now we see not yet all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:8). These great promises and others associated with them have not yet been accomplished—the world is far from being in subjection to Him, and we are far from being like Him. But the hour will come, just as the first one did, and it will be glorious. For “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). HMM

Sunday, February 11

Fruit-Bearing Christians

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” (John 15:2)

As Christ emphasized in His parable of the vine and the branches, it is vitally important for a Christian to bear fruit. There are, in fact, many types of spiritual fruit mentioned in Scripture.

Perhaps the most important fruit, produced in one’s life by the Holy Spirit, is that of a Christlike character. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). “For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Ephesians 5:9).

Holiness—the seal of a life dedicated to God—is a particular spiritual fruit. “Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness” (Romans 6:22) and are “filled with the fruits of righteousness” (Philippians 1:11). This entails also the fruit of good works performed in the name of Christ, “that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Colossians 1:10).

The habit of giving thanks and praise rather than complaint and criticism is a valuable Christian fruit. “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15). Generosity is another important fruit. Paul commended the sacrificial giving of the Philippians, “not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account” (Philippians 4:17).

Finally, one vital fruit of a Christian witness is fruit borne in other Christians’ lives. Paul’s great desire was “that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles” (Romans 1:13). HMM

Monday, February 12

The Gospel of Prosperity

*“Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.”
(Romans 1:10)*

This mention of the word “prosperous” is the first of the only four occurrences of the Greek word *enodoo* (meaning literally “good journey” but translated “prosper” or “prosperous”) in the New Testament. Here, it is actually rendered “prosperous journey.”

It is obvious that Paul was not praying for his journey to prosper financially, for the next verse indicates his long desire had been to “impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established” (Romans 1:11).

However, the word has come to include any kind of prospering, as in 1 Corinthians 16:2, when Paul urged Christians to provide financial help for other Christians in need. “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him,” he said.

The term can also refer to physical and spiritual health. Its two other occurrences are in 3 John 1:2: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” Unfortunately, certain teachers of these latter days have taken the biblical teaching of spiritual prosperity to mean financial prosperity, which they teach is the right of every Christian. But this “prosperity gospel” is so clearly unscriptural that it is merely a testimony to the cupidity of the Christians who believe it. “They that [desire to] be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts,” warned Paul (1 Timothy 6:9). And to whatever extent God does prosper us financially, it is strictly for the purpose of helping others, not to indulge ourselves. “Charge them that are rich in this world, that . . . they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute” (1 Timothy 6:17-18). HMM

Tuesday, February 13

Seven Days

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.” (John 8:56)

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about “my day”—a day that Abraham had “seen” 2,000 years before. This evidently referred to the time when Christ would be on Earth, which God had enabled Abraham to see in prophecy.

But of all the days when He was on the earth, the most glorious was the great day when He rose from the dead. “He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:33).

As a result of His death and resurrection, “behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). The day of salvation is any day in this age of grace when a person believes on Christ for salvation. He then receives “the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). This great future day of redemption evidently is the same as “the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6), when He comes again.

Following this is the fearful day of the Lord, when Christ will punish and judge and reign. “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night . . . and they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). It is also called “the great day of his wrath” (Revelation 6:17).

This day of the Lord will culminate at God’s great white throne. This will be “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:5).

Finally will come the eternal “day of God” when this present earth will be purified with fire and “we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). That day will never end, “for there shall be no night there” (Revelation 21:25). HMM

Love in the Old Testament

“And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.” (Genesis 29:20)

It is well known that “love” in the New Testament almost always means unselfish *agape* love. The Greek word for sexual love or romantic love, *eros*, is never used at all in the New Testament. Even marital love is ideally *agape* love in its main expression, as in Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”

In the Old Testament, on the other hand, there are about a dozen different Hebrew words used for “love,” and these often have wide variations in meaning, depending on context, often including romantic love as one of them. For example, Jacob’s willingness to work for Laban seven years in order to obtain Rachel for his wife clearly must have involved a high degree of romantic love on his part. He also loved her sister Leah, after Laban insisted he marry her first, but “he loved also Rachel more than Leah” (Genesis 29:30).

Several different “love” words are used in the Song of Solomon, as Solomon and his bride frequently speak of their romantic love for each other. There is no doubt that God approves of such love when it is pure and true and involves self-sacrificing *agape* love as well. “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4). The word for “whoremonger,” incidentally, is also often translated “fornicator” and can refer to any kind of sexual activity (some may call it “love,” but this is a caricature) outside of monogamous, man-and-woman, lifelong marriage.

The greatest love of all, of course, in both Old and New Testaments, is God’s love for the men and women He has created and redeemed. HMM

Thursday, February 15

The Lively Oracles

“This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.”
(Acts 7:38)

This pungent expression, “lively oracles,” is the felicitous King James translation of *zao logion*, “utterances that are vibrantly alive.” In Stephen’s address, he was referring, of course, to the tables of the law, “written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18) and received by Moses on Mount Sinai directly from the Lord.

The Greek word *logion* is derived from *logos* (“word”) and occurs just four times. In the other three references, it appears in the phrase “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11). These “oracles” are *living* words precisely because they do come from God. They include not only the Ten Commandments but all the Holy Scriptures.

The word “lively” is the Greek *zao*, occurring over 140 times and translated variously (depending on context) as “alive,” “live,” “living,” “quick,” etc. It is significant that it occurs, first of all, on the lips of Christ Himself when He said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). We are truly alive only through the life-giving words of the living God! “For the word [that is, each individual saying] of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

The Bible is not just a book but *the* Book. Its content is “for ever . . . settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89), “able to make thee wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15), and is “given by inspiration of God” (“God-breathed”) (2 Timothy 3:16). Its words must guide our very lives! HMM

The Call of the Twelve

“And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.” (Mark 3:14)

Early in His public ministry, Jesus gathered around Himself those to whom He would eventually entrust the Christian message. Many others had also been attracted to Him and His works, as indicated in the previous verse: “And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would [emphasis in the Greek is on *he*; the choice was His alone]: and they came unto him” (v. 13). Of those He invited, He “ordained twelve.”

Such a momentous selection could not be taken lightly, and we should not pass over it either. Luke gives us further information: “He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12) before choosing the twelve. As a sidelight, it bears mentioning that if God the Son so relied on the wisdom from God the Father before making an important decision, how can we neglect prayer as we so often do?

Four purposes are listed for these appointees, but the last three flow from the first: “That they should be with him.” They would see Him in action, learn truth from Him, assist Him in His work; but most importantly they would see His character and habits, and would never be the same.

Part of their training included being sent out to put in practice what they had learned, “that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils” (Mark 3:14-15). He gave them a message to preach and the ability to authenticate that message.

A study of these disciples as revealed in the gospels makes one wonder if Jesus made a proper choice. However, in the book of Acts, once He was gone and the Holy Spirit empowered them, we recognize that their training was complete. We are the result of their effective ministry. JDM

Saturday, February 17

Faith in All the Ages

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.” (Hebrews 11:32)

Hebrews 11 is a thrilling catalog of the faithful servants of God in all the ancient ages. There were Abel, Enoch, and Noah before the Flood; then Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph in the patriarchal age; followed by Moses, Joshua, and Rahab in the time of the exodus and conquest. Finally, today’s verse summarizes the periods of the judges (Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthae), the kings (Samuel, David), and the prophets.

All these were men and women of great faith, though each had to endure great testing. They, as the writer says, “stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword . . . had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder . . . destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Hebrews 11:33-37).

In every age, men and women of faith were more often than not despised and persecuted by the world (even by the religious world!), but the Bible notes, parenthetically, that it was they “of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:38). In God’s sight, they all “obtained a good report through faith” (Hebrews 11:39), and this is worth more than all the world, for it is the entrance into a far better and eternal world.

Note that faith is not a sentimental wishfulness but a strong confidence in God and His Word, through Jesus Christ, who is Himself “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Like those of past ages, we can also “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1) through the faith He offers us. HMM

Sunday, February 18

Watch and Pray

“Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.” (Nehemiah 4:9)

Prayer is a powerful weapon, but the wall-builders in Jerusalem also were careful to set a watch against their enemies “with their swords, their spears, and their bows” (Nehemiah 4:13). They were ready to fight if necessary, but at the same time they were confident that “our God shall fight for us” (Nehemiah 4:20).

This is a sound biblical principle. God expects us to make appropriate use of whatever physical means are available for a needed ministry rather than to rely simply on prayer and divine miracle. The Lord rebuked those who came asking Him to perform a miracle merely to test Him or to see something curious. “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe” (John 4:48). Neither does He condone prayer in lieu of work, for “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17). The same holds for prayer in lieu of obedience. As Joshua was praying for deliverance from the enemy, “the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them” (Joshua 7:10-11).

But as prayer without working is dead, so watching and working without prayer are futile. “Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2). “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

The biblical principle is not only to watch or only to pray. Both are essential. “Watch and pray,” said Jesus, “that ye enter not into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). HMM

Monday, February 19

Emblems of the Holy Spirit

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.” (Matthew 3:16)

There are several beautiful symbols of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. The first is that of the dove, here mentioned in the very first New Testament reference to the Spirit. It was the dove, of course, that first assured Noah that the earth had risen out of the death waters of the great Flood, just as Christ now rose up out of the baptismal waters to receive the dove-like Spirit.

The water itself is also an emblem of the Spirit in its cleansing efficacy and life-sustaining virtue. Jesus said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). This could also be translated “born of water, even the Spirit.” When He promised “rivers of living water” to those who believed on Him, “this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive” (John 7:38-39).

Then, there is the wind: sometimes a gentle breeze, sometimes a mighty hurricane, and this also symbolizes the Holy Spirit. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

John the Baptist said, “I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh. . . . he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Luke 3:16). The Holy Spirit is God; “our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). The Spirit of God is a gentle dove and living water; He is the blowing wind and a consuming fire; He is our “Comforter” (John 14:26), “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17), and “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). HMM

Tuesday, February 20

True Worship

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)

The word “worship” is used frequently today in Christian circles—in addition to worship services, we now have worship choruses, worship teams, worship manuals, worship seminars, etc. Often, however, the basic meaning of worship is misunderstood.

In the original Hebrew and Greek, the words translated “worship” mean simply to “bow down”! The Hebrew is so translated the first time it is used. When Abraham saw God and two angels approaching, “he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground” (Genesis 18:2). That is, he recognized God’s “worthy-ship” and was submitting himself to do His will.

The last time “worship” is used is when John “fell down to worship before the feet of the angel.” He was corrected by the angel with these words: “See thou do it not: . . . worship God” (Revelation 22:8-9). Only God, our Creator and Savior, is worthy of true worship, and that worship involves simply bowing down in submission to do His will.

That is why it must be “in spirit and in truth.” Our spirit must submit to God who is Spirit, and this can only be in truth. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus concerning the Spirit whom He would send to indwell His followers: “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: . . . He shall glorify me” (John 16:13-14).

He would do this by revealing God’s Word to the writers of the New Testament, just as He had for the Old (2 Peter 1:21). In His prayer to the Father, recorded by John, Christ prayed for us, saying, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). True worship is simply submitting to and doing God’s will as made known by His written Word and the guidance of His Holy Spirit, thereby glorifying Christ. HMM

Wednesday, February 21

Grace upon Grace

“And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.”
(John 1:16)

We can never exhaust the riches of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we receive Him as Savior, we receive “grace for grace”—that is, one grace after another, grace upon grace.

In the first place, we have received His *saving* grace: “For by grace are ye saved” (Ephesians 2:8). We also receive *justifying* grace, because we are “justified freely by his grace” (Romans 3:24), having the very righteousness of Christ credited to our account. It is then *standing* grace, enabling us to stand confidently in our grace-given salvation. “We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Romans 5:2).

That same *boundless* grace soon becomes *working* grace and *serving* grace. “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

Yet, there is more, for we need grace for times of testing and opposition as well as for serving. When such times come, “he giveth more grace” (James 4:6). “My grace is sufficient for thee,” He says, “for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). He gives *strengthening* grace and *sufficient* grace for every need.

The grace of Christ is thus truly *abounding* grace, for “God is able to make all grace abound toward you” (2 Corinthians 9:8). It is even *giving* grace, and we should “abound in this grace also” (2 Corinthians 8:7). Therefore, we should continually “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). HMM

Thursday, February 22

John the Baptist and Jesus

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.” (John 1:6-7)

John the Baptist was, according to Christ Himself, the greatest man who had ever lived up to that time (Matthew 11:11). As great as he was, however, there is a striking contrast between himself and the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said that John “was a burning and a shining light” (John 5:35), but he was not “the true Light” (1:9). The two Greek words used depict something like a candle in John’s case and a brilliant light such as the sun for Christ.

Similarly, John was a great “voice of one crying in the wilderness” (v. 23), but Jesus Christ was “the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (v. 1). John “came for a witness” (v. 7), bearing witness to the light and to the truth, but Jesus Christ was Himself incarnate truth (14:6). Some even thought John was the Messiah, but he said, “I am not” (1:20).

John’s coming was prophesied 400 years before: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me” (Malachi 3:1). John was the divinely sent messenger, but Christ was the One whose way he came to prepare. John was “a man sent from God” (John 1:6), but when Christ came, John “saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

Both were called to baptize, but there was a great difference. John said, “I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Luke 3:16).

John was a mighty man of God, but when Christ finally came, John could only say, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). HMM

Friday, February 23

The Cure for Spiritual Weariness

*“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”
(Hebrews 12:3)*

Faith in Christ does not make one immune to spiritual weariness and faintness of mind. This condition may arise from frustration at our own natures, our inability to love God as we ought, to pray effectively, to understand the Scriptures, or to bear fruit for Him. We may feel that our best efforts to represent God in our community have been of no avail and very few show by their lives that our witness and ministry have been effective.

Sometimes we may question why God does not choose to favor all those who follow Him with material blessings and pleasant circumstances, but instead, at times, the wicked prosper. Looking at the tide of evil sweeping our world can leave us faint and weary.

But the answer to our dilemma is Christ! Reflection on Him will re-energize even the most discouraged saint, for He “endured such contradiction [or opposition] of sinners” (today’s verse), was victorious, and now promises to lead us to similar victory (see Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16, for example). It will help us to persevere if we notice how He endured, “who, when he was reviled, reviled not again” (1 Peter 2:23), and that He endured it all, not just for Himself or just for His followers, but also for us, who, “when we were enemies [of Christ], we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10).

The so-called “Hall of Fame of Faith” (Hebrews 11) immediately precedes today’s verse. Reflection on the testimonies of those faithful and victorious warriors, coupled with our example of Christ, will make our greatest burden seem light and should spur us on to even more effective and sacrificial labor. JDM

By His Doing

“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Corinthians 1:30)

In this one verse we find described four aspects of Christ’s work on our behalf. As we look at each one, let us first note that it is “of him,” literally “by his doing,” that we are in Christ Jesus, who “is made” or “who became” these things to us and for us.

Wisdom of God: This is the preferred rendering. Paul was writing to the church at Corinth (a Greek city). The Greeks were infatuated with wisdom, but Paul declared Christ Jesus to be the “wisdom of God.” Such wisdom is likewise imparted to believers (v. 24), while “the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (v. 25).

Righteousness: Christ, being “made” righteousness, becomes an all-sufficient righteousness to us. This imputed rightness before God gives us a new standing before Him, permitting us access to Him, peace with Him, and ultimate glory with Him.

Sanctification: In Christ, we not only have this righteous standing, we are assured of a holy state as well. Through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we know that our lives will be constantly molded into Christ-likeness.

Redemption: Christ is made redemption for us, and in its fullest definition, this is His final goal. Through His redemptive work, we have been completely delivered from the power of sin and will one day be delivered from the presence of sin.

The introductory phrase “of him” or “by his doing” is emphatic in the Greek text. When we see what He has done, we realize just how helpless we were and how strongly He has acted on our behalf. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (v. 31). JDM

Sunday, February 25

Moral or Sanctimonious

*“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”
(Luke 6:41)*

This rhetorical question by the Lord Jesus incisively points out a sin common among most Christians—the sin of sanctimoniousness, committed in the good name of morality. It is easy to criticize fellow Christians for their moral or ethical deficiencies while simultaneously justifying one’s self for the same or worse defects. “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things” (Romans 2:1).

True morality is generated internally from a heart of gratitude and love for the Lord and His Word, then manifested externally in a godly life of non-self-centered service. Sanctimoniousness is generated from a heart of pride and is manifested in a critical spirit. Morality judges one’s self; sanctimoniousness judges others.

This inconsistency afflicts all of us to some degree, so we need to be especially alert to its outcropping in our own lives. We must condemn sin, of course, but we must at least be as concerned to correct it in ourselves as we are in others. “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10).

And if, indeed, we do see a mote—or even a beam—in a brother’s eye, one that really needs to be removed for the Lord’s sake and that of His testimony, the best procedure is not one of sanctimonious rebuke but of gentle and empathetic edification. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). HMM

No More Tears

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

Surely this is one of the most glorious promises in the Bible! No more suffering, no more sorrow, no more death! In this present life, in this present world, every one of us must endure suffering and sorrow in various degrees, and eventually death. But our gracious Savior “hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” and because “the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . he was cut off out of the land of the living” (Isaiah 53:4, 6, 8), and He endured for us the awful suffering of death on the cross.

In dying, however, He defeated death, rose from the grave, and is now alive “for evermore” (Revelation 1:18). Thus, He can promise immortal physical bodies that will never die again to all who trust Him.

How can He do this? He “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:21). “The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

The believers of pre-Christian days will also share in these blessings. Isaiah recorded a beautiful promise to them, as well as us, hundreds of years before Christ came to make it possible. “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: . . . And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him . . . we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isaiah 25:8-9). HMM

Tuesday, February 27

In the Spirit

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25)

When a person accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, believing on Him as the Son of God and personal Redeemer, the One who saves him from his sins, a wonderful event takes place. The Spirit of God enters his very body, there to reside and to guide his new life in Christ. Henceforth he is, whether he senses it or not, “in the Spirit.” “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9).

The believer’s body even becomes a temple in which the Spirit can reign over his life. “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

In addition to leading us (through the Scriptures which He inspired and through the circumstances which He ordains), “The Spirit [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16). “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

The indwelling, comforting, leading, witnessing Spirit is not alone, for Jesus promised that, when the Comforter comes to “be in you,” then through the Spirit, “I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you” (John 14:17, 20). Thus, we can “be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:19).

Such a marvelous relationship will surely transform our lives. As today’s verse exhorts us: “If we live in the Spirit” we should certainly “walk in the Spirit.” The practical result is then obvious. “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). HMM

Jesus Sees and Cares

“Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” (John 5:19)

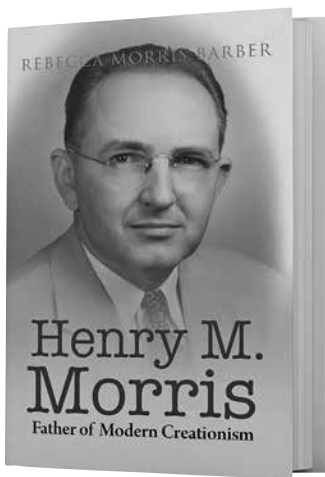
What the Father sees, the Son sees, and what the Father does, the Son does, for “I and my Father are one,” said the Lord Jesus (John 10:30). God sees everything, of course, for “the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3), but it is noteworthy that there are just seven occasions where John’s gospel stresses specifically that Jesus saw a particular event and then took special action to do something about it.

At Jesus’ baptism, two seekers followed Him and “Jesus turned, and saw them following” (John 1:38). He invited them to come and they followed Him from that day on. Nathanael, a devout Jew, also followed Him when Jesus said, “When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee” (v. 48).

There was an incurable cripple at a pool, and “when Jesus saw him lie” (John 5:6), He said, “Rise, . . . and immediately the man was made whole” (vv. 8-9). There was a hungry multitude: “Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him,” and He prayed, and soon “they were filled” (6:5, 12).

Next, Jesus “saw a man which was blind from his birth,” and soon the once-sightless man could testify, “Whereas I was blind, now I see” (9:1, 25). Not only the lame and blind, but also the grieving came to His attention. When Mary’s brother Lazarus died, Jesus “saw her weeping.” Then “Jesus wept” and soon “he that was dead came forth” (11:33, 35, 44). Finally, even while Christ was dying on the cross, He “saw his mother” and provided for her care (19:26).

Jesus sees those who hurt, or grieve, or hunger, and He cares. For, after all, He is our Father. HMM



Henry M. Morris

Father of Modern Creationism

Dr. Henry M. Morris, founder of the Institute for Creation Research, spent a lifetime investigating scientific evidence that confirms the Bible. In an age when many people had no answer to evolution, Dr. Morris sought to turn back the tide. Leaving his position as head of the Civil Engineering Department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute during the peak of his academic career, he dove headlong into God's strongest call on his life: answering the tough questions of faith and science. His book *The Genesis Flood*, co-written with Dr. John Whitcomb, triggered the modern creationism movement.

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