

MARCH 2015

A Monthly Magazine issued by

The Remnant of Christ's Ecclesia

in opposition to the Dogmas of
Papal and Protestant Christendom

A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

"Take heed that ye be not deceived"

THE LAW FULFILLED

THE VINE TREE

PATIENCE BY EXAMPLE

A BIBLE CLASS - I WILL PUT THEE IN A CLIFT OF THE ROCK

A JUST RESPONSE

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

All Communications

M. C. Steiger
836 King Road, Forestville
New York 14062
U.S.A.

THE LAW FULFILLED

Perhaps no greater task of Paul was with his own Hebrew brethren. There were many facets under the law which were in need of changing. We know their promised Messiah had come, and had fulfilled that law. Our recent readings in Hebrews bear this out, regarding the Levitical priesthood. This was abolished by the Lord Jesus. And Paul comes to tell them so! We can imagine what a great change this was:

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;
A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” Hebrews 8:1-2

The Lord Jesus' sacrifice had done away with the Levitical teaching. Paul was speaking of what was to be made of no effect by the Lord Jesus. The focus was to be on the promised Messiah, the true High Priest who is to be the means of salvation.

And so Paul reasoned:

“If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?
For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.
For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.
For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.” Hebrews 7:11-14

A big change indeed! How could Paul explain this to his brethren? Going on in chapter 7:

“... after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.
For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.
For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.”

Hebrews 7:1 5-19

Who is Melchisedec? Looking back to the time of Abraham, he was known as the King of Salem, the King of Peace, from whom peace was to be found, and he blessed Abraham;

“For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of peace;

Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.

And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham:

But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises.

And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.”

Hebrews 7:1-7

Here was the hand of God to help Abraham overcome his enemies. There was a change that would allow the people of God to perceive what God's perfect will was.

This new understanding of doing away with the Levitical priesthood would have been very difficult. They needed to perceive fully the word of God, so that they could better understand their place in the sight of God. Paul helps us further:

“... God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Hebrews 6:17-20

What are these two immutable things? God's word, and that word fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. God cannot lie. This was the truth set before

His people, to be used as an “anchor of the soul” — that means of hope — fulfilling God’s promises now seen in His Son, the Lord Jesus. The position of the Jews today is that they look to Jesus as a prophet, not as the Messiah, as the true High Priest.

Paul went on with this line of reasoning:

“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.” Hebrews 8:7-9

The time of that ultimate bond will come — a time when all will know the Lord, when the gospel message will be preached to all nations — no longer taught, but known through all the earth:

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.” Hebrews 8:10-11

We look to the Word daily to guide and direct us. He would have men see the light. It is within God’s power and mercy to have them know Him:

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”

Hebrews 8:12-13

This allows us to value the freedom which comes with the understanding of the Lord Jesus’ death, and His redemptive powers. It removes the law and replaces it with His sacrifice.

Paul wrote to those in Corinth:

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation, 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. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." II Corinthians 5:17-21

How clearly this puts forth the understanding of God's truth, seen in Jesus — the only means by which there can be forgiveness and reconciliation. The Lord Jesus fulfilled all righteousness; He fulfilled what God's desire is for all: to be right and to serve Him. How greatly is God to be worshipped and praised! And so we are helped to know the "sum" of the matter — what God has provided through His abundant mercies.

David understood this; he knew of the "sure mercies of David":

"The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.
The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.
Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.
The LORD at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.
He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.
He shall drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall he lift up the head."
Psalm 110:1-7

This eulogy of David proclaimed his place in the sight of God and His Son. The Lord Jesus laid down His life for us.

Let us consider chapter 11 of Hebrews — the faith chapter. Those mentioned applied the new covenant in their living, and looked for the hope to be seen in God's Son. If we value the word of God and the Lord Jesus, that word is truly an "anchor of the soul." It requires faith and hope as seen in that word:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Hebrews 11:1- 6

So we are allowed to value what we have been shown and know. That knowledge will be universal, and will take away the sin of the world. We look for the return of the Lord Jesus, who will keep and direct us to the new covenant. It gives life! Let us embrace it, allowing the mercy and peace of God to be seen in us:

“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 well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Hebrews 13:20-21

M.C.S.

THE VINE TREE

In the fifteenth chapter of Ezekiel there is a reference to a **vine tree**. In the chapter the Lord goes on to describe its uses and it's worth:

“Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest?
Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?
Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?
Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned?” Ezekiel 15:2-5

The vine tree is described as not being able to be used for any purpose but to be fuel for a fire. It can't be used to make tools or structural items. It is not like the hardwood trees that can be made into tools or furniture. So what is a vine tree? It makes one think of a large vine that hangs from the trees within a forest. These "vine trees" are often found locally and are usually wild grape vines. They often grow high up into trees and can grow to be several inches thick. Because these vine trees are wild they do not produce the large and juicy fruit that a well cared-for vine within a vineyard would. The grapes from these vine trees are very small and often sour by comparison. Throughout the scriptures the "vine" or "vineyard" has often been used to represent Israel. As is seen in the following verses the vine tree does still represent Israel:

"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them.

And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 15:6-8

The Lord's displeasure with the inhabitants of Jerusalem was such that He would not allow them to escape from the burning fire that He sent upon them. If we go back to the previous chapter we see the reason for God's anger with Israel:

"Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him myself:

And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Ezekiel 14:6-8

It is apparent that the Lord's displeasure with Israel and Judah was with their idolatrous ways. Israel was not only worshipping false gods, but was also setting up idols within their own hearts. God had given Israel many opportunities to change their ways over the thousands of years that He had been their God, and many times He had to punish them as He did

during the time of Ezekiel. God had provided His people with all they needed, and only required that they worship Him to keep their part of the covenant. We see the same thoughts echoed in the words of Isaiah in another example of a vineyard:

“Now will I sing to my well-behaved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-behaved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.

What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?”

Isaiah 5:1-4

God provided everything that Israel needed to be a prosperous and fruitful vineyard; yet they could not bring forth the good fruit that He wants from His people. God kept the vineyard safe, removed those hindrances that could slow growth, and provided the fertile ground for that growth, and still only wild grapes were produced. The vines spoke of Israel but certainly speaks about any worshipper of God, because God does provide for His faithful followers. We do not lack of those things that are required for faithful living. We might not have everything that we could wish for, but we do not lack the necessities. Certainly in the Israelites' case, in the previous verse, God provided all that was needed for a strong vine to produce good fruit, but they only produced small and bitter fruit.

The well-known words of the Lord Jesus about the true vine emphasize the importance of a complete connection to Jesus so that we may produce those good fruits that God expects from His followers:

“I AM the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

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.

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in

him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” John 15:1-7

In the previous example, we were represented by a vine abiding in the fertile ground provided by God; but in Jesus’ example, we are the branches that abide in the vine (Jesus) that is provided by God. In either case we are required to produce good fruit. If we are fruitful God will continue to test us to trim away the bad wood (flesh), so that we can produce even more good fruit which is pleasing to Him. If we do not produce good fruit we are severed from the branch, and without that connection, we will dry up and be cast into the fire of judgment. Jesus reminds us that we have been selected to abide in Him and to take advantage of that opportunity:

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” John 15:16

It is humbling to think that we have been chosen, and as long as we abide in Jesus and continue to worship God, we can be granted everything we need to continue to produce good fruit.

We do not want to become a vine tree in God’s eyes. The vine tree has grown thick and inflexible and no longer produces good fruit. The branches of a vine tree are not good for anything if they are not producing acceptable fruit, and thus are burned up in the day of judgment. If we can remain flexible as a fruitful vine, accepting God’s pruning actions, we can bring forth even more fruit. A vine can do nothing of itself to produce good fruit but is reliant on the husbandman to trim off the dead wood. As branches abiding in the true vine we need to humbly accept our position in the vine, and receive its life-giving sustenance, so that we may continue to produce a refined fruit that is pleasing to Him who planted us.

E.J.M.

PATIENCE BY EXAMPLE

In Mark we have read of the Lord Jesus' witnessing, and have learned of His great patience. He was sorely tested in this regard, for He knew His end, yet responded faithfully to the purpose of God, being an example to those around him:

“... And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles:

And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.

Mark 10:32-34.

Jesus knew that His death was imminent and endeavored to prepare His disciples for this eventuality, in order that they might be strengthened to endure when these things came to pass.

After this understanding was conveyed however, the disciples lost sight of it wrongly surmising that Jesus upon entering Jerusalem would immediately establish His kingdom. They were too intent upon their own misguided thoughts as the example of James and John reveal:

“And James and John the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying Master we would that thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?

They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.

But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”

Mark 10:35-40.

How could these two disciples have been so presumptuous? Indeed, the Lord Jesus might have rebuked them for such an ill-conceived idea, but with patience He reminded that only God had the authority to grant such a request. When the other ten heard, they were displeased with James and John, giving an opportunity for Jesus to gently rebuke all:

“...Ye know that the which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:42-45.

He was teaching them by example how they should behave—not as the Gentiles after the flesh, but as men of spirit obeying the word of God. Certainly in the midst of the testing and persecution that Jesus was enduring, their bickering and pettiness could have caused Him to feel impatient and frustrated with their lack. Yet He taught them in a calm and kindly manner, leading by example.

Even prior to this incident they had been arguing similarly, and sensing an opportunity to instruct, Jesus asked:

“..What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth not me, but him that sent me.”

Mark 9:33-37

Theirs had been the reasoning of the flesh, competing for the most important place in desire to be first. Jesus knew how needful it was that they learn submission, enabling them to receive what God had prepared, instead of seeking their own glory and recognition. Again, as they shared the last meal before the Lord Jesus betrayal, this point of contention was still visible:

“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth:

is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Luke 22:24-30.

This question of who was greatest obviously dominated their thinking and knowing its inappropriateness Jesus answered straight forwardly, again his example teaching them. They were to share an honored place in His kingdom, but the struggle to attain that reward came first. Being flesh, Jesus could understand their weakness, and he spoke concerning the lordship of the Gentiles over one another saying, “but ye shall not be so”. They were to avoid the fleshly thinking of worldly men, and build up instead the thinking of a spirit man—one who serves, as did the Lord Jesus, humbling Himself even to obedience on the cross, though not without great tribulation:

“But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”

He knew what was required to fulfill God’s purpose, for Himself and His followers before they could partake of that hope. But what an agonizing it was to overcome—“.., how am I straitened”. Straitened means held together, contained. What was contained? His flesh and its thinking had to be hedged in by the spirit man, using all the patience and control we could muster, if He were to be found, “perfect and entire, wanting nothing”:

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” James 1:2-4.

The Lord Jesus during His time of probation revealed there was nothing wanting in His behavior, as He submitted perfectly to the will of God, and in so doing left a pattern for us to follow.

Peter who had been impulsive and impatient in his lounge days, must have learned the value of submission for he helps us by saying:

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” I Peter 5:6.

This too was the mind of the Lord Jesus as He worked to the glorification of God, in hope of sitting at His Father’s right hand and with those of like precious faith who have humbled themselves during trial and temptation.

The disciples according to the record, came to value more fully the example left by Christ, and with added maturity and perception they often must have felt remorse for their earlier self-centred thinking. They learned forbearance and submission while witnessing to Jesus' example, and endeavored to be faithful to His words:

"Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations."
Luke 22:28.

How often these words must have come to mind as they too, faced temptation and suffering for His name, growing in patience and becoming themselves examples of endurance to those who also believed on His name. So, too, are we to grow, submitting to His hand upon us in hope of being accounted faithful to His example.

A BIBLE CLASS

"... I WILL PUT THEE IN A CLIFT OF THE ROCK."
Exodus 33:22

This consideration looks at Israel in the time of Moses, after he received the law written on tables of stone from God. Upon returning from the mount, he found the congregation worshipping a golden calf which they had made. Shocked and angered at their wickedness, he broke the tables of stone saying:

"... Ye have sinned a great sin; and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin."
Exodus 32:30.

God sent this message back to the people through Moses, a severe warning because of their idolatry.

**"... Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiff-necked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee that I may know what to do unto thee.
And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb.**
Exodus 33:5-6.

Moses must have felt great sorrow and shame that his people had repaid the Lord's kindness and mercy with disobedience, for even Aaron ordained to be the high priest, had helped in the making of the golden calf.

Although he was not part of their wickedness, Moses needed strengthening and confirmation that God was still with them for he said:

“For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. Exodus 33:16.

Who else had the God of heaven and earth dwelling in their midst?

This distinguished them as a blessed people, set apart from all other nations in the world. Separate, as used here means, “to show marvellous” and is used also in the Psalms to help us see how truly blessed Israel was:

“Shew thy marvellous loving kindness. O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them.” Psalm 17:7.

Because of the holiness of God’s presence, Moses knew they must be separate from the wickedness and idolatry that filled the nations. He greatly feared that God would leave them because of their sin, and sought assurance that His presence would remain with him and with the congregation:

“Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.” Exodus 33:13.

God bestowed a special blessing reassuring this man who was so meek and obedient:

“... Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.
And the LORD said, Behold there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:
And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:
And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.” Exodus 33:20-23.

A special glimpse of God’s glory given only to Moses, a wondrous sustaining for him during these grievous times. This rock in which Moses was placed speaks figuratively to us of Christ. Moses must not see the full glory of God because he was flesh, so the Lord’s hand shielded him in a

clift of the rock—a niche of protection, speaking of the life-saving care granted in Christ who is our rock.

“... did all (Israel) eat the same spiritual meat; “And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for the drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” I Corinthians 10:34.

Some five hundred years after Moses’ time, the prophet Elijah was on that same mount—Mount Horeb—he too witnessed an exhibition of God’s glory sent to strengthen him.

“ Go forth and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake:
And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.
And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and in the entering in of the cave”
I Kings 19:11-13.

Elijah recognized the glory of God in that stills mall voice and so, fearful of Him ace to face, covered himself in his mantle while protected in the mouth of a cave—a clift in the rock. From this intimate experience with the Almighty, he too was made stronger and encouraged in the work of prophesying to God’s people when he thought himself alone, as being alone in serving God.

Returning to the record of Moses God called him to the mount a second time to receive new tables of stone, replacing those broken, and in gratitude Moses said:

“...If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord let my Lord I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for thine inheritance.”
Exodus 34:9.

How long-suffering God was to Israel even in the face of their blatent idolatry. He forgave them and a made a new covenant, yet coup led with a warning:

“... Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD: for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee.”
Exodus 34:10.

What privilege Moses was granted, placed in the cleft of the rock by God, shielded by His hand, an allowed to glimpse His glory passing by. No man can look upon the face of God and live, yet here one precious to the Almighty was granted this wondrous help because of his faithfulness.

How wonderful to know that the care and protection of this same God is promised to His people now, yet how important that we value this blessing as did Moses, in fervent hope of being accounted worthy to be part of His glory one day.

A JUST RESPONSE

As we have followed the acts of the apostles, of particular interest is their work in response to God's call to the Gentiles.

Peter in dealing with the circumstances surrounding Cornelius' call, was moved by the implications of this new understanding to commence a work unlike any which had gone before. One which now gave access to the Truth, for those not of natural Israel. Peter's perception is evident as he speaks to Cornelius:

“... Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness,
is accepted with him.” Acts 10:34-35.

With God there is no partiality based upon nationality. Because of this particular circumstance, Peter understood that God did not look upon man's outward appearance but upon that which is within. This was a new revelation to him, yet God has dealt that way with mankind from the beginning. For instance we read of Samuel sent by God to Jesse's house for the anointing of one of his sons to succeed Saul asking. However, here Samuel, like most men, judged by appearance not according to a man's heart:

“And it came to pass, when the were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.
But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature; because I have refused 'him; for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”

I Samuel 16:6-7.

This is how God has dealt with those who would be His, looking upon the heart, not on the surface qualities which can so easily deceive. In like manner God had respect unto Abram, calling him out of Ur of the Chaldees, not because of his position or accomplishments, but because of his responsiveness and willingness to obediently serve Him.

The fact that He is not a respecter of persons helps us to recognize our need to use extreme diligence, earnestly seeking guidance in the work of witnessing. Peter in that same spirit after he had heard Cornelius' confession of faith, extended the hope of salvation to him and his household asking:

“Can an man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?
And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.
Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.” Acts 10:47-48.

This new work, testifying of the way of salvation to the Gentiles, was questioned by some of the apostles and brethren, but upon hearing of Peter's vision and the result of his meeting with Cornelius, all were convinced this was by God's hand.

The spirit of fairness and impartiality has always been a part of God's way, for He said to the children of Israel in the law:

“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.”
Leviticus 19:15.

His word was to be a guide, letting nothing else hinder the outcome of righteous judgment. This same message of impartiality is given again under the law:

“Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgement.
Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.
That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”
Deuteronomy 16:18-20.

Care was to be taken that the judges not be influenced by fleshly desire or temptation, but rather to judge as God would in the matters brought before them.

Certainly Peter's circumstance with Cornelius was new to him, yet he responded in compassion and submission to God's indication. This knowledge of the Spirit's mercy and grace is to be applied in the work we are privileged to do, looking at each new circumstance not with bias but with an open mind, desiring that God's indication guide us to do His will. God made His will known to Peter concerning this new work with the Gentiles and so we too can trust that His purpose will be revealed if we approach with the same spirit of mercy which is revealed here in Acts. As we call upon God, who being no respecter of persons, but a discerner of each heart, we unable to judge one's heart, must pass our sojourning here in godly fear seeing righteousness, not moving in our own thinking but endeavoring to serve Him with the mind and spirit shown by Peter.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

In the writings of Luke, the Lord Jesus' mind and spirit are revealed in a manner to inspire us as we endeavour to take up our cross and follow Him. Placing ourselves in the Lord Jesus' position is impossible, especially as we remember that when He was crucified He looked down upon His persecutors and said:

"Father, forgiven them; for they know not what they do."

Luke 23:34.

How difficult such a plea would have been—to pray for those that had tormented and were in the process of killing Him. Such control of the flesh's natural inclinations reveals the completeness of His spirit. Think of the pain and suffering endured, yet He asked God's forgiveness for them.

Jesus revealed by His own actions during these final moments before death to the beauty and righteousness of the Word He had spent His life teaching. During His ministry he had taught the disciples concerned forgiveness saying:

"... Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you."

Luke 6:27-28.

Under the carnal influence of the flesh one would hate one's enemies yet here, enabled with the strength of the Spirit to deliver Himself, He submitted, setting a powerful example.

Even as we struggle to conform how easily we may resort to anger when provoked. Yet for those that seek to serve God, thoughts of hate or revenge must be put aside to follow the lesson left by Christ:

“... love ye your enemies and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful”

Luke 6:35-36.

God today is still kind to the unthankful and evil. The world so full of wickedness is yet allowed by Him a measure of His benevolence in the ordered wonder of Creation. However, only a few are to receive the ultimate reward of His compassion as “children of the Highest”:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.
But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you and persecute you;
That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Matthew 5:43-45.

These, His words are expanded in thought as recorded by Luke: that there is a judgment to come, but until that time His goodness is seen in the blessings of nature. However, Those who desire to be His must work out their period of probation striving to nourish the fruits of the spirit in their living even as taught by Jesus who did so perfectly:

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Matthew 5:46-48.

In trying to walk after Jesus’ example, our own trials and tribulations are minor in comparison, yet how easy it is to lack in displaying His spirit of forgiveness.

There are many examples in the Scriptures of those who put aside hate and revenge in time of testing. David restrained himself from harming Saul in the cave, instead beseeching him:

“... Wherefore hearest thou men’s words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?

Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD’s anointed.”

I Samuel 24:9-10.

David perceived this as a test from God and bowed himself to His will. The upper hand had been given to David against his old enemy Saul, but his mind was:

“The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.” verse 12.

He did not allow his flesh to circumvent God’s purpose, believing that vengeance belonged to God alone, even though he had been hounded throughout the land by Saul.

Job was another who suffered unjustly at the hands of those who called themselves “friends”, yet he contained his natural inclinations, bending his own will to God’s because he too wished to be known as one of His:

“...for I should have denied the God that is above.

If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him:

Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.”

Job 31:28-30.

At the end of Job’s trial, God’s retribution came upon his tormentors:

“... the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against they two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.

Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering: and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.”

Job 42:7-8.

How much these examples of Jesus, David and Job teach of the care needed in exercising the spirit of goodness over our flesh toward our “enemies”.

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Romans 12:19-21.

Peter exhorts his brethren in the same manner:

“... be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye:

and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts:

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but quickened by the Spirit:”

I Peter 3:8-9, 14-15, 18.

This blessing has been made possible through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus—the One who could pray for those who not only spitefully used Him but eventually were the instruments of His death. That quickening spoken of by Peter is the hope of eternal life, held out for those who can overcome the evilness of their own flesh nature through the goodness of the Spirit's teaching. Only those can hope to be known as “children of the Highest” when He returns.

For more information or to read our literature, log onto:

www.remnantofchristsecclesia.com