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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"

WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG

THE LORD REVEALS

GREAT AND MARVELLOUS ARE THY WORKS

A BIBLE CLASS -
IF THOU, LORD, SHOULDEST MARK INIQUITIES

SPEAK EVIL OF NO MAN

AN ACCEPTABLE TIME

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“WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG”

How greatly we are helped by Paul’s example as he went about the work of the Truth, ministering to those of Cod’s household. A glimpse is given us of how he managed this work, although not in his own strength, for he was afflicted by a physical weakness, as he explained to his Corinthian brethren:

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.”
II Corinthians 12:7.

What exactly this thorn in the flesh was is not known for certain, but we do know it caused him sufficient pain and hardship to ask God repeatedly for its removal:

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.”
II Corinthians 12:8.

When this was denied, Paul accepted and used this infirmity as a positive help in the work of the Truth, because of the Lord Jesus’ words to him

“... My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”
II Corinthians 12:9.

His grace provided for a spiritual health—more important to Paul than physical well-being, and for this he was grateful. This word “perfect” used here means complete, reaching a goal, attaining an end or conclusion. He goes on to say:

“... Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake:
for when I am weak, then am I strong.” II Corinthians 12:9-10.

That same power of Christ dwells with His brethren and sisters as they endeavour to follow after His example, recognising the flesh’s weakness and imperfections, relying upon the spirit and example of Christ to guide and direct their actions. Strength through weakness is the ability to go through each day recognizing the flesh’s hindrance but getting the

mastery over it by allowing spiritual thinking to permeate one's living. This word strength signifies as being possible, and is used by the Lord Jesus in prayer just hours before His crucifixion:

“... My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death....Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

Mark 14.34,36.

Jesus knew strength could be found in God, though His flesh yearned to be relieved yet His righteous and faithful desire was rather that God's power would provide the necessary ability to accomplish the Father's will. If He had not been strengthened in spirit, God's will might not have been fulfilled, which was that Jesus overcome His sin nature.

Paul gloried in the thought of spiritually growing in strength for he felt sustained and helped in the work as he said to Timothy:

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who bath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the minis-by; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”

I Timothy 1:12-13.

Paul recognized that the “enabling” given him came from God through the Lord Jesus. God in His divine wisdom appointed to the ministry one who had done great harm to Christ's brethren, but one whom He knew, once converted, would bring glory through the proclamation of His word among the Gentiles. The work given Paul was enormous and yet how well it was completed, for as he took pleasure in distresses and infirmities for Christ's sake, his faith was bolstered. He felt it possible to do whatever was required to carry out his work of ministering, in this, his third trip to those of Corinth.

How much we too must recognize that spiritual strengthening can be extended as our Father sees an effort on our part to control the flesh's weaknesses. Paul reminds of the faithful in the past who were helped in this way:

“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:

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness,

obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” Hebrews 11:32-34.

Those who moved in faith submitted to the word of God with spiritual strength and zeal, completing the work appointed because of the promised hope set before them. That hope also sustained Paul, who recognized that personal perfecting was possible only in God’s mercy as he endeavored to complete the given ministry though burdened by the weakness of the flesh:

“For though he (Christ) was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove yourselves. Know ye not yourselves how Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate?” II Corinthians 13:4-5.

How helpful are Paul’s words, for those who really try to follow the example of Christ’s life, living in weakness but sustained by the Spirit and so able to do all things. The Lord Jesus reminded His disciples:

“... With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.” Mark 10:27.

How mighty is the spirit’s power that took hold of the man Saul, “a blasphemer and a persecutor”, until he became Paul, a man of spirit faithfully ministering to God’s household. Through the process of spiritual growth, Paul realized that when he was weak in the flesh he was made strong by the power of Christ resting upon him. We too must ever strive and pray to gain strength through our weaknesses, growing in understanding and walking in the way He has ordained if above all we hope to share with our brother Paul in the promise of life everlasting.

THE LORD REVEALS

While reading about the Lord Jesus' resurrection in John the twentieth chapter, we are reminded how the Lord reveals His plan, His purpose and His love to those who seek Him. We see when Mary Magdalene discovers that Jesus' body is not within the sepulchre, she runs and finds Peter and John who, in turn, run to the sepulchre. When the disciples arrived, they saw nothing within the sepulchre but the linen clothes in which Jesus was wrapped and the napkin that was about His head. When John entered the sepulchre after Peter, he saw and believed that the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead:

“Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.” John 20:8-9

It is hard to believe that the disciples could not grasp the death of the Lord Jesus and His resurrection, even after Jesus had alluded to it many times. It is easy for us who have the printed word to see it, but how often do we overlook an obvious event happening around us until much later!

We have more examples of the confusion that Jesus' death and resurrection caused in the account from Luke. The women who followed Jesus came to Jesus' sepulchre and found two men in shining garments. These two men told the women things that allowed them to remember the words of Jesus:

“And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.” Luke 24:4-11

Later that day two disciples were walking to a town and talking about all the circumstances that had happened recently, when the Lord Jesus

came upon them. His identity was hidden from them and He inquired of what things they were speaking. They told Him about the great prophet and what had befallen Him, and how earlier some of them had gone to Jesus' sepulchre and found Him missing:

“Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:
Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”
Luke 24:25-26

As we look back to John's account of Jesus' resurrection, we see Mary Magdalene again at the sepulchre, after the disciples had left, when she sees the two angels in white within. They asked her why she was crying and she replied, because they had taken my Lord away and I know not where. It was then she turned and looked, and Jesus was standing close by, but she didn't recognize Him:

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.
Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.”
John 20:15-16

For one reason or another, Mary did not initially recognize Jesus. Maybe Jesus had changed His appearance, or maybe in her grief she was prevented from seeing or perceiving clearly. No matter the case, Jesus did reveal Himself to her and brought great comfort to her.

Later that same day the disciples were gathered together and had shut themselves within a house, for fear of the Jews, when the Lord Jesus appeared in their midst and said, “Peace be unto you.” When Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples they were allowed to see His wounds, and that would comfort them in knowing that it truly was He who had been raised from the dead. It would have brought them peace, knowing that the words that He had spoken had come true. Thomas was not with them on Jesus' first visit, but was told that Jesus had appeared in their midst. He did not believe their words, and stated that He would not believe until he saw Jesus' wounds and was able to feel them with his own hands. Jesus returned eight days later, again while they were closed within a home, and this time Thomas was with them:

“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

And Thomas answered and saith unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed:

blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

John 20:27-29

As Jesus appeared again He would bring the disciples peace and hope. He bolstered their faith in the word of God as they began to understand the words of the prophets. The words that Jesus spoke of Himself also started to be fulfilled before their very eyes!

Jesus also revealed how God would show to the believers the truth about the words that Jesus had spoken:

“... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.

These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise let us go hence.”

John 14:23-31

The Comforter would be sent by God and reveal the truth of Jesus’ words after Jesus returned to His Father. We too, have the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort us as we seek the truth of the word of God in our daily lives.

For roughly six thousand years God has been revealing His word to His chosen people. Sometimes that word was instruction, like after the fall in the garden, when He informed Adam and Eve that their covering of fig

leaves was not sufficient, and He provided them with skins which would cover their sinful nature. Under the law of Moses, God revealed His word to Israel, and they were to live by the spirit of that law and recognize a future Messiah who would atone for all men's sins, if they recognized the true nature of His sacrifice. Even during the time of the prophets, the Lord revealed to Israel what their fate would be if they would not turn from their idolatrous ways. What is clear is that the Lord reveals to His people what they must do to please Him. His love for this creation is evident by the number of opportunities He has given His people; and we should see that God has not changed in all the 6000 years since He created us. This should give us hope that He will reveal our faults to us if we seek Him. He will reveal the things we need to perceive, in order to continue in the Hope that He has set forth. Our faith must be that God will reveal in His time, all that His chosen people need to know, because He does love those who seek Him.

E.J.M

“GREAT AND MARVELLOUS ARE THY WORKS”

In our recent readings in Revelation help is given through John's vision which can encourage and strengthen in these last days as we endeavor to keep in mind and spirit the sureness of God's purpose.

John saw a great sign, the last plagues or judgments which are to be carried out prior to the establishment of the kingdom. Our attention is focused upon those standing before His throne with the harps of God:

“And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are they works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints.”

Those who comprise that company of saints give glory to God for the great blessing that is theirs. They now sing the song of Moses and the Lamb because God's ways were precious to them during their probation as they endeavored to praise Him with their living. In kindness He allowed John to record this stirring event to inspire us toward that promised end. Those granted the gift of life sing of God's great and marvellous works

never perceived by those in the world who reckon man's works only are of any importance and ignore the wondrous signs around them.

The Almighty's ways are just and true while men are tainted with the corruption characteristic of the flesh. Here is the righteousness and patience of the saints revealed for those who have struggled to keep God's commandments and the faith of the Lord Jesus. These now with uplifted heart sing "great and marvellous are thy works".

The song of Moses was written in ages past celebrating one such miraculous work, for God had just delivered His people from the hardened heart of Pharaoh:

"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."
Exodus 15:1.

Israel's enemies had been destroyed, not by Moses or the people but by God's hand alone. In this song Moses speaks of God's greatness and His mighty works.

"Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"
Exodus 15:11.

The children of Israel saw great wonders while in Egypt but did not fully realize the magnitude of His power. These marvels were witnessed too by Egypt and Pharaoh—symbolizing all who are ignorant and scornful of God ruled by flesh. Yahweh delivered His people from oppression as He took them through the Red Sea while the Egyptians who pursued soon lay dead upon the seashore as a testimony of His might.

We too have the ability to see His hand working toward His purpose and bringing judgment upon the earth. While we witness these last day signs shall not our spirits reflect this Song of Moses which helps us to recognize and value God's mercy, kindness and power to be vested in His Son.

"Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy."
Exodus 15:6.

Moses looking to THE right hand of God could envision the deliverance promised through Yahweh's Messiah yet to come—these events of which we read in John's vision. Remembering the Song of Moses helps us to have faith and perception that we too can see His great and marvellous works even today, similar to Egypt's plagues. Man now looks chiefly at

his own accomplishments as great, but because they are motivated by flesh they are doomed to failure. We only have to look around at the world to see the damage brought about by man's greed—acid rain, pollution of the lakes and oceans, A.I.D.S., war, and famine. All these are as plagues upon the world's people yet, are nothing as compared to the ultimate judgments to be brought by Christ and the saints when the kingdom is established:

“Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.” Rev. 15:4.

The world today generally does not regard God—they think Him dead or powerless, for the flesh rules their lives, but there will come a time just as it came to Pharaoh and his army, when fear will overcome them and they will be destroyed because of ungodliness. A kingdom is to come which will be great and marvellous—a culmination of all His goodness to those who are sustained by the hope of being with the Lord Jesus as kings and priests, singing the Song of the Lamb:

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.” Rev. 14:1.

This glorious multitude now redeemed are those who have seen in faith the Lord Jesus as the victor over his flesh, have endeavored to walk after Him during their time of probation and will sing:

“... a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.” Rev. 5:9-10.

During his probation David recognized God's majesty and purpose praising Him in a “pruned song”:

“I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee.”
Psalm 144:9.

His words speak of hope in God's promised deliverance:

“O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.

He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.”
Psalm 98:1-3.

The song of the redeemed is one of joy in submission to His guidance, even as Israel under Moses as led to deliverance in the conquest over Pharaoh. The world’s present signs portend Jesus’ near return. The promise of life everlasting may be close for some, but only as they continue to focus on His great and marvellous works, joining with David in spirit to:

“..sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth.
Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.”
Psalm 96:1-2.

It is a day to day struggle to keep in mind and show forth that salvation, but it is possible, for we have been shown these one hundred and forty-four thousand through John’s vision. How is it to be done? David’s words help us to understand:

“Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.”
Psalm 96:3.

Part of our work is to witness of His glory by our words and actions, to a world which does not know Him.

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.
And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even raise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”
Psalm 40:1-3.

David was nearly overwhelmed by the Almighty’s wonderful works. As we await the Lord Jesus’ return, may not these same thoughts fill our hearts, for it is only those who have seen in faith His great and marvellous works may sing the Song of Moses and of the Lamb.

A BIBLE CLASS

“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities” Psalm 130:3

David’s appreciation for the mercy and grace of God towards His children is the subject of this particular psalm. This is one of the “Songs of Degrees” (or ascent) for those going up to Zion, conveying the hope of all His people. Part of this thought of going up, is realizing that any climb is difficult, requiring effort, reminding us of the words of the Lord Jesus:

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few that be that find it.” Matthew 7:14.

God’s way of life is narrow, and along it are His law and commandments as signposts to guide and warn of danger. If one disregards the help of His word he will find himself in trouble, sliding off the path or veering in a wrong direction, that if continued will not end in the hoped for destination of Zion.

David sometimes found himself in danger of falling, and cried unto God:

“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.” verse 1.

During our time of probation sometimes we find ourselves exceedingly cast down because of serious failure. Only as forgiveness is sought with humble confession are we able to look up and go on. David knew he needed lifting up and cried out to God as the only source of sure help. This thought of “the depths” appears in another Psalm penned by David:

“Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.” Psalm 69:1-2.

Here David cried out in distress when the way was difficult, just as Jonah cried from the belly of the whale:

“Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish’s belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and the waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward the holy temple”. Jonah 2:14.

Jonah suffered hardship because of failure to do what God had commanded. He ignored the signposts along the way and instead chose his own path. Yet he knew that if he repented, God would hear his prayer, forgive and not mark iniquity.

We must realize that an essential part of seeking God is through confession of sin, as seen in David and Jonah's example, for only then will iniquity not be marked. The great danger and inclination of the flesh is to deny sin or minimize it and thus deceive ourselves. Only the Lord Jesus was without fault and therefore only through His name is redemption possible:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

I John 1:8-10.

David realized that forgiveness would not be possible without God's long suffering mercy. This is the focus of this verse under consideration—the contemplation of God's immeasurable kindness to man, who as a sinning creature is not deserving:

“If thou, LORD shouldest mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall stand?”
verse 3.

To mark means to consider and who should be able to stand if God remembered iniquities? What blessedness to know that, with humble acknowledgment and through the One who can atone, God wipes away the sin of which we are all guilty.

Indeed God's willingness to forgive has always been present, even from the very beginning when after the fall in the garden He provided a covering of skins, involving a shedding of blood to cover the iniquity of Adam and Eve.

David, though a great ruler, was a humble man who recognized that his failures hindered him from being acceptable at times. As King over Israel, his hope was the hope extended to all God's people as the 7th verse conveys:

“Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.”

They were God's people—his chosen nation to whom He had made the promise of everlasting life—possible through the “plenteous redemption” paid for with the life of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah which would come from David's own line.

At the time of the end, the judgments of God will be brought upon an unbelieving world by Christ and His saints. In that day when there is time no longer, forgiveness will not be found and in their distress they will cry out to the mountains and rocks:

“... Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”
Revelation 6:16-17.

During this time, God will punish iniquity and none shall be able to stand, save those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and whose iniquities have not been marked because they sought God during their time of probation with repentance and humility as Spirit Israelites in hope that:

‘..he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.’ verse 8.

“...SPEAK EVIL OF NO MAN...”

Paul’s letter to his brother outlined Titus’ continuing work with those in Crete:

“To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:” Titus 1:4-5.

He was reminding Titus of the need to encourage those in Crete in the ways of Christ, and our consideration is part of that message:

“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work
To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.” Titus 3:1-2.

Paul was exhorting those in fellowship with God and His Son to conduct themselves in a manner befitting His children and specifically to ‘speak evil of no man’. The word evil means impious, intending to defame, defile or injure. The import of Paul’s message is that speaking evil of another causes harm and is an act of the flesh, whereas the brethren must strive to be Christ-like, acting in a godly manner, harming no one. The same word for speaking evil was used by Peter:

“For the time past of our life may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, then we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banqueting, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:

Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” I Peter 4:3-6.

Peter speaks of those who were reproached by fleshly men because they did not share in their carnal excesses—just as the Lord Jesus was reviled by the high priest, offended by His teaching so contrary to theirs. Christ’s assessment of such fleshly behavior is clear:

“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

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 12:34-37.

From Jesus’ words there is no question that evil speaking will bring condemnation from God.

Thus Titus was to teach of the spiritual deportment required in those striving to be brethren of Christ and shows us as well the danger of speaking injuriously of another. He was also told by Paul to:

“... let our’s also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.”

Titus 3:14.

What are necessary uses? Witnessing by faithful living that here are a people called by God, but who in times past:

“... were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.”

Titus 3:3-7.

This calling to be children of God is an opportunity to witness by good works that we endeavor to bring forth fruits of the spirit which precludes speaking evil to cause injury to another. The flesh speaks hurtfully in order to pull down others and consequently make self appear better. Paul told Titus to “put in mind”, these thoughts not lecturing in a strident or boastful manner but speaking quietly with care for the feelings of others.

In a similar manner Paul wrote to the Colossians:

“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.
But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy,
filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another,
seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;
And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge
after the image of him that created him:” Col. 3:3-10.

Speaking evil is part of the old man of flesh that is to be put away — crucified. To think carefully how we speak is needful for the flesh is inclined to be impulsive.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.
For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters,
proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
Without natural affection, truce-breakers false accusers,
incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady
high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;
Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from
such turn away.” II Timothy 3:1-5.

This describes the world’s manner of every age and today where many show a form of godliness but deny its power in their living. That power is the restraint to put down the flesh’s inclinations and refrain from speaking evil but rather show forth a new man of spirit.

It is interesting to note that Paul was one who originally spoke and did great evil against the people of God:

“As for Saul, (Paul) he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.” Acts 8:3.

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest
And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.’ Acts 9:1-2.

We know in that journey to Damascus he saw a vision and being touched by God’s light was converted. Thinking back upon those earlier times he may have thought of himself as “sometimes foolish and disobedient”.

Also one of the thieves who was crucified with Christ lashed out against Him:

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” Luke 23:39.

This word “railed” is the same as “speak evil”—a characteristic of uncontrolled flesh. Yet it is that control that is the work and duty of every child of Christ. If that struggle for control is not there, the man of spirit is extinguished and the hope of ever overcoming dies.

“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Romans 12:17-18.

The work of overcoming is understandably difficult and when one speaks injuriously of another he takes away the peace that is between them.

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” Titus 2:11-15.

These words of Paul are essential for our spiritual well-being as we endeavor to deny such ungodly behaviour as evil speaking and strive to live peaceably in this present world and hope in His salvation to come.

AN ACCEPTABLE TIME

In the 49th chapter of Isaiah we see the hope that God held out to Israel extended to the Gentiles — a gracious promise through the Lord Jesus. The 22nd verse tells us:

“Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.”

This hope spoken of by Isaiah is the hope we have today — the hope seen in the provision of the Lord Jesus to any who can permit their living to be touched and influenced by the Word of God. As He was foreordained to be the essence of the gospel message, the Lord Jesus and His work were foretold by Isaiah in verses 8-9:

“Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.”

These words speak of Christ — the means whereby we can take confidence in the hope God extends. We know how the Lord Jesus used His living and knowledge of God’s mercy to approach unto the Father to seek help and deliverance from His own flesh nature. How great an example this is for us that we might approach to be heard and helped, to keep alive the covenant relationship we can know through His covering.

The words, “acceptable time”, as used by Isaiah, translate into the thought of being diligent and come from a prime root meaning to be pleased with or to satisfy a debt. To satisfy a debt, brings to mind the redemption price paid by the Lord Jesus’s death, a perfect life poured out in obedience to His Father. Even at the time of Adam, an acceptable time to return to God could be found through the covering of animal skins — the shedding of blood which spoke of Christ. In Isaiah 55 it speaks of this acceptable time in verses 6—7:

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

To seek the Lord while He may be found is to do so in an acceptable time — time used to call upon God while He is near. Our desire today should be to find God, and to do so we must seek Him. Is this using the time acceptably, telling Him that we need His help? We can reveal what is truly within our hearts by striving to be God’s children, valuing the hope mercifully extended to us Gentiles.

David was one who valued the time given to him when he said in Psalm 69:13—14:

“But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation.

Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters.”

David recognised his only source of help and means of deliverance was God. His reaction in time of trial or testing was to come to God in prayer. This was an acceptable time, for David recognised he needed the kind of help that was beyond his own strength. The Lord Jesus in His hour of testing in the garden, approached unto God not once but on three occasions seeking help ... an acceptable time, during which time His spirit was strengthened to help Him overcome. This speaks to us of using the time God has given us in an acceptable manner, seeking the deliverance only He can provide. David knew he could be taken from the mire of affliction and would not be allowed to sink. God does hear, see and help those He regards as His little ones. David often approached to God, for he failed often. But because of God’s mercy and grace His hand was there to uphold him. Psalm 32:5 echoes his thoughts:

“I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.”

Was this an acceptable time for David? He knew he could not hide the sins of his flesh, but if he did confess them, he knew that God would forgive, that he might be once again found acceptable.

How needful it is then for one striving to be godly, to pray unto the Father in times of trial and testing. God looks upon us and is mindful of our every thought and circumstance. He also looks to see if we turn to Him when in difficulty.

The purpose of God is seen in this 49th chapter of Isaiah, desiring that all come to know His Son as a Saviour and Redeemer. How merciful that the Almighty extends the knowledge of His purpose to us as Gentiles and that we should be privileged to know that heritage extended to Israel of old. In gratitude we must use the time given in an acceptable manner if we hope to share in that promise of life everlasting. Paul confirms these thoughts in speaking to the Roman brethren in chapter 12:1—3:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

We can accomplish this only as we yield our bodies, seeking God to renew our minds and prove those things within us that are right in His sight. This is how the Lord Jesus showed an example of overcoming as He sought to do God’s will, no matter what price the flesh had to pay.

These words of Isaiah then are a help to us to recognise how delightful it is to God as we approach unto Him. We remember the meaning of acceptable as, “to satisfy a debt”. How indebted we should feel because of the great price paid by the Lord Jesus Christ in the sacrifice of His life, to make possible our hope of acceptance now and in the time to come.

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