

Reflections on
“AS WE FORGIVE”

Prepared by
Dwight Burford

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This booklet represents a personal study on the principle of forgiveness based on scripture recorded in the King James Version of the Bible. The good which is contained in this booklet is of the Lord; if there is any weakness, may the Lord strengthen it through His grace. To God be the glory.

As a draftsman uses construction lines in developing a drawing, so have I felt led to use the scriptural references noted throughout this booklet in “constructing” the body of the text. The references in parentheses are included for the interested reader. You, the reader, are encouraged to consult your own Bible regarding the references made and the scriptures quoted. And as it is written, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...”* (James 1:5); He is the Engineer.

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“...he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.” Isaiah 50:4

Thank you Lord Jesus Christ. May all the nations praise thee. Amen.

To my wife, Pamela Burford, and my brother in Christ, Gary Whiting, thank you for your editorial contributions to this booklet (although I often resisted changes to my “style”). Your contributions have greatly improved the readability of the text and helped clarify its focus.

A special thank you to my Grandmother, Lena Herzel. May you ever be blessed of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He loves you and I love you.

PREFACE

Our God is not moved by our emotions, but by His compassion; He is not moved by our demands, but by His wisdom and justice. He is not only our loving heavenly Father, but He is also a merciful and just judge who sits upon the throne of righteousness. Upon Him do all the nations depend.

Forgiveness is more than a recurrent theme in scripture; it is an essential element of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For our understanding of forgiveness to be complete we must consider both God's forgiveness granted in Jesus Christ as well as our forgiveness of each other through the "person of Jesus Christ."

God offers us forgiveness for the sake of His Only Begotten Son who, when we were sinners and thus enemies to God, laid down His life to atone for the sins of the whole world. Accordingly, Jesus has taught that we are to love and forgive one another, especially our "enemies" (i.e. those with whom we are at variance), as He has loved us and forgiven us.

Jesus Christ willingly laid down his life for us out of a loving hope that we would accept His Father's invitation to be transformed from our sinful and rebellious nature into the children of light by being born again of His Spirit. For us to be thus transformed into the image of our Lord, we must receive the Holy Ghost, the promised Comforter, and be led by Him into all truth. In receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, we are empowered with perfect love to love, even as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and thus fulfill His commandments.

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Do Justly, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with Thy God

On one occasion while Jesus was talking with His disciples about forgiveness, Peter asked Him:

“Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?”
Matthew 18:21

Jesus replied:

“I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” Matthew 18:22

It was not the frequency with which we are to forgive that Jesus was trying to impress upon Peter and the other disciples as much as it was the extent to which we are to be willing to forgive those who sin against us. By literally magnifying the number Peter proposed (seven for perfection?) by the same value multiplied tenfold, Jesus dramatized the importance of our need to persevere in being prepared to forgive others. His reason was to warn of the significant consequences of not being prepared to forgive.

To illustrate what the consequences are, Jesus taught his disciples a parable. In the parable, found in Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus reveals how God operates the affairs of his kingdom with an example involving a king and his servants.

This parable is about a servant who owed his king a great debt which he could not pay. Upon hearing of the determination of the king to obtain what was owed him by selling the servant and his family, the servant fell down before the king and worshiped him and pled for mercy, asking for an opportunity to repay his debt. In response, the king had compassion and simply forgave his servant without requiring repayment. Upon being forgiven, however, the king's servant found a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller amount and demanded that this debt be paid immediately. The second servant also pled for mercy, but the first would not hear him but rather had him thrown in jail. When the king heard about the actions of the servant he had just forgiven, he was not pleased. Why? He expected his servant to respond as he had in forgiving debts, i.e. to be merciful in light of judgment:

“Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?” Matthew 18:32,33

So what did the king do to the unforgiving servant? He turned his servant over to “***the tormentors***, till he should pay all that was due unto him” (vs. 34).

Was the unforgiving servant just in requiring his fellow servant to repay him after he had been forgiven his debt? Initially, yes. Both the king and the servant were just in taking action to reclaim what was owed them. But unlike the king, the unforgiving servant was not merciful but chose rather to pass harsh judgment upon his fellow servant.

We too are to be just in all that we do. But if someone is caught in a fault and seeks forgiveness, God expects us to be merciful and to forgive them as He has forgiven us. The following teaching from Jesus to His disciples shows us how we are to be both just and merciful in this way:

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.” Luke 17:3

This message is for the believer! While it seems simple enough, if our hearts are not prepared in love to actually love *“our enemies,”* forgiving them will seem an impossible task. If we love grudgingly we will falter and be caught unprepared when asked to be merciful. The warning by Jesus to *“take heed to yourselves”* means to be ever mindful to be merciful as our Father is merciful (Luke 6:36).

The prophet Micah has stated succinctly how we are to conduct our dealings with others:

“He hath shown 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 (cf. Deuteronomy 10:12 & Zechariah 7:9,10)

For us to *“do justly”* and *“love mercy”* we must be transformed by the light of God’s love.

“How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God!... For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light.” Psalm 36:7-9

Mercy is the light of love shown forth in judgment. As it is written, *“mercy rejoiceth against judgment”* (James 2:13). How then can we find agreement between justice and mercy except we walk humbly with our God in His light (cf. John 5:19,20,30 with I John 4:8,16)?

“...if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” I John 1:7

With What Judgment Ye Judge

From the writings of the apostle James we learn that if we are not merciful we will be judged without mercy:

“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shown no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” James 2:13

These words help clarify why Jesus taught:

*“Judge not, that ye be not judged. **For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.**”* Matthew 7:1,2

Can anyone stand to be judged without mercy, i.e. the mercy granted for Jesus Christ’s sake? Clearly the answer is a resounding NO! But how we judge others is how we will be judged (like the unforgiving servant in Jesus’ parable about the kingdom of heaven)! If we judge others without mercy, we will be judged without mercy! Therefore, Jesus has taught us, saying:

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” Luke 6:36

Our heavenly Father judges righteously, i.e. with mercy and true justice (cf. Nehemiah 9:17,

Psalms 119:160, Jeremiah 11:20, Romans 2:1-6 & II Thessalonians 1:5). Therefore, we too are to “*judge righteous judgment,*” i.e. God’s judgment, and not by our own standards (John 7:24 with Zechariah 7:9, James 2:1 & II Corinthians 10:12). We can do this only by humbly walking with Him.

The wicked servant in Jesus’ parable about the kingdom of heaven received grace first by worshipping his king and asking to be forgiven. But because he was not merciful as was his king, he was turned over to the tormentors “*till he should pay all that was due unto him*” (Matthew 18:34). Why?

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” Romans 6:16

This quote from Paul’s letter to the Romans was written to the body of Christ’s church! This is a message for believers! If we yield our hearts to hating one another, even for trivial offenses, we sin against God because we are serving the evil one who seeks to divide us. Such division is contrary to why Jesus came. He came to save, not to condemn as some do:

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. **For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.**”* John 3:16,17

If we condemn others, we are fighting against God.

“The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”
II Peter 3:9

Therefore, if we accuse others, whether rightly or wrongly, can we expect to have any reward other than that which is prepared for the “*accuser of the brethren,*” i.e. eternal separation from God?

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” Galatians 6:7-9

The Tormentors

For what purpose was the unforgiving servant in Jesus’ parable turned over to the *tormentors*? More particularly, how do the *tormentors* serve God’s purposes in His kingdom?

According to scripture the *tormentors* buffet and cause spiritual and/or physical afflictions in the lives of God’s servants (remember Jesus’ parable was about how God operates His kingdom) so that His servants may learn to obey Him as their Lord (cf. II Chronicles 18:18-21). For example, Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, said that he “*delivered unto Satan*” certain men that they should learn not to blaspheme (I Timothy 1:20; see also I Corinthians 5:5). Even Paul himself was not exempt from God’s correction in this way, as he confessed to the church in Corinth:

“For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I

forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. 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 12:6,7

Since Jesus Christ “*is the head of all principalities and powers... triumphing over them*” (Colossians 2:10-15), why did He not remove Paul’s “*thorn in the flesh*”? Jesus’ simple reply to Paul’s thrice repeated request to do so was:

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

Jesus allowed this “*messenger of Satan*” to buffet Paul to keep Paul humble. Jesus did not want His servant to become proud as a result of the many revelations he had been given through the grace of God (II Corinthians 12:7-10).

“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.” Romans 12:3

And so, out of love, Jesus allowed Paul to be buffeted; He did not want Paul, because of pride, to come under the condemnation of the devil. Paul understood very well the potential of coming under this form of condemnation as illustrated in the following quote from Paul’s first letter to Timothy:

“...If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless...not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” I Timothy 3:1,2,6

I Am Meek and Lowly of Heart

Jesus said, “*Come...and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart...*” (Matthew 11:28,29). And to Philip He said, “*he that hath seen me hath seen the Father*” (John 14:9). Combining these two scriptures, it is clear that God, in whose image we were formed, is meek and lowly in heart. What a marvelous revelation this is about the very nature of our God (cf. I Corinthians 13:4-8 with I John 4:16)!

Since we were made in the image of the Father and the Son (Genesis 1:26,27), God’s intent behind His work of reconciliation (cf. II Corinthians 5:14-21) is directed at bringing us back into the conformance of the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). In short, we are to become meek and lowly in heart (cf. Psalm 34:18 & Matthew 5:2-12).

For this to be accomplished, there are certain things which must be removed from our lives which are counter to His image. For example, we are told that God hates “*a proud look*” (Proverbs 6:16,17). Pride and vanity are in direct opposition to the very nature of God, and they must therefore be eliminated from our lives if we are to dwell with Him in eternity.

Satan, or Lucifer, was proud and vain in the beginning, and so he fell from God’s presence (Isaiah 14:12-17 & Luke 10:18 with I John 3:8). Being cast down to earth, he seeks the

destruction of those who follow Christ by deceiving them with that which caused his fall, i.e. pride and vanity (I Peter 5:8 with Revelations 14:9-11). Those who exalt themselves in pride through vanity will be humbled by the judgments of God; but those who will resist the devil and humble themselves before God will be exalted in Christ (cf. Matthew 23:12 & 19:27-30 with James 4:7).

God not only resists those who are proud (James 4:6), but He intends to bring them to shame.

“The Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.” Isaiah 23:9

How does the Lord intend to do this? He has chosen to call the weak and foolish “*things*” of the world to do His work rather than those who are proud according to their own wisdom and thus who exalt themselves “*against the knowledge of God.*” As Paul testified:

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.” I Corinthians 1:25-29

We have been called to serve the Lord by coming to Him to learn of His ways. While many have been called, not many will be chosen (Matthew 20:16 & 22:14 with Romans 8:28-30 & John 6:44). We must choose to obey His teachings and commandments if we are to continue with Him (cf. Matthew 7:24-27 & John 6:47-69 with Joshua 24:15).

The alternative to serving the Lord is to serve the devil through vain pursuits in this life:

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness...For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:16,23

Our service to either of these choices is manifest by the way we live each day, i.e. by the decisions we make and the fruits we bear (cf. Galatians 5:13-26). Depending upon whose servants we are, our actions will be marked with meekness and lowliness of heart or with pride and vanity. The choice, and thus the reward, is ours.

God has not left us on our own to make this choice, however. His Son came to show us the Way and He has sent His Spirit of truth to guide us into all truth (John 16:13,14).

Jesus is our hope (I Timothy 1:1), and if we will but believe enough to receive Him into our hearts as the Lord of our lives He will direct our paths (cf. Proverbs 3:6). When we are out of step with Him, the Lord will lovingly, but firmly, direct us back into the conformance of His image. If we resist His Lordship over us, Jesus may take more drastic measures to draw us back to Himself. It is important for us to remember that in the parable of the wicked servant given in Matthew 18, Jesus was talking about the way God operates His kingdom in heaven as well as His church on earth. And what far too many of us who seek to follow Christ forget (or would like to

forget) about Him is that:

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” Revelation 3:19

The joy of such chastening is that *“afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby”* (Hebrews 12:11).

As We Forgive

God requires us to forgive each other as He has forgiven us. If we do not forgive each other, we will not be forgiven, as Jesus told His disciples (Matthew 6:14,15). But Jesus does not leave it at that; He convicts us and disciplines us that we might abide in His kingdom in peace.

Jesus underscored the importance of our forgiving others as God has forgiven us by teaching us to pray:

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Matthew 6:12

“As We Forgive!” This is both just and merciful.

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” Matthew 7:12

As followers of Christ we are called to love each other as we are loved (John 13:34,35):

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” Romans 13:8-10

Jesus taught that we are not only to love those who love us but we are also to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48):

“But 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. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” Luke 6:35-38

Why is it so important to God that we forgive one another? Because when we were yet sinners and thus enemies to God, Jesus Christ gave His life for us so that we would not perish by incurring the wrath of God:

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for

us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” Romans 5:8-10

God expects us to be like Him in forgiving others, as pointed out earlier. Specifically, God has given us the commandment that we are to love each other, and forgive one another as He has forgiven us for Jesus Christ’s sake:

*“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.**” Ephesians 4:31,32*

These words were written to Christians, i.e. to those who trust and follow the Lord! They are consistent with Jesus’ teachings (Matthew 5:43-48) and are meant for followers of Christ today as much as when they were first given. Our Lord is merciful. He has not dealt with us according to what we deserve; so we too must take care to impart justice and mercy as He has dealt with us:

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:8-12

However, if we refuse to behave ourselves in a way that is becoming His grace, God disciplines us and calls upon us to repent (Revelations 3:19,20 & Hebrews 12:5-13 with I Corinthians 11:31) and then to live as His Son has said, *“love one another, as I have loved you”* (John 13:34 & 15:12-14). If we choose to receive the gift of perfect love from our heavenly Father (cf. Romans 5:5 with James 1:17) in which He provides the way for us to love all people, including our enemies, we will become as Jesus and not be ashamed at that day when our Lord comes in His glory (cf. I John 3:1-3).

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us [cf. John 3:16,17]. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.” I John 4:16,17

Again, God labors with us through His Spirit when we do not forgive one another in order to bring us into the conformance of the image of His Son (cf. Hebrews 3:6-4:16). If we resist His ways and do not repent, the scriptures are clear that one of God’s means of correcting us is to turn us over to the tormentors to be buffeted so that we may learn obedience to His laws of justice and mercy (cf. Matthew 18:23-35).

Let Bitterness Be Put Away From You

In Ephesians 4:31,32, Paul tells us to *“Let all bitterness...be put away from you.”* Why is it so important to have bitterness eliminated from our lives? The following scripture is helpful in providing understanding of the importance of Paul’s admonition to avoid bitterness at all cost.

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking

diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any...as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” Hebrews 12:14,15

Having the “*root of bitterness*” in us is the opposite of being “*rooted and grounded in love*” (Ephesians 3:17). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote on being rooted in Christ by being strengthened “*in the inner man*” by the Holy Spirit:

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and the length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” Ephesians 3:14-19 (cf. Colossians 2:6,7)

When we resist the Lordship of Jesus Christ by not loving as He loves us, we open ourselves up to allowing “*the prince of this world*” (John 14:30) to extend his dominion into us to the exclusion of God’s love. The devil attempts to drive his spirit of bitterness deep into the souls of the disobedient so as to make them as different from God as possible and thereby separate them from God’s presence.

In short, by sowing bitterness Satan has devised a means for obtaining the souls of the disobedient children of men. We were created in the image of our God who is love (I John 4:8). Since bitterness is contrary to the very being of our God, a bitter person is no longer like Him. This point is critical because, as noted above, if we are not like God when Jesus Christ comes in His glory, we will not be able to abide His presence (cf. Malachi 3:1-3, Romans 6:16, Joel 2:11-14 & I John 4:16,17).

But praise be to God, Jesus can root out all sin, including bitterness, if we will but call upon Him and permit Him to work His work of righteousness within us (I John 1:9). Jesus came into this world to destroy the works of the devil:

*“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. **For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.**”* I John 3:8

We must guard against the infectious nature of bitterness. If we let the root of bitterness spring up between ourselves and someone else, we will become defiled before God if we do not pluck it out through faith in Christ. In other words, we can “*fail of the grace of God,*” as the scripture says, by letting bitterness defile us. Those who are so defiled will not be permitted to see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14,15).

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Hebrews 4:12,13 (cf. Proverbs 21:2)

Receive Not the Grace of God in Vain

What a joyful but fearful thing to be in the hands of God (cf. Hebrews 10:31). He understands all things perfectly and nothing can be hid from Him (Job 42:2). We can, therefore, trust God to see clearly in us those areas which need correction in order that we might be transformed into the image of Jesus, and, more importantly, we can trust that He is able to make the necessary changes.

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you...being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ...And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:3,6-11

Our Lord, as a potter, is attempting to mold us as clay into the image of His Son (Isaiah 64:8 & Romans 8:29 with Philippians 2:12,13). But if we, like the children of Israel so many years ago, make our hearts “*an adamant stone*” (Zechariah 7:12) and resist the loving and merciful correction of His Spirit, we can be cut off as they were (cf. Isaiah 63:9,10).

“For if God spared not the natural branches [Israel], take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”
Romans 11:21,22

Love and bitterness cannot dwell in the same heart at the same time. We are called to be merciful and willingly forgiving as our Father is when we call upon Him (Matthew 6:9-13). The promise of the gospel is:

“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Romans 10:12,13

By remaining faithful to the gospel, we become “*grounded and settled*” in Christ and therefore in the love of God (Colossians 1:19-23). There is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ (cf. Galatians 3:26-29). We are all of the household of faith in Christ if we:

“...hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end...For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; while it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.” Hebrews 3:6,14,15

And so as Peter has written:

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things [see verses 5-14], ye shall never fall...” II Peter 1:10

Jesus Christ died on the cross to reconcile us to God so that we might be at peace with Him and all His children (cf. II Corinthians 5:17-19 & Ephesians 2:13-22). How can anyone be at peace

with God if they are not at peace with their brother or sister in love?

“We love him [God], because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” I John 4:19,20

Bitterness is deadly. It can lead to eternal separation from God, especially for those who say they believe in the Lord yet who refuse to receive the perfect love of God into their hearts to the loving of others as they are loved.

“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” II Corinthians 6:1

The unforgiving servant in Jesus’ parable about the kingdom of heaven, received *“the grace of God in vain”* because he would not be merciful to his fellow servant (cf. Matthew 18:26,7 with 18:33-35). He chose to be separate, not seeking fellowship with him through *“the bond of perfectness”* which is charity (Colossians 3:14). By looking to Jesus Christ, we learn how important it is for us to love each other:

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” I John 3:16

God is love (I John 4:16), therefore, He himself teaches us to love:

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” I Thessalonians 4:9

Therefore, if we refuse to love each other, we are sinning against God (cf. James 4:17). What then?

*“And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. **For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required:** and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”* Luke 12:47,48

The stripes mentioned here are in reference to the stripes of affliction brought about by the tormentors (cf. Matthew 18:34). If we receive correction and call upon the Lord, He is faithful to plead our cause before the throne of mercy (I John 2:1) and to cleanse us of all sin (I John 1:9). Jesus expects great things from those who have been cleansed by His blood. He expects us to let Him transform us into new creatures (cf. Colossians 3:15-17 & I Corinthians 5:17-21). The Father will seek to purge our old creature habits from us by *“pruning”* us as a gardener so that we will bear Him the fruits of His own Spirit of justice and mercy, of meekness and lowliness of heart.

*“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 [prunes] it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”* John 15:1,2

The fruit our Father expects from us is the fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” Ephesians 5:8-11

Jesus gave His life on the cross so that all people might become the children of God (cf. II Peter 3:9) and thus be one as He and the Father are one (John 17:20,21). Because of this, if we resist or even fight against God on this issue of forgiving each other and loving as he loves us, what promise can we claim (cf. II Peter 1:2-12 with Colossians 1:21-23)? If we sow separation from God’s children, our reward will be separate from the Spirit of the Lord and His kingdom (Galatians 6:7,8). Let us, therefore, love one another to the glory of the Father and the Son (Romans 13:8-14).

It is sad to think that some have sold their *birthrights*, as stated in Hebrews 12:15, by retaining bitterness and grudges against others, especially fellow Christians. The Lord is, however, able to deliver His children from bitterness by the peace of His presence in their lives if they will but trust in Him (cf. Philippians 4:4-7).

“Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.” Isaiah 38:17,18

Hope Maketh Not Ashamed

The “*hope for [God’s] truth*” in the above scripture is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 8:24,25 & I Timothy 1:1), for He is the Truth (cf. John 14:6). He is the “*desire of all nations*” (Haggai 2:7), the promised “*dayspring*” (Luke 1:78) to whom all people are invited to come and drink (Isaiah 55:1,2) and be filled with the light of God’s love (cf. John 4:14 & 6:48-58). Most importantly, if we come to Jesus we will be filled with His hope unto salvation (cf. Romans 15:13):

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Romans 5:1-6

Belief in the gospel brings hope because, as it is written:

“...whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered <saved>...” Joel 2:32 (cf. Acts 2:21 & Romans 10:6-13).

This is a message of hope; as such, we are saved by hope:

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.”
Romans 8:24,25

Our Advocate Versus The Accuser

If we come to Jesus, He is able to cleanse us of all ill will and the disposition to do evil, e.g. not forgiving each other.

“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. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”
I John 1:9-2:2

Here is true hope! We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous! What a joy it is to know Him and to live by His grace. As the apostle John has written:

“But 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

If we have difficulty in forgiving one another on our own, Jesus is able and ever willing to help us so that we become blameless before God (I John 1:7). And so, with the apostle Paul, we are enabled to proclaim:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Philippians 4:13

While we have an advocate with the Father, we must also recognize that there is one who accuses us day and night before the throne of God, even the devil who is *called “the accuser of the brethren”* (Revelations 12:10). These two stand in opposition at the two seats which are before the Father: 1) our Advocate, Jesus Christ, stands to plead our cause at the mercy seat, and 2) our accuser, Satan, stands at the judgment seat to have us condemned as he is condemned.

But neither of these two stand idly by and just watch how we live our lives. Jesus Christ labors with us through His Spirit of truth so that we become *“blameless and harmless”* (Philippians 2:14,15 & II Peter 3:14). On the other hand, our accuser works very hard to have us do those things for which He might accuse us before God and attempt to bring us under his condemnation. Satan is very aware through personal experience that God is a judge whose judgments are swift and exacting (cf. Luke 10:18).

The apostle Paul, being sensitive to these concerns, wrote to the believers in Corinth:

“To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” II Corinthians 2:10,11

The message is clear: beware, Christian, of the devices of Satan, lest you become defiled by the root of bitterness and thus refuse to forgive another to the failing of God’s grace in you (cf.

Hebrews 12:14,15). Again, Satan knows the commandments of God pertaining to forgiveness that if we do not forgive we will not be forgiven (e.g. Matthew 6:14,15). Our accuser, like a contemptuous prosecuting attorney, seeks our condemnation and fall.

In the Person of Jesus Christ

Jesus is the one who has paid the price for the sins of the whole world (cf. I John 2:1,2). Therefore, when we seek to forgive others, we must do it in the “*person of Christ*” as Paul confessed he forgave others (II Corinthians 2:10,11). Otherwise our forgiveness is incomplete (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:14) and we will have to continually deal with the feelings of hurt and vindication (cf. Hebrews 10:11-27).

But if we will rest in the assurance that God will repay all offenses according to justice and mercy (Romans 12:17-21), we will not have to continually ward off or deal with the difficulty of avoiding bitterness on our own. After all, if we could forgive on our own, would we need a savior? We are to be rooted and built up in Christ, not in our own strength (cf. Colossians 2:6-10 & Ephesians 3:14-19). Jesus carries our burdens if we will but bring them to Him (cf. Matthew 11:28-30 & Isaiah 53:4).

Even though Satan works directly against God’s work of sowing love in us so that we will be reconciled to Him (cf. Matthew 13:3-23 and 13:24-30 with Philippians 2:12,13), we have victory in Christ “*because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*” (I John 4:4).

Only by Pride Cometh Contention

Why do people resist the call of God to be merciful and forgiving? Pride! It is pride which often stands in our way of full reconciliation with God and each other.

“Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.” Proverbs 13:10
(cf. James 3:1-18)

We must realize that our adversary seeks not only to defile us with a bitter root, but he also seeks to beguile those who would follow Jesus with pride. Why? The proud will not seek the Lord; “*God is not in all his thoughts*” (Psalm 10:4). So we are called to humble ourselves before God and let Him establish us, not we ourselves.

*“...for 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: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.** Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”* I Peter 5:5-11

Pride is an effective lock on the chains of sin that bind those who follow Satan (cf. II Peter 2:1-22 & Jude 1:4-19). The proud resist the call to repent, and to humble themselves and confess their faults; i.e. they resist the call of our Lord to follow Him into the kingdom of heaven through humility and meekness (cf. Mark 1:14-18 & Matthew 11:28,29). Consequently the proud are

held prisoners to their sin because they continually excuse themselves from heeding the call to repent and call upon the Lord.

Out of divine compassion for those who “*oppose themselves*” (cf. I Timothy 2:24-26), Jesus came to set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18 & I John 3:8) by teaching them (Matthew 5:2-16) and empowering them (John 1:12) to become meek and lowly in heart as are God and Christ.

The Weapons of Our Warfare

By heeding the words of Christ (cf. Matthew 7:24-27), we avoid the condemnation of the devil brought about by pride. Satan is vain (Isaiah 14:12-15), so he also seeks to deceive others through vain imaginations (cf. Romans 1:18-25).

As soldiers of the cross, we do not “*war after the flesh*” (cf. II Corinthians 10:3 & John 18:36). But rather, as Paul writes, we contend by:

“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” II Corinthians 10:5

Therefore, if we are to fight the good fight of faith we must “*put on Christ*” and pray always (Romans 13:12-14 with Ephesians 6:10-18 & I Thessalonians 5:17), being instant in prayer (Romans 12:12) to the “*bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*” in meekness and humility.

The Sieve of Vanity

Why is bringing vanity and vain thoughts under control of Christ so important in the life of a believer?

“They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.” Jonah 2:8

If we observe the lying vanities of the devil (cf. John 8:44 & I John 2:21-23), we not only forsake the mercy that God has extended to us in the person of Jesus Christ, but we also avoid being merciful to others by ignoring the truth of the situations within which we are living (Isaiah 59:1-15), i.e. we exalt ourselves against the truth. The result is an unmerciful and an unforgiving heart (cf. Matthew 18:23-35).

God knows that our thoughts are vain (Psalm 94:11) and so he has established us for “*correction*” (Habakkuk 1:12,13), to chasten us that we might learn His ways of righteousness and peace (Hebrews 12:6-11). God has prepared the “*sieve of vanity*” to separate (Isaiah 57:13-21) those who refuse correction by hardening their hearts to His loving correction from those who will hear His voice and serve Him in love (cf. John 10:1-18 with Matthew 25:31-46).

*“Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: and his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, **to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity:** and there shall be a bridle [vanity and pride] in the jaws of the people, causing them to err.”* Isaiah 30:27,28

If we do not repent (i.e. return back to God from vanity), we will have our reward with the author of vanity, Satan, in unquenchable wrath (cf. Revelations 14:9-11 & Matthew 3:12).

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:” II Peter 2:9

Judgment begins in the Lord’s house among those who profess to know him:

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” I Peter 4:17-19

God did not place us in this life to fight Satan for Him in and of ourselves (cf. Ephesians 6:10-18 with Romans 13:12-14). Jesus delivers us from our adversary through the grace and power of God (cf. Romans 8:32-39 & Matthew 12:28 with I John 4:18).

But why then is Satan permitted to tempt us? One reason is to expose us to our adversary’s devices of lies and vanity so that we might gain experience and wisdom (cf. Romans 5:3,4 & James 1:2-5), i.e. that we will neither be “*novices*” or “*ignorant*” of the devil’s devices (cf. I Timothy 3:6 with II Corinthians 2:10,11).

Such exposure graphically teaches us that we must call upon God to be delivered (Romans 10:12-13). Specifically, we are to come to know 1) the power of our God, 2) the captivating devices of our accuser, and 3) our own weakness and necessity for our Savior, Jesus Christ.

“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Romans 8:20,21

God has placed us in this life in His hope that we will choose His Way and thus choose Life (cf. John 14:6). Once here, the opportunity to either yield ourselves in service to the Lord or to our own desires in the flesh is before us. And to whom we yield ourselves as servants by the way we live, we will have our reward with him (Galatians 6:7,8 & Romans 6:16). Specifically, we can yield ourselves to obey either the “*prince of this world*” (John 14:30) or the “*Prince of peace*” (Isaiah 9:6,7). The choice we face is between the temptations of lies and vanity in opposition to the revelation of the Truth (cf. Romans 1:16-25). The decision is ours according to the desires of our hearts.

A Way To Escape

If we yield ourselves to Christ as Lord, we will be established in His kingdom of righteousness and hope (cf. John 14:15-21 with Romans 14:17). Otherwise, we have our reward separate from Him (cf. Matthew 6:1-18).

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but 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. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.” I Corinthians 10:13,14

In order for us to resist temptation, we must love truth more than *“lying vanities.”* Jesus Christ is the Truth; He is the WAY (cf. John 14:6) provided for us to flee all temptation. If we love Him to the keeping of His commandments, He will send us His Spirit of truth to comfort us in our adversity (Psalm 94:11-13) and to lead us into all truth (John 14:15-18 & 16:13,14).

Our calling is to *“seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;”* if we do this, the Lord has promised not to leave us comfortless (cf. Matthew 6:33 & Hebrews 13:5). In His presence there is peace without want. But if we linger in the ways of the world of self-interest and pride we can expect to be left outside the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matthew 25:1-13 with Genesis 19:15-26).

The warning is clear: flee the unrighteous ways of this world by coming to Jesus and then following Him according to His commandments (cf. Hebrews 13:11-16 & I Corinthians 6:9). And what are His commandments? They are *“briefly comprehended”* (Romans 13:9) in Christ’s own words:

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Matthew 22:37-40

We are called to be the body of Christ and thus to love each other as ourselves, being one in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-16). In our Christian walk with others, we are called to be like Jesus and to look to Him to show us the way (Hebrews 12:2):

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:3-8

The emphasis on the mind is significant in light of *“the weapons of our warfare”* and the *“sieve of vanity”* previously discussed. We are to foster the hope of becoming like Jesus (I John 3:1-3) to the renewing of our minds by His grace and presence in us (Romans 12:2).

Choose Ye This Day Whom Ye Will Serve

Before each of us there are two paths: the Way of Life and the way of death (cf. Jeremiah 21:8). Jesus in our Life (Colossians 3:4); we have been called to be like Him. If we will accept God’s love for all people, we will be transformed into the image of his Son. Accordingly, we will become advocates for others, as opposed to being unforgiving accusers.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” I John 3:1-3

As our Life, Jesus is also our hope (I Timothy 1:1). In Him are the words of eternal life (John 6:63,68). Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He came to reveal God’s love to us and He has commanded us to love each other as He has loved us (John 13:34,35). The alternative to choosing to be like Jesus is to abide in death, i.e. eternal separation from the fellowship of the Father in His kingdom. The way of death is to be like the devil by being proud or by becoming accusers of others.

Each day we must choose between these two opposing paths for *“sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”* (Matthew 6:34). If we vacillate in the valley of indecision between these two, we will be tossed about as waves (cf. James 1:5-17). Therefore, each day let us observe the words of Joshua and choose to serve the Lord:

“...choose ye this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

To be able to make a decision between Life and death, we are allowed to experience the results of our decisions. If we choose Life, we are given a taste of eternal life through the Holy Spirit of Promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13,14). On the other hand, if we choose to lust after the corruptible things of this world, we will experience the buffetings of the tormentors as a foretaste of the eternal reward which awaits the wicked (i.e. those who refuse to heed God’s call to come back to Him by the Way He has provided).

One of the consequences of our decisions which we experience includes the chastening of the Lord (cf. Revelations 3:19, Hebrews 12:6-11, I Corinthians 11:31,32 & Matthew 18:23-35). He disciplines us because He does not want us to become defiled with a bitter and unforgiving heart. By being turned over to the tormentors we learn firsthand what the eternal reward is for having the disposition of an unforgiving heart.

The result of not repenting when we are chastened is that we will eventually become like Satan, accusing others because of the suspicions and fears brought into our lives by the presence of the tormentors. In this way we become Satan’s servants (cf. Romans 6:16). But if we repent and serve the Lord by loving as He loves by the gift of His Spirit (cf. Romans 5:5), He blesses us with the peace that passes our understanding (Philippians 4:7). Such peace can only come from the presence of the Comforter dwelling within us (John 14:15-27).

Today If Ye Will Hear His Voice

“Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is quick, and

powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession [confession of him].” Hebrews 4:7-14

While it is still called “today,” we can repent from serving ourselves and return to our Lord and do good by His grace (cf. Philippians 2:12,13 with John 14:10,12). We are living in a period of time in which our heavenly Father “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). In other words, this life is a time of grace in which we are given the opportunity to choose whose servants we will become in eternity. It does not last forever. The time will come in which we will be judged according to our deeds in this life (cf. II Corinthians 5:10,11). In other words, we will not always have this opportunity to choose to bear God fruit to His honor and glory by working good works through His Spirit (cf. Acts 10:35).

In this also Jesus was our example. He knew that His time on this earth in which He was to do the work He was sent to perform was limited. Jesus said:

“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

We, too, have a limited amount of time in which to work the works of righteousness (cf. Acts 17:26 & Hebrews 4:7 with Philippians 2:12,13). Jesus warned those to whom He ministered in His life on earth to walk in the light of the truth while they had opportunity:

“Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light...I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” John 12:35,36,46

Jesus is the light which has come into this dark world so that whosoever would follow Him might be led back into the presence of the Father of lights as His children (James 1:17). If we will draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8).

“Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.” Zechariah 1:3

The apostle Paul encouraged us to stay the course in following the Lord Jesus by saying:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light...Jesus Christ...” Romans 13:12-14

When God established the day, He began with the evening:

“And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” Genesis 1:5

The night then concludes the first part of the day before the dawning of light. Paul's statement that "*the night is far spent, the day is at hand*" was an earnest plea for us to be prepared for the coming of our Lord in His glory. Jesus told His disciples that His return could be at any time but that only His Father in heaven knew when it would be:

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory...But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." Mark 13:26,32-37

That we are to work and to watch for his coming, not knowing when it will be, is more than evident, it is imperative as Paul has emphasized by stating that the night is far spent. When our Lord comes in His glory, the opportunity to do the work He has given each of us to do will have ended. We are to take heed that we do not sleep away our lives in the pleasures of this life nor idly wait for His return.

In the Full Assurance of Faith

The day of the Lord is described as being both a wonderful day of glory for those who believe, and a day of sorrow for those who have wasted their days in this life by not heeding the call to repent and be cleansed of all unrighteousness (cf. Luke 21:28 with Joel 2:1-14, Amos 5:18). Those who are prepared to meet the Lord will "*love his appearing*" because a great treasure awaits them (cf. II Timothy 4:1,8, I Corinthians 1:9,10 & John 14:1-3). On the other hand, among the disobedient there will be "*a certain fearful looking for the judgment and fiery indignation*" (cf. Hebrews 10:26-31).

As the day of the Lord approaches, we are to live by faith, not by fear:

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back [in fear], my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Hebrews 10:38 (cf. Romans 8:15)

To abide the day of our Lord, we must abide in "*the full assurance of faith*":

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Hebrews 10:22-25

Through faith, our Lord is preparing those who love Him for His coming in glory; as it is written of Him, Jesus Christ is both the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2):

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you...being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”
Philippians 1:3,6

The faith our Lord instills in those who believe in Him does not involve the claiming of promises as much as it does the obtaining or receiving of the promises of the gospel.

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shown toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.” Hebrews 6:10-15

It is very important for us to understand that the establishing and building up of our faith in us is our Lord’s work, not our own work (cf. Philippians 2:12,13). Too often in response to our Lord’s call to have faith in Him, we offer Him the faith we have developed on our own and expect Him to approve of it. But the Lord has a better faith in mind for us; it is called the faith of the gospel:

“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ...that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” Philippians 1:27

Hebrews 11:1 defines the faith of the gospel as follows:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
Hebrews 11:1

It is worth noting that other translations (e.g. The Amplified Bible and The Holy Scriptures, Inspired Version) of this passage read “assurance” in place of the word “substance,” that is:

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

This definition of faith describes the workings of the Holy Ghost in our lives. First, as indicated by the name Jesus used in referring to Him (John 14:15-27), the Comforter assures our hearts and thus gives us hope and peace beyond our own understanding and requests (Philippians 4:6,7 & Ephesians 3:20). What is the work of a comforter but to assure and instill peace? And if we are comforted by the Lord, will we not have everlasting peace (cf. John 14:27)?

Can anyone have a greater faith than that which is based on the assurance of the Comforter? Jesus is our hope (I Timothy 1:1); and if we hope to be like Him, the Comforter will assure us of the goodness of this hope. But more importantly, He will assure us of God’s ability to actually bring us into the conformance of the image of His Only Begotten Son in perfect love. Remember, “*faith is the [assurance] of things hoped for.*”

“And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Hebrews 6:11,12

Let us also, therefore, exercise faith in God to the obtaining of the promises reserved for those who through patience await the prize set before them, to rest in the kingdom of glory and righteousness forever (cf. I Peter 4:12-19).

Faith is not an ideal nor related to a set of beliefs alone. It is the very presence of God’s Spirit dwelling within us to will and to do according to His design (cf. Philippians 2:12,13 & I Corinthians 6:16). As such, faith is a very real “*substance*” that resides in the believer. In other words, God’s contribution to our faith is His Spirit, while our contribution is to believe unto the receiving of His Spirit, being led of Him into all truth. Of His Spirit of truth, Jesus said, “*he shall be in you*” (John 14:17). By imparting to us His Spirit, Jesus both authors and finishes our faith.

Jesus, as the truth, is the living word of God. His Spirit of truth is the engrafted word, who, if we receive Him with meekness, is able to save our souls (James 1:21 with John 1:14). Jesus’ words are spirit (John 6:63), and if we keep His words within us (John 14:23) we will be built upon the Rock of His salvation (cf. Matthew 7:24-25).

The second half of this definition, “*the evidence of things not seen,*” refers to the Spirit of Christ and the fruits He brings in the lives of those who believe (cf. Philippians 1:11). The “*evidence*” is revealed in bearing good fruit in great abundance, “*some thirtyfold, some sixty and some an hundred*” (cf. Mark 16:19,20, John 15:8, Philippians 4:17 & I Thessalonians 3:12). As, the apostle James has written, faith without works [i.e. the good works of the Father] is dead (James 1:27-2:26). Of the “*things not seen*” Jesus said that the world could not receive His Spirit of truth because they do not see or know Him, i.e. they will not receive of Him because their faith is based on sight (vanity) rather than on the love of truth (John 14:17; cf. I Corinthians 2:9-16 & **John 5:40-44**). Therefore, not all people have faith (II Thessalonians 3:2). But to as many as have believed have received from God the power and grace which is sufficient to become His children (cf. John 1:12).

Simply put, faith consists of two integral elements: 1) we have the witness from God that we please Him (Hebrews 11:5); and 2) we bear an abundance of fruit to His honor and glory. Our God is a Rock who cannot be shaken. Therefore, if we will rely upon the Lord, we will never be moved nor be disturbed, i.e. nothing will be able to take away our peace and confidence (cf. Hebrews 12:27-29). As John has written:

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself...” 1 John 5:9,10 (see also verses 4:13,15-19)

We must continue in the witness and fellowship of the Spirit of our Lord to receive the blessed end of our hope:

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.” Hebrews 3:14

Jesus said to those who believed on Him that if they continued in His word then were they His disciples:

“Then said Jesus to those Jews [remember Romans 10:8-12] which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” John 8:31,32,36 (cf. Matthew 7:24-27)

Just as a gardener who tends his garden, we must be patient to let the word of faith grow within us until we become rooted and grounded in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” Colossians 2:6,7

Again, Jesus is both the author and finisher of our faith. Establishing and building up faith in us is His work (cf. Philippians 1:6). Through His prayer of faith to the Father, Jesus introduces the Spirit of truth into our lives (cf. John 14:15-27). If we are faithful to those things which we receive of Him, Jesus promises to add more (cf. Luke 16:10-12 with Hebrews 6:3). Remember, it is God alone who brings the increase, even of our faith (I Corinthians 3:6 with Romans 10:13-17). We cannot, by taking thought, add to our own stature of faith (Matthew 6:27-33). If we are faithful to Jesus, He will add to our stature according to the wisdom of God (Luke 16:10-13).

“I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.” Ecclesiastes 3:14

Jesus does not expect anyone to obtain faith on their own. Faith is a gift which comes by receiving the Spirit of truth and then bearing fruit of the same by His grace. But if we are proud and self-reliant we will be bent on looking to ourselves to accomplish the requirements placed upon us by God, e.g. to be perfect (Matthew 5:48; cf. with I John 4:13-18). This tendency of the natural mind to figure out our own way of doing things (cf. Romans 8:7) will always cause us to fall short of the glory of God.

By Their Fruits

As mentioned before, a sign of the influence of Satan in people's lives is that they start to take on traits of the *“accuser of the brethren.”* He lies (cf. John 8:44) to the children of men to entice them to be suspicious of others and to *“watch for iniquity”* or *“make a man an offender for a word.”* Our adversary knows that there are grave consequences awaiting those who do such things:

“For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.” Isaiah 29:20,21

Therefore, if we find ourselves accusing others, even of small things, we must earnestly go to God in prayer in the name of Jesus and seek repentance, i.e. to turn from the old creature unto the new creature in Christ, so that we might bear Him the fruit of His Spirit in truth.

Our hearts are fertile soil. We can either produce fruits of the Spirit or those of the flesh which hurt others (cf. Galatians 5:13-26). Those who have partaken of the Holy Ghost and have known the love of God yet bear “*thorns and briers*” are rejected by Him and are “*nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*”

*“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come [the Holy Ghost, Ephesians 1:13,14], if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. **For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.**”* Hebrews 6:4-8 (see also Matthew 12:31-37 & James 1:26)

Our Lord is longsuffering, but if we persist in old creature habits and allow our hearts to become a brier patch of ill thoughts and conversation about others (cf. Zechariah 7:9-12), we have a known end which is separate from the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matthew 13:24-30).

Jesus said “*you know them by their fruits*” (Matthew 7:15-20). Even though people confess and testify of Jesus, if they are not converted such that they bear the fruit of His Spirit, they are not His disciples and “*shall proceed no further*” (cf. II Timothy 3:1-9 & II Peter 2:9-22 with John 13:34,35 & 15:8-17, Romans 8:9). Therefore, we are told to:

“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.” Matthew 12:33 (see also James 3:10-18)

The fruit of God’s Holy Spirit is love, patience, joy, brotherly kindness and all things which pertain to the character of God (cf. Galatians 5:22,23 & I Corinthians 13:4-8), not suspicion, fears and accusations, all of which promote division through rumors and gossip and other fruits of the flesh. If we talk about others, we had better be spending more time in prayer for them than discussing what we think about them with others. Remember, the Lord hates “*a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among the brethren*” (Proverbs 6:19). All such things promote unforgiving and hard hearts, i.e. hearts “*which are past feeling*” (cf. Ephesians 4:17-19).

On one particular occasion during His life on earth, Jesus’ actions reinforced the importance of bearing the fruit which is expected of us. He and His disciples were on their way to the temple in Jerusalem when they came to a fig tree. Jesus expected the fruit of the tree to be ripe. It had leaves as if it would provide fruit in its “*season.*” But instead the fruit was not ripe, and so Jesus cursed the tree, saying:

“Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.” Matthew 21:19

The tree withered away! We, too, may very well “*wither*” if we are not “*instant in season*” in bearing the fruit of God in the “*season thereof*” (cf. II Timothy 4:2 with Matthew 21:41). Just having “*leaves*” to adorn ourselves does not make us Christians; it is not enough to look the part.

We are called to bear fruit. If we are to bear fruit, we must let Jesus do His work of conversion within us.

Because the work of converting our souls from the old creature to the new is the Lord's work, not ours, the simple question facing each one of us is: are we actually letting Jesus bear His fruit of righteousness within us, or are we trying to meet our own expectations in our supposed walk with the Lord?

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:9-11

John, in preparing the way before the Lord, admonished, *“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance”* (Matthew 3:8). Why?

“And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” Matthew 3:10

In preparing the way before the Lord, John (who baptized Jesus) testified that we must repent and bear God fruit according to His grace if we are to enter His kingdom (Mark 1:15).

Repentance itself is a gift from God which He grants to those who are of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (cf. Acts 11:18 & I Timothy 2:24-26 with Psalm 34:18, Matthew 18:1-5 & Jeremiah 31:18,19). Without God consummating our repentance with His presence and good works in our lives (cf. Matthew 3:8 & Acts 26:20), our repentance is but a dead work, being devoid of Life.

The Lord brings life to our souls by dwelling in us. Without His presence we are spiritually dead, having only the form without the substance (cf. Hebrews 11:1 & II Timothy 3:5). God resists the proud, but the humble receive more grace to the bearing of *“fruit meet for repentance.”* God has provided the Way of forgiveness for the whole world; therefore, let us forgive to the glory of the Lord by His grace (cf. Matthew 7:7-12).

“...freely ye have received, freely give.” Matthew 10:8

Maintain Good Works

In Paul's letter to Titus, he wrote:

“Put them in mind...to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.”
Titus 3:1,2,8,14

This admonition is consistent with the gospel of salvation by grace through faith for we have been created in Christ Jesus to bear good works which God has before determined we should do

(Ephesians 2:8-10). Paul reaffirms here that we are not saved “*by works of righteousness which we have done*” (verse 5). Our works do not save us “*lest any man boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-10), but they do show whose servant we are (cf. Romans 6:16 & Matthew 7:15-20).

Remember, it is “*the Father, he doeth the works*” (John 14:10). Accordingly, the good works Paul has admonished us to maintain are fruits of the Spirit which demonstrate Jesus Christ’s lordship over our lives. We are not to work according to our own desires nor dictate to God what we think should be done (cf. Isaiah 40:9-26). But rather, like Jesus, we are to do the works of the Father (John 14:10-12 with Philippians 4:6,7).

“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. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.” John 5:19,20

Without being “*rooted and grounded*” in Jesus Christ, we too can do nothing (John 15:5).

Jesus associated the bearing of fruit to God’s glory with discipleship.

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” John 15:8

We do not just do this once in our lives. We are to continue in being like Jesus who did the work of our Father to the end (John 17:4 with John 5:17 & 14:10-13). That we are to endure to the end of our lives is evident in many scriptures (Mark 13:13, James 5:11, Hebrews 12:7, etc.). By way of personal example, Paul affirmed to Timothy that he had indeed kept the faith to the end:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”
II Timothy 4:7,8

And to the saints at Philippi he wrote:

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded...” Philippians 3:14,15

Are we “*thus minded*” to remain faithful and endure to the end? To do so, we must guard against letting the ground of our heart (cf. Hosea 10:12) become overgrown with the cares of this life. Otherwise we will bear the fruit of the flesh which cannot but bring division and strife (cf. James 4:1-5:11).

We cannot rest in victories of the past or on some select fruit we have born for Jesus in days gone by. We must continually press forward. God will supply our every need to perform His good works no matter what our condition or our circumstance (cf. Ephesians 2:8-10).

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:19

The fact that we are to work the works of righteousness while in this life is abundantly clear from our Lord's own message to His disciples before He was crucified. He said:

"...the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works...He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall He do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." John 14:10,12

The "good works" that we are to perform are the works of the Father that Jesus worked; we are to look to Jesus, the living Way, to know how to live our lives in righteousness before God.

"Oh Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." Jeremiah 10:23,24

Only by being born of the Spirit are we enabled to bring forth good works (cf. Galatians 5:22-25 with John 14:15-18). We are stewards over the vineyard of our own hearts; we are not the owner or the one who causes the plant of faith to grow and bear fruit.

Said another way, I am the caretaker of the Lord's garden in my heart. If I do not permit His produce to grow within me, I not only starve, but those around me are deprived of the special fruit the Lord is seeking to bring forth out of my life (cf. Ephesians 4:1-16 with I Corinthians 12:1-14:40).

Because our natural tendencies and understandings continually divert us from the ways of God (cf. Romans 8:5-8), it is important to receive and to submit to His Spirit of truth as our guide:

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12

Wisely, then, David prayed:

"Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer...lead me to the rock that is higher than I."
Psalm 61:1,2

and:

"Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day." Psalm 25:4,5

Our Father in heaven is the author of all good works for He alone is good (Matthew 19:17). The "good works" the Father brings forth from the life surrendered to Him are the good works Jesus has taught that we are to let shine before the world to the glory and honor of His Father (Matthew 5:16).

God gives us gifts by His Spirit like seeds which are to be planted and cultivated in our hearts "with patience" (cf. Luke 8:11-15 with James 1:2-4). These gifts are meant to sprout and grow to fruition until we bear the fruits of the Spirit, some thirtyfold, some sixty and some an hundred

(cf. Mark 4:2-34). If we not only let them take root and grow within our hearts but also let them bear fruit, we will glorify our Father in heaven by having a loving and forgiving heart.

Perfect Love Casteth Out Fear

Perfect love works by this gift/fruit principle. We receive perfect love as a gift (i.e. seed) from God through His Spirit (Romans 5:5 with Luke 8:11 & James 1:17,21). Then, by allowing His Spirit to work within us, He brings forth fruit after His “*own kind*,” i.e. His own image, from out of our hearts (Galatians 5:22 with Genesis 1:11,12,26-28).

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” I Peter 1:22,23

God is love (I John 4:8) and, therefore, if we dwell in God we dwell in love. Only by God dwelling in us and we in Him can we be perfected in love (I John 4:17).

“Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” I John 4:13,16

Only by becoming like God in character and action through the reception of perfect love can we be at peace with Him (cf. I John 3:21-24). Such peace comes into our lives by the presence of the Comforter unto an unconquerable confidence in His love:

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, for Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:31-39

By receiving the hope of becoming like Jesus from the Holy Spirit, we purify our hearts (I John 3:1-3 with Romans 5:5 & 15:13). In so doing, we permit the Lord to fill us more fully with His love, i.e. His governing presence.

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Colossians 3:15-17

It is by having thankful hearts filled with praise that we “let” the engrafted word of Christ dwell richly in us unto the perfecting of our love for God and our fellow man (cf. Hebrews 13:15,16 & Colossians 2:6,7).

We receive perfect love and peace (John 14:26,27 & Philippians 4:7 with James 1:17) by receiving the Holy Ghost through the baptism and prayer of Jesus (Mark 1:8 with John 14:15-18). God’s gift of perfect love received in this way excludes fear (cf. Romans 8:15):

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” I John 4:18

Persistent or reoccurring fears may be the result of buffetings caused by being under condemnation for not fully surrendering to perfect love. Therefore, those who have fears must call upon our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for comfort through correction and cleansing to the perfecting of His love within themselves.

“...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:6,7

Earlier it was noted that our accuser is trying to create in us a character which is counter to the nature of God, i.e. to be bitter rather than loving. How better, then, to “resist the devil” than to forgive one another “in the person of Christ” as God for Christ’s sake has extended forgiveness to us?

The only way to guard against the devil’s attempts to persuade us not to forgive is to receive perfect love to the casting out fears through the Holy Ghost (cf. Matthew 12:28). If fears are allowed to persist, they will sprout into suspicions and doubts concerning others and we will lose our peace. Paul’s counsel to the believers in Philippi is helpful in this regard:

“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:4-7

By placing every aspect of our lives in God’s constant care, we permit Him to assure our hearts (else we are left to assure our own hearts). Jesus taught us to trust in our heavenly Father by seeking the kingdom of God first and letting Him provide for us (cf. Matthew 6:25-34). The promise that God will provide our every need is meant for those who intend to enter the kingdom (Luke 9:62), or rather, to let the kingdom enter them:

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Romans 14:17

Though we yet live in tribulation and adversity in this world after we come to Christ, He gives us His Holy Spirit as the down payment of our inheritance to teach us about the kingdom of God (Ephesians 1:13,14 with Romans 5:1-6 & 8:1-39). As Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit of promise “will show you things to come” (John 16:13,14).

“But as it is written, 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. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” I Corinthians 2:9,10

And so we pray, *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10). (A beautiful vision of what the kingdom of God accomplishes among His children is revealed in Acts 4:31-35.)

How then is it that fears can enter into a believer’s life? Outside of simply doubting God’s word, there are at least two other ways. One, according to the discussion presented earlier, is from being buffeted by the tormentors due to disobedience to God’s word. Another way in which fear can enter our lives is in the form of fiery darts.

We are told *“be not afraid of sudden fear”* (Proverbs 3:25). Sudden fears, like fiery darts from the evil one (Ephesians 6:16), are sent to cause doubt or mistrust; they are sent to cause us to question one another’s motives, including God’s motives in dealing with us. If we permit such fears to take root in us they can lead to our separation from the other members of the body, and eventually from the head of the church, Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:15).

Servants of the Lord often come under attack, being barraged with sudden fears. For example, the apostle Paul had the following experience:

*“...I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation. For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless **God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us** by the coming of Titus.”* II Corinthians 7:4-6

Paul’s statement that the Lord comforted him by sending Titus is significant in light of the promise of the Lord:

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:20

We must not forsake *“the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is”* (Hebrews 10:25) if we are to be conquerors in Christ Jesus.

If we submit to God and allow His perfect love to fill us, His Spirit of truth will drive fear and torment from us and we will be set free (cf. I John 4:7-18 with John 8:32,36).

“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”
II Corinthians 3:17

Jesus is the truth, so the Spirit of truth is the Spirit of Christ (cf. Romans 8:9 & 15 with Galatians 4:6).

By giving us His Spirit of liberty and truth, Jesus comforts us and sets us free (John 14:18,27 & Hebrews 13:5). In this He is the author and finisher of our faith. For by placing His liberating Spirit within us, Jesus instills and perfects our confidence in God (cf. Galatians 3:2,3 & 5:5,6).

The Comforter is our Lord's contribution to our faith. Our contribution to our faith is to receive His Spirit graciously and with thanksgiving (cf. Colossians 2:6,7) and then be led of Him into all truth (cf. Romans 8:14 & John 16:13,14).

If we have the assurance which only the Comforter brings, i.e. that the love of God is in us (I John 4:18), then we know that the fiery darts of fear cannot persist in us (cf. Ephesians 6:16). On the other hand, if we have long-standing fears which persist, we need to examine ourselves (cf. I Corinthians 11:31,32 & II Corinthians 13:5) and see if, for example, we have need to forgive one another and thus be forgiven.

Put on Charity

“And above all these things [vss. 12,13] put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”
Colossians 3:14

Charity, or the *“bond of perfectness,”* is what Jesus manifest in laying down His life for His friends (John 15:12-15). It is the only thing that can endure all things (cf. I Corinthians 13:1-13). Therefore, without charity being invested in us through the Spirit of truth, we can have no hope of enduring to the end or abiding the presence of the Lord when He comes in His glory (ref. I John 4:7-18, John 14:15-27, James 1:17 & Romans 5:5).

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”
I Corinthians 13:13

Faith believes in God's love for oneself. Charity believes in God's love for others. The hope of becoming like Jesus (cf. I Timothy 1:1 & I John 3:1-3) is the path which leads faith to charity.

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” I John 4:10,11,19-21

Faith grows up, i.e. matures, in charity through hope.

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” I Corinthians 13:11

Paul spoke these words in demonstrating the superiority of charity above other spiritual gifts. We begin as children in Christ with faith, i.e. having confidence in God's love for ourselves through the assurance of the Comforter. Faith is not an end in itself, however; we are to grow up unto the loving and strengthening of one another in Christ:

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:15,16

Accordingly, Paul's great struggle for those to whom he had taken the gospel was:

"That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Colossians 2:2,3

These things cannot be among us without charity being the governing principle of our lives. How do we obtain charity?

"And beside this [vss. 1-4], giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." II Peter 1:5-8

Peter has shown us that our journey in the Lord begins with simple, childlike faith, i.e. believing in the love God has for us. And being filled with charity to the loving of others is the end for which we seek (I John 4:10-17 & Matthew 7:7,8).

"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." I Timothy 1:5

Therefore:

"...let us go on unto perfection...and this we will do, if God permit." Hebrews 6:1-3

We cannot climb up nor enter into the kingdom of heaven by any other way than the way which has been prepared by the Father in the person of Christ Jesus our Lord (John 10:1-18). If we try to take shortcuts or try to continue in the pride and vanity of this life, we will not prosper in the Lord (James 4:6,7 & II Timothy 3:9). But if we will go on unto perfection in Christ by receiving His word into a humble heart we will grow in His grace (cf. II Peter 3:18 & James 1:21).

Faith Which Worketh by Love

"For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by...faith which worketh by love." Galations 5:5,6

Following Christ involves more than just knowing about Him and His teachings.

"Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." I Corinthians 8:1

Knowledge alone leads to an imagined faith, one which is not founded on the "substance" of charity. People with this type of faith have a form of godliness which is devoid of God's

attendant power in their lives (cf. II Timothy 3:5). Only through allowing the perfect love of Christ into our lives can we be built up in Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:13).

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” John 5:39,40

Knowledge and understanding of scripture alone is not enough to be built up in Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:1-16). We must come to Jesus as the living Word (John 1:14, Psalm 119:89 & Acts 2:29-36). Our calling in Him is to bear the fruit of His Spirit or our faith, without having works, is vain (cf. James 2:14-26 with Ephesians 2:10 & II Timothy 3:15-17).

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” I Corinthians 13:1,2

God has foreordained (i.e. intended and determined, even decided) that we should be conformed to the image of His Only Begotten Son (cf. Romans 8:29,30 with Philippians 2:1-13). We have victory in that God has provided the way for this to be accomplished in the baptism of His Son (cf. Titus 3:4-6 & Mark 1:8). In believing in Jesus Christ and keeping His words and doing them (John 14:21-24 with James 1:22 & Matthew 7:24) He promises to “*pray the Father*” to give us the gift of the Holy Ghost (John 14:15-18 & Romans 5:1-6). The Holy Ghost then fills us with perfect love (Romans 5:5 with James 1:17) unto the keeping of the commandment of loving one another (cf. Romans 13:10 & James 2:8).

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” I Timothy 1:5

Charity is life.

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth...”
I Corinthians 13:4-8

These are the traits of perfect love; they are the description of our God and His Son (I John 4:16).

If we are not charitable like Jesus Christ, we will be ashamed when He comes in His glory and will not be able to abide His presence. But by receiving this perfect love of the Father into our lives and living according to His prompting and direction, we are encouraged before Him because we are becoming pure before the Father (cf. I John 3:13-24):

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” I Peter 1:22,23

We please God by bearing Him the fruit of His own countenance. In return He keeps us in perfect peace and provides the way for us to be at peace, even with our enemies, as we, who were once enemies to God because of sin, are now at peace with Him through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:1).

“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil. When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”
Proverbs 16:6,7

The Fear of the Lord

The “*fear of the Lord*” is the understanding which comes from knowing how God rules. Our God is not only merciful but He is also a just and righteous judge who does not let unforgiven sin go unnoticed, i.e. He is not unjust to deal with offenses. It is the conscious awareness that He not only loves us but He also passes judgment over us according to our response to His mercy and grace, especially in our dealings with others (cf. Matthew 18:23-35):

“...Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches [the Israelites], take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.” Romans 11:20-23 (cf. Isaiah 63:9,10)

More particularly, the fear of the Lord is the knowledge that the disobedient and proud who “*hold the truth in unrighteousness*” will incur His wrath (Romans 1:18). No one is exempt; only the faithful in Christ who have kept His words will be spared (cf. I Peter 4:17,18 with Habakkuk 1:12-2:4).

In Proverbs, the fear of the Lord is defined as follows:

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” Proverbs 8:13

In this verse there are several elements which are relevant to forgiveness. One in particular is the matter of how we view others. If we refuse to forgive another, we are arrogant because to be arrogant is to be partial, that is, to have respect for some (especially ourselves) but not for others. Arrogance among Christians can be evidence that we believe that God loves one person or group of people more than another (cf. Matthew 5:46). But this is not so! We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23); we all had a debt so great that none of us could pay. It took God’s Only Begotten Son’s death on the cross to have all our sins blotted out (John 3:16,17 & I John 2:2). And so the apostle James admonished us:

“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.” James 2:1

In other words, we are not to show favoritism because:

“...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

The word “*nations*” in the days of Christ was often associated with religious groupings of people. So we may conclude that in any church (in today’s terms) those who fear the Lord (that is, hate evil) and who work righteousness (that is, those who bear God His fruit in their season) are accepted of Him. In all our dealings with others, we must forever keep in mind that the Lord is seeking the redemption of those individuals as well as our own.

Created in Christ Jesus Unto Good Works

Why is it important for us to work righteousness to be accepted of God?

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10 (remember John 14:10-14)

Early in the walk of faith with the Lord the believer is led to repent and to be baptized for the remission of sins (cf. Acts 2:38 & 10:44-48). These two “*works*” must be fruits of the Spirit; they are not to be works performed by personal conviction else they will be dead works which are unable to bring true and lasting change to our lives. Why is baptism so important? Jesus’ answer to John as to why he should baptize his Lord is as sufficient an explanation as can be given:

“...it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” Matthew 3:15

In being led of the Spirit (Romans 8:14) we will bear fruit to the fulfilling of all righteousness in Christ (Philippians 1:11) and thus we will be saved (cf. Mark 16:15-20).

The work of convicting us of our sins is the work of the Spirit, not ours (cf. John 16:8). True repentance and baptism are the direct workings of the Word of God in our lives, rather than simple obedience to the letter of the law (cf. II Corinthians 3:6, Galatians 3:2-5, Acts 8:12,35-38, etc.). Everyone must be drawn by the Father and established by Him in the faith of His Son, or they will be uprooted (cf. John 6:44 & Matthew 15:13, with John 15:1-5).

It is not the works we perform under the guidance and instruction of the Holy Ghost that save us. But rather it is by becoming like Jesus Christ through the inner workings of His Spirit that we are spared from wrath (I John 4:17). Thus, it is our obedience in faith which enables us to overcome unto salvation (cf. I John 5:3-5 with II Corinthians 5:1-7). The works of faith performed in our lives are the evidence of the unseen presence of God in us. To mimic the workings of God is to be as those who have a form of godliness but who deny the power thereof (II Timothy 3:5). The Holy Ghost is the power of godliness which is to dwell within us. Otherwise there is no redemption. As it is written we are the temple of the Holy Ghost:

“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.” I Corinthians 6:19,20

Why are we the temple of the Holy Ghost? So that we might be holy as God is holy. In other words, by placing His Spirit of truth within us, our Lord has provided the Way for us to keep the commandment to be holy:

“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” I Peter 1:15,16

We have this confidence that God does not require anything of us except He first provides the way for it to be accomplished (cf. Revelation 13:8, John 17:24 & Hebrews 4:3). So it is with holiness. If we receive the Holy Spirit of promise which is given us as the *“earnest of our inheritance”* (Romans 5:5 & Ephesians 1:13,14 with Romans 14:17), we will be holy by grace, not by our own merits.

“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. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” II Corinthians 4:6,7

Remember, the kingdom for which we have received an earnest of our inheritance is *“righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 14:17). If we do not obey the Truth, but rather defile our bodies with fruits other than those of the Spirit of truth, what can we expect?

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” I Corinthians 3:17

We must become holy by grace to dwell in the presence of our Lord.

“Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...”
Habakkuk 1:12,13

By walking *“in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 9:31) the Lord’s work is multiplied among us, not only in our own lives but in the lives of others as far and as wide as He directs (cf. Acts 13:2-4, 15:28, 16:6, 20:23,28, etc.).

If We Confess

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He was sent by the Father to be the light of the world and to take away the sin of the world (John 1:4,5,29). How? by the *“washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Titus 3:4,5). What must we do to be cleansed of our sin?

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

Confession is an essential element of our salvation from the bondage of sin. We are to faithfully confess our faults and pray for each other in order that healing may take place:

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”
James 5:16

Because Jesus paid the price for the sins of the whole world, our individual and collective sins belong to Him; we must give them all to Him to be cleansed of *“all unrighteousness”* and, thus, to be healed (cf. Isaiah 53:1-12 & Matthew 8:16,17).

In a forum where we confess our faults one to another, we are afforded the opportunity to retain humility, not thinking more highly of ourselves or others than God has given us the measure of faith to think (cf. Romans 12:3). But in such settings we must be careful not to glorify past sins or to revel in those things from which we have been freed in Jesus Christ. It is the simple but humble acknowledgment of our sins and the great bounty of God’s mercy and faithfulness which glorifies our Lord and permits us to come unto the throne of grace and mercy (cf. Hebrews 4:14-16)

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned...Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Psalm 51:1-4,10,17

The Testimony of Jesus

In addition to the confession of our faults, we are to confess the divine calling and stature of our Lord. If we do both, great blessings await us. For example, John revealed a beautiful truth when he wrote:

“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” I John 4:15

Many people have searched far and wide for a lasting meaning to life. Yet, here in these few short words, John reveals to us the beautiful mystery pertaining to true happiness and joy, to true meaning and purpose, i.e. those who confess that Jesus is the Christ, *“God dwelleth in him and he in God”* by His Spirit (I John 4:13-17 with John 14:23). The presence of God in our lives brings everlasting fulfillment and meaning (cf. I Corinthians 2:9-16 & Psalm 36:5-10).

The work of the Holy Ghost is to perfect in us the testimony of Jesus in perfect love and peace:

“I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is not peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” Isaiah 57:19-21 (cf. Matthew 21:16 & Psalm 8:2)

The Spirit of God has been sent into the world to testify of Jesus Christ and to establish the Light of Life within those who believe:

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.” John 15:26

Jesus is our light; we are to let Him shine forth to the world from out of our lives (Matthew 5:16 & Colossians 3:14-17). In whom the Holy Ghost resides, this light of Christ is ready to shine forth in good works and in the confession of abiding hope.

“...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: having a good conscience...” I Peter 3:15,16

The hope of which Peter is speaking is given to us through the Holy Ghost (Romans 15:13). The confession of this hope of becoming like Jesus (I John 3:1-3 & I Timothy 1:1) is an integral part of our salvation:

*“But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. **For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.** For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* Romans 10:8-13 (cf. Joshua 1:8)

The hope which comes from the Holy Ghost gives us confidence to “*speak forth the words of truth and soberness*” (cf. Acts 26:25):

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Romans 5:5

The fact that confessing Jesus Christ with our mouths is important to our salvation cannot be underestimated. Jesus said:

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32,33 (cf. Matthew 7:23)

This means that we can lose our advocacy before the throne of mercy (cf. I John 2:1) if we do not confess that Jesus is the Christ (cf. Romans 11:20-22 with Isaiah 63:9,10 & Hebrews 4:7-11). We must seek “*the things which are Jesus Christ’s*” if we are to live by Him (cf. Philippians 2:20,21). What we speak of reflects whom we love and serve (cf. I John 2:15-17 & 4:5,6 with Matthew 12:34-36). Therefore:

“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.” Psalm 107:2

On the occasion when Jesus asked His disciples who they believed Him to be, Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:15-18). Jesus commended Peter for believing the witness the Father had given him of the Son and for confessing according to the divine witness of Truth. If we, too, will receive the living witness the Father has given of His Son, we will be built upon the Rock (Matthew 7:24-27).

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself...He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” I John 5:9,10,12

Those who receive the revelation of Jesus Christ and confess Him by the “*testimony of Jesus*” (Revelations 19:10) will be established in His Church if they do not savor the things of men above that which comes from God (cf. Matthew 16:15-18 with vss. 16:23-27; see also Galatians 1:6-12).

Just having a personal testimony of Jesus is not enough; each of us must have the testimony of Jesus, the Spirit of truth who is to dwell in us. We cannot stand on our own. By the blood of Christ (His advocacy for us before the Father) and our confession by the engrafted Word of truth we are enabled to overcome our accuser:

“And they overcame him [the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” Revelation 12:11

The Holy Ghost is the “*testimony of Jesus*” (cf. Revelations 19:10 with John 16:13), who, if He dwells in us, will glorify God through fruits of praise and confession (cf. Hebrews 13:15). These are select fruits to the Father (cf. John 4:23). Let us therefore permit the word of Christ to dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:14-16 with John 6:63), without which we can do nothing good (cf. John 15:5-7 & Isaiah 64:5-9). All that is good and is of benefit to others in our lives is either a gift or a fruit of the Spirit of Christ. As it is written: “*for whatsoever is not of faith is sin*” (Romans 14:23). Or in other words, whatever is not of the Father is not good and cannot abide His presence (cf. Matthew 7:21-27).

“I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.” Ecclesiastes 3:14

Therefore We Conclude (Romans 3:28)

In this life we can have either faith or fear, depending upon whom we choose to serve. If we will surrender to our heavenly Father, our souls will be filled with His perfect love which drives out fears and torments:

*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. **He that feareth is not made perfect in love.**”* I John 4:18

Our heavenly Father is the source of perfect love.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James 1:17

We receive this perfect gift of love from Him through the gift of the Holy Ghost:

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Romans 5:5

How do we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost? By the prayer of Jesus:

“If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth...and he shall be in you.” John 14:15-17

How do we know we have been born of the Spirit? We bear the fruits of the Spirit (cf. John 13:35) which are:

“...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22,23

This is grace! If we bear God fruit by His Holy Spirit we are not under law and are, therefore, under grace (Galatians 5:18 with Romans 8:14). Those who are alive in Christ are no longer under condemnation.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Romans 8:1-4

Love is the “*righteousness of the law*” (cf. Romans 13:8-10). Those who love to the fulfilling of the law in charity are the disciples of Christ; they are the children of His Father (Romans 8:14):

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” John 13:35

Because God is love, those who are born of God bear the fruit of His Spirit and thus are like Him in love. And if we are like Him we know we will not be ashamed at the judgment day:

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.” I John 4:17

If we do not continue to receive God’s perfect love into our hearts by receiving the Holy Ghost and then by bearing fruit, we will be ashamed before the throne of God; our accuser will see to that. But this is not all; we will have fear and torment:

*“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, **but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.**” Hebrews 10:26,27 (see also Isaiah 26:11)*

Remember that while Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith, Satan is the author of our fears. Our accuser uses “*devices*” (II Corinthians 2:11) against us which are designed to bring us into

the captivity of fear. Why? Because the end of those who are fearful is the second death, i.e. eternal separation from God:

“But 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.” Revelations 21:8

Why are fearful people grouped with those who are unbelievers and others who are to die the second death, which is a spiritual death? Again, because:

“He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” I John 4:18

By being born of God, we come to love as He loves because He dwells in us (John 14:21-23). The Lord Himself strengthens those who choose to love.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” I John 4:7,8

If we do not love each other by the gift and grace of God, we cannot say that we know God. Therefore, we cannot hope to have eternal life:

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3

Because we were created in the image of God, we are to be like God in character and action.

“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” I Peter 1:15,16,22,23

Our love is nothing compared to the perfect love God gives us in His Spirit. Therefore, we can be holy only by receiving the Holy Ghost, who is given unto us for Christ’s sake and by whom our heavenly Father teaches us to love and forgive each other:

“But as touching brotherly love [charity] ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” I Thessalonians 4:9

If we refuse to love and forgive each other as God loves us, we grieve the Holy Ghost which thing we have been warned not to do:

“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you [by the Holy Ghost], with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Ephesians 4:30-32

These words were written to those who believe in Jesus Christ! Too many of us draw close to God with our lips and claim the promise of salvation without surrendering to His lordship (cf. Matthew 15:7-13). God is not fooled by the claim of belief in Jesus Christ by the disobedient.

“And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” Luke 6:46

Belief is more than a matter of words. It means trusting the Lord enough to do what He has commanded in all of life’s situations. For those who do not bear Him fruit in due season, Jesus has said that His Father will prune them from His body:

*“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.” John 15:1,2*

If we were permitted to continue to bear “*thorns and briers*” and the fruits of the flesh (cf. Galatians 5:19-21) after we came to Christ, what would become of the kingdom of heaven? There would be no hope of peace and joy for anyone. Therefore, we must be converted from living after the flesh to being led by the Spirit of God.

“Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.” Zechariah 7:9,10

Jesus has invited us to come to Him as little children who, when they are just learning to walk, may fall down but with time and experience learn to walk in the full stature of adulthood. The Lord Jesus knows our weaknesses, our infirmities of the flesh (Psalm 103:13-18), and so He willingly laid down His life that He might become our advocate.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” I John 2:1,2

The apostle Paul has told us that in the last days there will be those who will fall away from the Lord because they “*received not a love of the truth, that they might be saved*” (II Thessalonians 2:3-10). We have to be in Christ first before we can fall away from Him (cf. John 15:1,2). And once we are in Him, we must be conformed to His image by the will of God. To do this we must receive the enabling love of the Spirit of truth or we are “*none of his*” (Romans 8:9).

We have been called to love our enemies as Jesus has loved us to the laying down of His life in service and sacrifice (Philippians 2:1-18 with Luke 9:23-26). Notwithstanding He was made a reproach for us, Jesus is yet the Lord. He has given us both the example and commandment to live the gospel and take up our crosses daily amid adversity to the glory of God.

Jesus Christ is the truth (John 14:6). He is the light to which we must come if we are not to perish. And so, you and I must come to love Him and keep His commandments to love each other in this world.

Jesus has warned us by parable what the consequence is for not becoming like Him through the grace and power of God given to us in His Spirit of holiness. He said:

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, **but cast the bad away.**”* Matthew 13:47,48 (see also Matthew 13:24-30)

Oh, Christian, would you like to have peace of mind again?

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” Colossians 3:12,13

Let us turn, therefore, back to the God of our redemption and receive His love that we might hope with God that all should come to repentance and be saved (cf. Romans 8:24-29).

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” Romans 15:13