

Days of Praise

September ♦ October ♦ November 2019

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

September • October • November 2019

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”
(Psalm 27:1)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

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

Dear Christian friend,

Sometimes it seems that churches have lost contact with the “glorious” holiness sung by Moses after the display of the Ten Plagues and the delivery of the nation through the Red Sea.

What an awesome sight that must have been. Walls of water on each side; walking over the bottom of the sea on dry ground; watching the Egyptian army totally destroyed in the same sea through which God had just opened a safe passage for them. No other terms would do—“glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders.”

The Lord seldom demonstrates His power in public venues now that the Messiah has come and completed His work on Earth. Yet, the record is here. The written Word of God is available, and His “invisible things . . . are clearly seen . . . by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20). Perhaps we should stop looking with worldly eyes and begin to search with spiritual sight. Perhaps then our “joy may be full” (1 John 1:4).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

Contributors:

HMM

HMM III

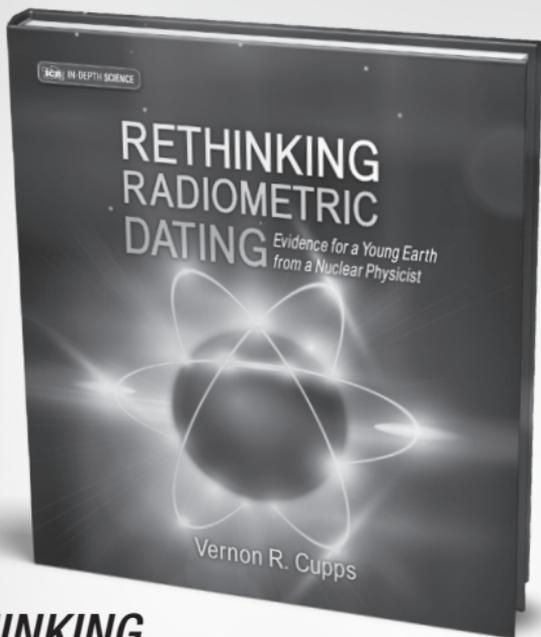
JDM

Henry M. Morris, Ph.D.

Henry M. Morris III, D.Min.

John D. Morris, Ph.D.

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Sunday, September 1

Conformed to His Image

“And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” (1 Corinthians 15:49)

One of the most amazing promises of the Word of God is that those who “love God” and are “the called according to his purpose” are those whom “he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:28-29).

Adam and Eve were created in His image physically in the beginning. “So God created man in his own image . . . male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27). Presumably this means they were created in the physical form that God knew He would assume when, in the fullness of time, He would become man Himself, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

That image was marred when Adam (and, in Adam, all men) sinned. Nevertheless, it can be restored spiritually when we receive Christ and “have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:10).

But this is not all. As our text reveals, we who have been made in God’s earthly image (both physically and spiritually) will also, in due time, receive His heavenly image. This will take place when Christ returns. At that time, “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye . . . and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

In what way shall we be changed? The Lord Jesus Himself “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). His body, after His resurrection, was still His physical body, but it was no longer subject to pain or death and was able to pass through walls and to speed rapidly from Earth to heaven. That is “the image of the heavenly” to which we shall be conformed some day soon! For “we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). HMM

Monday, September 2

Labor

“We beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.” (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12)

On Labor Day, we traditionally take time to recognize the great workforce here in America. From factories to restaurants, from typing pools to machine shops, from schoolrooms to gas stations, laborers help make the economy run, and on this day America honors its workforce.

The Bible likewise frequently commends those who work. For example: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Ephesians 4:28).

Several of the words in our text are significant. The verbs “increase . . . study . . . be . . . do . . . work . . . walk . . . lack” are all in the tense implying a habit, or lifestyle. We are thus commended to have a mindset of work, not laziness or expecting others to do for us what we can do for ourselves.

The word “honestly” elsewhere is translated “decently” or “properly” and is emphasized in the Greek. There is a proper way to walk.

Perhaps Paul was referring to his own example: “For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you” (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

Note that an admonition to continue in “brotherly love” (v. 9) is the context of our text. For one who refuses to work and becomes a burden to society exhibits a lack of brotherly love and is a reproach to the community of Christ.

Laborers are honored in Scripture, and so is labor. JDM

Tuesday, September 3

The Power of the Saints

“The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.” (Ephesians 1:19)

The power of the triune Creator, as displayed in the resurrection of Christ, is directed toward us! We will never fully comprehend that, but the Scriptures provide several clear statements that will help us gain a small grasp on this magnificent resource.

- We receive power when the Holy Spirit indwells us (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit takes up residence in everyone who is twice-born (John 14:17) and is therefore readily accessible to all believers (Ephesians 3:20).
- We use the power of God every time we preach the gospel (Romans 1:16), whether to one person or to thousands (1 Corinthians 1:18).
- We learn of the power of God through “great and precious promises.” Indeed, those promises involve “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3-4).
- We see the results of God’s power in our lives when we are “strengthened with all might” so we demonstrate “all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Colossians 1:11).

The Lord desires “that [we] might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19) and “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (v. 16). The purpose of this empowering is to be “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith” (Colossians 2:7), “able to comprehend . . . the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know [!] the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Ephesians 3:18-19).

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (vv. 20-21).

HMM III

Wednesday, September 4

Grow in Grace

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18)

These last words of the apostle Peter urge us to grow in each of two important phases of the Christian life—grace and knowledge. Such growth into Him in all things (Ephesians 4:15) will indeed give glory to Him, now and forever.

When we first become Christians, we are newborn babes (Greek *brephos*, 1 Peter 2:2). Our spiritual birth has been by the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23) on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

As the Christian life began with the Word, it can only grow on the Word. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). Here, “of the word” is the Greek *logikos*, elsewhere used only in Romans 12:1, where it is translated “reasonable.” It is the source of our English word “logical.” New Christians must feed on unadulterated, logical truth if they are to grow, and this can be found only in the Holy Scriptures.

There is another word used for babes: Greek *nepios*, “without speech.” This word is used for toddlers, old enough to walk but not yet able to speak plainly or to act unselfishly. It is used for “carnal” Christians. “I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat” (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

Carnality in Christians is arrested growth at the “babes in Christ” stage and is clearly abnormal. Such stumbling, quarrelsome babes need to be fed with meat, as well as milk, if they are to grow: “For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe” (Hebrews 5:13). May the Lord enable us to grow in His grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! HMM

Thursday, September 5

Speaking Evil of Dignities

“But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.” (2 Peter 2:10)

In context here, Peter is speaking of the false teachers who would later come into the Christian community, leading many to “follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Peter 2:2). Among other characteristics, these teachers would “despise government” and “speak evil of dignities.”

Again in context, it seems clear that the “government” Peter has in mind primarily is the divine government that had been established by God for the universe (the “principalities and powers in heavenly places”—Ephesians 3:10) and the “dignities” refer to the angels—even those that have rebelled and now follow Satan. Jude notes in a similar passage that even the archangel Michael spoke respectfully to Satan, the premier fallen angel (Jude 8-9).

Therefore, it is carnally arrogant and dangerous for men to insult or to ridicule such powerful beings. They are for God to judge and deal with, in His own time and way.

And the same must be true of human “dignities” and “government.” We must remember that “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1) and that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will,” and sometimes He even “setteth up over it the basest of men” (Daniel 4:17).

Even if we live in a republic, therefore, and can participate in the selection of our leaders, our main responsibility is to “be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men” (Titus 3:1-2). HMM

Friday, September 6

Completing a Good Work

“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 1:6)

In his introductory comments to the Philippian church, Paul reminds them of his thankfulness for them (v. 3), his prayer for them (v. 4), and as we see in our text, his confidence in God’s continuing work in their lives.

This “good work” is not the sort of work that men and women are able to accomplish. Paul identifies this as God’s work, as yet not completed—that is, the transforming work of grace. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (2:13).

The work of grace takes several forms: It includes the redemption of our lost souls, having been fully accomplished by Christ on Calvary. It also includes our ultimate sanctification, transforming our character from that of a redeemed sinner to one of Christ-likeness. He is working toward this goal on a daily basis and will finish the task in His presence. But the work of grace also includes our service for Him—not our work, but His, that He does through us. He grants us, through His grace, the distinct privilege of participating in His work here on Earth.

Paul writes that the ultimate completion of this “good work” of grace awaits “the day of Jesus Christ.” In a similar prayer for the Corinthian believers, he writes of their “waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:7-8).

Meanwhile, we can rest in His faithfulness, fully convinced of His intention and ability to complete His work. “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands” (Psalm 138:8). JDM

Saturday, September 7

The Crown of Glory

“She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.” (Proverbs 4:9)

There are five specific “crowns” mentioned in the New Testament as rewards for faithful service, presumably to be rewarded by Christ at His judgment seat (1 Corinthians 3:14). These are the “incorruptible” crown (1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Corinthians 5:10); the “crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8); the “crown of rejoicing” (1 Thessalonians 2:19); “the crown of life” (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10); and lastly the “crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).

Although the crown of glory is mentioned only once in the New Testament, the phrase occurs four times in the Old Testament, each providing special insight into its character and scope. The first is Proverbs 4:9: “[Wisdom] shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.” The other three are, in order, as follows:

- “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31).
- “In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people” (Isaiah 28:5).
- “Thou [probably a reference to the new Jerusalem] shalt also be a crown of glory in the land of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God” (Isaiah 62:3).

The one New Testament reference, in 1 Peter 5:4, is a wonderful promise to the faithful shepherds of each “little flock” (Luke 12:32) of believers: “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

We do not know exactly what these crowns will be composed of, but when we see the Lord we shall lay each of them before His throne (Revelation 4:10). HMM

Sunday, September 8

Joy in Believing

“Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” (1 Peter 1:8)

After His resurrection, the Lord acknowledged the legitimate need for evidence of such a mighty miracle, honoring the request of Thomas to see for himself that He had, indeed, returned from the grave. Nevertheless, Thomas could and should have believed the evidence from the other disciples, when they testified of the empty tomb and the previous appearances of Christ. Consequently, the Lord Jesus gave a mild but loving rebuke to His doubting disciple. “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

It is not that the Lord wants us to be credulous, believing something with no basis except blind faith. Today we have an abundance of solid evidence, more even than the disciples themselves had, and there is no excuse not to believe. Nevertheless, we must believe; “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).

We cannot yet see Him with our eyes, as Thomas did, but we see Him with our hearts, and that is enough. As we read of Him in the Word, we see Him on the cross, taking “our sins in his own body” (1 Peter 2:24) and it breaks our hearts. Then we read of the empty tomb and the linen clothes, and are like John, who “saw, and believed” (John 20:8). Then we “rejoice with joy” (literally, “exult with exceeding gladness”), which cannot be told vocally any more than He can be seen visually. One day soon we shall really see Him in His glory, and “when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). HMM

Monday, September 9

Christ: Our Example

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21)

Some have tried to pattern their lives after that of Jesus simply by asking in every situation, “What would Jesus do?” But in the context of our text, the primary “example” that He left us was nothing less than His own sacrificial death!

Note the context: “For this is thankworthy [same word as ‘grace’], if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully . . . if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, yet take it patiently, this is acceptable [also the same word as ‘grace’] with God” (1 Peter 2:19-20).

To follow Christ’s example, therefore, is to be willing to endure unjustified suffering—even defamation and persecution—with grace and patience.

But that is not all; we must also do it in silence! “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not” (1 Peter 2:23). “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

It is a natural reaction to want to strike back at one who has slandered or injured us, especially if such an act was an insulting response to kindness. But such a “natural” reaction was not Christ’s reaction. He could have called “twelve legions of angels” (Matthew 26:53) to His defense, but He chose to suffer in silence.

And why would He do such a thing? First, if He had *not* done so, we would have been lost in our sins forever. He “bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24).

Second, He left us an example, that we “should follow his steps.” He was not just silent in His sufferings; “He suffered for *us!*” If we would really be like Him, we must be willing to suffer quietly on behalf of others, even when they are the ones who deserve it. *This* is acceptable with God! HMM

Tuesday, September 10

The Power of the Gospel

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

In this verse we are told that God’s power resides in the gospel—and indeed, that the purpose of this power is the salvation of both Jew and Greek. This passage is intended to incorporate spreading the gospel to all humanity, which is specifically commanded by the Lord Jesus: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Evidently, the event that takes place when one is twice-born is nothing less than a supernatural “creation” by the Creator Himself (Ephesians 4:24)! There is no need for salesmanship or psychology or finesse or technique; the *dunamis* (power) of the living God is transmitted, applied, and exercised as the gospel is spoken and a person listens.

- Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”
- Romans 10:17: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
- John 6:63: “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”
- 1 Peter 1:23: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

To be successful (not to mention obedient) to the Lord’s command, we must most surely use the “power” of God that has been made available to us in the Scriptures! HMM III

Wednesday, September 11

Great Is the Lord

“For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.” (1 Chronicles 16:25-26)

This testimony is in the heart of a great hymn of thanksgiving (1 Chronicles 16:7-36) composed by David when the Ark of the Lord was brought back to Jerusalem. It is a testimony of the unique greatness of the God of Israel, with recurring expressions of gratitude for His deliverances and blessings.

This God of Israel was no mere tribal-god or nature-god, such as Dagon, the fish-god of the Philistines from whose hands the Ark had been delivered. All such “gods” of the peoples of the earth—whether wooden images in a shrine, astrological emblems in the heavens, or mental constructs of evolutionary humanistic philosophers—are nothing but idols (that is, literally, “good for nothing,” “vanities”).

It is *Jehovah* God who is not only *in* the heavens but who *made* the heavens! It is their Creator who one day will “let the sea roar” and “the fields rejoice,” when “the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD, because he cometh to judge the earth” (vv. 32-33).

As Creator and Savior, all His people are exhorted also to “shew forth from day to day his salvation. Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations” (vv. 23-24). Because of His power, the world itself “shall be stable [that is, ‘permanently established’], that it be not moved” (v. 30). This “God of our salvation” (v. 35), and the wonderful heavens and earth He created, will be forever. The psalm ends with the exhortation: “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. . . . Blessed be the LORD God of Israel for ever and ever” (vv. 34-36).

Now, if Israel needed such an exhortation, our modern science-worshipping world needs it still more urgently. HMM

Thursday, September 12

Wait on the Lord

“Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.” (Psalm 37:34)

In spite of the occasional successes of the wicked, we are to “wait on the LORD.” The Hebrew word used in this passage for “wait” is unusual. The term *quvah* describes the “binding together” of strings to make a cord. The same word was used to “collect” the water and dry land into separate areas on the third day of creation.

It carries the idea of anticipation toward useful results and does not mean to “hang around and wait.” It does not imply useless boredom, waiting for something to happen. The essence of the term is to be alert, watching the events and activities of the Lord and reacting to His timing and direction. Indeed, the word is translated “look” as often as any other term.

The great promise of “eagle’s wings” recorded by Isaiah tells us that the source of our victory comes from the Lord alone: “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

That great promise, which is a comfort to so many, is based on the fact that the “Creator of the ends of the earth” is the One making the promise (Isaiah 40:28).

As Psalm 37 comes to a close, the summary contains both instructions and blessings: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But . . . the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD; he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him” (Psalm 37:37-40). HMM III

Friday, September 13

The Point of No Return

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

Our God is longsuffering and full of mercy, but there is a line that must not be crossed. It is dangerous to presume that God will always continue to forgive; He can become a “consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

The leaders of Ephraim (a collective term for the 10 northern tribes of Israel) had passed this point of no return. They had become completely infatuated with the pantheistic polytheism of the nations, being “joined” to their symbolic models of natural forces and all the immoral practices that accompanied such nature worship. The word for “joined” means “fascinated by.” They had been brought so deeply under the occult powers behind these nature-god idols as to be irrevocably committed to them, so that it would be a waste of time and tears to try to reclaim them now.

The Scriptures contain many similar warnings. “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:3). “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind” (Matthew 15:14). “There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it” (1 John 5:16). “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6). Pharaoh repeatedly “hardened his heart” against God, and finally God Himself hardened Pharaoh’s heart (e.g., Exodus 8:15; 10:27). “God gave them up” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

These should be sobering words to anyone who is becoming enchanted with evolutionism, or occultism, or any form of pantheistic humanism. As long as such a person has any qualm of conscience, or even any doubts about the pseudo-scientific philosophy to which he is becoming addicted, there is hope that he might yet turn to the true God of creation. To continue in his present course, however, is presumptuous and deadly. The time will come, perhaps sooner than he thinks, when God will say: “Let him alone.” HMM

Saturday, September 14

The Sun

“Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.” (Psalm 19:5-6)

This well-loved psalm provides us a glimpse of God’s creative majesty: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge” (vv. 1-2).

Modern science has shown that the universe in which we live is really a tri-universe—a continuum of space/time/energy (or information). Thus, the first two verses of this psalm, by focusing our attention on “the heavens . . . the firmament” (space), “day . . . night” (time), and “speech . . . knowledge” (information/energy), reveal a scientific truth long before its “scientific” discovery.

There is, of course, one created source of energy that typifies this energy. Speaking of space and time, the psalmist claims, “In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun” (v. 4), which is further described in our text verses. The sun is like a bridegroom, fully dressed in wedding garb, radiating joy as he comes forth. It is also like a champion runner, fully able to run the race and gain the victory.

The sun’s energy, radiating out in all directions, not only energizes the earth but the entire solar system as well. Furthermore, it is now known that the sun traverses the galaxy in a gigantic orbit with its energy bathing each part. Truly, “there is nothing hid from the heat thereof” (text verse).

Only the Creator of space, time, and energy—the Creator of the sun, the solar system, the Milky Way galaxy, and the universe—could have known these things. That Creator, through the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit, is the author of this psalm. JDM

Sunday, September 15

Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him

“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” (John 15:15)

We possess a special place in God’s heart. Many uplifting hymns have been written over the centuries that can lead us into a deeper love for and greater understanding of our Savior. One such hymn, “Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him,” introduces many important concepts and reasons to praise.

*Praise the Savior, ye who know Him!
Who can tell how much we owe Him?
Gladly let us render to Him
All we are and have.*

Those who know the Savior are bidden to join together in praising Him. As Christians, we not only “know” Him as Savior, He calls us His friends. He identifies His friends by their obedience to His loving commands: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). He proves His friendship through His own sacrifice: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (v. 13). How could we ever repay Him? We cannot.

We can, however, praise Him for all that He is to us and has done for us. We have the privilege of declaring “with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell[ing] of all thy wondrous works” (Psalm 26:7), and “speak[ing] of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works” (Psalm 145:5). “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15). JDM

Monday, September 16

The Name That Charms Us

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”
(1 John 5:13)

The second verse of the sweet hymn “Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him” continues with reasons to praise Him.

*Jesus is the Name that charms us,
He for conflicts fits and arms us;
Nothing moves and nothing harms us
When we trust in Him.*

We are informed in Scripture that He assigns great value and power to His Name. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9-10).

He protects and empowers us to do great things in service to Him. “But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head” (Psalm 3:3). “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler” (Psalm 91:4).

In His service and following His lead, we are victorious. “O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvelous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory” (Psalm 98:1). “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

He is not only the conquering general, He is the Creator as well. We put our trust in Him, for where could our trust be better placed? “Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all” (1 Chronicles 29:11). JDM

Tuesday, September 17

Trust in Him

“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.” (Hebrews 6:18-19)

As children of God, we possess everything we need, from an invincible refuge from the enemy to a certain hope for eternity with our heavenly Father. The third verse of the hymn “Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him” reminds us that our trust in Him is well placed.

*Trust in Him, ye saints, forever;
He is faithful, changing never;
Neither force nor guile can sever
Those He loves from Him.*

Trust in something or someone would be worth much less if the object of our trust might change his mind. Thankfully, our Savior never changes. His love for us is constant. “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war” (Revelation 19:11). As long as we are with Him, we are safe and secure.

Consider that we are safe in Christ’s hand, as He is secure in the Father’s hand. All believers are further sealed by the Holy Spirit. “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29). Who or what could break such a bond?

We have no need to fear. We are safe and secure in Him. JDM

Wednesday, September 18

The Joy That Is Promised

“But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Joshua 22:5)

The fourth verse of the hymn “Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him” reminds us of our responsibility to be faithful to our calling. At our new birth we were fully granted eternal life, a standing we have now, and eternal life is not temporary. Yet we must strive to prove our love by obedience and holiness, and maintain the sweet relationship with God.

*Keep us, Lord, O, keep us cleaving
To Thyself and still believing,
Till the hour of our receiving
Promised joys with Thee.*

While He doesn't need our help in accomplishing His will, we are granted the privilege of serving Him. And we must never come to the place of unbelief. Doubts sometimes come, placed there by the Tempter, but they should drive us to further study, deeper growth, and the eventual resolution of doubt. Doubt must never be allowed to fester into disbelief.

There will come the day when our belief is complete, as faith passes into sight. Unknowable joy will be ours, He promises: “God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:3-5). JDM

Thursday, September 19

Then, Oh Then

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. 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.” (1 John 3:1-2)

The hymn “Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him” was written in the more formal early 1800s, yet it has an almost whimsical approach to its clever rhymes and cadence. A delight to sing, one might at first think it somewhat trivial, but a more careful look finds many rich insights into doctrinal truth. The final verse reflects the promise that one day “we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

*Then we shall be where we would be,
Then we shall be what we should be;
Things which are not now, nor could be,
Soon shall be our own.*

We can scarcely imagine the joys in store for us in Glory. The apostle Paul had similar difficulty, yet he prayed that we might “be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and 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 3:18-19).

As we anticipate what is to come, we can rest in the certain knowledge that all is secure, for He has promised this. Ephesians concludes with this benediction: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21). JDM

Friday, September 20

Scripture and the Christian Life

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” (Psalm 19:7-9)

Most Christians spend little time in the Word of the Lord, and this is a great tragedy. It is the necessary food for health and joy in our spiritual lives. “The sincere milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2) is for “newborn babes” and the “strong meat” is for those who are not “unskilful in the word of righteousness” (Hebrews 5:12-13). “Thy words” are also “honey to my mouth” (Psalm 119:103), and “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD” is the very bread by which “doth man live” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Not only are the Scriptures basic in salvation (2 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 1:23) but also in sanctification and cleansing day by day: “That he might sanctify and cleanse [the church] with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26).

The Scriptures also provide daily guidance for those who will use their directions: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105). Every Christian must be a seed-sowing witness for Christ, and “the seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). In the Christian’s armor, the sole offensive weapon is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17), and this means a victorious life and testimony for the Christian who uses it.

The wonderful testimony of David in our text is the Old Testament equivalent of the great assertion by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” HMM

Saturday, September 21

This Work Was of God

“So the wall was finished. . . . And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.” (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

There have been so many occasions throughout history when God worked mightily either to establish or to preserve America; there can be no doubt that God has uniquely blessed this country. There have always been those who would destroy, establish themselves as dictators, or who have scoffed at or hindered the American experiment in freedom, but in His grace and in His time and way, He has responded with victory.

Similarly, there were many times in the history of God’s chosen nation of Israel when mighty victories were accomplished. In the events surrounding our text, a ragged band of exiles had returned from captivity in Babylon and were attempting to rebuild the broken-down walls of Jerusalem. The detractors were many, saying it couldn’t be done—but it had to be done!

Satanically inspired opposition came through ridicule (Nehemiah 2:19; 4:1-3); threats of invasion (vv. 7-9); discouragement (v. 10); fear of attack (vv. 11-23); internal friction (5:1-5); diplomatic treachery (6:1-8); and lying prophets (6:10-14). But in the face of each threat, Nehemiah was equal to the task. “We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night” (4:9), and eventually, as we read in our text, “the wall was finished.”

Nehemiah’s victory was preceded by his confession of his own sins and that of the people (1:6-11), and the purification and dedication of the people. It was followed by great rejoicing and blessing. Would that America’s present leaders and people would follow this godly example. JDM

Sunday, September 22

Ready and Able

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:17)

The word “perfect” in this verse is *artios*, and it is used only this one time in the Bible. Its basic meaning seems to be “fitted,” or “fresh.” Then, the words “thoroughly furnished” are one word, *exartizo*, in the original, which—interestingly enough—is essentially this same rare word (*artios*) with the prefix *ex* (meaning “out of”) added. It is only used one other time, where it is translated “accomplished” (Acts 21:5).

Putting these concepts together, Paul seems to be saying that the “man of God” is not necessarily a man who is sinlessly perfect but one who is both fresh (*ready* to meet present needs) and fully equipped (*able* to meet present needs).

And, of course, it is significant that this splendid testimony to what a man of God can be—and *should* be—follows immediately upon Paul’s grand testimony to the inspiration and power of the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures, first of all, “are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). Then, they are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (v. 16).

“Doctrine,” more specifically, is *teaching*. “Reproof” is *evidence* or *conviction*. “Correction” is a word used only this one time, and it means *setting straight*. “Instruction” is *chastening*. Then, the end result of the perfect teachings, the convicting evidences, the correcting influences, and the chastening cleansing of the Holy Scriptures is to produce men and women of God who are both ready and able to meet the critical needs of the times in which they live.

By the same token, the large numbers of nominal Christians who do not diligently study, obey, and apply the Holy Scriptures in their lives are not either ready or able to face the awful challenges (vv. 1-14) of these last days. HMM

Monday, September 23

Beware of False Teachers

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.” (2 Peter 3:17)

Peter’s final epistle, especially chapters 2 and 3, is the classic New Testament passage on the false teachers that would plague the church in the “last days” (v. 3). In addition to the characteristics listed in the introductory verse, 2:1 (e.g., slipping in surreptitiously heretical teachings, denying the redemptive work and Lordship of Christ), a number of their attributes are predicted for our guidance, as follows:

They will “wrest the scriptures” (3:16), distorting their literal meaning to conform to their own philosophical preferences. This involves using “feigned words” (2:3)—that is, *plastic* words, with devious meanings to make them say what their users wish to convey. They may well be very eloquent and seductive in their speech, “when they speak great swelling words of vanity” (2:18).

They will deny the doctrine of special creation and the judgment of the worldwide Flood (3:5-6), teaching instead that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (v. 4), and will scoff at the Second Coming. They “despise government” and are “presumptuous” and “selfwilled . . . not afraid to speak evil of dignities” (2:10).

They both practice and defend immoral acts, “having eyes full of adultery” (v. 14). Yet they maintain their religious ties because they have hearts “exercised with covetous practices” (v. 14), seeing nothing evil in taking money for personal gain from those whose faith they seek to undermine.

This is, indeed, a fitting description of many modern liberal theologians, religious bureaucrats in the big denominations, “New Age” preachers, college teachers of religion, etc. Although this is not a pleasant subject, Christians urgently need to awaken to what is happening and “*beware*”! HMM

Tuesday, September 24

Jesus and Jonah

“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” (Jonah 1:17)

The Bible’s most famous “fish story” has been the target of skeptics for hundreds of years, but it was confirmed by none other than the one who Himself had prepared the great fish: “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

Jonah may actually have died and gone to “hell.” “Out of the belly of hell [Hebrew *Sheol*] cried I,” said Jonah, “and thou heardest my voice” (Jonah 2:2). The testimony of Jesus was similar: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [i.e., *Sheol*]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10; also Acts 2:27). Jonah also prayed: “Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God” (Jonah 2:6). His prayer ended: “Salvation is of the LORD” (v. 9), and this is the very meaning of the name “Jesus.”

Thus, 900 years before Christ died and rose again, Jonah died and rose again, a remarkable prophetic type of the mighty miracle that the Lord would accomplish one day to bring salvation and life to a world dead in sin. Only the power of God could direct a prepared fish to save Jonah, then three days later allow him to preach repentance and salvation to the lost souls in Nineveh. Then, finally God Himself, in Christ, died on a cross for the sins of the world, and this time it took the infinite power that created the very universe itself to bring His own soul back from hell and, three days later, to rise again. This is “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19-20). Truly, “a greater than Jonas is here” (Matthew 12:41). HMM

Wednesday, September 25

The Power of the Comforter

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” (John 16:7)

The privilege of declaring the gospel to the unsaved becomes a delightful use of the “power of God” (Romans 1:16), speaking the words of God to a heart that has been prepared by the trifold ministry of the Holy Spirit, who will “reprove the world” (John 16:8) of the following things.

“Of sin because they believe not on me” (v. 9). All sin of every person has been forgiven (1 John 2:2). The only sin that irrevocably condemns is unbelief (John 3:19), or more accurately stated, conscious rebellion against the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He convinces men of their need for salvation through Christ. Rejecting that message is “blasphemy” and is unforgivable (Matthew 12:31).

“Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more” (John 16:10). Now that the Lord Jesus has gone up to heaven, there is “none righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10) visible on Earth—including you and me. The Holy Spirit must convince men that righteousness does exist. Otherwise, there would be no possibility of understanding why we need to be saved.

“Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:11). Some have suggested that the “prince” is Satan. I think not. There is no need to convince us that evil Lucifer needs to be condemned. However, that the sinless Son of God was condemned on Calvary for your sin and mine, now *that* needs supernatural convincing. HMM III

Thursday, September 26

Strength Through Weakness

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)

Here is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life. How could the apostle Paul actually find pleasure in being persecuted or reproached, in being placed in distressing situations, and having to endure bodily pain or weakness? There could be no pleasure at all in such things were it not “for Christ’s sake.”

Paul was a great man of faith and prayer, and he prayed earnestly that God would remove what he called a “thorn in the flesh” (v. 7), evidently some painful infirmity that he felt was hindering his ministry. God answered his prayer, however, by saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9).

Somehow, one of the most powerful testimonies to the truth of Christianity is given when Christians exhibit patience and joy and fruitfulness in the midst of suffering—whether that suffering be due to illness, or persecution, or loss, or any of a hundred situations that could be unbearable apart from Christ. In Paul’s case, he said that his “thorn” could not be removed “lest I should be exalted above measure” (v. 7) because of the great experiences God had given him as a Christian.

“Grace groweth best in the winter,” and we can testify with the psalmist, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Psalm 119:71). One thinks, for example, of Fanny Crosby, blind since early childhood yet enabled to write 8,000 beautiful hymns in her 95 years.

The struggling church at Philadelphia was assured of an open door because it had “little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8). It is precisely when we recognize our own weakness in the flesh that we can become strong in Christ. HMM

Friday, September 27

Thanks Be Unto God

“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)

There are innumerable things for which we could—and should—give thanks to God. But there are three notable gifts mentioned by Paul in his letters to the Corinthians in which he was led to use this particular exclamation: “Thanks be to God.” We shall do well to look at these great blessings, and then—like Paul—pour out our own thanks to God for them!

The first is in our text above, giving thanks for God’s gift of victory. And what victory is that? “Death is swallowed up in victory” (v. 54), and death has lost its terrible sting for the believer, for Christ conquered death forever when He died for our sins and rose again.

The second is similar yet goes beyond even the first gift: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place” (2 Corinthians 2:14). Not only victory over death but victory in life!

By the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ, we are enabled to triumph over circumstances and “shew forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). But the greatest gift of all is Christ Himself! Therefore, we join with the apostle Paul as he exclaims, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15). “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” (John 3:16). The value of this gift is beyond language to describe, “unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). The Lord Jesus Christ is both our Creator and Savior, giving us triumphant peace and joy in life, and eternal victory over death. Thanks be unto God! HMM

Saturday, September 28

Sing and Give Thanks

“Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.” (Psalm 30:4)

When we do remember God’s holiness and then remember how the mighty seraphim in the heavenly temple are continually crying out “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3), and then further remember the prophet’s prayer acknowledging to God that: “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13), and then still further remember that, as Paul said: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18), we can only marvel at the infinite mercy and grace of God. He has not only forgiven our sins, saved our souls, and promised us eternal life, but “daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation” (Psalm 68:19). What can we do except to perpetually “sing unto the LORD, . . . and give thanks,” as David exhorts us in our text for today.

But how can this be? A God who is too pure and holy even to “look on iniquity,” yet promises unworthy creatures such as us that “goodness and mercy shall follow [us] all the days of [our lives]: and [we] will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalm 23:6). How *can* that be?

This could not be, of course, were it not for the incredible love of God in Christ, who “hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). “The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Therefore: “Be ye thankful. . . . 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). HMM

Sunday, September 29

In Everything Give Thanks

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herds in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

It is easy to be happy and cheerful in times of prosperity, when one has all the comforts of an affluent lifestyle and everything seems to be going well. The testing times come, however, when these material comforts are somehow taken away, and one feels defeated and all alone.

Except for God! Whatever else may fail, God “will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Since we still have the Lord (assuming we have trusted Him for forgiveness and salvation through Christ), we can always “rejoice in the LORD, . . . in the God of my salvation.”

Job, for example, lost all his possessions, then his children, finally his health, and even his wife turned against him. Yet he could say: “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

God has commanded the Christian: “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Not for everything, but *in* everything!

This has always been one of the greatest testimonies a Christian can give to an unbeliever—the testimony of a life rejoicing in God’s salvation even in the midst of trouble. This was the example of Christ Himself, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). HMM

Monday, September 30

The Real and the Unreal World

“He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and he hath set the world upon them.” (1 Samuel 2:8)

The above text contains the first reference in the Bible to God’s world. The “pillars” upon which it is set are, literally, “firm summits” (not “columns”), speaking of its permanence, “established that it shall not be moved” through the eternal ages when “the LORD reigneth” (Psalm 96:10).

That is the real world, where all who have been “raised up” by the Lord through faith in His Word will “inherit the throne of glory” and reign with Him forever. But that real world has, for a time, become “this present evil world” (Galatians 1:4), often mistakenly represented by its worldly inhabitants as *their* “real” world. In reality, this present world is very ephemeral, for “the world passeth away” (1 John 2:17).

This present unreal world has become the domain of Satan, “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4), for “the whole world lieth in wickedness [or ‘the wicked one’]” (1 John 5:19). Consequently, it is essential for believers now living in the world to heed the Lord’s warning: “I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19).

The “world” includes its inhabitants and the world system they have developed. This present world, because of sin, has become so unreal that it no longer even knows its Creator. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (John 1:10). Nevertheless, “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17). We can defeat this present evil world and prepare for our eternal service in the real world to come. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). HMM

Tuesday, October 1

The Law for Today

“And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deuteronomy 4:8)

God has never dealt with any nation as closely and fully as He has with Israel, but He nevertheless is directly concerned with every nation as a national entity. He has actually established each nation Himself (Deuteronomy 32:8), even determining the geographical boundaries of each and the time when each would rise and fall (Acts 17:26).

Every nation has a purpose in history, but Israel had the highest calling of all. God personally gave them (through Moses) the finest governmental and legal system any nation ever had (Deuteronomy 4:5-8), and modern governments would therefore do well to emulate these, in so far as possible. In fact, it is amazing that this Mosaic legal code has since served effectively as the basic legal code for all the greatest nations in modern history. This, in itself, is clear testimony to its divine origin and is therefore justification for retaining and implementing it wherever possible, even today.

Sadly, however, modern political and judicial practices are departing further and further from this divine standard. The philosophies of evolution and relativism dominate our schools of law today, and the concept of absolute principles of righteousness and justice, rooted in the nature of God as Creator and in His revelation, are largely being replaced by legislation based on evolving social policies and preferences. Even the Ten Commandments are banned from our schools, despite the fact that they are engraved in the Supreme Court building itself.

It is sobering to consider that God did not even spare His beloved nation Israel when His people departed from His law. Nor will He spare America if our growing rebellion against His Word goes on much longer. HMM

Wednesday, October 2

The Sign of Science and Travel

“But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Daniel 12:4)

The book of Daniel contains the most detailed description of the end times of any book in the Bible except the book of Revelation. In Daniel’s last chapter, after all the prophecies had been recorded, the condition in our text was given as a sign of their imminent fulfillment at “the time of the end.”

A more striking summary of our own times could hardly be imagined. The Hebrew word for “run to and fro” is used first in 2 Chronicles 16:9. “The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth,” and its sense is “race back and forth.” What a description of our present society, with speeding automobiles all over the land and airplanes filling our skies! In little more than one lifetime, the world “progressed” from horse and buggy to spacecraft, and almost everyone is racing to and fro.

Furthermore, “knowledge” has been “increased” far beyond the wildest imaginations of people in the days of our founding fathers. The Hebrew word could well be understood as what we mean today by “science.”

It is significant that the foundations of our modern scientific age were laid mostly by great scientists who were creationists (Newton, Boyle, Pascal, Pasteur, Faraday, Maxwell, etc.). In our present generation, however, science has been largely taken over by non-Christian evolutionists, and science has also generated deadly instruments of destruction and pollution that are threatening life’s existence. This rise in “science falsely so called” is also given as a sign of the last days (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Peter 3:3-4; etc.).

In any case, the explosive increase in science (both true and false) and rapid travel in our day is one of the many God-given signs that the return of Christ is near! HMM

Thursday, October 3

The Savior of the World

“And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” (1 John 4:14)

This unique title of the Lord Jesus Christ assures us that when the Father sent His Son away from the glories of heaven down to a world lost in sin, it was not just to be the Messiah of the Jews, or to assume David’s throne as King of Israel, or to punish the wicked Gentile nations.

“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17).

In fact, this special title is used only one other time in the Bible, and it was used by Samaritans rather than Jews when they came to know Jesus as He ministered among them for two days. These people were mostly of Gentile background with a mixture of Israeli blood who had become adherents of a quasi-Jewish religion that was also part pagan.

But they were actually looking for a Savior, and their testimony after meeting Jesus was: “Now we believe . . . and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). They perceived that He had come to bring salvation to lost sinners in every nation, not just to Israel or Samaria. As He said later, “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47).

And so He commanded His disciples “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations” (Luke 24:47). He became to the Father “the propitiation . . . for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2) when He offered up His life as a sacrifice for sins, then died and rose again. We who have believed on Him as our personal Savior are now to be His witnesses “in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). HMM

Blessings We Have in Christ

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Corinthians 5:1)

The blessings we have in Christ are far too many to number, but it is a blessing even to note just a few of those indicated by the words *we have* or *ye have*. First of all, in Christ “*we have* redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). As a result, “being justified by faith, *we have* peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

Thus, through such promises, His Word assures us of salvation. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that *ye have* eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Further assurance is given by the witness of the Spirit who indwells our bodies when we believe on Christ. “*Ye have* received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

There are many other blessings that are ours in Christ. In Him, for example, “*we have* obtained an inheritance” (Ephesians 1:11), for we are joint-heirs with Him. God has even confirmed His promises, the writer of Hebrews says, by taking an oath in His own name that “*we might have* a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope *we have* as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Hebrews 6:18-19). Indeed, “*we have* a great high priest” (Hebrews 4:14) ever living to intercede for us at the throne of God.

Finally, in the words of our text, when God calls us home, “*we have* a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” and then we are “to be present with the Lord” throughout the ages to come (2 Corinthians 5:8). These are a few of the blessings we have in Christ. HMM

Saturday, October 5

First Things First

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

There are innumerable things to do and things to buy and things to read. How does one choose between them? An important guideline is the use of the word “first” in the New Testament. For example, consider the following priority items.

Priority in awareness: “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers . . . saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for . . . all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3-4). The primary intellectual heresy of these latter times is the anti-God philosophy of naturalistic evolutionism, as succinctly outlined in this passage.

Priority in behavior: “Cleanse first that which is within the cup and the platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matthew 23:26). The thoughts of our hearts will inevitably control the words on our lips and the works of our hands.

Priority in giving: “[They] first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:5). One’s possessions, talents, time, and all other resources belong to the Lord, but such gifts are acceptable to God only when offered by one whose heart first has been given fully to Him.

Priority in witness: “For I delivered unto you first of all . . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Priority in concern: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men” (1 Timothy 2:1).

Finally, as the Lord Jesus Himself has commanded, our first priority in every decision should be to do that which honors the kingdom of Christ and His righteousness. HMM

Sunday, October 6

Prayer for Peter and James

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” (Acts 12:1-2)

Verse 2 of our text rather casually records what may have been one of the lowest points of apostolic time. James was killed with the sword—James, one of the only three disciples in Christ’s inner circle. He was one of only three to witness the resurrection of the synagogue ruler’s daughter (Luke 8:51-55); one of three to catch a glimpse of Christ’s glory at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-2); and one of only four to sit with Christ on the Mount of Olives and learn of the future (Mark 13:3-4). In Gethsemane, after their last supper together, Christ allowed him, along with Peter and John, to witness His agony in a special way (Mark 14:32-34).

He was highly trained by Christ Himself, and the fledgling church could ill afford to lose his leadership. But suddenly he was arrested and slain! A tragedy it would seem to lose such a leader. Think what James might have accomplished had he lived longer, much as Peter and John did. Could it be, however, that his martyrdom was a blessing in disguise? Certainly God allowed this to happen, but for what purpose?

The answer may be found in the verses following our text. Peter had been taken prisoner and was to be executed the next morning (Acts 12:6). However, the church had learned a lesson. No prayer for James is recorded, but for Peter, “prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5), and Peter was miraculously freed by an angel and joined the prayer meeting.

What would have happened had the believers prayed for James as they did for Peter? Of course, that question has no definite answer, but prayer such as was offered for Peter followed the apostles and early church leaders in their work from that time on. JDM

Monday, October 7

The Brightness of His Rising

“And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” (Isaiah 60:3)

This beautiful Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament book of Isaiah compares the coming of Christ to the rising of the sun.

The rest of this chapter in Isaiah seems to stress His coming in glory at the future end of the age (e.g., “the LORD shall be thine everlasting light,” Isaiah 60:20), but our text verse had at least a precursive fulfillment when the Gentile wise men from the east came to Bethlehem to honor Jesus soon after His birth.

Other Messianic prophecies used a similar metaphor. For example, there is Malachi 4:2: “Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.”

Christ Himself made the same comparison. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). He would not serve as the light for only the Jews; He is the light of the whole world!

The theme of global light through Christ is often found in the Old Testament. “I the LORD . . . will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles. . . . It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

It will all be perfectly and eternally fulfilled in the New Jerusalem, “for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: . . . for there shall be no night there” (Revelation 21:23-25). HMM

Lo, I Come

“Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.” (Hebrews 10:7)

These marvelous words (in Hebrews 10:5-7) are an interpretive quotation from Psalm 40:6-8, which in turn was being cited prophetically as the testimony of the eternal Son of God as He prepared to leave heaven and “the bosom of the Father” (note John 1:18) to descend to Earth to become also “the Son of man,” with no “where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20).

He first took up residence on Earth in the womb of Mary, then in a manger, then a house in Bethlehem, then somewhere in Egypt until the death of King Herod, who had tried to kill Him, then in the home of his foster father in a despised village, eventually on a cross on which His enemies would impale Him, and finally for three days in a borrowed tomb.

And all this, amazingly, was to do the will of His Father in heaven, which He fully understood would include the terrible death of the cross. “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again” (John 10:17).

We can never comprehend such love—only believe it and receive it. “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” (John 3:16). Now we can testify with Paul “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God [*His* faith, not ours!], who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

But anyone who ignores that love should note this sobering truth: “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). HMM

Wednesday, October 9

Everything Beautiful in His Time

“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

In verses 2–8 of Ecclesiastes 3 appears a remarkable listing of 28 “times,” arranged in 14 pairs of opposites (e.g., “a time to be born, and a time to die,” v. 2). The entire section is introduced by God’s definitive statement: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (v. 1). It is then climaxed by His remarkable assurance in the words of our text for the day. Everything that God has made is *beautiful* in its appropriate time—even death and war, killing and hating, and all the other “negatives” in the list, as well as the 14 “positives”—healing and loving, building and planting, and many others.

The pronoun (implied) could be either “its” or “His,” and since all our “times” are “in thy hand” (Psalm 31:15), it is fitting to recognize that the appropriate time for “every purpose under heaven” is *His* time—God’s time.

Thus, everything that God has made is, in fact, beautiful when accomplished in His own time, in His way, as set forth in His Word. We may not understand many things in *our* time, for “no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.” Nevertheless, when God made us, He “set the world in [our hearts],” so that the very deepest roots of our nature assure us that God exists and cares. The Hebrew word for “world” means, literally, that “world without end” (compare Ephesians 3:21). Thus, all that happens to us, if accepted and applied according to God’s Word, becomes beautiful, and “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). HMM

Thursday, October 10

The Man Child

“And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.” (Revelation 12:5)

This remarkable scene was part of a great vision given to the apostle John as the Lord was revealing to him “the things which shall be hereafter” (Revelation 1:19). He had seen an amazing “sign” in heaven—a woman “clothed with the sun . . . travailing in birth,” with “a great red dragon” awaiting the delivery and ready “to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Revelation 12:1-4).

Although the whole vision is richly symbolic, the figure of the man child clearly refers to Jesus Christ, because it is He alone who must eventually rule all nations “with a rod of iron” (Revelation 19:15). Thus, the symbolic “woman” must suggest His human mother, Mary, but also Eve, the “mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20), for in His human birth, the Son of God became also “the Son of man” (Acts 7:56; Revelation 1:13). The vision, in fact, dramatizes the long warfare between the great dragon (i.e., Satan—Revelation 12:9) and the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15).

In the vision, the “man child” will have been “caught up” (i.e., “raptured”) to heaven, and the dragon and his angels “cast out” to earth (Revelation 12:5-9). But when Christ returns from heaven, all believers, living and dead, will also be “caught up” to meet Him in the air, and thus may well be included in the man child of the great “sign.”

There has been continuous warfare between the seed of the Serpent and the spiritual seed of the woman. The Dragon is forever “wroth with the woman” and with “the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17). But Christ will finally prevail and cast Satan into the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). HMM

Friday, October 11

The Man Born Blind

“And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” (John 9:2-3)

Mankind has always found it easy to fall into the trap of thinking that suffering of any sort is due to sin. To be sure, much suffering is due to sin, and even after repentance and forgiveness, scars may remain. Furthermore, evil and its attendant grief surround us. Our civilization is plagued by sin and its evil fruits—some of which reach even the most godly Christian. Indeed, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain” (Romans 8:22) as a result of the curse brought about by sin. If there had been no sin, there would have been no suffering.

But this does not imply that all personal suffering stems from personal sin. The blind man was the way he was to bring glory to God, we are told. Although many at the time failed to recognize “the works of God” when this man was healed, countless millions have glorified God throughout the centuries for this act of creation.

Now some may ask, how could God have been glorified in this grown man’s life of blindness up until his healing? Actually, all life is a miracle, even the single-cell amoeba. Nothing living could possibly have arisen by accident, and as such testifies to the marvelous “works of God.” In this case, the item of interest was a human being, complete with fully functioning organs and systems. Even though he could not see, he could smell, taste, hear, speak, touch, move, walk, eat, breathe, digest, think, etc. This could not be the result of time and chance acting on “primeval slime,” as the evolutionist would claim. Any living system points to a loving Designer. Those who “willingly are ignorant” (2 Peter 3:5) of such facts are more blind than the Pharisees. JDM

Saturday, October 12

The Wisdom of God

“And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.” (1 Kings 3:28)

Although God’s wisdom is expounded in depth in the Scriptures, there are only seven times that the specific phrase “the wisdom of God” is used as such. The above text is indicating that God’s wisdom can actually be manifested in men through divine inspiration. The Persian king recognized this also in Ezra. “And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges . . . all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not” (Ezra 7:25). The wisdom of God thus is always consistent with the laws of God—that is, with the Scriptures.

The first New Testament reference is from Christ. “Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles” (Luke 11:49). Here the Lord is applying a scriptural principle from 2 Chronicles 36:15-16, in effect calling the Scriptures themselves “the wisdom of God.”

Then Paul three times uses the same phrase: “In the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God.” Human wisdom can never, by itself, discover God, but this very fact is bound up in the divine wisdom, revealed only through the Word of God. “We preach . . . Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” That is, through both the written word and the living Word, we can proclaim true wisdom. “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery . . . which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Corinthians 1:21, 23-24; 2:7).

Finally, with God’s wisdom manifested through chosen men of God, we also can preach true wisdom in Christ, “to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:10). HMM

Sunday, October 13

Walking in the Spirit

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1)

This promise in our text is followed in a later Pauline epistle by two nuanced commands in the letter to the church at Galatia.

“This I say then,” Paul says, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Then again, “if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

Although they appear to be the same command in English, there is a significant distinction in the original Greek language in which Paul penned the letters.

Both the Romans 8:1 and the Galatians 5:16 passages use the word *perepeto*, which carries the connotation to “walk around” and to “be at liberty.”

The second iteration in Galatians 5:25 uses *stoicheo*, which means to “step precisely,” to “march,” or to “go in procession.” Same command but different emphasis.

The context of Galatians 5 stresses the difference between a lifestyle of fleshly behavior and a life controlled by the Holy Spirit. The “fruits” of the flesh and the “fruit” of the Spirit are diametrically opposed. They cannot exist together; they are not harmonious (Romans 8:5-8). We either “mind” the things of the flesh or the “things of the Spirit” (Romans 8:5).

The Christian walk has great liberty (Romans 8:21), but that liberty must “step precisely” in honesty (Romans 13:13), good works (Ephesians 2:10), and in truth (2 John 4-6). Our walk is expected to be by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), and we are to conduct a spiritual warfare in the Holy Spirit’s power (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) protected by the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). HMM III

The Power to Edify

“Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.”
(2 Corinthians 13:10)

The Greek word *oikodemos* (translated as “edification”) pictures the building of a house. We still use the word edifice to describe a structure of some importance. Paul specifically said he had the “power” to edify and later called himself a “wise masterbuilder,” an *architekton*, who laid the foundation on which we would later build (1 Corinthians 3:10).

When Jesus used *oikodemos* to depict those who might build their house on a rock (His Word) or the sand (the ideas of men), He was painting a picture of how we should edify each other (Luke 6:48-49). The various gifts of leadership are to be used to “perfect” the saints in the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12), using the living “stones” that will build the “spiritual house” of God (1 Peter 2:5).

And like any good builder, the Christian carpenter has tools of the trade to assist the process. There are “things which make for peace” that must be employed (Romans 14:19). Most certainly “charity” is a major tool (1 Corinthians 8:1), along with good communication that does not “corrupt” the building work (Ephesians 4:29).

Since “all things” are to be done so that the church is edified (1 Corinthians 14:26), it surely follows that “fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions” are not helpful (1 Timothy 1:4). Effective communication demands that those with whom we are speaking understand what is said, hence a mysterious “tongue” does not publicly edify like prophecy does (1 Corinthians 14:2-4).

An “edified” church walks “in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:31). HMM III

Tuesday, October 15

A Truly New Thing

“How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.” (Jeremiah 31:22)

Long ago, the wise man concluded: “There is no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). That nothing is now being created is even recognized as a scientific law.

But God reminds us as He reminded His backsliding people of Israel that He has, indeed, created one new thing in the earth. Since only God can “create,” a really new thing would have to be produced directly by the Lord Himself. Of course, God had completed His original work of creating all things long ago (Genesis 2:1-3), including a marvelous mechanism for human reproduction. Nevertheless, because of man’s sin, He very soon had to begin a work of reconciliation, and this included a primeval promise that “the seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15) would come someday to accomplish this great work. Since all normal reproduction requires male seed, such a miracle would mean God would have to create a new thing when the appropriate time would come. At that time, as Isaiah prophesied many years later, “a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,” and that Son would be “the mighty God,” who would establish His kingdom “with justice from henceforth even for ever” (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7).

Then, still later, Jeremiah reminded his forgetful people of this same great promise: God would create, by His mighty power, a new thing, a perfect human body, without inherited sin or physical blemish, and with no contribution from either male or female, in the womb of a specially called virgin. She would compass that “holy thing” (Luke 1:35) with warmth and love for nine long months as it grew in her womb. Then, in the fullness of time, “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Galatians 4:4), to “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). HMM

Wednesday, October 16

Out of the Ivory Palaces

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

Psalm 45 is one of the Messianic psalms, quoted as such in Hebrews 1:8-9. The section so quoted (vv. 6-7), which immediately precedes our text, begins with one Person of the Godhead addressing the Messiah also as “God,” whose throne is eternal. Then, He says, “Oh God, . . . thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” The “oil of gladness” was the holy oil used for the anointing of priests and kings and was compounded of a mixture of spices that included myrrh and cassia (Exodus 30:22-25). Since the Messiah had been anointed to be “above his fellows” (first as High Priest, then as King of kings), “all his garments” would bear the sweet aroma of the holy ointment.

At the birth of Christ, His garments were “swaddling clothes,” and the gifts of the eastern wise men included a supply of myrrh and frankincense (Luke 2:7; Matthew 2:11). At His death, they gave Him to drink “wine mingled with myrrh [and] . . . parted his garments” (Mark 15:23-24). Then once again His body was wrapped in linen clothes and anointed with myrrh and aloes (John 19:39-40) for His burial.

The psalmist sees Christ (i.e., “Messiah,” both Greek and Hebrew titles meaning “the Anointed One”) emerging triumphantly from the “ivory palaces.” These mansions with their ivory walls and pearly gates are of shimmering white beauty in the distant heavenly city that will someday descend to Earth (Revelation 21:2, 10-21).

The Lord descended once from these ivory palaces to take on human flesh in Mary’s womb, thence to a burial in Joseph’s tomb. But someday He will again come forth, anointed as eternal King, and then “shall the people praise thee for ever and ever” (Psalm 45:17). HMM

Thursday, October 17

The Amen

“For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” (2 Corinthians 1:20)

The word “amen” is a most remarkable word. It is transliterated directly from the Hebrew into the Greek of the New Testament, then into Latin and into English and many other languages so that it is practically a universal word. It has been called the best-known word in human speech.

The word is directly related—in fact, almost identical—to the Hebrew word for “believe” (*aman*), or “faithful.” Thus, it came to mean “sure” or “truly,” an expression of absolute trust and confidence. When one believes God, he indicates his faith by an “amen.” When God makes a promise, the believer’s response is “amen”—“so it will be!” In the New Testament it is often translated “verily” or “truly.” When we pray according to His Word and His will, we know God will answer, so we close with an “amen,” and so also do we conclude a great hymn or anthem of praise and faith.

The word is even a title of Christ Himself. The last of His letters to the seven churches begins with a remarkable salutation by the glorified Lord: “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (Revelation 3:14). We can be preeminently certain that His Word is always faithful and true because He is none other than the Creator of all things, and thus He is our eternal “Amen.”

As our text reminds us, every promise of God in Christ is “yea and amen,” as strong an affirmation of truth as can be expressed in the Greek language.

It is, therefore, profoundly meaningful that the entire Bible closes with an “amen.” “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Revelation 22:21), assuring everyone who reads these words that the whole Book is absolutely true and trustworthy. Amen! HMM

Friday, October 18

God Knows Me

“O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.” (Psalm 139:1)

Perhaps the most frightening attribute of God is that He knows everything about us. Everything! He has “searched” (literally “penetrated”) us and “known” (“understood”) us. And since God is both omnipresent and omniscient, it obviously follows that nothing escapes His conscious knowledge about us. He observes our ordinary activities (v. 2) and our innermost thoughts. “Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways” (v. 3). The Hebrew word translated “compassest” suggests that He actually sees the formation of the words in our tongues before we begin to speak them (v. 4). That means that we are transparent to Him; we cannot deceive Him in any way. He knows what we are going to think; we cannot hide anything from Him. God knows what only we know about ourselves and those things we won’t even admit to ourselves.

Furthermore, He is everywhere around each one of us (vv. 7-10), wherever we are or could be. He fills all space, and there is no escape. We cannot hide from God. He is wherever we go. The apostle Paul once observed: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). This very intimate and complete knowledge about us is what makes God’s salvation such a marvelous matter. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8). God loves us in spite of what we have become. Yet, since He knows what we *could* be, He gives us eternal life through His Son so that we will realize, one day, what He knows we *shall* be. HMM

Saturday, October 19

It Is Christ

“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.” (Romans 8:34)

In our text, Paul asks if there is anyone who can issue a guilty sentence against believers. In light of all Christ has done and the fact that the Father “hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22), only Christ has the authority to condemn. Will Christ condemn those for whom He died? Obviously not, and Paul gives four reasons why the very suggestion is absurd.

First: “It is Christ that died.” He is the very one who left heaven to die as a substitute for us. True, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), but “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Certainly, the one who bore condemnation for us will not turn and condemn us.

Second: He “is risen again.” He did not stay in the grave but rose victorious, proving that God the Father had accepted His sacrifice. Certainly “the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18) who desires “that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29) will not turn and thwart His own work and plan.

Third: He is even now “at the right hand of God,” where He is, among other things, preparing a place for us (John 14:2-3). He intends for us to join Him and will not condemn us. One would think He had done enough for us, but no.

Fourth: He “also maketh intercession for us.” As long as we, His “brethren,” still live, He is interceding to God on our behalf. He asks the Father for our acceptance, not for our condemnation.

If the only one with authority to condemn will not condemn, then we have the assurance that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). JDM

Sunday, October 20

Renewing of the Holy Spirit

“. . . *the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*” (Titus 3:5)

The Holy Spirit’s eternal impacts on our lives (regeneration and renewal) are brought together in this text in a rather unique way. To begin with, the Greek words are unusual—“regeneration” being used only twice in the New Testament and “renewal” only five times in various forms. They come together only in this passage.

“Regeneration” (*paliggenesia*) means to “birth again.” The connection to our salvation is well established and does not need much explanation here. “Renewal” (*anakainosis*) in its variations is a bit more difficult to describe—especially since there is the possible linguistic connection to the “washing” (bath) of regeneration. That is, the section could be translated “the Holy Spirit’s bath of regeneration and renewing”—thus equating the two terms. Most translations, however, treat the terms as separate actions or conditions for which the Holy Spirit is responsible. This fits best with the rest of the biblical data.

Perhaps the most well-known passage focusing on renewal is Romans 12:1-2. In this precious reference, we are commanded to present (yield) our bodies as holy and acceptable living sacrifices, and to refuse to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed (*metamorphoo* = “permanent change”) by the renewing of our mind. The instrument by which the transformation comes about is the new mind (intellect)—a grace-gift imputed at salvation by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:16; Hebrews 10:16). This renewal takes place in the “inward man” (2 Corinthians 4:16), which “is renewed in knowledge” (Colossians 3:10) according to the image of the Creator. Thus, the renewal comes about intellectually, through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit, as we seek, study, store, and obey the magnificent Word of God. HMM III

Monday, October 21

The Active Power of Faith

“And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

When God grants the gift of faith that enables us at the point of salvation (Ephesians 2:8), it should not be seen as a static power that merely resides in our minds but rather an empowerment that is expected to grow into a dynamic and demonstrable “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4-9).

Faith preserves and protects us. Jesus insisted, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). These words are precise. Once faith is exercised, an eternal transaction takes place wherein a person is “passed” from spiritual death to eternal life. This is an absolute change and eliminates the possibility of hell (John 10:28-29).

Faith is power for effective prayer. The “mustard seed” promise in Matthew 17:20 does not refer to size or amount but to quality. The Greek comparative *hoce*, translated “as” in that passage, refers to the same kind of faith as the mustard seed. Just so, the promise of Matthew 7:7 (that if you ask and seek, you will find) depends on our confidence (faith) in the heavenly Father.

Faith is our “shield” against the Enemy. The seven pieces of God’s armor identified in Ephesians 6:10-18 include “the shield of faith” that provides an ability “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (v. 16). That shield is defensive in the sense that it only provides protection when we use it to block the “darts.” The active use comes when we “resist the devil” (James 4:7) “in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9).

Do you use faith as God intended? HMM III

Tuesday, October 22

Godly Derision and Wrath

“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.” (Psalm 2:4-5)

What does an individual gain by opposing God and His plan? Can human opposition succeed against the Almighty One who created the universe? Obviously, no rebellion has a chance to succeed. God’s sovereign control will certainly overpower man’s feeble attempts to wrest command from Him. He will simply laugh in derision.

However difficult it is for us to imagine God laughing in this manner, we can surely understand His derision at the futility of created beings confronting their Creator and His right to rule over their lives. The name used for God is Lord, meaning Master. As Creator He has the authority to set the rules for His creation and the power to exact the penalty for breaking the rules.

Note that His response exceeds mere derision. It extends to “wrath.” At the appointed time, the sovereign Judge will address all those who have rebelled against and opposed Him.

Man has no right to question God’s authority or goodness in exercising it. Indeed, “the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). He even sacrificed His only begotten Son to pay the just penalty for sin. What more could He do?

With our sin penalty fully paid, our sin is forgiven, and we gratefully acknowledge His kingship over our lives. Once submitted to Him, we face everlasting fellowship with Him. With sin banished, believers need never fear His derision or wrath. JDM

Wednesday, October 23

The Power of Forgiveness

“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 26:18)

There is a historical point in our earthly lives at which the forgiveness of Christ was granted—even though He was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8) and in the eternal sense we were “predestined” to be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

Christ has subdued, cleansed, and forgotten our sins. Our human minds will never comprehend what it cost the triune Godhead to “subdue our iniquities” and metaphorically throw our sins “into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). How is it possible for an omniscient God to blot out and forget our sins? Yet the Scriptures clearly tell us that He does so (Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; Acts 3:19). God’s forgiveness is an eternal act of forgetfulness as well as judicial payment and propitiation.

Christ has replaced our sins with His holiness. Of course this must be! A holy God cannot fellowship with an unholy being. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” We must be “made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21) so that He “might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

Christ has given us victory over sin. Since all of the above (and more) is true and active in the life of every believer, there should be an obvious exhilaration that enables us to confidently stand against whatever “fiery darts” the Enemy throws at us. “Sin shall not have dominion over you,” we are clearly told in Romans 6:14. Since the “offense” of sin was dealt with on the cross, we should “reign in life” by Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).

Do you rejoice in your forgiveness and therefore reign over sin in your life? God has made this possible. HMM III

Thursday, October 24

The Power of Grace

“Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.” (Ephesians 3:7)

In the New Testament, the words for gift and grace are very closely related. The Greek term *charis* is most frequently translated “grace,” and *charisma* is most often rendered “gift.” We who are twice-born are to use our “gift” with one another as “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

When God gifts us with faith so that we are saved by His grace (Ephesians 2:8), we are then “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). This “new man” is granted the potential to understand the “exceeding greatness of his power” (Ephesians 1:19) and to participate in the “divine nature” so that we are able to escape the corruption that pervades the lust of this godless world (2 Peter 1:4).

When we preach the gospel, we are using “the power of God” that will result in the salvation of those who respond (Romans 1:16). Right after the day of Pentecost, the apostles gave testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in a demonstration of that power so that “great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). The message and the power and the grace of God are inseparable.

When our lives radically changed in response to the “new man” created in us by God, they did so by “the grace of our Lord” that is “exceeding abundant with faith and love” (1 Timothy 1:14). When we access the strength to rise above our infirmities or difficult circumstances, we are experiencing the Lord’s grace that is sufficient to deal with or overcome whatever may be hindering us (2 Corinthians 12:9).

When we “work out” the salvation God has “graced” us with, we can be sure that God is working in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). HMM III

Friday, October 25

The Heavens Declare

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.” (Psalm 19:1)

This verse has been a favorite of many who recognize God’s creatorship. The vastness of space “declares” His power and sovereign control over all and calls us to worship Him as not only Creator but Savior as well. In what ways do the heavens speak?

The orderly progression of day and night reminds us of God’s purpose in creating the heavenly bodies, that they should be “signs” for us to aid in telling time and the passage of time (Genesis 1:14). The sun’s light energizes Earth’s processes. From photosynthesis to tidal and atmospheric movements, the Creator can be recognized as the great Provider.

The “line” mentioned in Psalm 19:4 is that of a surveyor’s line, true and accurate. It represents the absolute standard by which our conduct is measured. Just as surely as an Earth-encircling line demarcates light and darkness, so God’s holy nature measures and evaluates our behavior.

The sun’s light extends outward in all directions, not just toward Earth. Light generates heat, thus “there is nothing hid from the heat thereof” (v. 6). This life-sustaining light can be compared to a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, anxious to receive his bride, and a strong man, an athlete ready to claim the championship (v. 5). In a similar manner, God delights in supplying every need of His children. He is near and ever-powerful. We can ask Him for anything at any time, He loves us that much.

From this poetic rehearsal of some of God’s immutable attributes, we can learn much of both His nature and our relationship to Him. While Psalm 19 does not teach in a didactic fashion, it can thrill our spirits and motivate us to draw nearer to Him. JDM

Saturday, October 26

We Are His Image

“And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (Colossians 3:10)

Man’s body is made of the same “earth” material (Genesis 2:7) as the animals (v. 19) and as the earth itself (Genesis 1:10). Furthermore, he shares the created “soul” (Hebrew *nephesh*) and “spirit” (Hebrew *ruach*, same as “breath”) with the animals (compare 1:21; 7:15, where *nephesh* and *ruach* respectively are used of the animals). However, he shares the created “image of God” (1:27) only with God Himself.

Ever since Adam and Eve first sinned, all people have been born in innate rebellion against Him. The image of God in man has been grievously marred, and we are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

However, as our text reminds us, the image of God in man can be “renewed” through the great miracle of the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). And this includes more than just our soul/spirit nature, for we have His gracious promise that our own resurrection bodies will be “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21) when He comes again.

Evidently, God had all this in mind from the very beginning, when “in the likeness of God made he him” (Genesis 5:1). That is, He foreknew that He would one day become man, in the person of Jesus Christ, and so He created man in the image and likeness of that body/soul/spirit complex that He Himself would eventually assume.

In some mysterious way, Christ Himself is, in His eternal and glorified human body, the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), and God amazingly has even predestinated us “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29), and “we shall be like him” when we finally “see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). HMM

Sunday, October 27

The Power of a Sound Mind

“For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

The gift spoken of in the previous verse is based on a transfer of authority from God, and we are exhorted to “stir up” that gift (2 Timothy 1:6) *because* God did not give us a “spirit of fear.” The word *deilia* stresses timidity or cowardice, not terror. The gift does not function well if we are too timid to use it.

The gift referred to is not power. That spiritual gift comes with *dunamis*—the innate ability to “do” the gift. Whatever the Holy Spirit has gifted us with upon our entrance into the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 12:4-11), that gift comes with the power necessary to implement and use it.

The gift also comes with love. Again, love is not the gift, it is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit that comes with the gift. Were it not for the reflection in us of the unilateral and sacrificial love of our Redeemer, these supernatural gifts could well be misused, distorted, and abused for personal glory. Diotrefes misused his gift, failing to employ the spirit of love (3 John 1:9).

The unique Greek word *sophronismos* (sound mind) is a combination of the verbs “to save” and “to control.” Its basic meaning would be “safe control” or “wholesome control”—perhaps even “control that saves”—the perfect combination of abilities that empower the gift, the love that keeps the gift focused on others, and the “safety controls” to keep it from unwittingly doing damage.

“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). HMM III

Monday, October 28

For Ever and Ever...

“The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.” (Exodus 15:18)

The Bible is a book of eternity, its words “for ever . . . settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89). The theme of eternity is prominent throughout; in fact, the words “for ever,” “everlasting,” and the like occur more than 600 times. Many occurrences (49, to be exact) seem to make the concept even more complete, being combined either as “for ever and ever” or “from everlasting to everlasting.”

The first of these is in our text: “The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.” He is the eternal King of all creation! How beautiful and appropriate it is, then, to find that the last (the 49th) of these occurrences tells us that we—His redeemed saints—also “shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

To note just a few of the other truths that will last for ever and ever, consider first of all the creation: “Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. . . . For he commanded, and they were created. He that also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass” (Psalm 148:3, 5-6). Not only the world of God but also the Word of God shall endure eternally. “All his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. . . . So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever” (Psalm 111:7-8; 119:44).

On the other hand, those who reject God and His Word will endure forever but will be forgotten forever. “Thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever” (Psalm 9:5). “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever” (Revelation 14:11).

“But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him” (Psalm 103:17). “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). HMM

Tuesday, October 29

True Christian Fellowship

“That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.” (Philemon 1:6)

This one-chapter epistle of Paul to his friend Philemon is essentially a personal request by Paul that Philemon forgive his runaway slave, Onesimus, and receive him back into “the church in thy house” as a new Christian, recently won to Christ (vv. 2, 10, 15-16). Our text is Paul’s prayer for Philemon and is similar to prayers by him for other believers (e.g., Colossians 1:9-10). It is an appropriate prayer on behalf of any fellow Christian. Its emphasis is on the blessings and responsibilities of true fellowship.

The “communication” of which Paul speaks is the Greek word *koinonia*, meaning “fellowship.” That is, genuine Christian faith involves a sharing of one’s life with others of “like precious faith” (2 Peter 1:1). That fellowship becomes “effectual” (literally, “full of power,” from the Greek *energes*, “energizing”) only through recognizing and appreciating all the blessings we have received through Christ.

Paul pointed out that he himself should be counted as a “partner” with Philemon (v. 17). Here the Greek is *koinonos*, practically the same as *koinonia*. Both Philemon, the wealthy Colossian master, and Onesimus, his runaway bondservant, were Paul’s spiritual children (v. 19), so they all theoretically shared “every good thing” in fellowship through Christ. Thus, Paul offered to repay anything Onesimus had stolen or any other losses, should Philemon so insist (vv. 18-19).

The demands of Christian fellowship thus might cost Onesimus his freedom, Paul his helper, and Philemon his property. True fellowship is not mere Christian socializing. It is the sharing of love and concern, time and talents, possessions and even life itself, as need and circumstance demand, with others in the household of faith. HMM

Wednesday, October 30

Power of the Holy Spirit

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” (Acts 1:8)

This promise of our Lord signaled the beginning of the immense change from the old covenant to the new. Prior to the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16) on the day of Pentecost, the saints of God were empowered both selectively and infrequently.

We, however, upon whom the “better thing” has come (Hebrews 11:40), are all temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Since we have been “quickenened” (made alive) by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 3:18), we surely should then “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). What, then, is the *dunamis* (power) that the Holy Spirit provides to us?

Obviously, the power comes from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit Himself (Ephesians 3:16-20). Our flesh has “no good thing” (Romans 7:18) to provide for an empowered, Spirit-filled life. Apart from the dwelling of God’s Spirit in us (Ephesians 1:14), we would be unable to live righteously (John 15:5).

But thanks to the omnipotent and omniscient Creator, the Holy Spirit gives us gifts to use in Christ’s assembly to mature and to encourage each other (Ephesians 4:7-16). The Holy Spirit also grants us the ability to develop His “fruit” in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Then, with the encouragement and maturity we gain through our churches, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit being obvious in our daily lives, the great privilege of sharing the gospel with the lost becomes a delightful exercise of “power” (Romans 1:16) that is clear, not only in careful words of testimony, but in and through a life empowered by the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5). HMM III

Thursday, October 31

My King of Old

“The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.” (Psalm 74:16-17)

The 74th Psalm is a sad lamentation over the apparent triumph of the enemies of God, but its central verse is a beautiful statement of faith: “For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psalm 74:12). Then, in support of his faith, the psalmist remembers the mighty creative acts of God in ancient times, giving assurance that He could, indeed, work salvation in these present times.

Those who believe that man is the measure of all things, sufficient unto himself, ignore how dependent all people are on God’s provisions. The very rotation of the earth, with its cycle of day and night, has set the basic rhythm of biological life, and it was God—not man—who “divided the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:4).

There is even the testimony in Genesis that God “prepared the light” before He prepared the sun (Genesis 1:3, 14), thus rebuking all those who later would worship the sun as the source of the earth and life.

God also “set all the borders [or ‘boundaries’] of the earth.” This refers both to the emergence of the continental land masses after the Flood and then also to the enforced scattering of the peoples from Babel into all the world, when He “determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26).

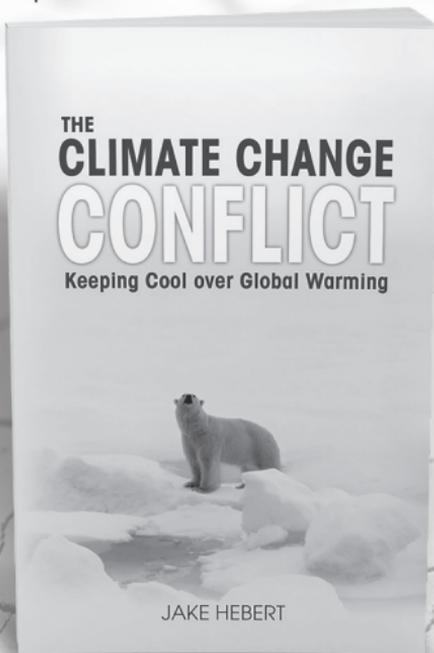
He has even made “summer and winter, and day and night [that] shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). God did all this—not man! Evolutionary humanism is futile foolishness, and one day soon God will answer the cry of the psalmist: “Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily” (Psalm 74:22). HMM

THE CLIMATE CHANGE CONFLICT

JAKE HEBERT, Ph.D.

Climate change is a hot topic. From politics to theology, debate rages over whether we face an imminent climate catastrophe and whether drastic action is needed to stop it. But how much is real science and how much is just political alarmism?

In *The Climate Change Conflict: Keeping Cool over Global Warming*, Dr. Jake Hebert dives into the confusing world of climate change science and brings much-needed clarity from a scientific and biblical perspective.



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Friday, November 1

Fear of the Lord

“Then had the churches rest . . . and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31)

There is something of a paradox in this requirement to “fear the Lord.” On the one hand, we “have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear” but have received “the Spirit of adoption” (Romans 8:15). On the other hand, we are told to “cleans[e] ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Our text insists that we are to be “walking in the fear of the Lord.” Obviously, the context illustrates a lifestyle of godly behavior that is produced by our attitude toward God’s sovereign majesty and unique holiness as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. We should “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth” (Psalm 96:9).

It is clear that the “beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7), the “beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10), and the “instruction of wisdom” (Proverbs 15:33) are founded in the fear of the Lord. It is also clear that the fear of the Lord is that which mimics God’s hatred of “evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward [perverse] mouth” (Proverbs 8:13).

But the one who fears the Lord also knows “strong confidence” (Proverbs 14:26) and has an unwavering satisfaction in his or her life (Proverbs 19:23). Indeed, such godly fear promises to prolong our days (Proverbs 10:27) and to be a “fountain of life” that keeps us from the “snares of death” (Proverbs 14:27).

Knowledge of God should produce a “godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28) as we serve in the Kingdom—fear of His power and holiness and omniscience—yet also provide a steadfast rest in the knowledge that we are His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10), gifted not with timidity, but with a spirit of “power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). HMM III

Saturday, November 2

Guard Your Heart

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

The Hebrew word *nasar*, here translated “keep,” carries the strong idea of protection or guarding. It is used 10 times in Psalm 119 to stress the necessity of “keeping” (guarding, protecting) the various kinds of instructions in God’s Word: “testimonies, statutes, laws, precepts, and commandments.” Everything written down by God is worth guarding.

In our text, the importance of guarding our hearts is emphasized since it is the source for the “issues of life.” Jesus said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45). Our “heart” is indeed the key to much in our life.

It is no wonder that the first commandment of all is to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mark 12:30).

Here are a few important principles that we must guard if our hearts are to produce the good “issues of life.”

- If we seek God with all our hearts, we will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13).
- We must believe with our hearts if we are to be saved (Romans 10:9; Hebrews 11:6).
- If we hold on to iniquity in our hearts, God will not hear our prayers (Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:1-2).
- If our hearts do not condemn us, then we will have confidence with God (1 John 3:21).

“He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart” (Psalm 15:2) will live forever with the Lord of heaven and earth. HMM III

Sunday, November 3

Messages from the Messiah's Life: True Character Revealed

“And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.” (Mark 14:3)

A few days before Passover, after the Lord Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus returned to Bethany with His close friends. Simon the leper offered his house as a gathering place (John 12:1; Mark 14:3; Matthew 26:6). We are not told who Simon was, but he might have been the only one of the 10 lepers who had been cleansed who actually came back to thank the Lord (Luke 17:17). This supper was a chance for Simon to show his appreciation for the Lord's ministry.

Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were at the dinner. Martha was serving. She had been gently admonished by Jesus sometime back (Luke 10:41-42), yet she still held to what was familiar to her, giving what she knew to give—her personal service to the Lord.

Mary, on the other hand, took “a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. . . . Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, [said,] Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” (John 12:3-5). This may be a hint of Judas' family. If he is Simon the leper's son, then we are shown a huge disparity between the father, now healed, and a bitter son who “was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (v. 6).

Martha, the servant; Mary, the generous disciple; Simon, the grateful host; and Judas, the bitter thief—all followers of the Lord on the surface. One, however, is not present to learn or to fellowship, but to advance his own agenda. HMM III

Messages from the Messiah's Life: Taxes and Tithes

“Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” (Matthew 22:17)

In His last week of earthly ministry, Jesus confronted efforts by religious leaders to discredit His teaching. Furthermore, they wanted to catch Him in such a clear violation of public policy that the Roman government would imprison Him and silence the impact He was having on the population of Jerusalem.

Matthew records the question asked by the corrupt scribes and teachers, but Jesus knew it didn't reflect their real intentions. They flattered Him with platitudes about seeking truth, but they really wanted an excuse to not pay taxes and a way to accuse Jesus of rebellion against Rome.

“But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's” (Matthew 22:18-21).

Both sides of this debate are brought up in churches today. Some would deny the government the right to tax its citizens to support policies that are not moral (abortion) or to pay for unjust wars (Vietnam, etc.). Jesus said that “Caesar” has the right to demand tribute whether or not we agree with its use.

Others insist that since the law is no longer in force under the New Covenant, our giving is not mandated, and the “tithe” amounts to whatever the conscience deems appropriate. Jesus told the Jewish leaders they ought to tithe all they were prospered by but not leave the “weightier” issues alone (Matthew 23:23). On this matter, we are to pay taxes to our Caesar and our tithe to God as commanded. HMM III

Tuesday, November 5

Messages from the Messiah's Life: The God of the Living

“And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?” (Mark 12:26)

The Sadducees were the “liberal” party of Judah’s leaders. They wanted to expose Jesus as an unscholarly and unskilled teacher who was unable to answer difficult theological issues. They did not believe in any form of resurrection, so they concocted a story about a woman who had been widowed seven times. Mosaic law demanded that a brother of the deceased husband marry the widow and name the firstborn son after the husband who died “that his name be not put out of Israel” (Deuteronomy 25:6).

This fictitious story was designed to trap Jesus in an unsolvable problem. The Sadducees said, “Last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore . . . whose wife of shall she be of them?” (Mark 12:22-23). They got much more than they sought. “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:29-30).

Two major doctrines are clarified by Jesus’ response. “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God *is* not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31-32).

The *proof* of the resurrection rests on the *tense* of the Greek verb “to be.” Scripture is accurate and authoritative even to the minute detail of verb tenses. HMM III

Wednesday, November 6

Messages from the Messiah's Life: The Great Commandment

“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 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.” (Matthew 22:35-37)

The Pharisees had come together to test how well Jesus understood the Mosaic law. They wanted Him to verify what the greatest law was since they prided themselves on knowing all there was to know about the law. After quickly and correctly quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5, Jesus then quoted Leviticus 19:18: “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:39-40).

When the Pharisees were quiet, Jesus asked them: “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?” (Matthew 22:42). The Pharisees strongly promoted the false idea that the Messiah would come from the line of King David to put down the Roman rule and establish again the Davidic kingdom. This was critical to prove from the genealogical records the Jewish right to rule Jerusalem. The Pharisees immediately said to Him, “The son of David.”

Quoting Psalm 110:1, Jesus asked them: “How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying: The LORD [*Yahweh*] said unto my Lord [*Adonai*], Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matthew 22:43-45). This play on the Hebrew words in the psalm makes the Lord Jesus not the “son” of David but the Lord and Master of David.

In His earlier interaction with the Sadducees, Jesus silenced them with a single word (“am”). Again, He used just a single word (“Lord”) to answer the Pharisees. HMM III

Thursday, November 7

Messages from the Messiah's Life: Hypocritical Religious Leaders

“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” (Matthew 23:13)

Jesus condemned both the Pharisees and Sadducees for the same problem, though the two groups were very different. The Pharisees were like the legalists of our day and the Sadducees like the liberals. Both camps claimed to believe in inspiration and prided themselves on their knowledge of Scripture.

However, both groups were focused on power and authority rather than on the teachings of Scripture. There was no desire to honor the Creator and be agents of witness. The Pharisees developed a vast system of rules to force their followers to behave in a certain way. The Sadducees sought favor with the Roman officials. Jesus' opinion of them was clear.

- Matthew 23:15: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”
- Luke 11:52: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.”

Their error was consciously twisting the truth of God with interpretations that distorted the message of Scripture. The Pharisees added extra requirements that were “burdens grievous to be borne” (Luke 11:46). The Sadducees denied the glorious hope of the resurrection, denying a core principle of the gospel. As Paul pointed out to the Corinthians, that false doctrine would make “all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19). May God keep us from such confusion. HMM III

Messages from the Messiah's Life: Gifts from Fools and Blind Leaders

“Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? . . . whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?” (Matthew 23:17, 19)

The temple was the center of the Old Covenant. The Levite's income and temple's upkeep were derived from an elaborate system of tithes and other offerings defined in Leviticus.

By the time the Lord Jesus entered His ministry on Earth, the regulations God initiated had been turned into an intricate web of demands designed to coerce people to give. Jesus confronted the leaders and exposed their wickedness.

- Matthew 23:23: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”
- Matthew 23:27: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.”
- Luke 11:43: “Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.”
- Luke 11:46: “Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.”

This kind of hypocrite seeks his name in a bulletin, a plaque on a wall, a brick in a walkway, or a wing in a hospital or museum, and is indifferent to the quiet background work of ministry that embraces judgment, mercy, and faith. The Lord regards the condition of the heart far more than the deed. HMM III

Saturday, November 9

Messages from the Messiah's Life: Warnings on Prayer

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” (Matthew 6:5)

Our Lord sometimes contrasted the habits of the religious leaders of His day with that which was expected of His followers. On this occasion, Jesus warned that prayer to the Father in heaven was never to be performed publicly to impress men but rather to be privately presented to the Father seeking His blessing and reward.

Nor are we to use “vain repetitions, as the heathen do,” expecting to be heard for the “much speaking” (Matthew 6:7). Many religions use prayer wheels, hypnotic chants, or formatted prayer rituals to expedite the process.

“Vain repetitions” is the translation of *battologeō*, which means “to stammer” or to “repeat endlessly.” Paul told Timothy that he must “shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:16) and to “refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7).

The widow whose “continual coming” wearied the unjust judge (Luke 18:2-5) is not to be used as an example to constantly repeat prayers, as is often incorrectly suggested. But rather, “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). It may seem like we are repeating the same things in our prayers over and over again. Yet, we are instructed to pray “always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18). HMM III

Sunday, November 10

Delight in the Law

“But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” (Psalm 1:2)

Most Christians feel that God’s law is harsh and burdensome, and they rejoice that God’s grace has set them free from the law. The fact is, however, that the law should be a joy and delight to anyone who really loves the Lord. Even Paul, the great apostle of grace, said: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Romans 7:22). “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Romans 7:12). David testified that “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting [or ‘restoring’] the soul” (Psalm 19:7).

The majestic 119th Psalm contains no less than 25 specific testimonies to the benefits of the law. For example: “Blessed [i.e., ‘happy’] are [those] who walk in the law of the LORD” (v. 1). “Great peace have they which love thy law” (v. 165). “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (v. 18). “Thy law is my delight” (v. 77).

That God’s law was not set aside when Christ came is evident from the first mention of the law in the New Testament: Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law. . . . Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18). That the law was not for Jews only is suggested in its first mention in the Old Testament: “One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Exodus 12:49).

The law cannot save, of course: “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). But “Christ . . . redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13) when He died for our sins. His law (which now includes the entire Bible) is no more a burden but a delight—restoring the soul and bringing true success and great peace to those who love it. HMM

Monday, November 11

Peace, Peace, When There Is No Peace

“They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”
(Jeremiah 6:14)

This indictment by the prophet Jeremiah of the false prophets of his day could easily find a parallel today. The charge was repeated (8:11), so Jeremiah evidently considered it important. The prophet Ezekiel later leveled almost the same indictment against the false prophets of his time: “They have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace” (Ezekiel 13:10).

Almost every person would prefer to live in peace, of course. The word itself has become almost an ironic cliché. Our annual observance of Veterans Day (originally called Armistice Day) wistfully expresses the hope that when the current war is settled, it will be the final war, and thenceforth there will be “peace, peace.” The word “armistice” is from the Latin and means “arms standing still.”

But there is no real peace; there were numerous wars back during Babylonian times and Roman times and medieval times and all times! Even today there are dozens of small “wars and rumours of wars” going on in any given year (Matthew 24:6) and will continue to be so until Christ, the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), comes back to “speak peace unto the heathen” and to establish His kingdom of peace “even to the ends of the earth” (Zechariah 9:10).

In the meantime, James reminds us of our personal guilt: “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (James 4:1). And Paul exhorts: “Finally, brethren, . . . be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11). HMM

Tuesday, November 12

The Called

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

This great promise has been an immeasurable source of strength and comfort to Christians, especially during times of trial. It is specifically directed, however, only to those who are “the called.”

Recognition of those who are “the called” is best achieved through their synonymous description as “them that love God.” There are also numerous other Scriptures that further describe them. There are two Greek words (each occurring 11 times) that specifically refer to those who are members of this select group: One of these words is *kletos* (“called”); the other is *klesis* (“calling”). Another very important term is *ekkllesia*, meaning “called out,” which occurs 115 times and is almost always translated “church.” That is, a true church is composed of people who have been specially called by God out of the world system, then joined together in a local church to fulfill the purposes of their divine calling.

“Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26). No I.Q. test, or physical exam, or social standing is used as a criterion; neither are any human achievements. “[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

God’s call was strictly by grace, according to His own eternal purpose! The means by which God calls is the gospel: “Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:14). No wonder, then, that we can know that all things work together for good on behalf of those whom God has called, and who therefore love God! HMM

Wednesday, November 13

The Eyes of the Lord

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.”
(2 Chronicles 16:9)

Since God in His essence is Spirit (note John 4:24) and is omnipresent, one might wonder how He could have physical eyes. The fact is, however, that the Bible frequently refers to His eyes. In fact, this phrase, “the eyes of the LORD,” occurs no less than 21 times in the Bible.

While this is hard to understand in one way, it is wonderfully clear when we remember God is omnipotent and omniscient, as well as omnipresent. “He that formed the eye, shall he not see?” (Psalm 94:9). We may not be able to understand the actual seeing mechanism of spiritual eyes; nevertheless, “the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3).

The prophet Zechariah reminds us not to “[despise] the day of small things,” for they will be observed by “the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:10). The phrase is used first of all in connection with those terrible times when “the wickedness of man was great” and “the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:5, 11). Yet God could still see righteous Noah there. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8), and he and his family were saved through the awful worldwide Flood.

The last usage of the phrase is in Peter’s epistle, quoting Psalm 34:15: “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). We do well to remember always that one of the great names of God is “Thou God seest me” (Genesis 16:13) and then conduct ourselves accordingly, aware that our God is indeed watching us with deep love and concern. HMM

Thursday, November 14

Make Your Calling Sure

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” (2 Peter 1:10)

Although the calling of God is solely by His grace apart from works (2 Timothy 1:9), and although “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:29), it is quite possible for a person to believe mistakenly that he has been called, and so Peter urges each professing Christian to make *sure* of his calling.

In the first place, one who is truly called will love God (Romans 8:28), and such love should not be superficial but with the whole heart and soul and mind (Matthew 22:37). One who is called should “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2). If our lives fail such tests, we should at least “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

God’s call is not only unto salvation, of course, but to a particular service for His glory. Some like Paul were “called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God” (Romans 1:1). Many in Paul’s day were actually called to be slaves: “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayst be made free, use it rather. For he that is called to the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant. . . . Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God” (1 Corinthians 7:20-22, 24).

Even the apostle Paul, however, could still say (and so should we), “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). We need, first of all, to make our “calling and election sure.” HMM

Friday, November 15

Son of God/Son of Man

“And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20)

It is significant that although Christ clearly taught that He was the unique Son of God, He most frequently referred to Himself as Son of man, earnestly desiring that people understand His true and representative humanity.

The first use of the phrase is in Psalm 8:4: “What is . . . the son of man, that thou visitest him?” Although David may have been thinking of all “sons of Adam” in general, the writer of Hebrews applied the passage specifically to Christ (Hebrews 2:6), “that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). In order to save lost men, God in Christ had to become man through supernatural incarnation. Then, as perfect, sinless man, He could represent us before God, finally tasting death for every man.

The vital importance of the incarnation is affirmed by John: “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:2-3). It is noteworthy that Satan and his evil spirits would recognize Christ as the Son of God (Matthew 4:3; 8:28-29) but never as the Son of man! This reluctance seems also to characterize all the occultic philosophies of the so-called “New Age” movement, as well as all ancient and modern pantheistic religions. They speak glibly of “the Christ” as a spirit that might come on many, but bitterly refuse to acknowledge that the man Jesus was actually the Son of man, God incarnate.

Finally, it is thrilling to realize that, although He only became the Son of man through His incarnation, He will always remain the Son of man! John saw Him in His glory—as we shall see Him in eternity—as “one like unto the Son of man” (Revelation 1:13; 14:14). HMM

Saturday, November 16

Tears in Heaven

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.” (Isaiah 25:8)

It may be surprising to learn there are tears in heaven, but there are three places in the Bible where we are told that God will wipe away our tears there. This promise appears first in the Old Testament in our text—a text that is quoted in the New Testament as applying to the events of the second coming of Christ. “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). The graves will be emptied and death itself will die when Christ comes again! But there will still be those tears, even after death, that God must wipe away.

The other two occurrences are in the last book of the Bible, both again in the context of the return of Christ, “[who] shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Finally, in the new Jerusalem, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

But why should there be tears at all when death has passed away? The Scriptures do not say specifically why, but it seems probable that these may be tears of regret at lost opportunities and tears of sorrow for unsaved friends and loved ones. It does say that in the new earth we shall somehow “look upon” the lost (Isaiah 66:22, 24) and that even some of the saved “shall suffer loss” when their works in this life do not “abide” in the judgment (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). But then, after these tears are shed, God will graciously wipe them away, and there will never be sorrow or crying anymore. HMM

Sunday, November 17

The Good Shepherd

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1)

The 23rd Psalm is perhaps the best-loved chapter in the Bible, with its beautiful picture of Christ as the Shepherd. This chapter finds its New Testament exposition in John 10:1-30, where Christ identifies Himself as “the good shepherd” who “giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

These two chapters (Psalm 23; John 10) are probably the two greatest chapters in the Bible on the security of the believer in Christ. This theme seems woven by divine inspiration into the very structure of the passages. For example, there are six verses in the poetic structure of the psalm, each containing a different testimony concerning the providing and protecting Shepherd. In similar fashion, there are six times the word “shepherd” is used in John 10, each referring again to the work of our Good Shepherd. There are also six references in the other books of the New Testament where Christ is referred to as a shepherd.

The intensely personal aspect of the 23rd Psalm is evidenced by David’s use of the first-person pronouns (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc.) no less than 17 times in its six verses, all expressing his absolute trust in the Lord. Similarly, the word “sheep” is used 17 times in John 10, with the grand theme again stressing the security of the sheep. This number “17” repeatedly seems to crop up in Bible passages related to our security in the Lord. As one example, the famous passage ending the eighth chapter of Romans lists exactly 17 things that can never “separate us from the love of God” (Romans 8:35-39).

In any case, this marvelous psalm of security concludes (as it began) with a great promise and testimony, which can be paraphrased as follows: “Surely [Christ’s] goodness and lovingkindness will pursue me as long as I live, and then I will dwell in God’s great heavenly family through all the ages of eternity!” HMM

Clothing

“And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.” (Revelation 1:13)

In the beginning, at the creation of Eve from Adam’s side, “they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). There was no need for shame at their lack of clothing for neither had any consciousness of sin or moral guilt. They were truly “one flesh” (v. 24), aware that their physiological differences had been divinely created to bring about God’s purposes for His creation. Any embarrassment would have been quite unnatural.

But soon sin entered; they rejected God’s purposes and plan for their lives. Satan had promised they would acquire wisdom, but what was their first taste of wisdom? “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (Genesis 3:7). Their shame must have been multiplied many times over as they heard God pronounce the dreadful curse on all of creation as a result of their sin. And then they had to watch as two of their animal friends (probably sheep) were slain, sacrificed to “make coats of skins” (v. 21) for their covering.

Many years later, another Lamb was slain for sin, stripped of His clothing and hanged on a cruel cross, bearing unthinkable shame. “I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psalm 22:17-18). Today, having conquered sin and death, He reigns in heaven, “clothed with a garment down to the foot” (text verse). In His death, He arranged for us some day to be “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white” (Revelation 19:8), having “washed [our] robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). JDM

Tuesday, November 19

Problems, Problems, Problems

“And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.” (Psalm 55:6)

The 55th Psalm is a psalm of “complaint” (v. 2) by David and gives an insight into his thought process as he tried to deal with the great problems and burdens that were overwhelming him. His first instinct was to run away from them, flying like a dove far off into the wilderness.

The prophet Jonah (whose name means “dove”) tried that strategy years later, only to encounter even worse problems (Jonah 1:3, 15). One does not solve problems by fleeing from them.

Then, David decided to berate those who were causing him trouble and to complain about them to the Lord. “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17). The words “pray, and cry aloud” here actually mean “complain and mourn.” “Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues” (v. 9). “Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell” (v. 15). His burdens were all the heavier because those whom he had trusted as friends and colleagues were now using deceit and guile against him (vv. 11-14), and the injustice of it all was almost more than he could endure. But complaints and imprecations were also unsatisfying: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

Finally, the Lord gave him an answer, and David found the rest for which he had been so fretfully searching. Here it is: “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22). The last phrase of the psalm is “but I will trust in thee” (v. 23).

The way to deal with burdens and problems is not to flee from them or to fret about them but to turn them over to the Lord: “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7). HMM

Wednesday, November 20

God's Story

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand.” (1 Corinthians 15:1)

The word “gospel” comes from the Anglo-Saxon “god-spel,” meaning “God-story.” The Greek word is *euaggelion*, from which we get our word “evangel,” and it means literally “a good message” or “good messenger.” The prefix *eu* or *ev* means “good,” and *aggelion* means “messenger.” Thus, the gospel is the great story of God that is to be preached as by an angel dispatched from God. The word normally is used in the sense of “good news” or “glad tidings,” but this good message is specifically God’s story, sent to lost men from a loving, caring, and saving God.

As our text says, it is a message to be “declared” by its messenger, then “received” (literally “once and for all”) by its hearers. It is the message “by which also ye are saved” (v. 2) and “wherein ye stand.” Then, verses 3 and 4 declare the very heart of what is to be received and believed—the substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It is a dynamic gospel—“the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16) for every true believer.

It is a “glorious gospel” (2 Corinthians 4:4) through which Christ “hath brought life and immortality to light” (2 Timothy 1:10). It is the “gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15) and brings “the fullness of the blessing” (Romans 15:29).

Its duration is “everlasting” (Revelation 14:6), and its foundation is the primeval making of “heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Revelation 14:7) by Christ Himself (Colossians 1:16). The apostle Paul gravely warns against “any other gospel” than this gospel that he had preached (Galatians 1:8-9). This gospel, this glad story of God’s grace in creation and salvation, is to be preached “to every creature” (Mark 16:15). HMM

Thursday, November 21

Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

In this seventh (out of nine) of the Beatitudes with which Christ began His Sermon on the Mount occurs the first mention in the New Testament of the important word “peace.”

But how can one be a peacemaker? Note that Christ did not say: “Blessed are the pacifists.” There are many today who talk about peace, but how does one make peace?

The answer lies in the example of Christ Himself. He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and He “made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself” (Colossians 1:20).

The real problem is that there can be no lasting peace between man and man as long as there is enmity between man and God. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

With that problem settled, we are now in a position to become true peacemakers, for we also can lead others to God through Jesus Christ. He “hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we . . . pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

As ambassadors for Christ, we are true ambassadors for peace. The best possible contribution we can make toward world peace, racial peace, industrial peace, family peace, or personal peace is to help people become reconciled to God through faith in the peace-making work of Christ on the cross. “These things I have spoken unto you,” says the Lord Jesus, “that in me ye might have peace” (John 16:33). HMM

Friday, November 22

For Me to Live Is Christ

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

There are many motivating reasons for serving the Lord. One, of course, is His many merciful blessings on our behalf. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Then there is the incentive of rewards: “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12). There are also many rewards even in this present life for dedicated Christian service: “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

The great need of the lost is also a tremendous motivation for Christian service. This was the burden of Paul: “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (1 Corinthians 9:19).

But surely the greatest of all motives is the constraining love of Christ. Not our love for Him, which is poor and weak at best, but His love for us. *This* is the constraining compulsion that makes us live and love and witness for Him. Because He loved us so much, therefore we no longer live for ourselves but unto Him who died for us.

As our text notes, if Christ died for *all*, that can only mean that “all were dead,” or more literally, “all died.” Therefore, if we live, it is because we have been “bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20), the terrible price of the never-equalled suffering and the uniquely cruel death of the sinless Son of man. “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). HMM

Saturday, November 23

Teach and Preach Continually

“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” (Acts 5:42)

The Great Commission was given to every Christian and implied a daily ministry of witness by life and word. The early Christians took it seriously, as our text implies. Even when they began to be persecuted for it, this merely led to a wider proclamation of the gospel. “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

The command of Christ was to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and this required every Christian to be involved every day. The “gospel” includes the entire scope of the person and work and teachings of Jesus Christ, so both preaching and teaching are involved. Furthermore, Christ did not say “send” but “go!” Although it is vital that missionaries be sent and supported as they go to “the regions beyond,” each believer must go to those he can reach as ability and opportunity allow. “Jerusalem . . . Judaea . . . Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8) were all to be reached not consecutively but *simultaneously*, and this would require both personal and financial participation by every Christian.

The message was to “teach and preach Jesus Christ” in all His fullness. Their witnessing was to be “unto me” (Acts 1:8). It was to be both in public and in private—“in the temple, and in every house.” They were to pray to “the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2) and also to train “faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

And the result of this intense first-century dedication to the Great Commission was that “the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly” (Acts 6:7). However, the work has never been completed and the command is still in effect. HMM

Our Weapons

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.” (2 Corinthians 10:3)

This verse introduces a famous apologetic charge to the saints. The key to the whole passage is the qualifier “we do not war after the flesh.”

We must conduct war with non-flesh weapons, since “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). Fleshly wisdom (2 Corinthians 1:12) often is nothing more than a “snare of the devil” (2 Timothy 2:26) and may well spoil us if we are not very careful (Colossians 2:8).

The objective, of course, is to bring every intellectual argument captive to the truth of Scripture. This is done by the pulling down of strongholds and “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:5). This warfare, if not done according to the flesh (2 Corinthians 1:17), is “mighty through God” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Nowhere in these verses is there permission or an implied need to learn the thoughts of the enemy before we can bring them into captivity. Biblical data insist that the flesh has “no good thing” (Romans 7:18) and cannot understand the things of God. The weapons we have are not fleshly (i.e., natural thinking, natural emotion, human reasoning, etc.). Our weapons (Ephesians 6) are the “sword of the Spirit” (offensive) and the “shield of faith” (defensive), and we’re protected by the full armor of God—praying always. It is not possible to learn all the subtle arguments of the enemy. What is possible, however, is a knowledge of the truth through our having the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16) that will make us sufficient for “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). HMM III

Monday, November 25

Things We Can't Do Without

“That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”
(Ephesians 2:12)

There are many things in this world that we can easily get along without, but some that are absolutely essential: First of all, we need Christ. Otherwise we are like the Gentiles described in our text—“without Christ . . . having no hope, and without God in the world.”

Secondly, if we were ever to be saved, Christ must shed His blood for our sins, for “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). In order for His death to be effective for our salvation, He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Before Christ's work actually becomes effective in our personal salvation, it must be believed and received by faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6). This faith must be true faith, which transforms the life, for “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). Works do not bring salvation, but saving faith brings “things that accompany salvation” (Hebrews 6:9).

Among those things that accompany salvation is holiness, “without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Another is the privilege of chastisement! Our heavenly Father must deal with His errant children in loving discipline. Otherwise, “if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye . . . not sons” (Hebrews 12:8).

There are thus seven things we cannot do without. We cannot do without Christ, without the shedding of His blood, without His sinlessness, without faith in Him, without works for Him, without holiness unto Him, and without chastisement by Him. He said, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). But with Him, we have everything. HMM

They Shall Never Perish

“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” (John 10:28-29)

What rich blessings Christ promises to those who “hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (v. 27). To think that the omnipotent Creator knows us and gives us eternal life! He is certainly powerful enough to see that this life is in no danger, either from our own weaknesses (“they shall never perish”) or from the enemy without (“pluck them out”). *Temporary* eternal life simply cannot be. The eternal life that *He* gives lasts for *eternity*.

Actually, the promise “they shall never perish” is very strong in the original Greek. A repeating negative precedes the word “perish,” and the specific form of the word “never” literally includes “eternally,” or “forever.” A more complete rendering would then be, “They shall not, in no wise perish, no, not for eternity.”

The word “man” is not in the original, and the word “any” is more properly translated “any one” or “any being.” This includes Satan—no match for the Savior. He is powerless to *pluck* or *snatch* us from either the Father’s or the Son’s hands. How could we be any more secure?

Note that the Father gave us to His beloved Son as gifts of His love. In turn, Christ values these precious gifts so much that He holds us securely in His hand, so tightly that no created being can snatch us away. The Father even assists in providing us this security, for we are also in the “Father’s hand,” and “I and my Father are one” (v. 30).

When we consider the size and strength of the Creator’s hand, we can understand why no one, not even Satan, can snatch us out of its protective care. JDM

Wednesday, November 27

Wonderful Words of Life

“Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.” (Psalm 119:129)

Modern liberals may ridicule Bible-believing Christians as bibliolaters, but the fact is that it is not possible to place the Bible on too high a pedestal. “Thy testimonies are wonderful,” the psalmist says, for “his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor” (Isaiah 9:6), whose testimonies they are.

Consider just how wonderful are the Scriptures. They were written in the heart of God even before the creation. “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89). Then, “at sundry times and in divers manners,” this eternal Word of God was conveyed to men, as God “spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1). Finally, it was complete, and the last of the prophets concluded it with an all-embracing warning: “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life” (Revelation 22:18-19). Critics who tamper with the words of the Bible are on dangerous ground, the psalmist said: “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever” (Psalm 119:160). Jesus said: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

Eternal in the past; inviolable in the present; forever in the future! All we shall ever need for our guidance is to be found in God’s wonderful testimonies: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable. . . . That the man of God may be perfect” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

It is not possible to have too high a view of Scripture, “for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psalm 138:2). HMM

Thursday, November 28

Being Thankful for Grace

*“Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”
(Romans 5:20)*

This is the day that Americans set aside to reflect on the blessings of God that have been showered on us in the previous year. All other holidays, even Christmas and Easter, can be skewed into a non-Christian meaning, but not Thanksgiving. Historically, it was a time to give thanks to God for the bountiful harvest, and experientially, while there are those to whom we should give thanks for particular favors, there is only one to whom we can give thanks for the blessings of life. Nothing else makes sense.

Christians, of course, have much more for which to give thanks than the non-believer, or at least they have the eyes with which to see and the heart with which to recognize God’s blessings. Indeed, Paul instructs us that “in every thing [we should] give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18); the tense of the verb implying a habitual, continual thanksgiving.

But specifically, we should be thankful for His grace, which, as explained in our text, completely overwhelmed our sin and instead brought salvation and freedom from guilt. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Note that in our text the word “abound” appears three times. Both the offense and sin exist in abundance. But the abundance of grace comes from a different Greek word that means literally “to exist in superabundance.” But there is more. It is further modified by the prefix “much more,” implying a grace that is beyond superabundance.

On this special day of thanksgiving, let us not fail to include in those things for which we are thankful the overwhelmingly superabundant grace of God. JDM

Friday, November 29

Our Listening God

*“O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.”
(Psalm 65:2)*

There come times in each life when loneliness overshadows like a cloud, and no one is there to listen and provide counsel. Or perhaps there is some problem so personal and intimate that it seems unfitting or too embarrassing to share with anyone else.

But God will listen! No need is so small, no place too remote, no burden too heavy that He who is the “God of all grace” and “the God of all comfort” (1 Peter 5:10; 2 Corinthians 1:3) will not listen and care. “The LORD will hear when I call unto him” (Psalm 4:3).

Young people sometimes complain that their parents won’t listen to them; wives may say their husbands don’t listen; sometimes it seems that no one will listen to our questions or ideas about anything. But “the LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth” (Psalm 145:18). Therefore, “pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah” (Psalm 62:8).

But how can He listen? After all, God is far away upon His throne. The risen Savior ascended far above all heavens to sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. How can the Father hear when we whisper a prayer in our hearts that no human could hear?

God is indeed up there, but He is also right here! Jesus said: “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7). Our God is a triune God, and He can be both in heaven and in our room and even, as the Holy Spirit, within our very hearts. Of course, “if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18). But for those who confess and forsake their sins, “his ears are open unto their prayers” (1 Peter 3:12). HMM

Five Commands

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

In our text and the succeeding two verses, five commands are given to the believer striving to live a godly life. Let us look briefly at each one.

Gird up the loins of your mind: Using the long, flowing robes worn by most people in Greek societies as a word picture, Peter commands us to gird up our minds just as such a robe needed to be gathered up in preparation for strenuous activity. We need to discipline our minds for action.

Be sober: A drunken person has a disoriented mind, lacks self-control, and is not alert to his surroundings. We are commanded to maintain a calm and thoughtful state of mind, in full control of all our actions.

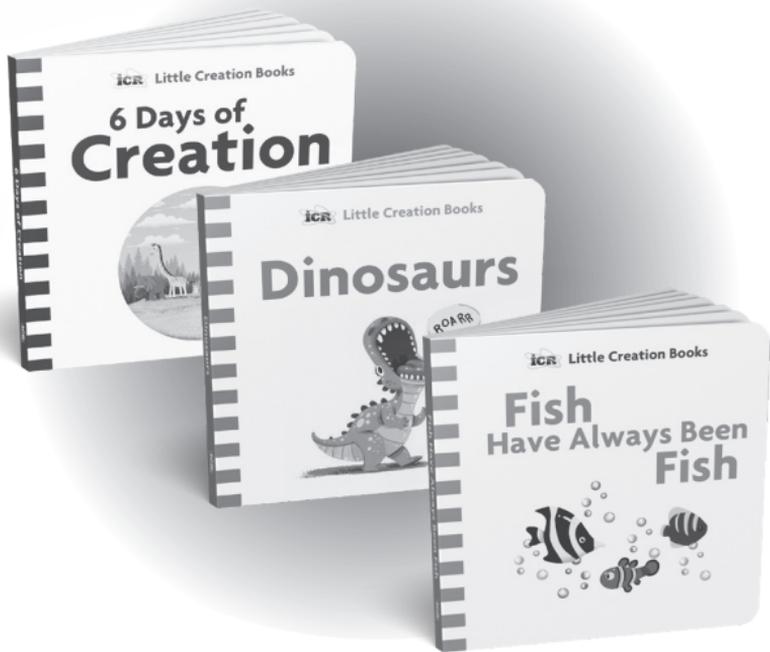
Hope to the end, or “patiently fix your hope”: We must recognize that He is in control and patiently wait for Him. The focus of our expectation is His grace, which we presently experience but which will be fully granted us at His return.

Not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance (v. 14): This phrase is translated “be not conformed” in Romans 12:2 and commands us not to adopt the world’s lifestyle and thought patterns, especially our “former lusts,” that enslaved us before our conversion.

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy (v. 15): God is first and foremost a holy God, and we are called to “fashion” ourselves after Him. Complete holiness is out of our reach this side of glory, but it should be our goal.

All five are commands indeed, but commands three and five are in an emphatic position in the Greek, and these two hold the key to success in the others. Only by patiently fixing our hope on Him and His grace can we successfully strive for His holiness. JDM

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