

Christian Attitudes

No.1. Relaxation.

pp. 131 - 133

“Be still and know that I am God” (Psa. xlv. 10).

In his series in *The Berean Expositor* on the Psalms, Stuart Allen drew attention to many interesting features of this Psalm (B.E. volume L., p.164). He points out that Psalms xlv. - xlviii. form a trilogy and he comments on the prophetic aspect, as the Psalmist looks forward to the time when war will cease, and this must relate to the second coming of our Lord.

The Companion Bible gives the following outline:

1. God our refuge
- 2, 3. Danger defied (earth moved, waters roar)
- 4, 5. Zion defended
6. Danger defied (heathen raged, earth melted)
7. God our refuge
8. Works seen (Behold God's works, earth desolate)
9. Wars ended
10. Himself known (know God—His exaltation—earth)
11. God our refuge

The Psalm commences with “God is our refuge and strength” and in verses 7 and 11, we have the refrain, “The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge”.

The refuge in verse 1 is a place of refuge, a place to which one flees. A different word is used in verses 7 and 11, which means a high place, a tower, or an impregnable place.

The Psalmist describes a scene of great trouble, the removing of the earth, the roaring of the waters, but he contrasts this with the peaceful scene in the holy city, where streams of the river bring joy and gladness. God is there. The city will not be moved.

Then a different scene is set. The heathen rage, the kingdoms are moved. He utters His voice and the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

A description of a peaceful scene follows. He maketh wars to cease, the bow is broken, the spear is cut asunder, the chariot is burnt. Then comes the words which we wish to consider “Be still and know that I am God”.

We live in difficult days, and there is trouble all over the world. The pressures of life affect us all and there are times when we need a word of comfort. In the business world,

the strain is enormous and many are caught up in what is called the “rat race”. How do these conditions affect us? What is our attitude of mind? When the businessman goes home, does he take his worries with him? If we have an hour to spare in the evening, can we relax, or are we still troubled by the strains of this life? It may be easy to advise the troubled to “Be still” and relax. But how can the anxious mind be set at rest?

The Hebrew word translated “Be still” is only translated once in this way. There are at least 20 occurrences of this word, and it is rendered cease, fail, forsake, let alone, let go, stay, etc. The basic meaning is to “let go”. The translation “Be still and know that I am God” reads much better than “Let go and know that I am God”. Yet, as we meditate upon it, we can see that the rendering “let go” is a valuable aid to our understanding. We carry our troubles always, and we do not let them go. How can we relax if we do not let our troubles go? Psa. lv. 22 reads “Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee”. But if we cast our burdens on the Lord and then pick them up again or fail to let go, are we relieved of our burdens? To cast our burdens on the Lord means that we must let them go. And if we let go, then we become “still” and know that the Lord of hosts is with us. We enter the refuge.

Certainly there is a need to “hold fast” and to be steadfast in the things of God. But we need to let go those things concerning this world which constitute a burden.

We need to rightly divide, to distinguish between those things which we should hold firmly and those things which we should hold very loosely, things which we should let go when we need to relax.

When we wish to relax, and “let go” may we remind ourselves of Phil. iv. 6, 7:

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Yes, that peace will help us to “let go” and relax. Then shall we “Be still and know, that I am God”.

So then, let us learn to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. iii. 2).

No.2. Quietness. pp. 149 - 151

“Rest in the Lord and wait” (Psa. xxxvii. 7).

Our peace of mind may be disturbed as we hear of continual violence in so many parts of the world; even in Northern Ireland and in this country we see lawlessness and the loss of innocent lives. In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul warned him that perilous times would come and the long list given in chapter iii. includes trucebreakers, false accusers, fierce, traitors, etc.

The Companion Bible indicates an outline of Psa. xxxvii. as follows:

- A1 | 1-11. Admonitions and reasons
- B1 | 12-26. Contrasts. Lawless and righteous
- A2 | 27-29. Admonition and reason
- B2 | 30-33. Contrasts. Righteous and lawless
- A3 | 34. Admonition and reason
- B3 | 35-40. Contrasts. Lawless and righteous.

The text that we wish to consider comes in the first section A1 and so we give the outline of that section:--

- A | 1. Trust. Fret not
- B | 2. Reason. “For”
- A | 3-8. Trust. Delight. Commit
- B | 9-11. Reason. “For”

Apart from the work of those who are violent, we may be vexed by the work of evildoers, who seem to prosper while those who try to live honestly suffer. Indeed, there is a real danger that a Christian may become jealous of the prosperity of those who are caught up with solely material ambitions. If this material attitude is allowed to develop, may there not be the possibility that a Christian may be tempted to lower his standards and achieve a higher “standard of living”? The Psalmist warns us of this.

Verse 1, “. . . . neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.”

Verse 7, “fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”

Verse 8, “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.”

“Fret not” means “heat not thyself with vexation”. Do not allow yourself to be emotionally upset when you see the activities of the evildoer. But how can this mental attitude be avoided? Let us look at the Psalm again.

Verse 3, “Trust in the Lord and do good”

Verse 4, “Delight thyself also in the Lord”

Verse 5, “Commit thy way unto the Lord”

Verse 7, “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.”

“Rest” means “be still or keep silent”. When we are upset, how often a torrent of words can flow from our lips! How hard to keep silent! But the Psalmist advises us when we are vexed and upset, often by circumstances beyond our control, to be still, be quiet, be silent. Then we can turn to the Lord in prayer, to commit our way unto the Lord and trust in Him. Then we begin once again to delight in the knowledge and in our experience of the presence of the Lord. We can accept those adverse circumstances, knowing that He can give us the strength to endure suffering.

Verse 18 reminds us that “the Lord knoweth the days of the upright” and we are also reminded of Job who said, “But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job xxiii. 10).

When we have to endure any kind of affliction or suffering, let us remember Psa.xxxvii. and rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him . May we not fret or become vexed, but rather learn to wait in patience before the Lord. Our prayer may indeed be a silent prayer, just resting in His presence, look upward to Him for courage and strength. As gold is refined by fire, so the fire of affliction may remove the dross and enable us to come through our experience in a state of greater spiritual maturity, and with greater faith in our Lord, our Saviour and Head.

No.3. Thankfulness. **pp. 171 - 173**

“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord,
and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most High” (Psa. xcii. 1).

There are over 100 references in the O.T. and more than 50 in the N.T. to thanksgiving. To try to summarize them in a short article is not an easy task.

If we turn to Nehemiah, and read of the tremendous opposition to the work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, we can understand the great pleasure of Nehemiah when that difficult task was completed. Chapter viii. tells us how Ezra read the book of the law of Moses to the people and in chapters xi. and xii., we read of those who were to dwell in Jerusalem and about the thanksgiving that was rendered. Mattaniah was given a special office in regard to the giving of thanks (see Neh. xii. 8). In chapter xi. 17 we read that he should begin the thanksgiving with prayer. In chapter xii. 27, we find that the dedication was to be made with gladness, both with thanksgiving and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. In justification of the inclusion of songs of praise, verse 46 explains,

“For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God.”

Paul also links songs of praise with thanksgiving:

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. v. 19, 20).

On some special occasions, Psalms were written to give thanks. In II Sam. xxii., there is a song of thanksgiving by David as he thanked God for deliverance from his enemies. Another special Psalm is recorded in I Chron. xvi., to give thanks for the transfer of the ark of God to Jerusalem.

Psalms cv., cvi. and cvii. exhort Israel to remember the marvelous works of the Lord. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt and an account of the experiences of Israel in the wilderness are recited and in Psa. cvii. there is the refrain:

“Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!”

Many Psalms give thanks to the Lord. Some give thanks for deliverance from the enemy (e.g. Psa. xxxv.). In Psa. lxxv. thanks is given to God the judge. In Psa. lxxix., there is a prayer for help as Jerusalem is invaded, which ends with praise and thanksgiving. Another Psalm is prophetic in character and ends with rejoicing and thanksgiving (Psa. xcvi.).

Coming to the N.T. it is remarkable how many times Paul gives thanks for the saints to whom he is writing. For example, “. . . . cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. i. 16). See also Rom. i. 8; I Cor. i. 4; Phil. i. 3, 4; Col. i. 3.

Prayer should always be made with thanksgiving.

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. iv. 6, 7).

We should abound in the faith, and this should be accompanied with thanksgiving.

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus our Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Col. ii. 6, 7).

And there is the need for constant prayer with watchfulness.

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Col. iv. 2).

Paul exhorted Timothy to pray for all men, and prayer and intercession should be made with thanksgiving (I Tim. ii. 1).

Sometimes we find difficulty in saying “thank you” and yet it is possible to convey thanks without actually using those words. Read Phil. iv. 10-20. Paul had received a gift which mean so much to him, and he did express his deep appreciation. In his special way, he says he was glad to receive the things, which were “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice well pleasing to God” but he adds that they would receive an even greater benefit because “my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”.

So then, let our Christian attitude be one of thanksgiving to God for all His goodness to us, blessings both spiritual and material, and let us praise Him for the fellowship we enjoy with those of like precious faith.

While it is right that we should constantly thank the Lord for all His gifts, let us not forget to thank those who help us in any way. A word of thanks may give joy and gladness as appreciation of kindness is so expressed. Let us not take things for granted but remember to say “thank you”.

No.4. Joyfulness. pp. 192 - 195

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. iv. 4).

Walking down a crowded street, do you notice the expression on the faces of the people who pass by? How many appear cheerful? The successful businessmen, those who own a car and a fair salary, and even younger folk, often look worried or perplexed.

How many people who attend church give the impression of being really happy? Surely the Christian should be an example and radiate joy and gladness.

The wise man says in Prov. xvii. 22:

“A merry heart doeth good like medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.”

If we are cheerful, there may be a benefit to health, for a healthy mind does affect the body. One would expect those who suffer from ill health or some major disability to be sad, but how often do we find such people relatively happy. We may know people who have indifferent health who are an example to us.

If we refer to II Cor. xi. 24-28 we shall find a list of the trials and sufferings of the Apostle Paul. The last epistles written from prison do not contain any complaint, although in prison, Paul must have suffered much. He writes about the revelation he received and he blesses God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, “who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. i. 3).

As there are so many references in both the O.T. and the N.T. to rejoicing, gladness and joy, we will limit our comments to the letter to the Philippians. In chapter i., he explains that what happened to him had furthered the gospel. Because of his bonds, and his witness, others became more confident to speak the Word without fear; but Paul might have been upset as some preached a Christ of contention, not sincerely, but trying to add affliction to his bonds (Phil. i. 16). However, others preached the gospel in the spirit of love, and supported him. How did Paul react to this confusion? The answer in verse 18 is given:

“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”

In the same chapter, he discusses the way Christ would be magnified in his body, whether by life or death. But he realizes how much his life meant to the brethren at Philippi, and he expressed his confidence that he would abide and continue with them for their furtherance and joy of faith. He adds:

“That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again” (Phil. i. 26).

Notice his concern and desire for their joy. In verse 25 he refers to joy and it is interesting that the word used for rejoicing in verse 26 is a stronger word indicating boasting. See how he encourages the saints so that they with Paul may rejoice.

In chapter ii. 17, 18 he expresses the possibility that he might die for his faith and his death would be like the drink offering which was poured over the sacrifice:

“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.”

This was a mutual rejoicing; I joy and rejoice together with you and you joy and rejoice together with me. So in what we would call adversity, Paul was rejoicing and asking the saints to rejoice with him.

Read what Paul wrote about Epaphroditus, who nearly lost his life in his willing service (Phil. ii. 25-29). When you see him, rejoice (verse 28). Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness (29). What a welcome he ought to receive and what joy at his coming! How Paul seeks to radiate joy and gladness and encourages others to share that joy with him.

Chapter iii. begins “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord” and then he seems to deviate, as he often does in his letters. He writes about his seven losses in the flesh and the seven gains he wishes to obtain in the spirit. He presses towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (verse 14), and he advises the saints:

“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded” (iii. 15).

“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 xv. 4 tells us that the Scriptures,

“were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

“Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (xv. 5, 6).

Turning to II Pet. i. 5-7 we have the following steps:

Add to your faith virtue – knowledge – temperance – patience – godliness and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.

“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (i. 8).

The Apostle Paul is our example. In writing to Timothy he remind him of the persecutions and afflictions he suffered, but despite all the adversity, his faith and patience remained firm.

“But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, but out of them all the Lord delivered me” (II Tim. iii. 10, 11).

He warns Timothy that those who would live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

As we read of all the things that Paul suffered, and remember his experience in prison, we realize how much patience Paul needed. Yet he endured, and wrote those wonderful epistles which contain the revelation of the mystery and the hope that awaits us.

Is it not wonderful that in Rom. xv., we have the reference to the God of patience and consolation? (verse 5). This is followed by the title the God of hope in verse 13 and in verse 33, the God of peace.

Have we ever thought of the tremendous amount of patience that has been shown by God over so many years? How patient was God with Israel, His chosen people! And when in the fullness of time, God sent His Son, He was rejected and crucified. Yet, God is patient still. He is the God of patience awaiting the time when His purposes will be fulfilled. And if God is so patient and if Paul our example was patient too, should we not also be patient?

The parable of the sower (Luke viii. 15) refers to the seed that was sown on good ground which brought forth fruit with patience. If we sow seed, whether in our gardens,

or on the spiritual level, in ministry or in our personal witness, do we expect “results” at once? Surely we should await the harvest with patience.

If we suffer affliction, or if our faith is tested in any way, should we not hold on in faith and endure with patience?

Let us conclude with two references:

I Tim. vi. 11, 12: “Be thou, O man of God, flee these things; follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses”.

Col. i. 10-12: “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His gracious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints (holiest) in light”.

Is it hard to be patient? Yes, most of us would reply. But if we are strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, surely we shall be enabled to be patient and so glorify God in our lives.

No.6. Humility. **pp. 230 - 232**

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. ii. 5).

How often do we wish to have our own way? It is natural to have desires and ambitions and to seek to achieve them. As Christians we need to have a balanced outlook and to remember that even “Christ pleased not Himself” (Rom. xv. 3). The danger is that if we are self-willed, we may become proud. Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Prov. xvi. 18). The fall of Satan was due to iniquity that was found in him. The King of Tyrus is described in Ezek. xxviii. 12-15. He was in Eden (he was the anointed cherub) and so it is reasonable to assume that the account of the King of Tyrus relates to Satan. Verse 17 of that chapter says “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty”. If pride was the cause of Satan’s fall, should this not be a warning to us, lest we think of ourselves “more highly than we ought to think” (Rom. xii. 3).

The children of Israel were exhorted to “remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart” (Deut. viii. 2. See also verse 3).

Micah vi. 8 reads:

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

As we come to the Gospels, we find many references to the need for humility. The disciples wanted to know who would be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, and our Lord set a little child before them. “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. xviii. 4). Our Lord spoke of the scribes and Pharisees who were proud and liked to be called “Rabbi” and have the best seats at civil functions. Christ said that “he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. xxiii. 11). He washed the feet of the disciples as an example of true humility (John xiii. 4-16). Christ quoted the words “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” in Mat. xxiii. 12 (also Luke xiv. 11 and xviii. 14).

An example was the wedding feast, when he advised guests not to take the best seats, lest they be asked to step down in favour of a more important person. Better to be asked to “come up higher”. The quotation in Luke xviii. 14 relates to the publican and the Pharisee who went into the temple to pray; it was the humble prayer of the publican that was commended by our Lord.

So in His teaching, our Lord often spoke about the need for true humility. It was in His life, His death and the cruel suffering on the cross that our Lord showed how His teaching was put into practice.

He was in the form of God, but did not consider that He should grasp at His “rights” as being equal with God. He gave up His “rights” and emptied Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a servant, and He was made in the likeness of men. Then, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians ii. 5-11).

His sevenfold humility is to be followed by a sevenfold exaltation, and the time will come when at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And so, Paul says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”. Let us reflect on what our Lord has done for us, what a tremendous sacrifice He made, giving up His “rights” and suffering such a dreadful death for our sakes.

May we remember verse 3, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves”. This is true humility, and the reverse of pride. It is the spirit of Christ, who took our sins and carried them to the tree.

James writes,

“Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He shall lift you up” (James iv. 10).

Let us conclude with a quotation from Col. iii. 12, 13:

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

Let this mind be in you.

Christian Attitudes

No.7. Prayerfulness.

pp. 13 - 15

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Col. iv. 2).

Stuart Allen, in the Editorial of the May 1981 issue of the Berean Expositor quoted this text and point out that intercession was a vital part of Paul’s ministry. Several times Paul writes that he prayed “without ceasing” for others. The Editorial continues:

“When one thinks of the immense burden he carried, can it be that he is exaggerating? No, for he had learned that prayer is the lifting up of the mind through Christ to the Father and this can be done at any time and in all circumstances.”

In other words, while it is good to set aside time for prayer, we can only pray continually if we have the attitude of mind that lifts itself up to God in prayer at all times.

Nehemiah was the king’s cupbearer. He stood before the king, took up the wine and gave it to him. But he was sad and the king noticed it. When the king asked, “Why is thy countenance sad, seeing that thou art not sick?” Nehemiah was afraid (Neh. ii. 2). He told the king of the desolation of the city of Jerusalem and the king replied “For what dost thou make request?”. And we read, “So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said unto the king” (Neh. ii. 4, 5). There was no time to kneel down and pray. Only a moment in which to lift up the mind to God in prayer and then to reply to the king. This is an excellent example of the attitude of mind which we should endeavour to maintain.

There are several words for prayer conveying different aspects.

“I will exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men” (I Tim. ii. 1).

The word for supplication indicates a beseeching prayer, while prayer means the pouring out of prayer. Intercession is when we pray for others and intercede for them.

In several passages we find that prayer and supplications are linked:

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts i. 14).

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and for me” (Eph. vi. 18, 19).

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. iv. 6).

While it is important that we should pray (or intercede) for one another, even as Paul prayed for the saints (and asked them to pray for him) we often feel our inadequacy. “We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom. viii. 26). Let us be comforted by the fact that the Spirit makes intercession for us (Rom. viii. 26, 27). Furthermore, Romans viii. 34 tells us that the risen Christ also makes intercession for us.

In the very early issues of Joints and Bands (numbers 2-17) there are brief articles by Stuart Allen on prayer which are worthy of reprinting. The following points have been taken from those articles:

“Continue in prayer” means to persevere, to concentrate, and regard prayer as a matter of urgency.

“Epaphras labouring fervently for you in prayers” (Col. iv. 12). The intense prayers of Epaphras are indicated by the literal translation of ‘labouring fervently’—which is ‘agonizing’. He agonized in prayer.

The word to ‘watch’ means to be on the alert, to refrain from sleep. The reverse of watching is given in Acts xii. 5-16 where we read of Peter being in prison and prayer was made without ceasing for him. But when he was released from prison and knocked at the door, he had to wait because they did not believe that their prayers had been answered.

When should we pray? Pray without ceasing! Be in constant communion with the Lord under all circumstances. Stuart Allen writes:

“Effective prayer puts God first, others second, self last.”
“Effective prayer is based on the Word of God.”

When David prayed to the Lord, after he was told that Solomon would build the house of the Lord, and that the house of David would be established for ever, David prayed “Do as thou hast said” (II Sam. vii. 25). As David based his prayer on the promise he had received of the Lord, so let us base our prayers on the promises that the Lord has made to us and pray with thanksgiving.

Our Lord Jesus Christ often prayed to His Father and we have many examples of His prayers. He prayed “Thy will be done”. As we pray, may we always pray, not that we should have our own way, but that the will of the Lord may be done.

Paul also is an example for us as he prayed and submitted his life to the will of the Lord. May we ever rejoice that we have access to the Father:

“For through Him we have both access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph. ii. 18).
“No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John xiv. 6).

So it is very important that one of our Christian attitudes should be prayerfulness. How often we fail in this! Let us remember that prayer is an essential part of our spiritual life. May we lift up our hearts and minds to God in prayer and realize His presence with us throughout the day.

“Continue (as a matter of urgency) in prayer and watch (be on the alert) in the same with thanksgiving” (Col. iv. 2).

No.8. Confidence. **pp. 30 - 32**

“In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence” (Prov. xiv. 26).

Some people by nature are shy, timid, reserved and perhaps apprehensive. Others are strong characters and have self confidence. Those who are timid need words of encouragement, while those who are self assured need to consider the basis of their confidence, remembering that it is easy for a strong character to become proud.

In the O.T. references to the faint hearted indicate that they are of little use when the enemy must be faced:

“And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart” (Deut. xx. 8).

Gideon was appointed by God to deliver Israel but his army was too large, lest Israel should say “Mine own hand saved me”. So Gideon told those who were fearful and afraid to return home, and twenty-two thousand left the field, leaving ten thousand. But God said that even these were too many (Judges vii. 1-7).

When Joshua was appointed to lead Israel, the Lord spoke words of encouragement:--

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Josh. i. 9).

Paul wrote to Timothy “Fight the good fight of faith” (I Tim. vi. 12) and he urged him to be strong:

“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. ii. 1).

Israel had to fight their enemies, but we are engaged in a different kind of warfare. It is a spiritual conflict. For us, we have to run the race that is set out before us. We need confidence; we need strength, but not a confidence that arises from self esteem. Our source of strength must be found through Christ:

“and such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (II.Cor.iii.4,5).

There are two references in Proverbs to confidence:--

“For the Lord shall be thy confidence” (Prov. iii. 26).

“The fear of the Lord is strong confidence” (Prov. xiv. 26).

But there is also a word of warning:--

“confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint” (Prov. xxv. 19).

If we are to be confident, our trust must be placed in the Lord Who is worthy of our confidence.

Paul could have had a confidence based on his Jewish birth and faith, but he rejected this:

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. iii. 3).

He counted as loss for Christ all those claims he had in the flesh, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, that he might gain Christ (Phil. iii. 7, 8).

In his daily life, he relied on the strength that he received from God:--

“. . . . all men forsook me notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (II Tim. iv. 16, 17).

Timothy was a faithful man, but it seems that he needed some words of encouragement. So we find in the letters that Paul wrote to him several messages to urge him onward in his life and ministry. Here are some of those words of exhortation:--

“Let no man despise thy youth” (I Tim. iv. 12).

“Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (I Tim. iv. 14).

“Stir up the gift of God” (II Tim. i. 6).

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Tim. i. 7).

“Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. ii. 1).

So if any are by nature timid and at times suffer from depression, or any kind of fear, consider the advice given to Timothy. God has not given us the spirit of fear, but may we be confident since we have received the gift of grace that is in Christ Jesus. His strength is sufficient for our every need.

Let us rejoice in the wonderful privilege we have which enables us to approach the Father, for we have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. ii. 18).

“In Whom (Christ Jesus our Lord) we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you” (Eph. iii. 12, 13).

There are several passages in Philippians that speak of confidence and trust, so in conclusion, let us remember these words:--

“Be confident of this very thing, that He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it (complete it) until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. i. 6).

If we are timid, let us not be faint-hearted. Let us rely on the strength that the Lord Jesus Christ will give us, for our sufficiency is in Him. We may feel inadequate as we try to run the race and fight the good fight of faith. But may we remember that He has begun the good work in our hearts, and we rely on His grace. That good work which He initiated will be completed by Him. So then let us be of good courage, let us have confidence, not in ourselves, but in Him.

“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (Eph. vi. 10).

No.9. Discrimination or Discernment. **pp. 51 - 53**

“That ye may approve things that are excellent” (Phil. i. 10).

The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and said to him “Ask what I shall give thee”. His answer is given in I Kings iii. 6-9. Verse 9 reads:

“Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”

God approved of this reply and gave Solomon a wise and understanding heart.

Although we do not have to shoulder responsibility as great as Solomon, each one of us needs an understanding heart, so that we can discern between good and bad. If our lives are to be in line with God’s will, we need guidance and wisdom. And if we are to know the deeper things of God, and His will and purpose for us, to know the hope of His calling, we need the leading of the Holy Spirit and the spirit of wisdom.

In order to make the right choice between good and bad, and to understand deeper things that God will reveal to us, we must learn how to test or try all things.

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (I Thess. v. 21).

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. xii. 2).

Not only do we need to test or prove all things, we also need to test ourselves:

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (II Cor. xiii. 5).

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Gal. vi. 2-4).

In Ephesians we read about the worthy walk:

“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light; (for the fruit of the Spirit [or light] is in all goodness and righteousness and truth) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (Eph. v. 8-10).

So then our Christian attitude should be to prove or test all things, so that we can choose what is good, and what is acceptable to the Lord in our daily lives.

It is right that we should learn what is good, but we read in Hebrews about some things which are better. Here are some examples:--

“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (Heb. vii. 19).

“By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament” (Heb. vii. 22).

“It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Heb. ix. 23).

“. . . . took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. x. 34).

“. . . . others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb. xi. 35).

To appreciate the values of spiritual things, we need more than an agile brain. The natural man may be clever, but it is only by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit that we can assess spiritual things, for they are spiritually discerned:

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. ii. 12-14).

The need for the wisdom that we receive from God is emphasized in the prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesians, so let us refer to Eph. i. 16-23. We will only quote verses 17-19 to save space:--

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power”.

So if we are to understand what is the hope of His calling, we need enlightenment, we need the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Writing to the Philippians, Paul told them of his prayer that their love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in judgment (intelligence) “that ye may approve things that are excellent” (Phil. i. 10). The margin gives the translation “that ye may try the things that differ”. In Ephesians we read that we are raised up together and “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. ii. 6).

As we try the things that differ and so approve things that are excellent, we see that we have a hope at the right hand of God where Christ sits (Col. iii. 1-4).

No.10. Submission.
pp. 86 - 88

“For even Christ pleased not Himself” (Rom. xv. 3).

There is a Sunday School prayer that begins:

“Lord Jesus, be Thou with us now
as at Thy feet we humbly bow,
And when we sing and when we pray
Help us to *mean* the words we say”.

In the hymn “Thy way not mine, O Lord” there are prayers such as “Choose out the path for me. Smooth let it be or rough” and “Take Thou my cup and it with joy or sorrow fill”. But when we sing these words, do we really *mean* them?

So when we think of submission, and submission to the will of the Lord, we ask whether we are giving an intellectual assent, without really meaning that we are willing to submit ourselves to God’s will. Would it be true to say that we make mental reservations when we say “Thy will be done”?

The Greek word *hypotasso* is translated in various ways, such as to submit, be subject to, be in subject to, be in subjection to, etc. Young’s Concordance gives the rendering “to set in array under” and this seems to convey an orderly structure.

The description in I Cor. xv. of the ultimate subjection and submission of all things to God is an example of an orderly structure. All things will be put under the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, although Heb. ii. 8 points out that we do not yet see all things under Him. Christ must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When all things are subdued unto Him, then we read “the Son also Himself shall be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (I Cor. xv. 24-28). See also Eph. i. 10 and 22.

We are instructed to recognize and be subject to the powers that be and this is another orderly structure. We should render to all their dues, we should pay our taxes, and render honour to whom honour is due (see Rom. xiii. 1-8). Hebrews xiii. 17 repeats this principle, “Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves”. See also I Pet. ii. 13-14.

The submission of the church to Christ is introduced as an example of the relationship that should exist between husband and wife. Eph. v. 24-25 reads:

“Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it”.

Some wives do not like the idea of obeying their husbands, but if the husbands give themselves as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, wives may be more willing to ‘submit’ to their husbands. For who could resist a loving husband who followed Christ in such devotion and care?

Let us mention very briefly other examples of submission:

- (a) Submission to ministers of the gospel (I Cor. xvi. 15, 16).
- (b) Submission to one another (Eph. v. 21).
- (c) Submission of the younger to the elder (I Pet. v. 5).

If our Christian attitude is to be in line with the teaching of the Word of God, we need to be humble in mind, and give every possible consideration to others. We cannot insist on our “rights” but be willing to give up and submit as we seek to know the mind and will of God.

As a boy Jesus Christ was subject to His parents (Luke ii. 51) and He was an example to children.

But surely, the finest example of submission is found as we study the life of Christ. He came down, not to do His will, but the will of the Father (read John vi. 38-40). Even Christ pleased not Himself, as we read in Romans:

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself; but as it is written, ‘the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me’.” (Rom. xv. 1-3).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (I Cor. x. 32, 33).

There is of course a danger if our desire is only to please men; Paul made it clear that loyalty to the truth came first and before his desire to please men. We find this corrective in Gal. i. 9, 10:

“As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

The carnal mind is enmity against God for it is not subject to the will of God, neither indeed can be (Rom. viii. 7). But we are not “in the flesh” but in the Spirit if the Spirit of God dwells in us.

If our Christian attitude in regard to submission is to be as it should be, we need the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our prayer, like Paul's in Acts ix. 6 should be "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?". If we are to show a spirit of submission to the Lord, to those who minister to us, to those around us, as well as to the powers that be, we certainly need help. Surely we all wish to do the will of the Lord, but have we the strength and the courage?

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians ii. 12, 13).

We need the strength—and we have been promised that God works in us and gives us the strength we need. So let us take courage.

Renew my will from day to day
Blend it with Thine, and take away
all that now makes it hard to say,
"Thy will be done".

No.11. Peace. **pp. 106 - 109**

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Col. iii. 15).

Some years ago, the writer received a visitor from Israel and during the interview, a telephone call came through for the visitor. Evidently, his wife was speaking to him and at the end of the call, the visitor said "Shalom" and replaced the telephone receiver. So even now, "Peace" is a salutation that is still in use. At the beginning and end of some of the epistles, we find this greeting of "Peace". After the resurrection, our Lord appeared to the disciples and said "Peace be unto you" (John xx. 19, 21, 26).

If there is to be peace, there must be a complete and mutual understanding and if any division or difference has occurred, there must be reconciliation. Sin created a barrier between us and God and so sin had to be dealt with, so that reconciliation could take place. Rom. iii. quotes, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (verse 10). But although all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, we can rejoice that we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans iv. 25 introduces resurrection. It reads:

"Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

This leads on to Rom. v. 1:

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So our peace comes to us through faith, and as a result of our Lord's victory over sin and death in His resurrection. We can never thank Him enough for all that He has done for us, and for our peace with God. (We do not make our peace with God for He has already done it for us.)

Not only do we have peace with God but we can enjoy the peace of God which keeps and garrisons our hearts and minds:

“Be careful for nothing prayer thanksgiving requests made known unto God And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep (garrison) your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. iv. 6, 7).

“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (Col. iii. 15).

Added to this is the promise that the God of peace shall be with us.

“Now the God of peace be with you all” (Rom. xv. 33).

“Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Phil. iv. 9).

There are eleven references to peace in Romans. In Ephesians, we find 8 occurrences and here we find a dispensational aspect. The middle wall of partition separated the Jew and Gentile. But of the two, Christ has made (or created) one new man. “The both” has been reconciled to God in one body by the cross. Mr. Charles H. Welch expounds this in detail in *The Berean Expositor* Volume X, pages 177-180. We can only touch upon the truth in this article. Here is an outline of the 8 passages where “peace” occurs.

- A | i. 2. Grace and peace (salutation).
- B | ii. 14. He is our peace (the Head).
- C | ii. 15. The twain.—One new man.
 - D | ii. 17. Preached peace—those far off.
 - D | ii. 17. Preached peace—those nigh.
- C | iv. 3. Unity—the bond of peace.
- B | vi. 15. Gospel of peace (feet shod).
- A | vi. 23. Peace and love (benediction).

Let us rejoice that He is our Peace. He has created the one new man, but in the practical section, we are enjoined to “endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”. Satan seeks to divide us and we need to be on our guard. Hence Paul says “endeavour” to keep the unity for there may be times when this is not easy.

Now let us revert to Rom. viii. 6, 7 which says:

“To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. The carnal mind is enmity against God”.

We are all aware of the conflict between the flesh & the spirit and Rom. vii. & viii. contain much about this.

But in our national life, we are faced with many problems, inflation, unemployment, etc., so much so that some people no longer listen to the news or read the papers. Their minds are greatly disturbed by the “news”. Voices are raised declaring that this or that is the solution to our national problems. But earthly wisdom is not enough to enable a solution to be found. When Christ returns, He alone will be able to show the right solution. He can heal the differences between the nations and the internal differences too. But even when He returns there will be opposition to His rule until all things are put under His feet.

One of Christ’s names is the Prince of Peace.

As we conclude, let us remember the picture of the storm at sea when Christ was asleep on a pillow in the boat (Mark iv. 35-41). The boat was full of water as the waves washed over it.

“Master, carest Thou not that we perish?” cried the disciples. “And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still” (Literally, “Silence, be quiet!”).

As the storms of life break over us, we too may be afraid or at least, the peace of our minds may be disturbed. The outlook for this material world is indeed grim. We need to hear the reassuring voice of the Lord so that our minds may have peace.

Should we not have that inward peace that only God can give? Whatever the “outward” may be, our peace should remain. Why? Because we have peace with God. Because we should let the peace of God rule in our hearts, and because the God of peace is with us.

“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Col. iii. 15, 16).

No.12. Sympathy. **pp. 122 - 125**

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind” (Phil. ii. 1, 2, R.S.V.).

“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded” (Phil. ii. 1, 2, A.V.).

There are some people who have been given a sympathetic nature; they are good listeners, and inspire others with hope and confidence. It has been said that one cannot sympathize fully unless the experience has been shared. For example, one who has had a nervous breakdown can sympathize with a person suffering from the illness in a way that

is impossible for one who has always been strong and healthy. So it may not be easy for everyone to sympathize in depth; yet we should be compassionate to all.

The dictionary gives sympathy – Fellow feeling, compassion.

The A.V. does not seem to contain the word “sympathy” but in the Greek we find the word *sumpatheo* which occurs twice in Hebrews. So let us begin by looking at these two references:

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. iv. 15).

The literal translation is:

“We have not a high priest not able to sympathize with our infirmities, but (Who) has been tempted in all things according to (our) likeness, apart from sin” or we may say “sin excepted”.

Our Lord has lived on this earth as a man, and experienced all kinds of suffering and deprivation. Surely He could say, “I too have been through it all and I know about your particular experience” and so He fully sympathizes with us.

Paul tells the Hebrews that he knew how they sympathized with him, and had experienced loss similar to his own losses. The literal translation begins “For both with my bonds, ye sympathized”. The A.V. reads:

“For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. x. 34).

Then in Peter’s epistle, he writes that we should extend compassion to one another:

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (I Pet. iii. 8).

The literal translation is:

“Finally, all being of one mind, sympathizing, loving the brethren, tender hearted, friendly”.

This then should be our attitude of mind, being sympathetic one to another.

The Greek word *sumpascho* means to suffer together, and this is an extension of the thought that we should sympathize.

“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (I Cor. xii. 26).

Paul is writing about the members of a body and shows how each member shares with the experiences of any one member. This word also occurs in Romans where Paul writes about the sharing of the sufferings of Christ. He writes:

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. viii. 17).

Paul writing to the Philippians explains how he counted all things loss for Christ, and he was willing to suffer the loss of all things in order that he might win Christ. He continues:

“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. iii. 10).

Our Lord has shared in our experiences, and now He asks us to share with Him for we are united with Him. We need strength if we are to suffer with Christ, but first Paul points out that we have the power of His resurrection which is the enabling power, so that we can share with our Lord.

We have seen how the Lord has compassion on the people and on us. Paul received sympathy from those who suffered as he did. We have read how we should have sympathy with one another and how the members of a body share. We have gone further and seen that we may share in the Lord’s sufferings.

Let us conclude by the words written by Paul in II Cor. i. 3-7 concerning the God of all comfort:

- (1) Who comforts us
- (2) and enables us to comfort others.

“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.”

No.13. Graciousness. **pp. 142 - 145**

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. iv. 32).

Paul was an example to us. “Be ye followers together of me” he wrote to the Philippians (Phil. iii. 17). In Eph. v. 1 he wrote “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” while in I Cor. xi. 1 he says “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”. It is evident that a high standard of conduct is demanded of us.

In Eph. iv. 32, which we have quoted above, we are enjoined to forgive one another even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us. The word translated ‘forgive’ means “to be gracious to” and so the message is that as Christ has shown grace to us, so we should be gracious to others.

This brings us back to the grace by which we are saved, and this basic doctrine has its practical implications.

Paul wrote in Phil. iii. 1, “To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and it is safe for you” (R.S.V.) so we may not hesitate to go back to elementary things which we surely know, but rather be willing to meditate on what Christ has done for us, knowing that our practice should balance the doctrine.

So let us remind ourselves of the 12 occurrences of the word ‘grace’ in Ephesians.

The epistle begins and ends with a salutation and benediction of ‘grace’. In chap. i., we are reminded that we have been blessed with every blessing that is spiritual in heavenly places. We have been chosen in Him, and blameless before Him, we have been predestinated unto the adoption of children according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

We have been accepted in the Beloved, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Then, passing to chapter ii., we are reminded of God’s great love; we have been quickened together with Christ, and have been raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ, that in the ages to come, He might show us the exceeding riches of His grace toward us through Christ Jesus.

Twice we are told “By grace are ye saved” and our salvation does not depend on our own works, lest we should boast. But we have been created “unto good works” and those good works should be the fruit and not the basis of our salvation.

In chapter iii., Paul speaks of the dispensation of the grace of God given to him for us. Paul was the minister for the truth of the Mystery according to the gift of the grace of God, given to him by the effectual working of His power. Although Paul said he was the least of all saints, this grace was given to him so that he could preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Then in chapter iv., we learn that to every one of us, grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Each one of us therefore has this gift of grace, whether in small or greater measure, and we have the responsibility to use this grace as we are given the opportunity. In verse 29, we are told that one of the practical outworkings of the grace of God given to us, should be in our speech. No corrupt word should pass our lips. Our words should edify so that we may minister grace to those who hear us. We may not be gifted speakers, we may not be preachers, but surely we do speak! And when we speak, our words should reflect the grace that God has placed in our hearts.

An outline of the 12 references to grace in Ephesians will summarize what we have tried to set out in our meditation and comments.

Charis (grace).

- A | i. 2. Grace to you.—Salutation.
- B | i. 6. According as He hath chosen us to the praise of the glory of His grace. |
 - a | i. 7. Accepted, redemption, forgiveness according to the riches of His grace.
 - b | ii. 5. By grace—saved.
 - a | ii. 7. Raised, seated together in heavenly places, the exceeding riches of His grace.
 - b | ii. 8. By grace—saved.
- B | iii. 2. The Dispensation of the grace of God. |
 - a | iii. 7. Paul—minister—according to the gift of grace of God.
 - b | iii. 8. Grace given to preach.
 - a | iv. 7. Every one. Given grace according to the gift of Christ.
 - b | iv. 29. Minister grace to hearers.
- A | vi. 24. Grace be with all who love in sincerity.—Benediction.

If our Christian attitude reflects the grace given to us, if we are followers of Paul even as he was of Christ, then this should be evident in our daily lives, in our speech, in our manner of life, and in our relationship with others. In Col. iii. 13, Paul is slightly more explicit. He says:

“ longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

Words cannot adequately express our thanks and gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ for what He has done for us. How can we reflect such grace in our lives? The last three chapters of Ephesians is a guide but even so, can we live up to this high standard? Ephesians vi. 10 says “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might”. We are

not in ourselves strong enough to live to this high standard and it is only as we receive the power and strength from Him that we may go on our way and be truly gracious.

No.14. Steadfastness.

pp. 163 - 165

“Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (I Cor. xv. 58).

The Christian life has been likened to a race and the Christian to an athlete. The race is not like the 100 yards sprint but to the 10 miles long run, which is a feat of endurance.

Stedfast (which we now spell steadfast) means to be firm or constant. It means that there must be a continuation of effort and not a series of short bursts of energy. The long runner must not stop on the way to look around and enjoy the beautiful countryside, he must concentrate on running and look towards the end of the race.

We live in days when there are many influences which would cause us to turn aside. As this is written, there is an article in a magazine that discusses the decline in moral values and one reason given is the changing nature of Christian worship and teaching: “The salt has lost its flavour”.

Today, we hear much about the social gospel and Christians are advised to participate in politics, with the thought that we are wise enough to be able to bring into being the kingdom of God. No mention is made of the return of Christ Who alone can bring into being the kingdom of God.

Let us see what the Scriptures have to say and what warnings are given to us in these days which are called perilous times.

We quote from the Revised Standard Version (R.S.V.):

“Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths” (II Tim. iv. 2-4).

Paul says that we should not be like children tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. He warns that there are those who are cunning and whose object is to deceive (Eph. iv. 14). Those who are “tossed to and fro” are just the opposite of steadfast, firm and constant believers in Christ. We need to be on the alert as it is possible to handle the Scriptures deceitfully (II Cor. iv. 2), and by failing to rightly divide the Word, those who claim to be teachers might mislead the earnest seeker after truth.

Some of the dangers are expressed in Paul's letter to Timothy and we quote three references:

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (I Tim. i. 5-7).

“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith” (I Tim. vi. 20, 21).

“Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some” (II Tim. ii. 17, 18).

Seeing that there are so many dangers to the honest seeker after truth, how important it is to prove all things and to hold fast that which is good (I Thess. v. 21). As Paul wrote to Titus, we should hold fast the faithful word (Titus i. 9) and his advice to Timothy is even more appropriate today “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. i. 13).

We need to hold fast and to stand fast:

- (1) “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (I Cor. xvi. 13).
- (2) “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. v. 1).
- (3) “. . . . stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. i. 27).
- (4) “. . . . so stand fast in the Lord” (Phil. iv. 1).

To be steadfast, we need to hold fast and to stand fast and we need to be established in the faith, for it is through the power of God that we are so established. “Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ” (Rom. xvi. 25).

The need for stability is expressed in Paul's letter to the Colossians. Again we quote from the R.S.V.: “provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Colossians i. 23). See also Stuart Allen's comments on page 132 of *Letters from Prison*.

We must have a sure foundation and our faith must rest squarely on the Word of God, which leads us to the Living Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. We do need the help of teachers who are sound in the faith and how fortunate are those who have such sound teachers!

Before we conclude, let us remember Eph. vi. 13-18. We need to put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers and other enemies. Three times we are told that we are “to stand”. The description of the armour is given in this passage.

We conclude with I Cor. xv. 57, 58:

“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

No.15. Bereavement. **pp. 210 - 212**

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;
blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job i. 21).

When our Lord walked this earth, He showed His love, concern and compassion for mankind. There are a number of remarkable examples, but two come quickly to mind when we think of bereavement. Let us look at them.

The widow of Nain. It is recorded in Luke vii. 11-17 that as Jesus approached the city of Nain, there was a funeral procession, for the only son of a widow had died and was being buried. Many people were expressing their sympathy by attending the funeral. The Lord saw the distress and sorrow of the widow and He had compassion on her. He went up to the widow and said “Weep not”. At that stage, the procession halted, and Christ went towards the bier. The Lord Jesus gave an order, “Young man, I say to you, Arise”. He who had been dead sat up, and began to speak.

The raising of Lazarus. The second example is even more strange. It is one of the eight signs recorded in the Gospel of John. There were two sisters, Martha and Mary, who had a brother named Lazarus, and Jesus Christ often visited them, for He loved all three. Lazarus fell seriously ill so the sisters sent a message to Jesus Christ. “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick”. Our Lord knew how ill he was, and that he would die within a few days but He did not hurry. He intended to raise him from the dead. In John xi. 4, 15 and 42 we have reasons for the delay. It was for the glory of God. It was to be an experience for the disciples so that they might believe. It was to be a proof that Jesus Christ was sent by the Father.

So when Jesus and the disciples arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days. The scene was one of great mourning and sadness, and our Lord was full of compassion and sympathy. He was deeply touched by the tears shed by Mary. Also the Jews were weeping.

Jesus groaned in the spirit and was troubled. Jesus wept (John xi. 35), “See, how He loved him”, said the Jews.

Having shown His love for Lazarus, and His sympathy with the two sisters, He prepared for the next stage to prove that He was the Creator made manifest in the flesh.

He approached the grave and asked that the stone which acted as a door to the cave should be removed. We read in verses 41-42:

“And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou has heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent me.”

Jesus cried “LAZARUS, come forth”. And he that was dead, came forth, bound hand and foot and his face bound with a napkin. “Loose him and let him go” said Jesus.

In these two events, we see the intense love, sympathy and compassion of our Lord. Today we can be assured that in our distress and sorrows, He shares with us and He supports us continually. But today we do not see these remarkable miracles or signs. But they do remind us that the day of resurrection will come and those whom we have lost, and who love the Lord, will arise in His likeness. Then, there will be no more sorrow, or pain or crying.

The bereaved. While one hesitates to refer to one’s own experience, the Psalmist exclaims “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so” (Psa. cvii. 2). The writer will take the liberty of giving examples from his experience, recognizing that others may have had quite different circumstances for we are all different by nature and environment.

One who has suffered bereavement needs a strong faith. However much the bereaved grieves and that grief may be most intense, should it not be possible to believe that God is in control, and that what God wills is best? If there is complete faith that God over-rules, may we not remind ourselves of Rom. viii. 28, “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose”. The writer lost his wife after 50 years, and before her death she was worried about many things. How could she cope if her husband died first? She feared having to go to hospital: and other worries could be added. But she died suddenly and did not have to enter hospital, and her husband did not die first. So one could give thanks that the writer’s wife was spared the worries and she did not have to suffer a long illness. Even while feeling a sense of loss, it is possible to praise the Lord.

The friends of the bereaved. Some people are embarrassed when they have to meet someone who has been bereaved.

In a local Church magazine, it is said that in Britain there are 3,000,000 widows, 800,000 widowers, and 200,000 children under 16 who have lost a parent by death. A comment is made that the clergy realize how inadequate their care of the bereaved can be. There is a National Organization to provide care for Widows and their children called CRUSE as they consider their work consists of, (1) finding the means of providing a suitable person to talk with the bereaved, (2) giving practical help where needed, for

example in legal, financial and housing matters, and (3) providing social activities, meetings and outings, establishing friendship groups, etc., etc.

We may not be able to compete with Social Workers in providing for the needs of the bereaved, but in our own way, and according to our circumstances, we may be able to show our sympathy in a practical manner. We may send a letter or sympathy card, or speak on the telephone to show our love and concern. When the writer's wife died, many friends sent cards or short letters which were deeply appreciated.

An important way of helping is to pray for the bereaved, and to mention in a letter or on a card that you are remembering your friend in your prayers. The writer is sure that many friends were supporting him in their prayers, and it was a great help. In our case we stated that no flowers were desired, but gifts to a certain charity could be made if desired. But it so happened that flowers came after the funeral from a few sources, which were displayed around the house and were a means of consolation.

JOB. You know the story of Job? Why not read Job chapter i. again and remind yourself of his great trials. Despite his great losses, he was able to say:

“The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job i. 21).

“Brothers as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (James v. 10, 11, N.I.V.).

No.16. Friendship. pp. 229 - 231

“A friend loveth at all times” (Prov. xvii. 17).

At Christmas time, it is the custom to send greetings cards to friends, and those of us who are systematic have a list, or a record on cards (in alphabetical order), which at first sight might indicate the number of friends we have. Indeed, this custom has extended to the business world and it is not uncommon for a businessman to have to sign 800 Christmas cards—a time consuming occupation! But if our list is only say 70 people, would it be true to say that they are friends or should we say they are acquaintances? We may have many acquaintances, but how many true friends? An acquaintance is someone who is known, but with whom there is not a close relationship. A friend is one with whom we are more intimate, one for whom we have affection, a high regard or we might say, one who loves us and whom we love.

An example of such a relationship is given in the account of the friendship between David and Jonathan:

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (I Sam. xviii. 1).

This close friendship was followed by a covenant and a gift which was evidence of the loving relationship that had sprung up between David and Jonathan. So we read in I Sam. xviii. 3, 4:

“Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.”

The whole account of this friendship is given in chapters xviii.-xx. and the death of Jonathan is recorded in I Sam. xxxi. 2.

Proverbs xviii. 24 says that if we want friends, we must be friendly to others and there follows the statement “and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”.

A friendship that will last must be based on a two-way co-operation. In the case of David and Jonathan, we notice in I Sam. xx., that Jonathan was willing to be of great assistance to David. “Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee” in verse 4. But David was under an obligation to Jonathan to show him kindness while he lived, but also David must continue his kindness to Jonathan’s house, in the event of Jonathan’s death.

Our ability to make friends is hindered if we are selfish, for selfish people do not always show themselves friendly. A friend loveth at all times, but this applies to each of the friends.

When we remember that Abraham was called “the Friend of God”, we move to a higher plane. James ii. 21-23 first refers to Abraham being justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar. Perhaps we have thought that Abraham did not offer up his son, because God found a substitute (a ram caught in a thicket by his horns, Gen. xxii. 13), but the Lord said “because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son” (see verse 16). We see that Abraham’s willingness to obey and trust God was counted for the very act. And James shows how faith was made perfect by his works.

“And the Scriptures was fulfilled which saith ‘Abraham believed God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness’; and he was called the Friend of God” (James ii. 23).

The complete trust of Abraham in his Lord established a bond of friendship which enabled him to be called the Friend of God. The O.T. reference is II Chron. xx. 7.

Is Abraham the only person who can be called “The Friend of God”? Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, so if we can be called friends of Jesus Christ, is this not the same as being friends of God?

If we turn to John xv. 13-15 Jesus spoke of greater love that no man has, than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. And Jesus continued, “Ye are my friends, if

ye do whatsoever I command you”. In the past, He had called His disciples servants but now he calls them His friends as He has made known the will of the Father to them. The disciples had not chosen Jesus Christ but He had chosen them and ordained them, that they might be fruitful.

In Ephesians, we also read that Christ chose us but there is no reference to our being called friends. Eph. v. 30 says we are members of His body. Eph. i. 22, 23 says that Christ is the Head of the church which is His body. As members of the church which is His body, we have a closer relationship than being friends. We are united with Him and with one another. So we can rejoice in the richness of His grace, for we do not deserve such blessings. Yet we have such a wonderful hope, that defies description. We can only bow our heads in prayer and thanksgiving.

But we must revert to a consideration of friendship with others in this present life. All friends are not true and reliable friends. Some people will only remain friends while they benefit from the relationship. They may be attracted to those who have material and plentiful goods which a generous man may be willing to share.

“Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour”
(Proverbs xix. 4).

“The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends”
(Proverbs xiv. 20).

“He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth”: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he” (Prov. xiv. 21).

The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke xv. is an example. He had plenty of friends while his money lasted but then he began to be in want. Where were his friends then?

There is also the danger that a friendship may be endangered by gossip or the spreading of rumours:

“. . . . a whisperer separateth chief friends” (Prov. xvi. 28).

“. . . . but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (Prov. xvii. 9).

Even a friend may betray one who has trusted him and the following verse reminds us of the betrayal of our Lord.

“Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psa. xli. 9).

So we find many warnings in the Scriptures about those who are supposed to be friends. Many of us may have had some experience which would enable us to say that all friends are not reliable. It is when we have suffered some loss, when we have faced some kind of crisis, or been in need of help, that we discover who our real friends are. In such times, we may have pleasant surprises, although also there may be unpleasant discoveries. But if we are in need, we remember Paul wrote in Phil. iv. 19 “. . . . But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”.

A friend loveth at all times. Our Lord Jesus Christ never ceases to love us.

Christian Attitudes

No.17. Loneliness.

pp. 10 - 12

“I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop” (Psa. cii. 7).

Introduction

Loneliness might be described as the condition of being alone. As a person becomes older, friends move to other districts, or pass away, and so an old person may feel isolated and friendless. Depression and despondency may follow. On the other hand, a person may be surrounded by many people and yet feel lonely. One may take a trip to London and stand at one of the busy junctions, such as the corner near the Bank of England, and see so many people rushing hither and thither, but they are all strangers and you are not recognized or noticed. “I watch and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop.” There is a feeling of loneliness if one is deserted by one’s friends, as is indicated by the Psalmist when he wrote “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psa. xli. 9), and these words apply also to the Lord Himself, when He was betrayed.

The Lord spoke of the sparrow as an example to show His love and care for all, including the lonely, and to give His assurance of the provision He makes for each one.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke xii. 6, 7. See also Matt. x. 29-31).

When we feel neglected and like a sparrow alone upon the housetop, let us remember that God is with us and He has not forgotten us. As he provides for the sparrow, He will provide for us. Remember, too, the promises made to Moses and Joshua, “He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed” (Deut. xxxi. 8; Josh. i. 9; Heb. xiii. 5). Christ did not forsake His disciples but made provision for them when He had to leave them. He sent the Holy Spirit to be their Comforter and guide them (John xiv. 16-18).

Elijah

The servants of the Lord frequently had experiences of loneliness. The O.T. prophets were sent with messages from the Lord, often with warnings and admonitions, and their task made them sometimes unpopular, and often lonely men. Elijah is an excellent example.

At first we read of the unpopular message “there shall not be dew nor rain these (three) years” (I Kings xvii. 1). He ran away to hide by the brook Cherith. Later he went to Zarephath. Read the full story in chapters xvii. and xviii.

The challenge of the 450 prophets of Baal is exciting. Let the God that answers by fire be the true God. Baal could not answer but God sent the fire, and later He sent the rain.

But the story as recorded in I Kings xix. is related to our study. Elijah's life was threatened, so he ran away with his servant. At Beersheba he left his servant and went alone into the wilderness. Under the juniper tree we hear Elijah saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers". He was very depressed. An angel gave him refreshment twice and he went for 40 days in the strength of that food. "What doest thou here Elijah?" asked the Lord. The Lord then revealed Himself to Elijah, not in the strong wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in a still small voice. "What doest thou here?" asked the Lord again. In reply Elijah complained to the Lord that Israel had forsaken the covenant, thrown down His altars, killed the prophets, and Elijah himself was in great danger, "and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life". Elijah believed he had come to the end for he thought he was alone, and his life was in real danger. How hopeless was his case! How depressed was Elijah!

But what was God's answer to Elijah? The full answer is given in I Kings xix. 15-18:

He must anoint: Hazael to be king over Syria.
Jehu, to be king over Israel.
Elisha, to be prophet in Elijah's place,

and God added:

"Yet I have left Me SEVEN THOUSAND in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (verse 18).

Was Elijah really alone? He thought he was but many were following the true God. And God had His plans for the future of Israel. When we think all is lost, let us remember that God is in control and He has His own plans which will ripen in due course. God will not fail us nor forsake us.

Our Lord

Let us remind ourselves of the tremendous cost paid, and the sufferings endured by the Lord. When the final test came was He supported by the disciples, or was He alone?

"But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled" (Matt. xxvi. 56).

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46).

"But He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah liii. 5).

The Apostle Paul

Paul often asked the brethren to be followers of him, and in I Cor. xi. 1 he writes, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ". He followed his Lord closely and suffered with Him. We have noticed how the disciples forsook Christ and fled. Paul had a similar experience. In II Tim. i. 15 we read:

" all they which are in Asia be turned away from me",

and in II Tim. iv. 16:

"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me",

but he adds in verse 17, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me".

If we endeavour to follow Paul as he followed Christ, we must not be surprised if we share, perhaps in a rather small way, in this kind of experience. If we try to "hold fast the form of sound words", some may turn away from us. We might be called to endure some loneliness. If we are able to have fellowship with those who share our faith let us be thankful, for it is indeed precious and helpful to enjoy such fellowship. But if we are isolated, may we be enabled to hold fast the form of sound words.

A last word

Are you one of those who feel lonely? You feel your need of fellowship? The Lord knows your need.

"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 19).

No.18. Fellowship. pp. 29 - 32

"truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John i. 3).

The family were at home and auntie would probably call as she was expected to be in the district. She came and brought her friends with her. They looked around in the garden, but No! they could not stay for tea. They all came indoors for a chat and then they went. One of the ladies who was quite a stranger to the family said to the lady of the house, "Thank you very much for the fellowship". This remark caused a discussion in the family. Was this just a polite way of saying, "Thank you for receiving us"? Did the friend really think that wandering in the garden and polite talk inside the house constituted real fellowship?

We can ask ourselves some questions. What do *we* mean by fellowship? What is the meaning of the word, fellowship? What does the Bible tell us about fellowship?

Was the stranger right in thanking the family for their fellowship? When we speak of fellowship, we usually think of sharing spiritual things. If we speak to those who hold similar or identical faith and we rejoice together as we talk of those things, this is fellowship. The two disciples walking to Emmaus enjoyed the Lord's conversation about the Scriptures which concerned Himself and they said "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke.xxiv.32).

While fellowship may be greatly enjoyed between Christians who share their experience and their faith, is it not more important to have fellowship with the Lord? The whole of I John i. 3 reads:

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Writing on the subject of true prayer and fellowship with God, Charles H. Welch says in *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 10, page 79:

"God forbid that we should ever regard prayer as a Christian act to be engaged in only when we *want* something, but rather learn, in a practical way, what day by day fellowship with the Father means, its wonder, privilege and joy. Just as breathing is the natural expression of physical life, so should prayer be the normal and continuous expression of our spiritual life."

Let us consider the meaning of the word "fellowship". We have assumed, so far, that fellowship is of necessity concerned with spiritual realities. Is this so?

If we look at the early chapters of the Acts we find that fellowship is related to having all things in common, and that meant material and spiritual things. Two references will illustrate this:

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and *fellowship*, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts ii. 42, 44).

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things *common*" (Acts iv. 32).

Again, we quote Charles H. Welch, who writes on Fellowship in *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 2, pages 24-28:

"The basis of the word fellowship is something that is 'common' like a 'common faith' or a 'common salvation'. The bulk of the references is of a practical nature, manifesting in deed, and by the sharing of expenses, the blessings which all shared alike in grace. The believer should be willing 'to communicate' (I Tim. vi. 18), which is used in that passage almost synonymously with readiness 'to distribute'. The Philippians, not only

knew about 'the fellowship' of the sufferings of Christ (Phil. iii. 10), they had fellowship with Paul in the gospel also (Phil. i. 5; iv. 15)."

When we consider the references in Acts and Charles H. Welch's comments we can see that it is not correct to restrict the meaning of fellowship. It certainly includes the sharing of spiritual things, and true fellowship must include prayer and communion with God our Father. Sharing material things must not be excluded. Paul had much to say about the gift made by the Philippians (see Phil. iv. 10-19), and when writing to those at Corinth he gave instructions about the orderly manner in which the collection should be made (see I Cor. xvi.). Because "having all things common" was in the Acts period, we cannot say that the principle of sharing with those who are in need does not apply to us. Paul told the Philippians that their gift was "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God".

We will not attempt to list every reference to fellowship, but the word *koinonia*, translated fellowship, is sometimes translated "communication", or "contribution", or "communion". In the touching letter that Paul wrote to Philemon about his runaway slave Onesimus, *koinonia* appears in the A.V. as "communication":

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

In Rom. xv. 26 fellowship is shown by a material gift:

"For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem."

In a negative sense we have a reference in Eph. v. 11:

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

If we are working on the A.V. with a concordance we shall find Eph. iii. 9 reads "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ". But if we turn to the R.V. we find that instead of "fellowship" we have "dispensation". Some texts have the Greek word *oikonomia* instead of *koinonia*, and scholars hold the view that the R.V. is better than the A.V. Both Mr. Welch and Mr. Allen use the R.V. for this verse.

But the spirit of Ephesians is that our position in the Body does merit the word fellowship. If we turn to verses 6 and 7 of Eph. iii., Stuart Allen in *Letters From Prison*, page 60, quotes the Revised Version thus:

"To wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the Body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God which was given to me according to the working of His power."

So in Ephesians we have a strong and warm unity in Christ, being joints and bands, all working together and building each other up in the faith.

To conclude, let us remember the three references to fellowship in Philippians:

- i. 5. Your fellowship in the gospel.
- ii. 1. Fellowship of the Spirit.
- iii. 10. Fellowship of His sufferings.

Fellowship in the gospel will give plenty of scope for sharing in things material and spiritual. Fellowship in the Spirit should help us to be likeminded, the same love, of one accord, of one mind. Fellowship of His sufferings can only be endured by the power of His resurrection. But what a wonderful fellowship!

No.19. Distress. **pp. 49 - 53**

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous:
but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Psa. xxxiv. 19).

In this present life there are many things that affect all of us, whether we are Christians or not: we are by nature descended from Adam, and through his fall we are involved in its consequences. Everyone has to face life as it is. We read in Job v. 7:

“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”

In Matt. v. 45, when Jesus Christ was teaching the multitudes, He told them to love their enemies:

“. . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.”

While it is true that both the just and unjust are subject to the trials and limitations of this present life, the invitation of Jesus Christ, extended to men while He was on this earth, promised relief and rest to those who came to Him. But He did refer to His yoke. In Matt. xi. 28-30 we read:

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

In His earthly ministry Christ did not offer an easy life to those who followed Him. He said to His disciples:

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. xvi. 24).

The apostle Paul did not tell Timothy that his life would be an easy one. He urged him to be strong, be faithful, and to stir up the gift that was in him; not to have a spirit of fear, and to hold fast the form of sound words. He wrote in II Tim. i. 8:

“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.”

In verses 11 and 12 of the same chapter, Paul says that he was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. And he continues, “For which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed”. So he was an example to Timothy, but notice that Timothy was to share “the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (verse 8).

Whenever there is affliction, suffering, or pain, there is also strength given. When Paul wrote to the Philippians (iii. 10) and referred to the sharing of the sufferings of Christ, and being made conformable to His death, he mentions first the “power of His resurrection”, which is the enabling power by which we endure all things.

As Timothy was to follow the example of Paul, we may remind ourselves of his own experiences. In II Cor. xi. 22-33 we have a long list of Paul’s sufferings for Christ. There is also a shorter list in II Cor. vi. 4-10 where we note in verse 4 that Paul speaks of “afflictions, necessities, distresses”. In II Cor. xii. 10 he says:

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Although Paul suffered distresses, he was not overwhelmed by them, for he writes in II Cor. iv. 8, 9:

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;”.

No doubt all of us experience trouble, for as we have seen in the book of Job, man is born unto trouble. But the experience of the faithful servant who suffers for his faith, who shares the afflictions of the gospel, and who partakes of the sufferings of Christ, is somewhat different. We *share* with Christ, and that means that He is with us and granting us help and strength by reason of which we may endure to the end. But in these present days, circumstances are different. It is possible that we may have to endure physical suffering as Paul did, for many suffer for their faith in Russia and other countries. In this country we have so far experienced no physical suffering, but if we suffer it is more likely to be mental distresses or anxiety. That is why this article is headed “Distress”. We may have been preserved so far from such pain, but who knows what may lie ahead. Let us be prepared for any trial that may await us.

Distress may be defined as anguish or agony. It may be due to physical or mental anguish and may be caused by poverty or misfortune, or other troubles. It is said that distress is a painful degree of suffering (physical or mental). Unlike anxiety, distress is caused by immediate, not future trouble. The cause is real and not imaginary. Thus,

distress is the more extreme and painful form of suffering. Anguish normally refers to mental suffering, but agony is the torture of the mind.

Agony occurs only once in the New Testament. It is the Greek *agonia*, and is found in Luke xxii. 44, where the agony of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane is described. He was subject to extreme tension, which caused mental agony and physical exhaustion.

Anguish occurs several times, and different Greek words are used. We have already referred to II Cor. vi. 4 and xii. 10, where the Greek is *stenochoria*, and the same Greek word occurs in Rom. ii. 9 and viii. 35. In Rom. viii. 35 it is translated "distress", "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Read Rom. viii. 35-39. Here is reassurance, confidence, and the promise of the Lord's enabling power. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Before we close, let us turn to the Psalms, for David during the lifetime of Saul had much to endure. He was persecuted and frequently feared for his life, but God delivered him and consequently he wrote many Psalms of praise and thanksgiving. Psa. xxxiv. is an example. We will not comment on this wonderful Psalm, but ask the reader to read it right through. Another which is worthy of study is Psa. cvii. Its structure is both interesting and helpful, so we will give it below. Fuller detail will be found given in *The Companion Bible*:

Psalm cvii.

- A | 1-3. Praise.
- B | 4-32. Distress and Deliverance.
- B | 33-41. Judgment and Blessing.
- A | 42-43. Praise.

Further expansion of B | 4-32. Distress and Deliverance.

- a1 | b1 | 4, 5. Trouble.
- b2 | 6-. Cry.
- b3 | -6, 7. Deliverance.
- b4 | 8, 9. Praise.
- a2 | b1 | 10-12. Trouble.
- b2 | 13-. Cry.
- b3 | -13, 14. Deliverance.
- b4 | 15, 16. Praise.
- a3 | b1 | 17, 18. Trouble.
- b2 | 19-. Cry.
- b3 | -19, 20. Deliverance.
- b4 | 21, 22. Praise.
- a4 | b1 | 23-27. Trouble.
- b2 | 28-. Cry.
- b3 | -28-30. Deliverance.
- b4 | 31, 32. Praise.

b1. Refers to Wandering in the wilderness.

“They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses” (6).

b2. They rebelled against the word of God.

“They cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He saved them out of their distresses” (13).

b3. Fools — Iniquities.

“They cry unto the Lord in their trouble and He saveth them out of their distresses” (19).

b4. Wanderers on the Deep (at their wit’s end!).

“They cry unto the Lord in their trouble and He bringeth them out of their distresses” (28).

At the end of each section there is the refrain:

“O THAT MEN WOULD PRAISE THE LORD FOR HIS GOODNESS AND FOR HIS WONDERFUL WORKS TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN.”

And at the end of the Psalm:

“Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord” (Psa. cvii. 43).

So in both the O.T. and N.T. we have similar testimonies:

“Even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord” (O.T.).

“. . . . nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. viii. 39).

No.20. Boasting. **pp. 69 - 72**

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (I Cor. i. 31).

In article No.4 (*The Berean Expositor*, Volume LI, page 192) we considered “joyfulness”, and we meditated on Phil. iv. 4 “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice”. There are many references to rejoicing and we have pointed out that Paul, despite his many intense sufferings, was always rejoicing. In Acts xvi., when Paul and Silas were beaten with many stripes and thrown into prison, their feet being made fast in the stocks, we read that at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God. There was an earthquake and they were delivered. The keeper of the prison was converted. But this is just one example how Paul rejoiced continually, although he suffered so much.

There are several Greek words that have been translated “rejoice” and one word is rather striking. It is *kauchaomai*, which means “to boast”.

In Proverbs there is the well-known statement “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (xxii. 6). As children, we were taught to adopt a humble attitude (are they still taught that way?), not to boast, nor to think more highly of oneself than one ought to think (Rom. xii. 3). To believe that boasting is entirely wrong is an extreme attitude. But we should ask what is the cause of the boasting? In what circumstances may it be permitted?

There are many warnings and exhortations about boasting. At this point we should mention that the Greek word *kauchaomai* is often translated “to glory”, and there is also a Hebrew word that is translated “to boast” and “to glory”. So when in Jer. ix. 23-24 we read “glory” we might equally read “boast”:

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”

The wise, the mighty, the rich should not boast, for the true cause of boasting is in the knowledge of the Lord and in His lovingkindness, His judgment, and His righteousness.

The clever businessman may be pleased with himself when he concludes a big deal. The Eastern style of bargaining is rather different from our way of quoting a market price, although in these modern days we have ‘discounts’, which may cause us to ask “When is a market price not a market price?”. But let us visualize an Eastern market where the buyer says “Your goods are worthless”. He walks away and then returns to offer a very low price: “I will give you so much”. Prov. xx. 14 summarizes the transaction in the words:

“It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.”

He is proud that he has bought from the poor man who must sell his wares to obtain money for food, and paid him much less than the true value.

Again in Prov. xxvii. 1 we are warned against boasting:

“Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

James iv. 14-16 conveys the same thought:

“. . . . whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.”

Psalm x. 3 also speaks of the boasting of the wicked who persecute the poor. God is not in his thoughts and he believes he will not be moved. But the Psalmist calls on the Lord to arise and defend the humble and the needy.

Psalm xlix. 6 refers to the boasting of the rich man who trusts in his wealth, and Psalm lii. 1 refers to the boasting of the man who delights in mischief (evil or wrongdoing).

The tongue is a little member—but it boasts great things:

“Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire”
(James iii. 5, 6).

So we could examine the exhortations of Scripture and ascertain the kind of boasting we should avoid. We should search the Scriptures to find what boasting is allowed. May we boast in ourselves? Should we not rather make our boast in the Lord? We have the straight answer in Psa. xxxiv. 2:

“My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.”

It is right that we should be humble and realize our weakness and our need of the strength that the Lord alone can supply. As we acknowledge His greatness, we rejoice greatly and make our boast in the Lord. We have a similar thought in Psa. xlv. 8:

“In God we boast all day long, and praise Thy name for ever. Selah.”

And in Psa. lxiv. 10:

“The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in Him; and all the upright in heart shall glory” (see also Psa. cv. 3 and cvi. 5).

Paul wrote about boasting both in the first and second epistles to the Corinthians. There are about thirty (30) references to boasting, sometimes rendered ‘glorying’, but in II Cor. xii. 1 he says it is not expedient to glory. In I Cor. i. 27 he says that God has chosen the foolish things to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the mighty things “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (i. 29). Again in I.Cor.iii.21, “Therefore let no man glory in men”. There is nothing in us to merit any boasting. Paul does not boast of himself, but he does magnify his office. He had authority given to him by the Lord. Also he loved the Corinthians, he praised them for their generosity and was prepared to boast about them to encourage others.

But the most important reason for Paul’s boasting was the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. When he writes to the Romans about this, quite suddenly he boasts (or glories) in tribulations. To quote all the chapter would take too much space, but we quote chapter v. 1-4 and 8-11:

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and *rejoice* in the hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we *glory* in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also *joy* in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have now received the atonement.”

We rejoice (or even boast) in the wonderful work of our Lord, but all the praise and glory is His. We rely entirely on His work. Eph. ii. 8, 9 reminds us:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Also in Phil. iii. 3 we have a similar thought:

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and *rejoice* in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

So we must not boast of our own works or praise the flesh, but we glory only in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we come to the text at the heading of this article, and another very similar one in the second epistle. After writing “That no flesh should glory in His presence”, Paul continues:

“But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, ‘He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord’.” (I Cor. i. 30, 31).

“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth” (II Cor. x. 17, 18).

No.21. Doctrine. **pp. 90 - 95**

“Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine” (I Tim. iv. 16).

These articles are intended to help readers in their practical lives and we have therefore concentrated on ‘practical truth’. Would an article on Doctrine be helpful? We will endeavour to set out what the Scripture says about it, and perhaps such a study may form the background for a deeper study later.

There are two references in the O.T. worthy of mention before we proceed to the N.T.

The Song of Moses is recorded in Deut. xxxii., and we quote verses 2 and 3:

“My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto your God.”

Moses set forth his teaching concerning the Lord, His greatness, His perfect work, His truth and His righteousness.

There is an interesting reference in Prov. iv. Solomon is exhorting his children, as a good father, to study wisdom. The whole chapter is profitable reading, but we must content ourselves by quoting only extracts from verses 1-7:

“Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding” (1).

“For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law” (2).

“He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments and live” (4).

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom” (7).

Solomon says his doctrine is good and he followed his father’s example. A father passed advice to his children, and in this way the doctrine was handed down from one generation to another. But then he (Solomon) says that wisdom is the principal thing, and the children should make every effort to get wisdom. We may have thought that doctrine is the vital thing, so why does Solomon say that wisdom is the first in importance? As doctrine was handed down by word of mouth (note the many references to ‘words’) there was the danger that in repeating what a father said, some inaccurate statement might be made. A wise man would spot any mistake of this kind by comparing statements made by various people, and so wisdom is important in the safeguarding of the truth. In our day we have the Scriptures, and so can compare Scripture with Scripture in our search for the truth. So wisdom is, and was, necessary to make sure that it was indeed “good doctrine”.

In the N.T. we find a word *didaskalia*, which occurs 21 times and is translated:

doctrine	19 times
learning	1
teaching	1

	21 times
	=====

“Learning” appears in Rom. xv. 4, and “teaching” in Rom. xii. 7. Rom. xv. 4 says the Scriptures were written for our learning (doctrine). According to Young’s concordance, this word means ‘teaching’, but it does not follow that the teaching is sound or good. We have to distinguish between the good and the bad: (Hence the need for wisdom). This is emphasized by the following references:

“. . . . teaching for doctrine the commandments of men” (Matt xv. 9 and Mark vii. 7).

“That we be no longer children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. iv. 14).

“. . . . after the commandments and doctrines of men” (Col. ii. 22).

There are eight occurrences of this Greek word in I Timothy, all translated in the A.V. by the English “doctrine”. They seem to form a pattern, so we will endeavour to display it:

DIDASKALIA in I Timothy

- A | i. 10. Contrary to sound doctrine.
- B | iv. 1. Latter times—doctrines of devils.
- C | iv. 6. A good minister . . . of good doctrine.
- D | iv. 13. Give attention to . . . doctrine.
- D | iv. 16. Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine.
- C | v. 17. Double honour—labour in the word and doctrine.
- B | vi. 1. God and His doctrine not blasphemed (admonition to servants).
- A | vi. 3. Consent not to wholesome words . . . and to the doctrine . . .

At the beginning and end of this letter there is a warning that some will oppose sound doctrine. This is reinforced by chapter iv., which speaks of the latter times and seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. This is balanced by the admonition to servants to respect their masters and count them as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.

In iv. 6 and v. 17 we have the picture of the good minister who himself is well nourished in the faith and of good doctrine, so encouraging the brethren in their spiritual lives. Such ministers are worthy of double honour because they labour in the word and doctrine. They conduct a teaching ministry and are worthy of financial support, for the labourer is worthy of his hire (or reward) (verse 18).

This leads us to the central references (iv. 13 and 16) where we have Paul's instruction to Timothy to be diligent in reading, exhortation, and doctrine (teaching). Do not let anyone despise your youth, he wrote. Be an example to all believers. Don't neglect the gift you have. Watch, or give heed to your own life and to the teaching. Conduct a teaching ministry.

To complete this study, we must record the occurrences in II Timothy and Titus:

DIDASKALIA in II Timothy

- A | iii. 10. Thou hast fully known . . . my doctrine.
- B | iii. 16. All scripture . . . inspiration . . . profitable for doctrines.
- A | iv. 3. They will not endure . . . sound doctrine.

The central feature in II Timothy is that ALL Scriptures is profitable for doctrine. If our teaching is to be sound, it must take account of the whole of Scripture, which is given by inspiration of God. Paul reminds Timothy that he already knew Paul's teaching, as well as his manner of life and the many afflictions he had suffered. Timothy, too, will suffer persecution but he must continue in the things which he had learned. He mentions Timothy's training from a child, when he was taught the way of salvation by his knowledge of the Word of God. Then follows the declaration of the inspiration and profitability of the Scriptures. Paul exhorts Timothy to preach the Word, but warns him that the time will come when men will not bear (or endure) sound doctrine.

DIDASKALIA in Titus

- A | i. 9. Bishop . . . able by sound doctrine to exhort . . . convince.
- B | ii. 1. Speak thou those things which become sound doctrine.
- B | ii. 7. Showing thyself a pattern of good works, in doctrine.
- A | ii. 10. Servants . . . adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

In writing to Titus, Paul takes specific examples, giving advice to bishops, aged men and women, young men and women, and servants. Bishops should hold fast the faithful word so that they may encourage their hearers with sound teaching and also refute those who oppose it (N.I.V.). Servants should be obedient, honest and faithful in their service. By so doing they will “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things”, (they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive, N.I.V.).

The two central texts relate to the witness of Titus. In his preaching he must convey sound doctrine. In his personal and practical life he must set a good example, showing a pattern of good works. In his teaching he must show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned. “Those who oppose you may be ashamed because they cannot find anything to say against you.”

We have so often said that we should search the Scriptures for ourselves, to see “if these things are so”. It is right that we should do this, but we must have an open mind, so that we may be led by the Holy Spirit. Christ spoke to the Jews, “Ye search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me. And ye will not come to Me that ye may have life” (John v. 39, 40). Searching the Scriptures is good, but if the mind is closed and not receptive to the Spirit’s leading, no progress is made.

Philip joined the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot where he was reading the Scriptures, but he was making little progress. In Acts viii. 30 Philip asks if he had understood what he read. He did not but wanted help, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” said the eunuch. There are times when we need a sound teacher to help us guide us. Paul was a teacher of the Gentiles. Timothy was to be a sound teacher, and Titus was to speak those things which become sound doctrine. Bishops, and even servants, were to make their contribution.

But any teachers that teach the commandments of men are unsound. We need wisdom to distinguish between the sound and unsound teaching. In Prov. xxvii. we found that wisdom was the principal thing. The need for wisdom and understanding to enable us to grasp the teaching is evident from the prayer in Eph. i. 17-23 which requests, “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know”.

We are all searchers of truth. We search the Scriptures because “Thy Word is truth”. It is only by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit that we can get the knowledge of that truth, and especially the truth for the present dispensation.

The advice to Timothy applies to us. We need to be on the alert so that we avoid unsound teaching. We need to take heed to ourselves and to the teaching. Or as the N.I.V. translates it, "Watch your life and doctrine closely".