

THE
ATTRIBUTES
OF GOD

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MOMENTS WITH THE BOOK

PO Box 322 • Bedford, PA 15522

(814) 623-8737 • www.mwtb.org

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First Printing 1990

This Printing 2004

Quotations from the Bible are from the King James Version except for those from the New Translation of J.N. Darby (denoted by "JND").

Published by:

Moments With The Book

PO Box 322

Bedford, PA 15522 USA

To order this or other books by this author, visit www.mwtb.org

Printed in the United States of America

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INTRODUCTION

“Be ye therefore followers [or imitators] of God” (Eph. 5:1).

“Worship God” (Rev. 22:9).

In order to be imitators of God it is necessary to know Him, what He is like, what are His attributes. Similarly, to worship God properly we must know something about Him. True worship does not consist of mindless repetition of “Praise the Lord,” “Thank you, Jesus,” or similar phrases, but of heartfelt appreciation of who God is and what He has done for us. “They that worship [God] must worship Him ... in truth” (John 4:24).

There are many ideas held by people as to the nature of God. Some say God is an impersonal force or influence. Others say He is synonymous with what we call conscience. Still others view God as all of nature itself; that is, God is everywhere and is everything. These are all false ideas; the truth can only be found in God’s Word where He gives us a revelation of Himself.

God is a person; that is, He is a rational being with intellect, emotion, and will. (We must be careful in our use of the word “person” to make sure that the theological definition—“any of the three modes of being [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] in the Trinity”—rather than the common everyday definition—“a human being, especially as distinguished from a thing or lower animal”—is understood.) Let us consider some of the Scriptural evidences that God is a personal being, having intelligence, emotion, and will.

God thinks, chooses. "He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

God has a will. "According to the good pleasure of His will ... according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:5,11).

God has a purpose, good pleasure. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself" (Eph. 1:9).

God has power, authority. "That ... He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Eph. 1:10).

God imparts wisdom and knowledge. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will" (Eph. 1:9). "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally" (Jas. 1:5).

God loves, shows mercy. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us" (Eph. 2:4). "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

God has creative power. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him" (Col. 1:16).

God speaks. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son" (Heb. 1:1,2).

Many of God's characteristics and attributes are mentioned in Exod. 34:1-15. God (Jehovah) speaks (verse 1), writes (verse 1), stands (verse 5), proclaims (verse 5), is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, not clearing the guilty (verses 6,7), and is jealous (verse 14).

Thus, in summary, God is a personal being who thinks, feels, acts.

God's attributes can be divided generally into two categories. First, there are the divine attributes that are His alone, such as being eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. But while these attributes belong to God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) alone, we enjoy the many blessings that flow from God's manifestation of these attributes; and as we receive these blessings and recognize the source of them, we worship God.

Second, there are the moral attributes that are not exclusively His but which He allows and encourages us to show forth as well. These moral attributes include holiness, goodness, longsuffering, love, and the like. God is perfect in His manifestation of these moral attributes and they are all in perfect balance and harmony with one another. Through new birth, the impartation of the new, Christ-like nature, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God's redeemed children are privileged to manifest these moral attributes as well. He is our perfect example and absolute standard in every case, and we are exhorted to be "followers of God" (Eph. 5:1). We are also exhorted to manifest specific attributes and characteristics of God in our lives. For example: "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16); "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us" (Eph. 5:2); "Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32); "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48); "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

May we each enter into this study of God's attributes with an attitude of prayer and a spirit of reverence. May we seek to learn more about God, that we may come to value more highly His precious Person and wonderful works, and that we may become increasingly like Him, "followers [or imitators] of God" (Eph. 5:1), "conformed to the

image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29), and “changed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Part One

THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

What we refer to as the divine attributes of God are those that are His alone. They are part of His deity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit alone are eternal and infinite. They alone are all-wise, knowing all things, present everywhere at the same time. It is the blessed privilege of the child of God to meditate with awe and wonder on these attributes of God, as well as to enjoy the many blessings that flow to us out of the expression of these attributes. And as a result, how can we help but return praise and worship to God!

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psa. 19:1).

“I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works” (Psa. 139:14).

“The LORD is great ... He is high above all the people. Let them praise Thy great and terrible [that is, to be feared or revered] name” (Psa. 99:2,3).

*Chapter One***SELF-EXISTENT**

We take for granted that everything we see around us has been created or made by someone—either by God or by His creatures. But what about God Himself? How did He come into existence? Who made Him? Where did He come from? There are deep mysteries here which our finite minds cannot grasp. At one level, the answers to these questions are simple. “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM [or literally, I am I WHO AM]: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exod. 3:14). The Septuagint (that is, the early translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek) renders the first part of this passage, “I am HE WHO IS.” Jesus reiterated this in His profound statement, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). No one created God; He had no origin. He is “the living, unchanging, self-existent one, necessarily independent of all others” (F.W. Grant). All of His acts are from Himself—issuing from His own will. He does not receive direction from one yet higher than Himself.

At one level this is simple and straightforward. Yet the more we ponder this, the more we meditate upon the awesome truth of God’s self-existence, the more we come to realize that He dwells in “light which no man can approach unto” (1 Tim. 6:16). Yet, let us not thus be discouraged from engaging in such meditations, from letting our hearts gaze in wonder at the I AM.

*I praise, I bless the Lamb,
Now seated on the throne—
Eternal Son, the great I AM
Who stood for me alone.*

G.W. Frazer

We tend to be a very practical-minded people, and thus may ask, “What is the practical usefulness of delving into such intangible concepts as God’s self-existence? What bearing does this have on my life? One answer to these questions has been suggested by A. W. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the Holy*: “The natural man is a sinner because and only because he challenges God’s selfhood in relation to his own.” Sin is the assertion of man’s self-will. It comes from self being on the throne rather than God. It is acting from oneself, independently of all others—including God. Thus, the sinner unwittingly displaces God from that position He alone can rightly occupy as the self-existent One and puts himself in that position. Thus, as we who are believers in Christ and children of God meditate upon the One who is the alone self-existent One, we should be challenged to search our hearts and lives to identify and root out any vestiges of self-will, self-assertion, independence of God—anything that would suggest that we have not yet fully restored God’s stolen throne to Himself.

Chapter Two

ETERNAL

Closely allied with the attribute of self-existence is that of the eternal existence of God. We who are born-again Christians have the precious assurance that we will be with Christ throughout the endless ages of eternity. What a wonderful expectation we have! But God's eternal existence goes far beyond this future aspect. He not only has no end, He never had a beginning! I cannot grasp this concept with my finite mind, but it is what His Word tells us: "LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God" (Psa. 90:1,2). "The LORD is ... the living God, and an everlasting King" (Jer. 10:10). "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8; also 4:8). The Old Testament name of God that He used to express His relationship to Israel was "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." This word is a contraction of the Hebrew words "was," "is," and "will be," that is, the eternal One. The French Bible captures this thought nicely by rendering the Hebrew name Jehovah as "l'Éternel," the eternal One.

There would seem to be another aspect to God's eternal existence, which again we have great difficulty comprehending. He is not limited to the longitudinal scale—the past, present, and future—of

time that confines us creatures. He inhabits eternity (Isa. 57:15) and thus is outside of that narrow line we call "time." "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isa. 46:9,10). God's foreknowledge, upon which election and predestination are based (Rom. 8:29 and 1 Pet. 1:2), comes not from His ability to see into the future but from His inhabiting eternity and thus being outside of time altogether and able to observe all things at all times simultaneously.

To God the passage of time is quite different from what it is to us. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday" (Psa. 90:4). This, again, is because God is outside the confines of time. I would suggest that this truth may help to answer a question sometimes raised concerning Christ's suffering to "bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28): How could Christ, in a period of only three hours on the cross, suffer the amount of punishment that millions would have had to endure for eternity had He not died as our substitute. One possible answer is that an eternity of suffering was somehow miraculously, uniquely concentrated into a three-hour period of time. Another possible answer is that while three hours passed in man's reckoning of time, to the reckoning of Christ it may have been as thousands or millions of years in accordance with 2 Pet. 3:8 and Psa. 90:4. In either case, or even if the truth lies in yet another answer, we are forced to fall down at Jesus' feet and worship and adore Him who has suffered so intensely on our behalf.

*Spotless Man, uniquely fair,
God Eternal from above,
Suffered infinitely there—
Mighty, quenchless, deathless love!*

F. Allaben

Eternal existence does not belong to God the Father alone. "In

the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2). "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father [or the Father of Eternity], the Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). The Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is likewise eternal. He was active in the beginning, in the creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:2). Also, we read in Heb. 9:14, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the *eternal* Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience."

The practical importance to us of God's eternal existence has already been alluded to. Because His Son has been raised from the dead and lives forever, we have eternal life in Him, and we too will be raised up to enjoy His presence for eternity. What a comfort this is to us as we experience the trials and sorrows of this present life. How wonderful to know that "The *eternal* God is thy refuge, and underneath are the *everlasting* arms" (Deut. 33:27).

Chapter Three

TRANSCENDENT

God is above and beyond all things; He exists totally apart from the material universe; He is transcendent. God is not a slave to the laws of the universe and laws of nature of which He is author; rather He is independent of them—above them. He can override them at will, though normally He does not interfere with them. A number of instances of God's overriding of His natural laws are given in Scripture. For example, resurrection from the dead (John 11:44; Luke 24:6), virgin birth (Matt. 1:23), water turned into wine (John 2:9), the sun standing still (Josh. 10:13).

God is not simply the highest in an ascending order of beings, but infinitely above the highest created beings. And this transcendence is not an exclusive attribute of God the Father. Concerning His Son we read, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. 2:9,10). Also, "He raised [Christ] from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet" (Eph. 1:20-22).

In connection with this attribute of God's transcendence, let us

notice from Scripture the response of man in the presence of God the Father and God the Son:

“And Moses hid his face: for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exod. 3:6).

“Then said [Isaiah], Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5).

“Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz; His body also was like the beryl, and His face as the appearance of lightning, and His eyes as lamps of fire, and His arms and His feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of His words like the voice of a multitude. And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength” (Dan. 10:5-8).

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken” (Luke 5:8,9).

“And as [Saul] journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:3-6).

What is our attitude in the presence of God during times of prayer, worship, and learning of Him through the Word? May we,

like Isaiah and Peter, experience a deeper sense of our own sinfulness and failure to do His will. May the fight and willfulness go out of us so that we ask meekly—as did Saul of Tarsus, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” And may we be properly filled with awe and deep respect for Him as we consider how He, the Son of God, the Creator, has come down—infinately down—to bring us into relationship with God the Father.

*The higher mysteries of Thy fame
The creature's grasp transcend;
The Father only Thy blest name
Of Son can comprehend.
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow.*
J. Conder

*Chapter Four***INFINITE**

God has no limitations. He cannot be imprisoned either in space or time. His attributes cannot be measured; His holiness, power, grace, wisdom, love have no limit—are infinite. By way of contrast, I may think I love all men, until one comes along so mean to me that I find myself hating him, or certainly not loving him or desiring good for him. But God’s attributes are not affected by what He finds in His creatures. I may have a measure of physical strength or spiritual power. But it constantly needs replenishing through rest and nourishment. And what is our power compared to God’s? He is infinitely more powerful: He has moved mountains, set the planets and stars on their courses, created the universe. And there is no indication that His power was ever diminished or that He ever became weary from doing such mighty works.

The Old Testament writers recognized God as infinite: “Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite” (Psa. 147:5). “I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvelous things without number” (Job 5:8,9). “[God] doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number” (Job 9:10).

May we echo in our own hearts and lips these words of Job and the psalmist. And may we likewise exclaim with the apostle Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of

God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

*Image of the Infinite Unseen,
Whose being none can know,
Brightness of light no eye hath seen—
God's love revealed below!*
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow!

J. Conder

*Chapter Five***IMMUTABLE**

God never differs from Himself. He is not a growing or developing God. He cannot change for the better or the worse. All His attributes are unchanging, always in perfect balance with one another. He does not change from being primarily a God of righteousness at one time or during one era to being primarily a God of love in another era. His love and His righteousness, His grace and holiness, are always present in unvarying proportions. With Him “is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17).

When we come to Him we don't have to worry about what kind of mood He is in today. His love is steadfast and constant, unlike the ups and downs of human love. His holy wrath toward sin is uniform and unchanging, unlike our tendency to be angry toward any sin that harms or hurts us but tolerant of sinful activities that give us pleasure. “I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal. 3:6). “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). “Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end” (Psa. 102:25-27).

Since God is perfect in all His ways, it is most comforting to know that He will always be the same, that He does not change. As

for ourselves, considering what we were by nature—born in sin and shapen in iniquity—the ability to change is a treasure. A.W. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the Holy* expresses it well: “For human beings the whole possibility of redemption lies in their ability to change. To move across from one sort of person to another is the essence of repentance: the liar becomes truthful, the thief honest, the lewd pure, the proud humble. The whole moral texture of the life is altered. The thoughts, the desires, the affections are transformed, and the man is no longer what he had been before. So radical is this change that the apostle calls the man that used to be ‘the old man’ and the man that now is ‘the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him’” (Col. 3:10).

There is a bit of a difficulty attached to the truth of the immutability of God. On the one hand it is said of God that He “is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent” (Num. 23:19; see also 1 Sam. 15:29). On the other hand, we read, “And it repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart (Gen. 6:6). Also, we hear the LORD saying unto Samuel, “It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king: for He is turned back from following Me, and hath not performed My commandments” (1 Sam. 15:11). And in Jon. 3:10 we read that “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not.” How is it that the unchangeable God seems to repent or change His mind about things?

The fact is that we never find Him changing in His basic attitudes and attributes. It is man that does the changing, and God may have to change His response to man—either for the better or for the worse—according to man’s behavior. When God created man He beheld that “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). But after man fell into sin, and “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,” we find a marked change in God’s thoughts toward man and the neces-

sity for Him to manifest to man His holy anger toward sin. His love and grace were no less evident in that He spared righteous Noah and his family from the judgment and gave mankind another chance.

The opposite occurred in Jonah's day. Because of the great wickedness of the people of Nineveh, God announced to them by His servant Jonah that the city would be destroyed in 40 days (Jon. 1:2; 3:4). But when the Ninevites responded to the pronouncement by repenting and turning away from their evil ways, they brought themselves under God's mercy and forgiveness instead of His wrath. God Himself had not changed.

Let us worship and adore, and have deep respect and reverence for our unchangeable God.

*Our love is ofttimes low,
Our joy still ebbs and flows,
But peace with Him remains the same,
No change Jehovah knows.*

*We change—He changes not;
Our Christ can never die:
His love, not ours, the resting place,
We on His truth rely.*

H. Bonar

*Chapter Six***OMNISCIENT**

God possesses all ('omni') knowledge ('science'). He has no need to learn; but more than this, He has never learned and cannot learn. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being His counselor hath taught him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and showed to Him the way of understanding?" (Isa. 40:13,14; see also Rom. 11:34). Who can imagine God sitting at the feet of a teacher? He perfectly knows Himself and all that can be known. In contrast, how imperfectly do any of us know even ourselves—what lurks within the depths of our hearts and minds.

God knows everything to know about the entire created universe. He knows each person through and through—every thought, word, action, the deep recesses of our minds and hearts, all our secret sins. As an example of this, Job was outwardly upright and God-fearing (Job 1:8); but God detected a root of pride and self-righteousness in Job, so He tested him until Job himself discovered what was truly in him: "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

God's knowledge is totally independent of any time frame. He knows the future as thoroughly as the past. "Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isa. 42:9). "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from an-

cient times the things that are not yet done” (Isa. 46:9,10). “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). “God ... calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17).

[At this point we must warn our readers about an erroneous teaching currently making its way through evangelical Christian circles that is undermining the truth of the omniscience of God along with other divine attributes of God. I refer to the teaching of “open theism” in *God of the Possible* by Gregory A. Boyd, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* by Clark Pinnock, *et al.*, *The God Who Risks* by John Sanders, and other books. Open theists teach that while God knows all things past and present, He for the most part does not know what will happen in the future, particularly in the area of man’s free moral choices. A number of the passages cited in this present chapter clearly refute these teachings that are so dishonoring to God. For readers who have encountered this heresy, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* by Bruce A. Ware provides a detailed refutation of the doctrine of “open theism.”]

God also knows all things that are possible but never became actual. For example, listen to the declaration of the Lord: “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.... And thou, Capernaum, ... if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day” (Matt. 11:21,23).

The Scriptures have much to say concerning God’s omniscience. Let us read a few of them.

“But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

“O LORD, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest

my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, Thou knowest it altogether.... Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Psa. 139:1-6).

"He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names" (Psa. 147:4; see also Matt. 10:30).

"Thus saith the LORD ... I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" (Ezek. 11:5).

"Thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly.... Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.... Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. 6:4,8,32).

Not only is God the Father omniscient, but God the Son and God the Holy Spirit likewise possess all knowledge. Concerning the Son we read: "And immediately when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, He said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?" (Mark 2:8). "And others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven, but He, knowing their thoughts, said ..." (Luke 11:16,17). "And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me" (Luke 22:34). "But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man" (John 2:24,25).

The omniscience of the Holy Spirit is brought out in the following verses: "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.... The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:10,11).

In consideration of the omniscience of God, let us stop and think back over the past 24-48 hours—our thoughts, words, and deeds. Does it not make us ashamed to realize that God was watching and listening to it all—our silliness, grouchiness, anger, self-pity, complaining, and so forth? May the fact of God's omniscience have a positive effect upon our behavior. Also, may we seek to lay hold of the measure of knowledge—about Himself, about ourselves, about His creation—that God has revealed to us in His Word. While our knowledge in this life is only partial, we surely look forward to that eternal day when we shall know even as we are now known by God (1 Cor. 13:12).

We conclude our meditation on the omniscience of God by exclaiming with the apostle Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

*Lord, Thou has searched me; Thou hast
known*

*My rising and my sitting down;
And from afar Thou knowest well
The very thoughts that in me dwell.*

*Thou knowest all the ways I plan,
My path and lying down dost scan;
For in my tongue no word can be,
But, lo, O Lord, 'tis known to Thee.*

Chapter Seven

OMNIPOTENT

“And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude ... saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev. 19:6). The same Greek word here translated “omnipotent” is elsewhere translated “almighty.” For example, “I am Alpha and Omega ... which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8). “And the four beasts ... rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8). “I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it” (Rev. 21:22).

God is omnipotent, almighty, all-powerful. His “eternal power” is displayed in His creation (Rom. 1:20). I believe it is not amiss to say that all His acts are done without effort. God expends no energy that must be replenished. Unlike ourselves, He does not need to look outside of Himself for a renewal of strength.

Let us look at some Scriptures that show various effects and results of the omnipotence of God the Father and of Jesus Christ, His Son:

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.... And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:1,3).

“Ah Lord GOD! behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the

earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee” (Jer. 32:17).

When Sarah doubted the word given to her that she was to bear a child in her old age, “The LORD said unto Abraham, ... Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” (Gen. 18:13,14).

“Say unto God, How terrible art Thou in Thy works! through the greatness of Thy power shall Thine enemies submit themselves unto Thee” (Psa. 66:3).

The power of the Lord Jesus was displayed in a variety of ways: healing many people of their diseases (leprosy in Matt. 8:3; palsy in Matt. 8:13; fever in Matt. 8:14; an issue of blood in Matt. 9:22), casting out demons (Matt. 8:16, 28-34), calming the winds and sea (Matt. 8:26,27), turning water into wine (John 2:7-11), raising from the dead (Lazarus in John 11:43; the daughter of Jairus in Luke 8:49-55; Himself in John 10:18), and forgiving sins (Matt. 9:6).

We who are believers in Christ can realize the power of God in a variety of ways in our own lives. Consider the following Scriptures in this connection:

“The gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16).

“And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10,11).

We “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5).

In conclusion, the apostle Paul prayed that we might know “the exceeding greatness of [God’s] power to usward who believe, accord-

ing to the working of His mighty power,” and also that God “would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 1:19; 3:16).

*I sing the mighty power of God
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad
And built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained
The sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at His command,
And all the stars obey.*

I. Watts

Chapter Eight

OMNIPRESENT

God is present everywhere. Adam and Eve tried to hide from Him (Gen. 3:8), but were found out by Him. Jonah tried to run away from God (Jon. 1:3), but God prepared a storm and a great fish to bring Jonah back to where He could use him (1:4,17; 2:10).

The omnipresence of God is marvelously described by David: "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee" (Psa. 139:7-12).

Other references to God's omnipresence include: "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:23,24).

God the Son is also omnipresent, although this attribute was temporarily laid aside while He was a man on earth. As Christ was about to return to heaven following His resurrection, He said to His

disciples: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

It is most comforting and encouraging to the believer in Christ to know that God is present everywhere, and therefore always close to us. We need not go to a special city or into a special building, put ourselves into a particular posture or position, or have an intermediary of any sort in order to commune with God. His ears are always open to our prayers (1 Pet. 3:12). And companies of believers in all parts of the world can simultaneously claim the promise made by the Lord Jesus, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

*Where shall I from Thy Spirit flee,
Or from Thy presence hidden be?
In heaven Thou art, if there I fly,
In death's abode, if there I lie.*

*If I the wings of morning take
And utmost sea my dwelling make
Even there Thy hand shall guide my way,
And Thy right hand shall be my stay.*

Chapter Nine

SOVEREIGN

The word “sovereign” is defined in *Webster’s New World Dictionary* as “above or superior to all others ... supreme in power, rank, or authority.” As an attribute of God, sovereignty includes all these things plus the idea of being free to do whatever He wills to do at all times to carry out His eternal purposes. God’s sovereignty is well established in His Word; let us read some of the passages:

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). As Creator of the universe, how could God be anything other than sovereign?

“I ... will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exod. 33:19).

“The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and He hath set the world upon them” (1 Sam. 2:6-8).

“Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art

exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might; and in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all" (1 Chron. 29:11,12).

"Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being His counselor hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge?" (Isa. 40:13,14).

"I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.... Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Isa. 46:9-11).

"O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20).

"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

A number of questions have arisen over the years in relation to the sovereignty of God. One has to do with the presence of sin, pain, and death in this world. Since God is sovereign, He could have prevented these from coming into existence. Why did He not do so? I doubt if anyone has a fully satisfactory answer to this question. It is sufficient to rest upon the declaration of Scripture, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25).

Another question widely debated in Christian circles for centuries relates to the will of man. If God sovereignly rules His universe with the freedom to do whatever He wills to do, how is it possible for man to exercise free choice? And if man cannot exercise freedom of choice, how can he be held responsible for his behavior? Again, there

is no totally satisfactory answer to such questions, and ultimately we must fall back on the fact that a God who is equally holy and loving will do those things that will be equally best for mankind and glorifying to Himself. But having said that, let us consider some of the issues involved.

The Scriptures clearly reveal the sovereignty of God in electing or choosing individuals for salvation. "He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4). "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:2).

A number of facts about election are apparent from Scripture. First, God has by election chosen *some* to salvation, but not all (John 6:37-40,44,65; 17:2,6,9; Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:22,23). Second, this election was accomplished in eternity past (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9). Third, election does not rest merely on God's foreknowledge of those who will respond to the gospel call. If it did, it would make God's choice dependent on man's choice, and thus could not properly be referred to as *God's* election. Further, election to salvation is according to the grace of God, not the good works of man, whether anticipated in the foreknowledge of God or already realized (Rom. 11:5,6; Eph. 2:8,9). Even the faith to accept God's free gift of salvation is itself a gift of God.

The following objection is often raised against the notion of God's election of some for salvation: If God has selected certain individuals to be saved, then has He not therefore selected the remainder to be lost? This may seem like a logical conclusion, but a careful study of Romans 9 will show that while God has appointed some to blessing, He has left the non-elect to reap the just punishment for their wicked deeds. "God ... endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath *fitted* [not by Him but by their own sinful behavior] to de-

struction; and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which *He had afore prepared* unto glory” (Rom. 9:22,23). Those chosen for salvation were no less wicked. In fact, except for God’s sovereign election, not one person would have chosen by his own free will to receive God’s free gift of salvation. There are many things we do not understand about all this; but instead of condemning God for showing partiality or unfairness in not choosing *all* to be saved, we should rejoice and praise Him that He has at least chosen *some*! Those of us who have heeded the gospel message and have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for our eternal salvation now realize in retrospect that we are among God’s elect. How this draws out our hearts to God in praise and adoration for His sovereign grace in choosing, calling, and saving us. Well might we join with Isaac Watts in asking:

*Lord! why am I a guest?
Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there’s room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?*

While God’s sovereign choice of individuals to be saved is not based on any foreknown merit on the part of those individuals, we can be certain that His choices are not random or haphazard. The fact that oftentimes entire families are saved and that those who are objects of prayer and evangelistic efforts seem more likely to end up being saved than the rest speak against a purely random selection. Perhaps God’s election does in some way take into account His foreknowledge of the prayers and the efforts of others to present the gospel to a given individual. In any case, we know that God is “long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). We also know that God has enjoined us to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and to pray “for all men” since God

“will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1,4). So the doctrine of God’s sovereignty in election must not deter us from actively seeking, through prayer and evangelistic activities, the salvation of the unsaved. We can be certain that every soul that places his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation will find that he is among God’s elect. We know this because Jesus said, “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Also, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come.... And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

I have purposely avoided mention of the term “predestination” in the foregoing discussions. If we consider this word in the various contexts in which it is found in Scripture, it seems to have a more narrow application than election. Election refers to God’s choice of certain individuals to be saved. Predestination refers to God’s determination that those thus elected should become His sons (Eph. 1:5), receive His inheritance (Eph. 1:11), and become “conformed to the image of His Son, that He [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). God could very well have chosen us to be delivered from eternal punishment and live forever as His bondslaves. Surely we would be grateful for this much. But in His sovereignty, “according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5), He has brought us into a much higher and nearer position to Himself, “having predestinated us unto the adoption of children [or bringing into the position of sons].” This leads us to far deeper gratitude, even “praise of the glory of His grace” (verse 6).

I will add one further comment concerning the will of man in relation to the sovereignty of God: Many Scriptures attest to the fact that God has given each individual a will of his/her own (see Gen. 6:5; 11:4,6; 49:6; Dan. 8:4; 11:3,16,36; Luke 23:23; Acts 24:27; 27:43; Rom. 7:18; 1 Cor. 7:37; 16:12; and many others). The fact that God is sovereign and free to do whatever He wills to do at all

times does not mean that He always forces His will upon man's will. The sin and rebellion against God throughout the millennia of man's history on earth indicate that God has largely given man free reign to act according to his own will. No man can stand before the great white throne or the judgment seat of Christ and claim that he sinned because God willed that he sin. The fact that God has allowed man to sin without divine hindrance does not make God responsible for the sin.

Sometimes we hear people say, unthinkingly, "God is in control of all things. Therefore, while so-and-so sinned, it must have been God's will that he sin." In the same vein, the "all things" that "work together for good" in Rom. 8:28 are sometimes taken to include man's sin. Let us be very clear that God is not the author of sin. He is holy and abhors sin! It is true that in special instances (notably the crucifixion) God has worked good and blessing for man out of man's wickedness. (God may *use* man's sin to work out His purposes, but He is never *dependent* on man's sin to accomplish these purposes.) But let us never condone or make light of sin by saying, "God allowed it," or "All things work together for good."

It is probably safe to say that whenever we have a desire to do something *pleasing* to God it is a result of God moving our wills in that direction. This is true concerning our desire to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, as noted previously in connection with election. It is also true for the believer in a more general way as indicated in Phil. 2:13: "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." It is quite a different matter with regard to the sins we commit. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.... Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin" (Jas. 1:13-15).

In conclusion, our God is sovereign; He has absolute authority in all areas of existence, even though He does not always impose His

authority and will upon His creatures. He is not dependent upon the advice and actions of others for the decisions and choices He makes. How wonderful to know that the One who has absolute authority is the same One who is eternal; infinite in power, knowledge, and wisdom; present everywhere; the God of love, grace, mercy, and longsuffering; the holy, righteous God. So we can be assured that the One who has absolute freedom to carry out His own will is working that which is good and beneficial to His created beings.

“To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever” (Jude 25).

Part Two

THE MORAL ATTRIBUTES

We have considered in Part 1 the divine attributes of God, that is, those attributes exclusively His own, such as being eternal and omnipotent. Now the fact that God is eternal and infinite, possesses all power, knows all things, and is present everywhere does not in itself say anything about the moral character of God. It is theoretically possible that one possessing these divine attributes could be a cruel, oppressive ruler who devotes all of His divine powers to making men miserable or aggrandizing self at man's expense. Happily, this is far from the case, for in our studies of the divine attributes of God we have noted many ways in which these powers are dedicated to bring blessing to man.

In Part Two we study God's moral attributes. In the course of this study we will find that He is a loving and merciful God as well as a holy and righteous God. We will find that all of His moral attributes are in perfect balance and harmony with one another. So, for instance, in His holiness He hates all sin and disobedience, but in His love He has found a way to show mercy to and righteously pardon the sinner.

We will also discover that God shares these moral attributes

with His children and thus encourages us to manifest them as well, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (Eph. 5:1).

“Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16).

“Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (Eph. 5:2).

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

*Chapter Ten***FAITHFUL**

God is true to His Word and to all that He is and stands for. He is faithful to fulfill all that He has promised, both to His own and to those who persist in rejecting Him. Let us examine the testimony of the Scriptures to the faithfulness of God.

He is faithful to reward appropriately both those that love Him and those that hate Him. “Know therefore that the LORD thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate Him to their face, to destroy them” (Deut. 7:9,10). “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war” (Rev. 19:11).

He is faithful to keep His promises concerning David and his seed. “I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations.... I have found David My servant; with My holy oil have I anointed him.... My loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven” (Psa. 89:1,20,33-37; see also 89:2,5,8,24).

He is faithful in showing mercy. "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22,23).

He is faithful in chastening His people. "I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psa. 119:75). However, He will not chasten them more than they can bear. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged—

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful

Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness—

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

J. Scriven

He is faithful to keep His people unto the end. "Our Lord Jesus Christ ... shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:7-9). "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:23,24).

He is faithful to forgive us when we sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Surely the faithfulness of our Lord gives us great peace, for therein do we have complete assurance concerning the Lord's coming for us and our blessings with Him for eternity.

Just as God is true to Himself and His Word, so are we—the children of God—enjoined to be faithful to Himself and His Word as well as to be true to our own word, that is, our promises and commitments to others.

We are to be faithful in delivering messages and proclaiming the truth. “A faithful witness will not lie” (Prov. 14:5). “A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health” (Prov. 13:17; also 25:13). But at the same time, we have the privilege of saying nothing if it will make for peace or protect another’s reputation. “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter” (Prov. 11:13).

We are to be faithful in reproofing our friends when this can be done to their benefit. “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:5,6).

We are to be faithful to do what our Lord wants us to do until He comes back for us. “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (Matt. 24:45,46).

We are to be faithful to the Lord in our use of the material possessions with which He has entrusted us. “He that is faithful in that which is least [that is, worldly goods] is faithful also in much [that is, spiritual possessions].... If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, how will ye commit to your trust the true riches?” (Luke 16:10,11).

We are to be faithful to the Lord in our use of the spiritual gifts with which He has entrusted us and our sharing of His Word with others. “Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17). “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same

commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Finally, we are to be faithful and true to our own word and promises to others. “LORD, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? ... He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not” (Psa. 15:1,4). “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay” (Eccl. 5:4,5).

Chapter Eleven

LONGSUFFERING

God is not only faithful to His Word regarding the blessings that are to come to those who trust and love Him, but He is also longsuffering toward the unfaithful, offering repeated opportunities to turn to Him to enter into His blessings.

The word in the Greek New Testament for “longsuffering” is *makrothumia* or literally, “long-tempered.” It is the quality of not avenging oneself, or retaliating hastily against an offence, slight, or provocation. It is the opposite of anger.

As we shall see in Chapter 12, God is holy and abhors sin. If He were not longsuffering He no doubt would have wiped rebellious, sinful mankind off the face of the earth many centuries, or millennia, ago. Let us consider the testimony given by the Scriptures to the longsuffering of God.

In three Old Testament passages we find a close connection between the longsuffering of God and His grace, mercy, and goodness: “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Exod. 34:6; similarly, Num. 14:18). “But Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psa. 86:15).

God’s longsuffering with man’s wickedness in the days of Noah,

during the 120 years of the building of the ark, is mentioned by the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 3:20). His longsuffering toward sinful man in the present era is likewise proclaimed by Peter: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.... The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Pet. 3:9,15).

God's longsuffering is evident even toward those whom He knew would not accept the offer of free salvation through the substitutionary death of Christ. "God ... endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). William Kelly, in *Notes on Romans*, makes the following comments on this verse: "He bore long with the corruption and violence of guilty man. Could man then justly tax God either with lack of compassion for himself or with haste to mark his iniquities? Impossible that a holy God could have fellowship with evil or be indifferent to it! But instead of promptly blotting out of this life the rebellious creatures who make the world a field for incessant warfare against what they know of God, or who at least live negligent of His will though He has revealed it fully, the history of the world since nations began is the fullest proof of endurance on God's part. He never made them as they are; but the sin of man now fallen He endured spite of countless and constant provocation. They sinned, they transgressed, they despised His mercy, they braved His wrath; but He endured with much longsuffering."

Those who persist in rejecting God's free gift are said to despise "the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth them to repentance" (Rom. 2:4).

In addition to these references by the apostle Paul to the longsuffering of God toward sinners in general, he makes mention of the longsuffering of Jesus Christ toward himself: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause

I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:15,16).

Well might we meditate upon the longsuffering of God toward ourselves in not promptly slaying us because of our sin and rebellion against Him, but sticking with us, repeatedly convicting us by the Holy Spirit until we finally broke down and acknowledged His estimation of us and accepted His free gift of salvation. Such meditations surely lead us to worship the Lord, just as Paul's thoughts of Christ's longsuffering toward himself inspired the doxology, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17).

Such meditations should, additionally, lead us to manifest this attribute of longsuffering toward one another. If we are filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit, longsuffering will be one of the products of such control (Gal. 5:22). If we are motivated by that divine love which God has so wonderfully shown to us, one of the evidences will be, "Love suffereth long" (1 Cor. 13:4).

In the New Testament, several exhortations are given to believers to be longsuffering. In order "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" the attitudes of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance must be manifested (Eph. 4:2,3). Also, Timothy was encouraged to "preach the Word" and to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). In other words, he was not to lose temper and patience with those who might not respond immediately to his words of reproof. Other passages include more or less general exhortations to longsuffering along with other godly attitudes and attributes (Col. 1:9-11; 3:12,13).

A word closely related to "longsuffering" is "patience." While the Greek word, *makrothumia*, for "longsuffering" expresses patience with regard to antagonistic *persons*, the Greek word *hupomone*, usually translated "patience," indicates a bearing up under adverse *things*

or *circumstances*. Patience is never mentioned in Scripture as an attribute of God; since He is in control of all circumstances, there is no question of His being patient and bearing up under them. On the other hand, as we have already noted, God is longsuffering toward the antagonistic, rebellious people of this world. There are a couple of New Testament references to the patience of Christ which no doubt relate more to His total submission, as perfect Man, to His Father than to His deity.

In conclusion, may we grow in the appreciation of God's longsuffering toward us in so many areas of our lives. May we recognize more fully how often we have brought grief to our Father and how slow we have been and continue to be to learn many of God's lessons for us, and how longsuffering He has been toward us all the while. Then, in turn, let us seek God's grace to display the same spirit of longsuffering toward others who are equally apt to grieve and offend us and equally slow to learn their lessons.

*Praise the Lord! whose love, unwearied,
Ne'er forsakes us in distress:
Everything around us dreary,
Gladsome shines His glorious face!*

*Praise the Lord! so full of mercy,
Strength, longsuffering, love and grace!
Though the way we tread be thorny,
Gladsome shines His glorious face!*
C.A.W. Herrmann

Chapter Twelve

HOLY

“Holiness has been described as ‘a nature that delights in purity, and which repels evil.’ Adam and Eve were ‘innocent,’ not holy; for though they might have delighted in purity, they did not repel the evil of Satan. God is ever holy; in heaven there is no evil to separate from, and He was holy, consistent with His perfection in everything, before there was any evil” (Morrish’s *New and Concise Bible Dictionary*). Our thoughts as to holiness are very incomplete compared to God’s. We have grown so used to the unholiness in ourselves and all around us that we have little comprehension of what true holiness is. But when we are exhorted to “abhor that which is evil” (Rom. 12:9), we can be sure that holiness goes far beyond the simple absence or avoidance of sin or uncleanness or evil. God is holy; He cannot tolerate sin in His presence (although, praise His name! He is frequently longsuffering toward the sinner); He abhors sin; He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and can not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13).

God’s holiness is clearly manifested in connection with the atoning death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Psa. 22: 1,2 we have, prophetically, Christ crying out: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.” Why did God forsake Him? Why did He not hear the cries of His own Son?

The answer is found in verse 3: “But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.” God laid upon His Son—the holy, spotless, sinless Lamb of God—“the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). God “made [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). And since God is holy, and “of purer eyes than to behold evil,” He had to turn His back on His Son while He was making atonement for our sin. The more we grow in the knowledge of God’s infinite holiness, the more we will come to appreciate His equally infinite love to us in pouring out His holy wrath and judgment upon His own Son and letting us—the real sinners—go free.

Let us consider some more Scriptures that attest to the holiness of God:

“And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done you good” (Josh. 24:19,20). The people rose to this challenge laid down by their departing leader by responding, “Nay; but we will serve the LORD ... and His voice will we obey” (verses 21,24).

“There is none holy as the LORD” (1 Sam. 2:2).

“Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness” (Psa. 30:4; also 97:12).

“God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness” (Psa. 47:8).

“Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before Me” (Psa. 89:35,36).

“The LORD is great in Zion; and He is high above all the people. Let them praise Thy great and terrible name; for it is holy.... Exalt

ye the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy” (Psa. 99:2-5,9).

“He sent redemption unto His people: He hath commanded His covenant for ever: holy and reverend is His name” (Psa. 111:9).

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims ... and one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:1-3). And notice the effect this scene had upon the prophet Isaiah: “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (verse 5). However holy Isaiah may have been in relation to his fellow Israelites, in the presence of God and His holiness he became thoroughly conscious of His own utter unholiness. In a similar way will we gain a more realistic appreciation of our own sinfulness and lack of holiness as we learn to compare ourselves against the standard of God’s perfect holiness.

The Lord Jesus testifies to the holiness of His Father in His prayer: “Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me” (John 17:11).

The proclamation of the holiness of God will ring out in heaven throughout eternity: “And the four beasts ... rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8).

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning let songs arise to Thee!
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty—
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!*

Holy, holy, holy! all Thy saints adore Thee,

*Casting down their golden crowns around the
glassy sea,
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Which were, and art, and evermore shalt be!*

R. Heber

Just as God the Father is holy, so is His Son holy. His holiness as the eternal Son of God did not cease at His incarnation: "And the angel answered and said unto her, ... that *holy* thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Peter proclaimed to the Jews, "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just" (Acts 3:14). And even the demons recognized who Jesus was: "A man with an unclean spirit ... cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:23,24).

The third person of the Trinity, while possessing the same attributes as God the Father and God the Son, is hardly ever referred to apart from His attribute of being 'holy.' Have you ever wondered why He is referred to as the 'Holy' Spirit rather than the 'Loving' Spirit, the 'Righteous' Spirit, the 'Good' Spirit, the 'Truthful' Spirit, etc.? I would suggest a possible explanation: Since He indwells all believers and communicates with our human spirits, that moral attribute that most sets Him apart from and above our own spirits is his intrinsic holiness. Perhaps another reason is that the primary work of the indwelling Spirit is to produce God's holiness in us.

This last point brings us to the application of all this to ourselves. Several times in the Scriptures we are exhorted to be holy because God is holy. For example, "I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44; also 11:45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8). This is reiterated in the New Testament: "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15,16). In his second letter, Peter again urges the

believers to holy behavior, this time in consideration of the judgment that will soon fall upon the earth: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy [behavior] and godliness" (3:11).

We are further exhorted to holiness in the writings of the apostle Paul: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

Who among us can claim to have attained even one-tenth of God's standard of holiness? May we all become more concerned about how far short of God's standard we fall in this regard. Then, let our continual prayer be, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23,24).

Chapter Thirteen

RIGHTEOUS

Righteousness has been described as “an attribute of God which maintains what is consistent with His own character, and necessarily judges what is opposed to it—sin” (Morrish’s *New and Concise Bible Dictionary*). As the one who is perfectly righteous and just, God does not play favorites; He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34); He is not capable of being bribed. All of His actions are perfectly consistent with one another and with every aspect of His nature and attributes.

The righteousness of God is revealed in a number of Scriptures. The following represent a sampling of these:

Abraham interceded with Jehovah to spare Sodom and Gomorrah: “That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25).

Nehemiah acknowledged that God was true to His word: “Thou art the LORD the God, who ... made a covenant with [Abram] to give the land of the Canaanites ... to his seed, and hast performed Thy words; for Thou art righteous” (Neh. 9:7,8).

“Righteous art Thou, O LORD, and upright are Thy judgments.

Thy testimonies that Thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful” (Psa. 119:137,138).

“The LORD is righteous in all His ways” (Psa. 145:17).

Jeremiah acknowledged God’s righteousness; but in his impatience, he wondered why God allowed the wicked to prosper, not realizing that God is longsuffering as well as righteous: “Righteous art Thou, O LORD, when I plead with Thee: yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?” (Jer. 12:1).

Daniel confessed Israel’s sin that led the nation into captivity. He owned that the Lord was righteous in having dealt with the nation in this way: “Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all His works which He doeth: for we obeyed not His voice” (Dan. 9:14).

God, in His righteousness, both will judge those who have died in their sins, and rewards those who serve and obey Him: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20:12). “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb. 6:10).

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally righteous. The following Scriptures confirm this:

“By His knowledge [or, by the knowledge of Him] shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11).

“But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you” (Acts 3:14).

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Tim. 4:8).

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

“If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Note that we have an advocate described as righteous, not merely gracious and merciful. His advocacy is based on the fact that “He is the propitiation for our sins” (verse 2), that is, He bore the punishment for our sins in our stead.

Man’s salvation is inextricably bound up with the righteousness of God. First, in the Old Testament we find: “There is no God else beside Me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside Me. Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45: 21,22). Then in the Epistle to the Romans in the New Testament we have the following references to the righteousness of God with respect to saving the sinner: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.... For therein is the righteousness of God revealed” (1:16,17). “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, ... even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (3:21,22). “God hath set forth [Christ Jesus] to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (3:25,26). God’s righteousness is revealed through Christ in His judgment of sin. The just penalty for sin was exacted when Christ died for us as our substitute upon the cross. God’s attributes of grace and mercy also shine forth in the atoning death of Christ for us, but mercy does not become effective until justice has been satisfied.

As a result of God's righteousness in thus dealing with the question of sin—that is, how sinful man can be reconciled with a holy God—those who place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation are pronounced righteous. This is our standing before God because of Christ's work. The believer in Christ is justified or accounted righteous, not by his own works but by Christ's work on the cross. "Being justified freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24). "That He might be ... the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus" (3:26). "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (4:5). "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (4:8).

This justification or righteous standing before God is a wonderful thing. It goes much further than being pardoned or forgiven. It means that the entire record of my sins, iniquities, and offenses against God and man has been judicially wiped clean because Another has taken them as His own and received the full penalty for them. Surely, then, we can joyfully exclaim, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

*The perfect righteousness of God
Is witnessed in the Saviour's blood;
'Tis in the cross of Christ we trace
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.*

*God could not pass the sinner by,
His sin demands that he must die;
But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be.*

A. Midlane

Now, given that we have this righteous standing before God so that there is no longer any judgment hanging over us because of our sins, what is our responsibility in our daily lives? Are we free to do as we please and sin with abandon because there is no judgment await-

ing us? “God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:2). It is a denial of the position God has put us in to go on living in unrighteousness. It is also an affront to Him and a display of gross ingratitude for all of the blessings He has given us. Thus, believers are frequently exhorted to righteousness, as shown in the following Scriptures:

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom. 6:12,13).

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14).

“But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness” (1 Tim. 6:11).

“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22).

“Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

May we all, therefore, be encouraged to live righteously, dealing honestly and fairly with all men, not playing favorites, having no respect of persons (Jas. 2:1-9), rewarding or complimenting those who do well, and rebuking or judging (as in 1 Cor. 5) those who do evil. God our Father and our Lord and Saviour are perfectly righteous in all their ways. Let us be “followers [or imitators] of God, as dear children” (Eph. 5:1), and thus seek to be righteous in all our ways.

Chapter Fourteen

GOOD

In Chapter 13 we considered God's attribute of righteousness. The attribute of goodness is often considered to be synonymous with righteousness. However, we shall see that one can be righteous in all his ways—doing all things according to God's law and the civil law, upright, honest, fair, not playing favorites, having no respect of persons—and yet not be characterized as being "good." Goodness goes beyond carrying out the letter of the law; it includes the qualities of kindness, benevolence, good will, compassion. Mercy and grace can probably be considered as special aspects of goodness; these attributes of God are considered in Chapter 15.

To exemplify the distinction between righteousness and goodness, suppose a landlord charges fair rental rates, carries out his responsibilities in maintaining the property, and only evicts the tenant who does not keep his part of the contract. Such a landlord would be considered righteous. However, if a tenant cannot pay the rent because he has lost his job, the landlord has the privilege—if he is a *good* man—of *not* evicting the tenant and of helping him to find a job.

If I slip on my neighbor's icy sidewalk and break a leg, I have a legal *right* to sue him for damages. However, I have the privilege of being an example to him of Christ in doing good to him by *not* suing him, and further, by helping him in the future to keep his sidewalks shoveled.

The distinction between righteousness and goodness is made in Rom. 5:7,8; "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The apostle is saying here that it is very rare for a man to lay down his life to rescue one who is an upright man. Somewhat more frequently, but still rarely, a man may die for one who is a "good" person—one who has shown kindness and benevolence as well as honesty, fairness, and uprightness in the past. In stark contrast, Christ died for us who were neither good nor righteous, but sinners.

God is not only perfectly holy and righteous, He is also good. His goodness is frequently attested to by the Scriptures; let us look at some samples:

God revealed Himself in His varied attributes to Moses: "The LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod. 34:6).

The goodness of God was a comfort to David in the presence of his enemies: "Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually" (Psa. 52:1).

God in His goodness provides us with temporal blessings: "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice. Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: Thou preparest them corn, when Thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: Thou settlest the furrows thereof: Thou makest it soft with showers: Thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and Thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing" (Psa. 65:8-13).

God's goodness is mentioned repeatedly in Psalm 107, beginning with the opening verse: "O give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever." We read in this psalm of different ways the LORD has delivered His people: He has redeemed them from the hand of the enemy (1-9); delivered them from bondage and prison brought about by their own rebellion (10-16); delivered from sickness and death, again brought about by their own foolishness and transgressions (17-22); and delivered from storms of judgment and persecution (23-32). Each type of deliverance called forth the exclamation, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (verses 8,15,21,31).

It is not God's righteousness so much but His "goodness" that "leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). But those who reject Him will some day have to face the "righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds" (verses 5,6).

We do not always appreciate the goodness of God, especially when it is manifested toward those who may be our enemies or toward whom we may have some bad feelings. Jonah was like this. After preaching the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the kingdom of Assyria, one of Israel's enemies, Jonah was chagrined to find that the LORD, in His goodness, withdrew His judgment when the people of Nineveh repented of their wickedness.

God the Son, like God the Father, was characterized by goodness:

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38).

"And a certain ruler asked Him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18).

“I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep” (John 10:11,14).

“Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from My Father; for which of those works do ye stone Me?” (John 10:32).

*Sing of His greatness, infinite greatness,
Sing of His goodness day after day;
Guarding from evil, shielding from danger,
Leading us onward, cheering the way.
We will adore Him, gather and praise Him,
Voices in concert joyfully blend!
His be the kingdom, power and glory,
Now and forever, world without end!*

F.J. Crosby

The believer in Christ is called upon to imitate God (Eph. 5:1) with regard to manifesting goodness to others. In fact, if the Holy Spirit, who indwells each believer, is allowed to have control of us, then we will manifest the fruit of the Spirit which includes “goodness” among other qualities (Gal. 5:22).

Along with the exhortation to “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,” we are called upon not to forget to “do good and to communicate” (Heb. 13:15,16), that is, to share our time, energy, talents, material goods, etc. with others who are in need.

To be effective ministers of God—shepherding, counseling, and seeking to help those who have fallen into sin, are having emotional problems, and the like—we need to be “full of goodness” as well as “filled with all knowledge” (Rom. 15:14). In other words, I may know that my brother has fallen into some sin, and may go and admonish him concerning that sin; but unless I am filled with goodness—an attitude of wanting to help the other person rather than showing off my knowledge and self-righteousness—I may end up repelling rather than helping my brother. (See also Gal. 6:1 in this regard.)

Our display of goodness is not to be limited to those who are good to us: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:43-45). A historical event recorded in the Old Testament beautifully illustrates the display of goodness to one’s enemies. In 2 Kings 6:8-23 we read how the LORD miraculously smote the Syrian army with blindness and delivered the army into the hand of Elisha, prophet of Israel. But when the King of Israel asked Elisha if he should kill them, Elisha responded that the enemies should rather be given food and drink and sent back home. Perhaps the apostle Paul had this episode in mind when he wrote: “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head [that is, cause him to blush with shame or remorse at such unexpected kindness]. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:20,21).

May we be encouraged and motivated by Christ’s supreme example—His unequalled goodness in laying down His life for us, His enemies—to manifest goodness to those with whom we come in contact each day.

*Chapter Fifteen***GRACIOUS,
MERCIFUL**

The two attributes of God under consideration in this issue are special aspects of His goodness. Mercy might be defined as the outward manifestation of pity, or compassion in action. It often assumes kindness toward one deserving punishment and resulting in that person's deliverance from the deserved judgment. Grace is perhaps a more positive quality. It denotes positive favor and blessing shown to those who do not deserve it, or who even demerit it, that is, deserve just the opposite.

God in His *mercy* has delivered us from the consequences and penalty of our sin, and is delivering us daily from the power of sin and from the misery which sin produces. God in His *grace* has promised us eternal life in His presence in heaven, united as a bride to His own Son, the Bridegroom; He has given us a heavenly inheritance; and He has already brought us into relationship as sons with Himself, our Father.

An event in the life of the prophet Elisha was used in the previous issue to illustrate the display of goodness to one's enemies. We see the elements of both mercy and grace in Elisha's actions. In his God-inspired mercy, Elisha prevented the King of Israel from killing

anyone in the captive Syrian army. In grace he did even more—set a feast before them! (2 Ki. 6:8-23).

The prodigal son hoped for mercy when he returned home after wasting his fortune and becoming destitute: “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” But notice how much higher were the thoughts of his father: “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:18-24). How the grace of the father toward the wayward son shines out here!

Let us consider what the Scriptures have to say about the mercy and grace of God:

“And the LORD passed by before [Moses], and proclaimed, ... The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exod. 34:6,7).

When David was asked to choose among three punishments for his sin of numbering the people, he answered, “I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man” (2 Sam. 24:14).

In Nehemiah’s day, the Levites rehearsed before God the history of His mercy and goodness toward His people: “Our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to Thy commandments ... but Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. Yea, when they had made a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; yet Thou in Thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness.... They were disobedient, and rebelled against Thee, and

cast Thy law behind their backs.... Therefore Thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto Thee, Thou heardest them from heaven, and according to Thy manifold mercies Thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies.... And many times didst Thou deliver them according to Thy mercies.... For Thy great mercies' sake Thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for Thou art a gracious and merciful God" (Neh. 9:16-31). Similarly, the psalmist, in rehearsing Jehovah's wonderful intervention throughout Israel's history, exclaimed 26 times, "For His mercy endureth for ever" (Psa. 136).

David, repenting of his sin in connection with Bathsheba, cried out, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Psa. 51:1). Similarly, while the proud Pharisee paraded his own fancied goodness before God, the repentant tax collector pleaded the mercy of God for his case: "The publican ... smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:11-13).

The progression from mercy to grace in God's dealings with sinners is seen in the following passages in Ephesians and Titus: "But God, who is rich in *mercy*, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, ... and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His *grace* in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by *grace* are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:4-8). "For we ... were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His *mercy* He saved us ... that

being justified by His *grace*, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7).

However wonderful it is to know that God in His mercy has saved us and pardoned us of our sins, delivering us from the coming judgment which we surely deserve, even more wonderful to us is the truth that He has justified us—cleared us of every charge that was against us. How God’s grace shines out in justifying the guilty sinner! (see also Rom. 3:24).

Notice in the verses previously quoted how God’s grace toward sinners is often referred to in terms of our eternal inheritance in the heavenlies with Christ. We find it similarly in Eph. 1:3-6; after speaking of our being blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, made holy and without blame before Him (only fully realized in the eternal state), and made the children of God according to the good pleasure of His will, the apostle bows in humble adoration: “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has taken us into favor [or a position of grace] in the Beloved” (JND).

It is through the knowledge of His grace that we develop the holy boldness to come into God’s presence with our petitions and worship. And it is through the appreciation of all that His grace has given to us for time and eternity that we are led to devote our lives to His service. The apostle Paul, who at one time persecuted the church of God, claims, “By the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:9,10).

God the Son, equally with the Father, was characterized by mercy and grace. Often needy people cried to Him for mercy (Matt. 9:27; 15:22; 17:15). And He is referred to as “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17) in His present resurrected and glorified position. The people “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22). John declared that He was “full of

grace and truth" (John 1:14). Paul testified, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). And the Bible closes with the prayer, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21).

*Son of God, with joy we praise Thee,
On the Father's throne above;
All Thy wondrous work displays Thee,
Full of grace and full of love!
Lord, accept our adoration—
For our sins Thou once wast slain;
Through Thy blood we have salvation—
Soon shall share Thine endless reign.*

*God, in Thee, His love unfolding,
Shows how vast, how rich, His grace;
Blest our lot, with joy beholding
All His glory in Thy face.
Oh, the mercy which hath blessed us,
Purposed thus ere time began—
Mercy which in Christ hath kept us,
Where His blessed race He ran!*

S.P. Tregelles

Believers in Christ are exhorted to be merciful (Matt. 5:7; Luke 6:36; Col. 3:12). But the real secret of the Christian's spiritual success, as intimated in Rev. 22:21 quoted above, lies in being filled with the appreciation of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and allowing that same grace to flow out of our own lives. Our lips are to minister grace unto the hearers (Eph. 4:29), and our speech is to be always "with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). We are to sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16). We are exhorted, along with Timothy, to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim.

2:1) rather than in any natural abilities. All are to minister their spiritual gifts “one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10).

At the close of his second epistle, the apostle Peter exhorts the believers to “grow ... in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” But knowledge alone does not give power for a godly life. So it is fitting that he includes before knowledge, “Grow in *grace*.” The Lord wants us to grow in our understanding of His infinite grace toward us, and correspondingly to grow in the manifestation of that grace one to another.

How do we show grace one to another? Grace, remember, is favor shown to those who deserve the opposite. Therefore, the only opportunity we have to show grace to others is when they are misbehaving, treating us badly, or offending us. So on these—hopefully rare—occasions when we are naturally prone to have feelings of anger or impatience, let us be alert to the opportunity to manifest the grace of God to the offending person. May our hearts be challenged as to the extent to which we are really growing in grace.

Chapter Sixteen

LOVE

Among the different attributes of God that are being considered in this book, the one before us now has a certain uniqueness. We read in the Bible that God is gracious, merciful, holy, righteous, eternal, etc., not God is grace, God is mercy, God is holiness, God is eternity. In other words, His attributes are given as adjectives, descriptors of Himself. But when we come to the attribute of love, we do not merely read that “God is *loving*,” but rather that “God is *love*” (1 John 4:8,16). This would seem to suggest that love, as the very nature of God, undergirds, entwines, and binds together all of the other attributes of God. His love is most evident in all of His works.

What is love? There are many kinds and definitions of love. There are many kinds of feelings and emotions that are termed by humans as “love.” Perhaps the greatest overuse and misuse of the term “love” is in connection with activities or inanimate objects. For example, “I love to read” or “I love that red dress.” “Love” is also used to describe the good feelings one may have toward another because of having been physically, emotionally, or spiritually close to that person; examples of these are the love of relatives or friends, romantic love, and sexual love. There is yet another kind of love, perhaps best exemplified in human experience by the attitude of a parent toward his/her child. The parent may not receive much in the way of emotional or spiritual benefit from being with the child, but even when having to

discipline the child for bad behavior can still honestly say to the child, "I love you." This is a love that finds value in another and wants the other to be and to have what is good. This latter kind of love comes closest to exemplifying—in the human sphere—the characteristics of the love of God.

The love of God might be defined as that attitude that places such a value on others that it seeks the welfare, the blessing of the other without demanding or seeking or expecting anything in return. This love often has a sacrificial quality. It has been suggested by another that there are three kinds of love—"if love," "because love," and "in spite of love." The first kind of love says, "If you will do such and such for me, if you satisfy my desire, I will love you and be your friend." The second, similar to the first, says, "I love you *because* you always treat me so nicely and pay attention to me," or "Because you have been good to me, I will love you and try to repay your goodness." The third, on the other hand, says, "In spite of all the terrible things you have said and done against me, yet will I continue to love you and do all I can to help you achieve the greatest happiness and the highest blessings." Clearly, this third kind of love best describes God's love for us.

So much for definitions. Let us see what we can learn from the Scriptures concerning the love of God.

The Pentateuch refers often to the people's need to love God (for example, Exod. 20:6; Deut. 6:5; 11:1; 30:20), less often to God's love for the people. Nevertheless, we find in the Book of Deuteronomy: "Because He [God] loved thy fathers, therefore He ... brought thee ... with His mighty power out of Egypt" (4:37). "The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people" (7:7). "Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee" (23:5).

“My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of His correction: for whom the LORD loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov. 3:11,12).

“Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: ... I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west (Isa. 43:4,5).

“The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3).

“Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine” (Hos. 3:1).

“When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.... I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love” (Hos. 11:1,4).

“The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph. 3:17).

We see from these verses in the Old Testament that God’s love is generally mentioned in connection with gathering his people, bringing them back to Himself, and delivering them from affliction which they got themselves into. Let us now look at some New Testament references to God’s love.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate

us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38,39).

“God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (Eph. 2:4,5).

“Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Heb. 12:6).

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1).

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:7-10).

From the foregoing verses from both the Old and New Testaments, we see the following features of God’s love:

1. God’s love is everlasting and unchanging (Jer. 31:3; Rom. 8:38,39).

2. God’s love finds value in its object (Isa. 43:4).

3. God’s love is independent of the behavior or attractiveness of its object (Deut. 7:7; Hos. 3:1; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4).

4. God’s love delights to bring blessing (Deut. 23:5; Isa. 43:4-6; Hos. 11:1,4; 1 John 3:1).

5. God’s love may have to bring pain to its object to achieve blessing (Prov. 3:11,12; Heb. 12:6).

6. God’s love is self-sacrificial (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:7-10).

The love of God the Father is found equally in God the Son, as evidenced by the following Scriptures:

“As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you” (John 15:9). Who can imagine a greater love than this—the love of God the Father toward His Son! So great is Christ’s love toward us. “The love of Christ ... passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:19).

“The love of Christ constraineth us ... that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:14,15). Rather than forcing His redeemed ones to be obedient out of fear of punishment, Christ constrains us, encourages us, challenges us—by constantly reminding us of His tremendous love to us—to live for Him.

*Father! in Thine eternal power,
Thy grace, Thy majesty divine,
No soul, in this weak mortal hour,
Can grasp the glory that is Thine!*

*And yet Thy love is not unknown
To those who have the Saviour seen;
Nor strange to those He calls His own—
Pilgrims in scenes where He has been.*

*In Him Thy perfect love, revealed,
Has led our hearts that love to trace
Where nothing of the love concealed,
But meets us, in our lowly place!*

*And here we walk as sons, through grace,
A Father’s love our present joy,
Find, in the brightness of Thy Face,
A rest no sorrows can destroy!*

*How sweet Thy love, that never forgets
To see what fruits Thy children bear—
May chasten still, while sin besets,
But with a Father's tender care!*

J.N. Darby

This leads us now to consider how we as believers in Christ are to show forth the love of God in our own lives. We will first discuss the motivation for love in a believer's heart. Then we will consider our responsibility to love God and to love one another, and the characteristics of this love.

Our motivation to show love to God and to one another lies first and foremost in God's love to us. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Notice that the word "Him" (that is, "We love *Him* because ...") has been added by the translators and is not found in the original Greek manuscripts. Thus, because of God's initiative in showing love to us in sending the Son of His love to die for us, we are moved and motivated to love God in return; and we love not only God Himself but all those whom He loves—which is *everybody*—as well.

This thought is emphasized in verse 11 of the same chapter: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." It is also brought out in Eph. 5:2: "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God." In this latter verse we find not only the motivation for our love but also the pattern for our love and the extent to which it should be willing to go. Christ loved us and gave up His life for our sakes. The standard for our love is nothing less than His infinite love for us—a love that is willing to die for another; a love that makes one willing even to lay down his life for his enemies (Rom. 5:7,8).

At this point let us remind ourselves of the definitions of love given earlier in this chapter. Love may be defined as an attitude that places such a value on others that it seeks the welfare and blessing of

the other without demanding, seeking, or expecting anything in return. As noted above, love—the love that characterizes God—often has a sacrificial quality. And it is an “in spite of” kind of love, seeking the greatest happiness and highest blessings for another in *spite of* all the terrible things the other person may have said or done.

In Matt. 22:37 we are given our responsibility to love God: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” This is a quotation from Deut. 6:5 and seems to be a summation of the first four commandments given to Moses. So if it is asked how can we show love to God, I suggest that it is principally by keeping His commandments, by being obedient to His Word and His will (as Christ was in a perfect way). “If ye love Me, keep My commandments ... My words ... My sayings” (John 14:15,21,23,24). We also show our love to God by putting our faith and dependence in Him alone (Exod. 20:3), not using God’s name in an empty, frivolous way (verse 7), and setting aside time each week to worship God while meditating upon His wonderful works of creation (verses 8-11), His wonderful work of redemption (Col. 1:12-14), and the spiritual blessings He has bestowed upon us in Christ (Eph. 1:3-14).

Yet another way we show our love to God is by our love to others. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20). Let us now turn to a number of Scriptures that exhort believers to love others. First we will notice the different classes of people we are to love, and then we will consider some of the characteristics of this love to others.

We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. 1:22; also 2:17; 3:8; 4:8).

We are to love our neighbors: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39). The Lord here quotes from the Old Testa-

ment (Lev. 19:18) and this may be considered to be a summation of the last six commandments given to Moses. Thus “neighbor” includes our father and mother (Exod. 20:12), those whom we deal with in our everyday lives (verses 16,17), and even those against whom we might tend to have prejudices or ill will (Luke 10:25-37).

We who are husbands are to love our wives (Eph. 5:25) with that same kind of selfless love that God has for us.

We are even to love our enemies: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you.... For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?” (Matt. 5:44-46).

Thus, just as God’s love extends to the entire world (John 3:16), so is our love as God’s children to encompass all people. And as we seek to love God and one another, we are exhorted at the same time to seek to refrain from loving (that is, giving honor to or esteeming or valuing) those things that are opposed to God: a position of honor in this world (Luke 11:43); material wealth (“mammon”) (Luke 16:13; 2 Pet. 2:15); “darkness rather than light” (John 3:19); “the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43); and the “things that are in the world . . . the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:15,16; 2 Tim. 4:10).

Some of the characteristics of this love that we are to display to one another are brought out in the following Scriptures:

“Love works no ill to his neighbor” (Rom. 13:10).

“Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth” (1 Cor. 8:1).

“Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

“Whom the LORD loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6).

“Have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

Everything we say and do is to be done in love: “Let all your things be done with love” (1 Cor. 16:14). If we speak with tongues, have prophecy, understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith, but do not have love, all these things are worthless (1 Cor. 13:1,2). Our giving to the poor is to be done in love (1 Cor. 13:3). We are to serve one another by love (Gal. 5:13). We are to be meek and lowly, forbearing one another in love (Eph. 4:2). We are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Our labor for the Lord is to be done in love (1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10).

Let each of us pray that we may grow in our appreciation of God’s perfect love for us, and that we may thus increase in the manifestation of His love one to another. In addition, well might we offer all praise and worship and adoration to our precious Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, in response to His great love to us: “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 1:5,6).

Chapter Seventeen

WISE

In Chapter 6 we noted God's omniscience or possession of all knowledge. Closely akin to God's omniscience is His possession of all wisdom. Wisdom is correct judgment and the right use of knowledge. God's wisdom is so far above that of all other beings that He is described thrice in Scripture as "the only wise God" (Rom. 16:27; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25).

Perhaps the chiefest displays of God's wisdom are found in His creation and in His plan of salvation, or the new creation. First, as to the creation of the universe: "O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches" (Psa. 104:24; also 104:1-23). "The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath He established the heavens" (Prov. 3:19). "He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion" (Jer. 10:12).

As to the plan of salvation, the apostle Paul sought to show in Romans 11 that neither Jews nor Gentiles have in any way deserved salvation. The nation of Israel had been God's chosen people but they forfeited this special place because of wickedness and rebellion against God. The Gentiles as a whole had lived in idolatry, not having any desire for the one true God. So "God concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all" (verse 32). As the

apostle contemplates God's wonderful plan of salvation, manifesting God's grace and mercy to Jew and Gentile alike, and designed to give all the glory to God, he breaks out with the well-known doxology: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (verse 33).

The wisdom of God the Son is also mentioned in Scripture. We read that as a boy of twelve, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). His wisdom is prophesied by Isaiah: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: but with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (11:1-4). The wisdom of Christ is amply displayed in His responses to the Pharisees' attempts to trip Him up (Matt. 22:17-45), following which "they marveled," "they were astonished at His doctrine," and "no man was able to answer Him a word, neither dared any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions" (verses 22,33,46). In Prov. 8:12,22-36 we find a sort of allegory in which wisdom appears in some ways to be synonymous with the eternal Son of God.

God delights to impart this wisdom to others. He gave wisdom to craftsmen of Israel for fashioning the tabernacle and the priests' garments (Exod. 28:1-6; 31:1-6). He gave to Solomon "a wise and an understanding heart" (1 Ki. 3:12) so that "all Israel ... feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment" (verse 28). The Lord promised to give His disciples "a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay

nor resist" (Luke 21:12-15); this was later borne out in Stephen when those who disputed with him "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:9,10).

God does not automatically impart wisdom to all believers. He wants us to ask for it just as Solomon of old asked for it (1 Ki. 3:5-13). Solomon, in turn, urged his children to "get wisdom," for "wisdom is the principal thing" (Prov. 4:5-7). Paul exhorted the Ephesians to be "as wise, redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:15,16). Also, he prayed that the Colossians "might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9). And James exhorted, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (Jas. 1:5). God imparts this wisdom through "the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise" (2 Tim. 3:15; see also Col. 3:16).

Let us now consider some of the features of this wisdom, and the characteristics of those who are wise.

Several Scriptures tell us that it is wise to prepare for the future. It was "a wise man which built his house upon a rock" (Matt. 7:24), and the five wise virgins who "took oil in ... their lamps" (Matt. 25:1-4). The wise steward prepared for being discharged from his job (Luke 16:1-8). A wise son gathers in the summer (Prov. 10:5). And the sluggard (or lazy person) is admonished to consider the ways of the ant and be wise (Prov. 6:6-8).

The Book of Proverbs, written by Solomon unto whom the LORD had imparted so much wisdom, gives us many features of wisdom, including that most basic element, "the fear of the LORD," which "is the beginning of wisdom" (9:10).

"A wise son heareth his father's instruction" (13:1). If, however, the son is foolish and does not obey, yet there is hope for him for "the rod and reproof give wisdom" (29:15).

A wise man is one who "refraineth his lips" and "holdeth his peace" (10:19; 17:28; 29:11; see also Jas. 3).

A wise man will hearken unto counsel, “receive commandments,” “lay up knowledge,” and will even love one who rebukes him (12:15; 10:8,14; 9:8,9).

A wise man is one who wins souls, pacifies the wrath of a king, and is strong (11:30; 16:14; 24:5).

Finally, James, in the New Testament, describes the wise man: “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but ... the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (3:13-17).

May we, then, be “followers of God” (Eph. 5:1) by seeking this “wisdom that is from above,” imparted to us by “the only wise God our Saviour” (Jude 25). And let us give “honor and glory for ever and ever” to “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God” (1 Tim. 1:17).

*Lamb of God, our souls adore Thee,
While upon Thy face we gaze!
There the Father's love and glory
Shine in all their brightest rays.
Thy almighty power and wisdom
All creation's works proclaim:
Heaven and earth alike confess Thee,
As the ever great I AM.*

J.G. Deck

