



THOUGH THY BEGINNING WAS SMALL, YET THY LATTER
END SHOULD GREATLY INCREASE. JOB 8:7

The Sabbath Watchman

January-March 2018

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- The all-wise, loving God created all things in the universe by His Son, Jesus Christ; He is its Owner and Sustainer.
- He met the challenge to His loving leadership and authority by reconciling the world to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Word made flesh.
- The Holy Spirit, Jesus' representative on earth, convicts of sin, guides into truth, and, when abiding in man, overcomes all unrighteousness.
- The Bible is the record of God's dealings with mankind and the standard of all doctrine; the Ten Commandments are the transcript of His character and the foundation of all enduring reform.
- His people, in harmony with God's Word and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, call all men everywhere to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus.
- Bible prophecy reveals that earth's history will soon close with the visible return of Jesus Christ as King to claim all who have accepted Him as the world's only Redeemer and their Lord.

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*“Lord,
make me to know ...
the measure of my days...”*

Another year has almost passed into eternity.... Let us review the record of the year that so soon will be past. What advancement have we made in Christian experience? Our work—have we so done it that it will bear the inspection of the Master, who has given to every man work according to his several ability? Will it be consumed as hay, wood, and stubble, unworthy of preservation? or will it stand the trial by fire? ...

Every provision has been made that we may attain a height of stature in Christ Jesus that will meet the divine standard. God is not pleased with His representatives if they are content to be dwarfs when they might grow up to the full stature of men and women in Christ. He wants you to have height and breadth in Christian experience. He wants you to have great thoughts, noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth, and lofty purposes of action. Every passing year should increase the soul's yearning for purity and perfection of Christian character. And if this knowledge increases day by day, month by month, year by year, it will not be work consumed as hay, wood, and stubble; but it will be laying on the foundation stone, gold, silver, and precious stones—works that are not perishable, but which will stand the fires of the last day.

Is our earthly, temporal work done with a thoroughness, a fidelity, that will bear scrutiny? Are there those whom we have wronged who will testify against us in the day of God? If so, the record has passed up to heaven, and we shall meet it again. We are to work for the great Taskmaster's eye, whether our painstaking efforts are seen and appreciated by men or not. No man, woman, nor child can acceptably serve God with neglectful, haphazard, sham work, whether it be secular or religious service. The true Christian will have an eye single to the glory of God in all things, encouraging his purposes and strengthening his principles with this thought, “I do this for Christ.” —*Our High Calling*, p. 369

Ellen G. White.



Hope for the New Year

By T. Petkov

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” 1 Thessalonians 2:19.

Dear brothers, sisters, friends, and interested believers, another year of experiences, lessons learned, pain, difficulties, joy, and successes has passed into eternity and will never come back again. The past year was marked by violent natural disasters, including hurricanes that struck islands and left thousands of people without water, electricity, or help. All these events remind us of the fulfillment of the prophecies given by Christ Himself. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is near, and this thought gives joy and hope to all Christians.

The preparation necessary for the coming of Christ includes the reproduction or reflection of Christ's character in His people's lives. “To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” 1 Thessalonians 3:13. The purpose of our existence—the goal of the plan of salvation—is the reflection of God in His children's characters. Since we have never seen Him, we need to be able to imagine Him, to have in mind an image of who He is. For this purpose, we need to see examples of Him in His people's lives, behavior, and actions. When Jesus took human nature upon Himself and came to this earth, that is exactly what He did; He is our example, substitute, advocate, and Saviour. But He also intends for His followers to reproduce and reflect the image of God to others, thus helping the world to see Christ. Everything else—doctrine and religious practices, worship in the church, health reform, and education—are simply tools to help us to come closer to Christ and reflect His character more closely. Let us recall the words of the Bible: “Though I speak with the tongues of

men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Love for our fellow men should be reflected in our activities as a church. Every department should work at every level of the organization, from every local church to the General Conference.

Our first priority is to share the gospel and invite as many as possible to receive the precious opportunity given to the world by the grace of God—salvation and eternal life. Every member of the church needs to be active in this work. Our stated goal is for every member to bring one member. If we want to be part of the plan of salvation and have stars in our crowns when Jesus comes, we will use every opportunity to labor and witness for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Youth and Education Departments are urged to work actively for the Biblical, spiritual education of the young people. Every church should be a school where the children receive systematic, organized Bible education. Let us not give up the education of our children and leave them alone in the hands of secular educators. In every home and church, the Bible should be taught systematically. Give the young people the opportunity to receive answers to their questions and obtain counseling and guidance from the pastors and elders. Remember that the church is not only a place of worship but also a dynamic educational environment, where each person’s problems and challenges are met with earnest prayer and counsel from the everlasting source of truth.

In the churches, we usually dedicate the greater amount of time to preaching the theory of the truth. However, there is a noticeable need in the world for practical instruction regarding good nutrition, a healthier life style, help for family problems, and wisdom concerning many other matters. Therefore, the Health and Family Departments are urged to work actively and provide monthly courses and cooking classes where practical advice can be shared. Educational seminars, including demonstration of practical remedies, should be conducted.

A recent article on the Internet stated that in twenty to forty years, the Christian churches in Australia will cease to exist because their members are moving to Hinduism, yoga, and other religions. Furthermore, the article stated that a survey was carried out to see why young people are no longer interested in Christianity. The result shows that

the Christian churches are preaching only abstract ideas but do not address the basic problems that people are facing every day and do not provide a practical approach to people’s constant needs. The result of this research should be an eye-opener for us. We need to consider these things in the new year, and having a new administration at the General Conference provides the opportunity to change our image and offer practical assistance and service to the public. We have precious truths that the world is waiting for. Let us reach out to others and share the wisdom from Above.



In today’s world, the Saviour’s messages need to be carried in multimedia outreach and publications to the utmost parts of the world. As never before, we have a great opportunity to reach people in their homes, on their cell phones, through the Internet, and on social media. In addition to books, powerful documentaries can be prepared to impact people’s lives and make them aware of the coming of Christ and the light given by the three angels’ messages. Today, as never before, even with few funds, we can cover an very large territory if we use the right methods at the right time.

In order to succeed and fulfill our mission as a church that reflects Jesus Christ, your enthusiastic participation is very important. Every single member and interested soul may contribute to the progress of God’s work. Every one of us is urged to be part of the progress, development, and success of the heavenly kingdom.

What can we expect in 2018? The new year will be what we make of it. If we are willing to make changes, carry out new activities, and gain a new understanding of old truth, we will face a new year with new opportunities, new victories, and success. “Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.” Matthew 9:17.

Let 2018 be the year of change, the year of renewal of heart and mind, and the year in which united action within the church truly represents the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! SW

In the Beginning

By A. Di Franca

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”

Imagine that you are standing for the very first time at the center of a famous metropolis, admiring its grandeur and splendor. What thoughts come to your mind? What is the history of this place, and how did it begin?

Or, suppose you are given the opportunity to view the original of a great masterpiece, and now you are standing in front of it. Immediately your thoughts go to the artist, and you ask yourself, What generated this masterpiece? How did the creator obtain such a wonderful skill level? And then, imagine that you standing in front of an unfinished building that has remained in this condition for many years. In this case, the questions are different. Why did the builders start the work and not finish it? Maybe they did not have an exact idea of how much the endeavor would cost. But this is not the case with Jesus. He is the “Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.”

The beginning and the end

In Revelation 22:13, the Lord defines Himself as the “Alpha” and the “Omega,” the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, corresponding to “A” and “Z” of the Roman/Latin alphabet. “Alpha” and “Omega” correspond to the expressions Jesus uses for Himself in the same verse—“first” and “last,” “beginning” and “end.”

The terms “first” and “last” are very familiar to the Bible reader, because the Lord used them many times in the holy word, including in the messages that He gave through the prophet Isaiah: “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god.’” Isaiah 44:6. “Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am He; I am the first, and I am the last.” Chapter 48:12. While in Isaiah’s writings these verses are applied to the Father, in Revelation 22:13 and 1:11, they refer to the Son. In Revelation 1:11, King James Version, we know

this to be true from the fact that the One speaking defines Himself as “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” He is the Son of man. Verses 12, 13. Therefore, like the Father, Jesus is the Beginning, the Initiator of the plan of redemption and creation, the Giver of light, hope, and life.

In the beginning, God created the world

It is interesting to note that the very first verse of the first chapter of the first book of the Bible begins with this word—the “beginning.” “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” How wonderful this introduction is, and how amazing the description is that follows. Every day of the creation week there was a new surprise and a new masterwork. There was the creation of light, the firmament, dry land, vegetation, the lights in the heavens, animals, human life, and the promise of progress and prosperity. Every element was precious and indispensable to the human being.

This was the birth, the wonderful beginning, of man’s story, as told in the first book. Genesis is really the report of origins, illustrating the beginning of heaven and earth, humanity, the Sabbath, human history, Israel, sin, human experience, and salvation. After this, many marvelous events occurred through divine intervention in the plan of life and happiness for the human race, reaching to our very time and touching our individual lives.

In the beginning, the Word made everything

The gospel of John outlined the work of the Saviour, starting with the same concept and term—“beginning.” Referring to Jesus’ preexistence, it is affirmed: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1. What has the “Word” done since the beginning? His activities are mind-boggling: “All things were made through Him.” John 1:3. Other writings repeat this: “Through whom ... He created the world.” Hebrews 1:2. “... By Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him.” Colossians 1:16.

It is moving to note that, in addition to the work of creation, from the beginning Jesus was active in radiating light and life to humanity: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” John 1:4. He is also the beginning of the great work of salvation: “And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.” Colossians 1:18.

“All the great truths of the Scriptures center in Christ; rightly understood, all lead to Him. Let Christ be presented

as the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, of the great plan of redemption.” —(Review and Herald, June 13, 1912) *Evangelism*, p. 485.

“Jesus was the light of His people—the Light of the world—before He came to earth in the form of humanity. The first gleam of light that pierced the gloom in which sin had wrapped the world, came from Christ. And from Him has come every ray of heaven’s brightness that has fallen upon the inhabitants of the earth. In the plan of redemption Christ is the Alpha and the Omega—the First and the Last.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 367.

The importance of the beginning

The beginning is very important in any work, enterprise, or mission. Without a start, nothing happens and nothing reaches a conclusion; there is no satisfaction or joy. The beginning is like the cornerstone or foundation of a palace. Not to lay a firm foundation, or to build on something that is crumbling and fragile, would be irresponsible. Matthew 7:26, 27. Beginning on a solid foundations contains the promise of a successful outcome. Matthew 7:24, 25. If we want to make good progress, how important it is to lay a good foundation at the very beginning.

It is at the beginning of our lives that our parents lay the foundation for the education that will prepare us for a future of responsibility and faithfulness. If the foundation is stable, the result can only be positive and benefit many generations. This is how it was with Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, John the Baptist, and many others. The solid



educations they received in their homes when they were children and their faith in the true God were revealed and produced wonderful fruit that benefits us still today. From now on, let us therefore build on the solid foundation and begin with the best possible preparation for the Lord’s coming.

Jesus emphasized the importance of learning good principles from the very beginning. Speaking of marriage, for example, and considering how far the Jews had departed from Heaven’s original plan, He referred back to the beginning. To people who had a wrong concept of marriage and divorce He said: “... But from the beginning it was not so.” Matthew 19:8. For Jesus, what was essential was that which the His Father had established at the beginning; and people today will be inspired and blessed if they take those teachings seriously.

The beginning is not like the end, when one can see what he has accomplished. When we start something, we do not see much from our work. Similarly, at the beginning of our studies, we have no certificate in hand, we see few visible results, we have no preparation for a profession, and we cannot find employment. Even though this is true in other areas of life as well, we should not be discouraged. Everyone has to begin in hope, looking ahead, as did Noah in beginning the construction of the ark without seeing any clouds or rain; or, like Abraham, who remained a pilgrim and continued his spiritual preparation as he waited for the promise of the heavenly city. Hebrews 11:9, 10.

Although the beginning of one’s Christian experience will be very small, not attracting any attention or interest from others, this should not discourage anyone. In the beginning, the Lord created only two people—one man and one woman—with the ability to procreate. That was the beginning of today’s humanity! The beginning was very insignificant, in our view, was it not? Well, not really. Thanks to that small beginning of only two individuals, there are now seven and half billion inhabitants in the world! Who could imagine at that time that there would be such a population explosion? Let us not be discouraged if we have to begin at zero and do not see immediate results!

“In
the
beginning
was
the
Word,
and
the
Word
was
with
God,
and
the
Word
was
God.”

John 1:1

The Reform Movement came into existence at the beginning of World War I. There were just a few people in one place and one or two elsewhere; but far away, without any contact with each other, there were other isolated ones, like a scattered flock. Could they have imagined that there were faithful believers in different places and countries and that one day there would be a worldwide movement as a result of a few people’s actions? This is how it is with any beginning. We need courage to start and perseverance to continue.

A good plan from the beginning

The Lord did not begin to think and plan for us when we were born or when we became mature and able to carry responsibilities. No, His plan for us was in place very much in advance. The Scriptures report that the heavenly Father “chose us in Him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.” Ephesians 1:4. Concerning the prophet Jeremiah, God said: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah 1:5. Then, when He called the prophet and the young man began to make objections, the Lord answered, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 1:7, 8. The apostle Paul was conscious of this same divine Hand in his life, for he wrote: “He ... set me apart before I was born, and ... called me by His grace.” Galatians 1:15. He did not understand God’s plan early in his life; but when he became conscious of it, he followed the call from that very moment to the end of his life. 2 Timothy 4:7, 8.

Every great work has a beginning, even though it may be small and just a simple idea that gradually develops. A profession, a course of study, a career—everything begins with alpha. Even cities that eventually became dominant in the world began as small villages in the past. The same is true of large, imposing trees; they have a beginning in a small seed and grow slowly and steadily, in time becoming strong and resistant to dry seasons and storms. So it is in the journey of life and faith, and Jesus is the best example in this.

A great idea

A bridge builder won the contract to construct a bridge over Niagara Falls. His design was a suspension bridge—an engineering marvel. But he had a problem. Helicopters did not exist at that time, and he had no way to stretch the first cable across the abyss from one side to the other. Any boat that would try to cross the river ran the risk of being dragged away by the river current. Then the builder hit on an idea. If a kite carrying a cord could be flown across the river, it would be possible with that cord to pull across larger cables. The builder announced a kite-flying contest, and a young man responded. On the first attempt, the cord attached to the kite broke when it got caught in the river’s ice; but on the next attempt, the young man succeeded in flying his kite to the opposite shore of the river. How great can an idea be? Thanks to that one, the important connection was made and the great suspension bridge over Niagara Falls was built.

Beginning and progressing

Having passed through another year of grace, we are now at the beginning of a new year. What it will bring us, we do not know. One thing we do know, however. If the Lord is still imparting life to us, this means He is giving us another year of grace. How will we begin it? How will we spend it? How will we end it? Let us start well and make good progress so we may come to a good end. How? “Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2.

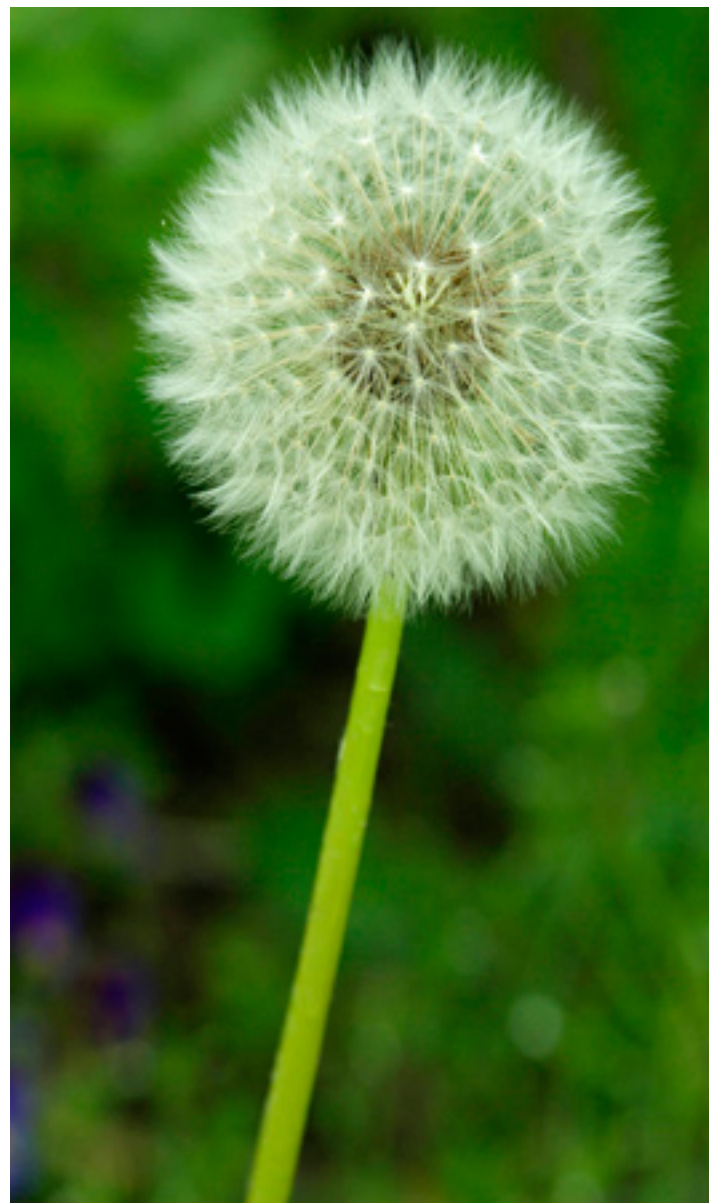
“We are to copy no human being. There is no human being wise enough to be our criterion. We are to look to the man Christ Jesus, who is complete in the perfection of righteousness and holiness. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the Pattern Man. His experience is the measure of the experience that we are to gain. His character is our model. Let us, then, take our minds off the perplexities and the difficulties of this life, and fix them on Him, that by beholding we may be changed into His likeness. We may behold Christ to good purpose. We may safely look to Him; for He is all-wise. As we look to Him and think of Him, He will be formed within, the hope of glory.” —*Review and Herald*, March 9, 1905.

“When we are placed in trying positions, and find things about us that we do not like, that try our patience, and test our faith, we are not to sink down in despondency, but to take a firmer hold upon God, and prove that we are not setting our affection on things on the earth, but on things

above; that we are looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Jesus is to be the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He is to be our strength in every time of trial.” —*Our High Calling*, p. 339.

God’s grace is extended every year; His blessing continues every morning. “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22, 23. With what attitude are we beginning this new year? With what intentions and commitment? Let us trust in the Lord, let us dedicate ourselves to Him so that our faith may have a new beginning and a new consecration. SW

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You have probably met or known someone who has suffered a failure—or several failures—in his life. He was weak in the flesh, lied, stole, transgressed the principles of health, etc.; and now he is so discouraged and confused that even the trumpets of Jericho would seem unable to have an effect on him. He suffers from great disappointment in himself, and self-pity is his daily bread and only nourishment. We can say that there is no shortage of such people, who sink deeper and deeper into the quicksand of despair.

It is not easy for anyone who is in this condition to find the ray of light that leads them to their cave’s exit. In the last five years, my ministry in writing this pastoral letter has allowed me to meet many young people and adults with this problem. Men and women are trapped by the long, heavy chains of a defeatist mindset, believing that their cases have no solution. Perhaps you are in this situation.

What can be done to return to the peace that you once had, or to experience true peace for the first time? You may ask, “Is it true that God can forgive me and restore me completely?” “Do I have another chance after having failed Him so many times?” Although the answers to these questions may seem obvious, a person in this situation needs help. It is urgent that the helping hand of a sincere, spiritual person be extended to him or her to show the way home, otherwise the results can be very negative.

What can one do? Is there hope for the fallen? The answer is yes, definitely yes. The finger of faith must point to the only One who can restore the lost: “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29.

Abundant pardon

The prophet Isaiah wrote about one of the most beautiful, hopeful attributes of God that is offered to the human race: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:7.

To me, in this inspired text the phrase that stands out like a blazing ray of light is, “He will abundantly pardon.” It presents Someone who truly wants to be generous and benevolent to one who has gone wrong and wishes to change. It is as if God says to the sinner: “Look, I know that you are a great sinner, but I give you the opportunity to be sorry and repent of this. Do not worry! I am not going to destroy you; I just want you to come to Me and fall into My arms. I am going to forgive and comfort you. My son, do not worry about what your life is like. I want to take charge of breaking it and repairing it. Come to Me.”

In *The Message Bible*, the verse in Isaiah is translated as: “Let them come back to God, who is merciful, come back to God, who is lavish with forgiveness.” God never tires of forgiving. How wonderful! We have a God who never tires of forgiving us, who are prodigals, when it comes to administering mercy. What a huge contrast this is to human nature!

A woman was sentenced to death by a U.S. court for a crime of double murder, which she confessed. After fifteen years in prison, the lady became a Christian and married a Protestant pastor. There were many requests for the governor of Texas to grant her clemency, based on the woman’s repentance and confession; but the U.S. Supreme Court denied her the opportunity to appeal, and she was executed.

How amazing it is to know that we have a God who loves us to the point of being willing to forgive us, no matter what sin or wrong we have committed! God’s words through the prophet Isaiah are even more expressive and graphic when He says: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Isaiah 1:18.

The prophet uses the illustration of the range of colors from red to white, considering red as the most serious transgression and white as perfect obedience to God. The mid tones between red and white are also sins, although perhaps not so terrible. Perhaps one has been angry with his brother and in his heart thought badly of him. What color is this sin? Gray? Brown? It does not matter, for it is sin. And what about theft? And adultery? And murder? All are transgressions of God’s law!

Sin is sin, and there is only one consequence of it: Death. Romans 6:23. Complete healing from sin can be found only in the Person of Jesus Christ. “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” 1 John 3:8; Matthew 9:12, 13.

Let us pay close attention to what Jesus taught about one person forgiving another. How many times should we forgive someone who offends us? “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” Matthew 18:21, 22.

What does Jesus’ mathematical answer mean? How much is seventy times seven? 490. Could it be that Jesus is limiting

forgiveness to 490 times? I do not believe so. What the Lord wants to say is that forgiveness is not a mathematical matter but an attitude toward the offender.

If you multiply 70 times 7, and the result in turn by seven, and so on successively, the result is virtually incalculable. When I tried to do this mathematical operation on my calculator, it gave me an error. One would have to use a special calculator, and then the answer would be beyond understanding. We would need a thousand lives to sin so much. If we desire to act righteously, we will always be willing to forgive both the person who apologizes the first time and the one who does so three hundred times.

What can be done to return to the peace that you once had, or to experience true peace for the first time?

“Peter had come to Christ with the question, ‘How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?’ The rabbis limited the exercise of forgiveness to three offenses. Peter, carrying out, as he supposed, the teaching of Christ, thought to extend it to seven, the number signifying perfection. But Christ taught that we are never to become weary of forgiving. Not ‘Until seven times,’ He said, ‘but, Until seventy times seven.’” —*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 243.

It is clear from this answer that the Master revealed the character of His Father; for if human forgiveness is to have no limit, certainly God’s is even more so, since the creature can never be more exalted than the Creator. John presented the ideal state of a son or daughter of God: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” But man’s Creator provides a solution for those who have not reached this point: “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” 1 John 2:1. Notice that John says, “we have,” not “you have,” showing that he included himself among those who could sin.

Here again the divine finger appears, pointing to the One who is most precious, to the chiefest among ten thousand (Song of Solomon 5:16, 10), to our Lord Jesus Christ. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12. He is the Author of salvation (Hebrews 2:10) whose blood “cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7.

Oh, yes, God wants to throw our sins into the depths of the sea! Micah 7:19. Praise His name! Dear friend, are you in despair over your sins? Are you ashamed of your wrongdoing? Trust in the mercy of God! Place yourself in His arms of love. Confess your faults to God, trusting in the merits of the

Lord Jesus Christ. Repeat with me: “My Father will abundantly pardon.”

The compassionate look

From a human standpoint, Peter’s denial of Jesus was not as terrible as what Judas did. The betrayer sold the Master to His enemies for a few miserable coins, adding to the sin of robbery, for he had stolen money from the disciples’ treasury bag. But we know that, if Judas had sought the forgiveness of Christ with a contrite and humble heart, he would have been forgiven!

But he did not want to repent, so he committed suicide. Jesus told Peter ahead of time that he would deny Him. He would lie to save his life, not just once but three times! Peter did not give credence to his Master’s words of warning, and in a vain attitude he sought to admonish Him, saying that he would never deny Him and that he would even die for Him.

Poor Peter! Not only did he deny the Master three times but he also used vulgar and sinful language in the attempt to make his lies more credible.

What would we think of Peter if he lived today? All of the following words fit him: “Betrayer,” “hypocrite,” “liar,” “coward,” “weak,” and more. But the compassionate look of Christ touched him. He repented and went and wept bitterly about what he had done. Matthew 26:75. Peter’s experience enabled him to write these words in his epistle: “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” 1 Peter 2:1-3. God pardons abundantly!

There are other examples of this in Scriptures. King Manasseh went so far into transgression that he made his sons pass through the fire, consulted the stars, practiced divination, and committed murder. But he was forgiven when in anguish he prayed to God for forgiveness.

David offended God terribly and degraded himself when he committed adultery and murder. A current court would accuse him of having done everything by premeditation and treachery. What kind of mind did this man have to cover his adultery with a crime of the worst kind? You remember that David commanded that Uriah, an officer in the army and the husband of the woman David went to bed with, be placed in the most dangerous place in the battle so he would die. The fact that Uriah the Hittite was so faithful to his king and to his role as a soldier in the army of Israel made the sin of the monarch all the more reprehensible.

But anguish and despair consumed David after his terrible fall, as recorded in his own words: “O Lord, rebuke me not in

Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed.” Psalm 6:1, 2.

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.” Psalm 51: 2-4. God forgave him, because He is full of love and mercy.

Come back to Me

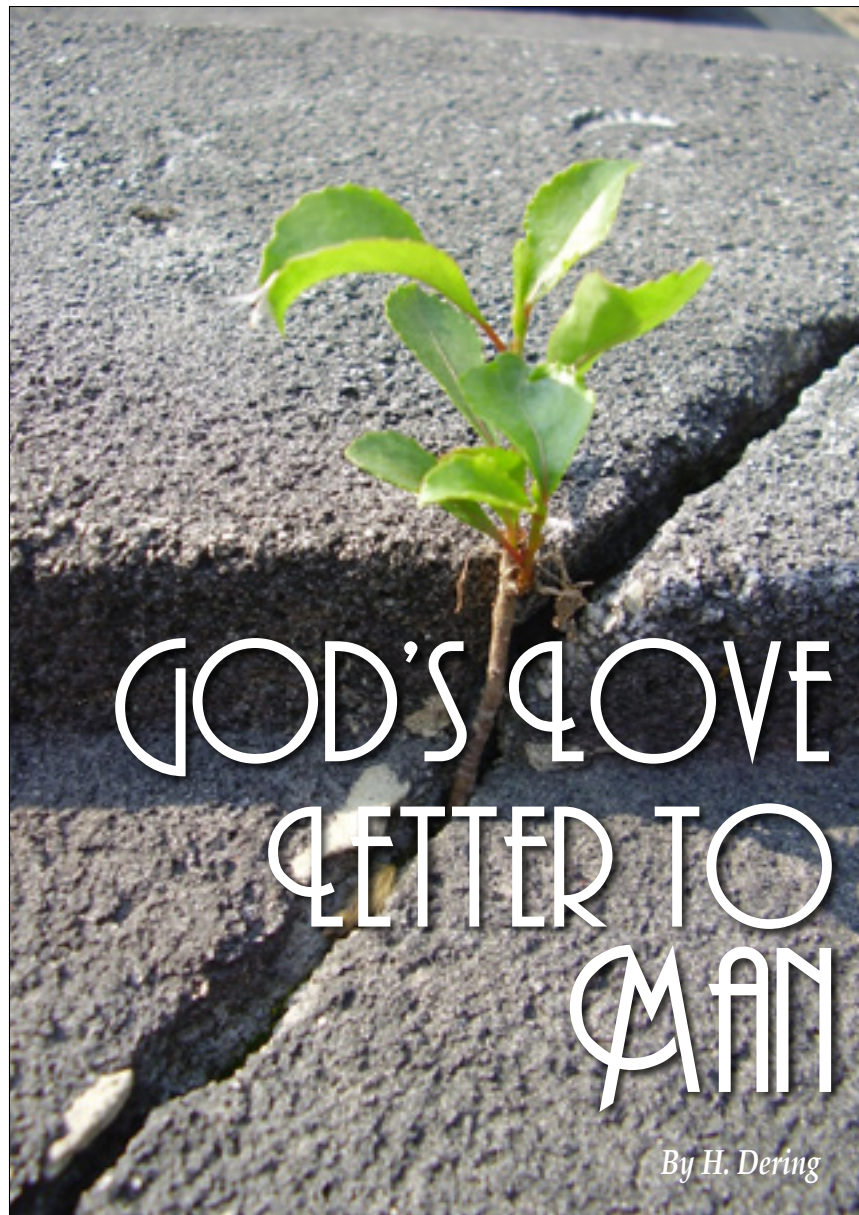
“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Ezekiel 33:11.

No matter how many meters deep you are in the well of sin, God can and wants to restore you. “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Psalm 103:4, 5.

There is a clear teaching in God’s word concerning the opportunities that He gives us in this life: They are innumerable. Yes, dear friend, there is hope for the fallen. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Romans 5:1; Hebrews 4:16.

God’s forgiveness is available to everyone who has ever sinned. He has more desire to forgive us and to restore us than we have to repent, and He wants not only to forgive us but also to give us the gift of His Holy Spirit so we can conquer sin. Is your heart as black as coal? Have you hurt God and other people? Have you left the path of salvation? Then, now is the moment to turn to God and ask for forgiveness by trusting in the atoning blood of Jesus. For sure you will have to face the consequences of your actions, as does everyone, but God will give you the grace you need to bear it without despair.

Get up, and go back to your Father’s house. Remember that there is only one sin that God cannot forgive, and that is the sin against the Holy Spirit, which consists of not wanting to repent. Start over! Have courage! God is waiting for you. Receive the blessing that He has for you! **SW**



“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.

These inspiring words, forming the heart of the gospel, have revived, encouraged, and rekindled hope in the hearts of men and women for hundreds of years. They tell God’s and man’s roles in the plan of salvation. Martin Luther called John 3:16 “the gospel in miniature.”

Yosemite National Park in California is one of the loveliest places in the United States. It has attracted millions because of its splendid scenic beauty. The spectacular sights are so breathtakingly beautiful they defy description. Several high waterfalls tumble hundreds of feet to the valley below, creating mist that waters luxuriant foliage and giant trees. The mist is not always white, for as the sunlight strikes the drop—lets of water, rainbows are formed. In the deep valley, the waterfalls start or join meandering rivers, clear—as crystal and cold as ice. Here one experiences a touch of God’s sense of beauty and originality and thanks

Him for satisfying man’s inner longing for relaxation and true beauty.

Everything beautiful was created for our benefit and happiness. Mountains and cliffs covered with stately evergreens rise above clear streams and are mirrored in crystal-clear lakes. Snow flowers and wild flowers and animals delight the senses.

Even though the Creator shows His goodness in the beauties and bounties of nature, which are an expression of His great love, many people have doubts about Him. They accuse Him of being stern, vindictive, ruthless, and tyrannical and say He sits high in the heavens sentencing man to be punished and tormented in endless misery somewhere below the earth’s surface. What a distorted picture of our loving Father! Christians who have preached such falsehoods are doing the work of the devil, who is a liar and a murderer. Millions are spreading the erroneous teachings of Satan, making infidels of people and causing them to lose the reward God offers to those who believe in Him.

Loved the world

God loves every individual who has ever been born. All nationalities and races are equal before Him. No one class of people is inferior or superior. God is no respecter of persons. “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.” Romans 10:12.

At the beginning of creation, God’s purpose was to have man multiply and populate the earth. The first human pair was His ultimate delight and the crown of creation. But as a result of the transgression of the moral law, the world sank into a degraded condition, which we can see all around us today. Immediately God put into operation a plan for restoring the original condition of man and the world, and still today He is offering everyone the paradise that was lost and forfeited. He loves the inhabitants of this Earth who have gone astray and is calling them to return to Him by ceasing their wicked

ways. All celestial beings are interested in the souls on this lost planet who want salvation. Great is the joy in heaven when one sinner repents!

Gave His only begotten Son

God gave everything He could to fallen humanity; His Son was a living proof of His love when He walked on this earth and gave His life for us sinners. Thus God’s love was not only written about in the Holy Scriptures but was also carried out in action. “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.” 2 Corinthians 9:15. This gift was the only begotten Son of the Father.

Before His crucifixion, Christ was brought before Pilate to be mocked and scourged. After this cruel treatment, Pilate symbolically washed his hands before the raging mob, declaring himself innocent of the blood of the Messiah. “. . . The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head.” Matthew 27:27-30. It is difficult for us to imagine the brutal mistreatment of the Savior by the cruel rabble inspired by Satan himself.

Whosoever believeth in Him

To believe, we must come to Christ and place full confidence in Him. A total surrender of the heart is the necessary requirement. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Acts 16:31. Belief in Christ will lead one to honor God’s law and obey His every commandment. One who truly believes recognizes his unworthiness and lost condition and accepts Christ as His personal Savior. The moment this fact is acknowledged, the sinner passes from unrighteousness to a state of perfection in Christ. This gift of heaven is called justification by faith.

“Here is where thousands fail; they do not believe that Jesus pardons them personally, individually. They do not take God at His word. It is the privilege of all who comply with the conditions to know for themselves that pardon is freely extended for every sin.” -Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 52.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8, 9.

If we could buy our way into heaven, every millionaire would have an advantage, but there is only one way to eternal life, and that way is open to every single person. We are saved by faith alone. If we were saved any other way than by faith, there would be pride, self-sufficiency, and a feeling of superiority present in our hearts. Maybe we would say, “Lord, Lord, look at what I have done. Last week I contributed a very large sum to the church. I don’t smoke, drink wine, dance, or even curse. So now I am entitled to heaven.” If such works could save us, we wouldn’t need Christ. Our faith in Christ, however, produces fruits that are visible to everyone.

Should not perish

God’s desire is that none should perish; He wants all of humanity to be saved. Every individual has been predestinated to have salvation freely. Although everyone is elected to be saved, only a minority will answer the call and, looking to Christ, keep His commandments. They will receive the reward of eternal life. Those who have chosen to be disobedient will receive their reward—eternal death—never to be remembered or lamented. This will occur at the end of the millennium, when God will perform “His strange work.” Isaiah 28:21. God will reveal to the whole universe the results and the wages of sin. Everyone will be judged fairly; their sentences will be righteous.

But have everlasting life

“And, behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” Revelation 22:12. Those who have by faith in Christ overcome every sin will receive their reward—eternal life. This promise will become reality when Jesus Christ comes back to earth the second time, and all indications are that it will be very soon. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, this wondrous expectation will be realized to the faithful in a very short time. Redeemed man will then live continually without experiencing death. The mind is not capable of grasping fully the thought of such endlessness!

How happy those will be who were crippled and diseased, for their new bodies will be free from every ailment. They will have perfect health. Throughout eternity people will never again be annoyed by Satan or fall into sin, for Satan will be destroyed and every sin will have been overcome. Every minute in eternity will give the redeemed new revelations of God’s lovely character. SW



Oceania Union Conference

Oceania Union Conference and Delegates' Meetings

Camp Obadiah, Johns River, New South Wales

December 6-10, 2017

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8, 9. Camp Obadiah is a rural retreat located on the beautiful mid-north coast of New South Wales, Australia, between Taree and Port Macquarie. It is surrounded by beautiful big trees that breathe out fresh air every morning, echoing the whistling and chirping of amazing birds and the quiet alertness of the kangaroos. "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." Job 12:7-10.

The conference began on Wednesday, December 6. Everyone arrived safely, including Elder Tzvetan Petkov, General Conference President, from the U.S.A. He had faced difficulties on the way, but the Lord in mercy brought him well and safe to be with His people in Sydney. "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." Psalm 91:9, 10.

Elder Anton Salavyov officially opened the conference with a warm welcome to everyone. Songs of praise were sung, Bible verses were read, and prayers of praise were raised to the mighty God, the Most High. His grace and goodness had allowed all the believers from overseas and local places to gather for spiritual nourishment.

The election of new officers began as Brother Petkov took over the meeting and praised God for His grace and mercy through His Son Jesus, our Redeemer. His traveling mercies

guided the brethren from all over the islands of the Pacific and from within Australia to this conference. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28. Brother Petkov announced the laying down of all the officers starting from within the Australian Field and moving on to the Oceania Union. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which

"Those who listen to instructions will prosper; those who trust in the Lord will be joyful. The wise are known for their understanding and pleasant words are persuasive." The election of new officers continued for a while and concluded with a prayer and a meal break. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28.

The same process was applied to the election of the Union officers and program on Thursday. It was a time of many blessings in line with the focus of the conference, as Deuteronomy 28:2 says: "And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God." The whole program was run by Brother Petkov with the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, as well as by the Oceania Division President, Brother Salavyov. The new elections for the Union and Field were completed, with everyone being involved and each newly elected member testifying of the Master's miraculous work in his or her life.

The Sabbath was approaching as everyone prepared for another blessed gathering. "This is the



New Officers with Elder T. Petkov

day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24. God sanctified His people through the imputed and imparted righteousness of Jesus Christ, and every believer felt the Holy Spirit's presence among His people. Words of grace and encouragement were heard and shared around the camp. This was reflected among God's people as they moved and worked together in one spirit.

The prayer of everyone, especially the elected leaders and Brother Petkov, was that every soul who needs the grace of Jesus and His sacrifice would be filled with His presence. We are living in the last days of this planet, and our desire is for all of God's people to unite and work together to fulfill every role and responsibility given from above to please our Lord. "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." 2 Corinthians 13:11.

As we closed the conference, we all cheerfully sang, "God Be with You Till We Meet Again!"

Philippine Union Conference

December 20-30, 2017

Angeles City and Bataan, Philippines

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ." Philippians 1:9, 10.

A Family and Leadership Seminar, Delegates' Meetings, and a Public Conference were held in Angeles City and Bataan,

Philippines, respectively, from Wednesday, December 20, to Sabbath, December 30, 2017. We were blessed to have the General Conference President, Elder Tzvetan Petkov, his wife Sister Raquel Orce, and their daughter Sister Anna with us. Also present was Elder Joel Barnedo, General Conference Canvassing Leader.

The Family and Leadership Seminar was held in the Timog Church in Angeles City, December 20-24. Around thirty Ministers and Bible workers with their wives were in attendance, and it was a great blessing for the entire Philippines, as the topics will be shared far and wide. The subjects included the Ministerial Family, Principles and Sociability, Children's Age and Education, Problems in the Family, Diversity, and Coordination, followed by workshops in which the couples were invited to participate. For the Leadership Seminar, the topics were Biblical Ethics, the Influence of Circumstances, the Influence of the Majority, Ethical Conduct, and Enthusiasm in Ministry, in addition to workshops on planning.

On December 23, 2017, the Sabbath services were held in the rented Function Hall in Angeles City. Almost 200 people were in attendance, including visitors from other denominations. The believers were blessed by the Sabbath School, services, and music. The seminar ended the following day with simple ceremonies after several topics were presented.

On December 26, we travelled to Bataan Province for the Philippine Union Delegates' Meetings and Public Conference. There were about 500 attendees, including members from Vietnam, Thailand, and China, as well as visitors from other denomi-



Six precious souls were baptized, including Brother Hung from Vietnam, on Friday, December 29, in Bataan, Philippines.

nations. On Friday, several souls were interviewed and examined for baptism. Six precious souls accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and Redeemer and were baptized.

Newly elected officers of the Philippine Union were presented to the congregation.

The conference in the Philippines was greatly blessed by the very spiritual services. Everyone is waiting for the soon coming of our great Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May God continue to bless His work around the world along with the believers in the Philippine Union.



Special music was presented by a group from the Luzon Field.



A portion of the 500 attendees in the Conference in Batan, Philippines, on December 30, 2017