



Readings for the Week of Prayer

Friday, December 1 – Sabbath, December 9, 2006

The Beatitudes

INTRODUCTION

The theme for the 2006 Week of Prayer is the Beatitudes. The spiritual content of their message, for each one of Christ's followers from the apostolic period to the time of the end, is profound and of great importance for today. We are truly living in the last moment of the history of this planet.

Consider carefully these solemn declarations. Keep in mind that we are responsible for being fully committed to Christ and His church. Remember one of His last messages to His faithful people: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Revelation 3:20.

During the Week of Prayer, take time to reflect on a personal, family, and community level about the year that is soon to end. Let us establish new spiritual goals and lift up our hearts to the Lord in prayer. Let us humiliate our souls before Jesus for vows unfulfilled, goals not reached, defects still undefeated, and our overall neglects. Finally, let us find consolation for our spirits in the loving arms of our tender Saviour, who bestows on us one more opportunity to grow into His image, to enjoy His love, to know His truth, to overcome evil with His power, and to impart to others His good news of salvation.

Let us commit ourselves to advance together in God's cause, to help one another grow and gain more souls for His eternal kingdom. In this way, we will accomplish Acts 1:14—"These all continued with one accord in prayer." The

Spirit of Prophecy emphasizes the same thought: "The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship...."

"These days of preparation were days of deep heart searching." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

From the beginning of the Week of Prayer, the church elder or other local leader should announce the special offering to be collected on the last Sabbath of the readings. This offering is devoted entirely to the advancement of the work on a worldwide level. Remember that "spiritual prosperity is closely bound up with Christian liberality. The followers of Christ should rejoice in the privilege of revealing in their lives the beneficence of their Redeemer. As they give to the Lord they have the assurance that their treasure is going before them to the heavenly courts." —*Ibid.*, p. 344, 345.

It should also be announced that the last Sabbath of the Week of Prayer is a special day of fasting.

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." Ephesians 3:20, 21.

—*The brothers and sisters of the General Conference*

"Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace."

John 1:16.

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“He opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:2, 3.

By Ellen G. White

As something strange and new, these words fall upon the ears of the wondering multitude. Such teaching is contrary to all they have ever heard from priest or rabbi. They see in it nothing to flatter their pride or to feed their ambitious hopes. But there is about this new Teacher a power that holds them spellbound. The sweetness of divine love flows from His very presence as the fragrance from a flower. His words fall like “rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.” Psalm 72:6. All feel instinctively that here is One who reads the secrets of the soul, yet who comes near to them with tender compassion. Their hearts open to Him, and, as they listen, the Holy Spirit unfolds to them something of the meaning of that lesson which humanity in all ages so needs to learn.

In the days of Christ the religious leaders of the people felt that they were rich in spiritual treasure. The prayer of the Pharisee, “God, I thank Thee, that I am not as the rest of men” (Luke 18:11, R.V.), expressed the feeling of his class and, to a great degree, of the whole nation. But in the throng that surrounded Jesus there were some who had a sense of their spiritual poverty. When in the miraculous draft of fishes the divine power of Christ was revealed, Peter fell at the Saviour’s feet, exclaiming, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8); so in the multitude gathered upon the mount

there were souls who, in the presence of His purity, felt that they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17); and they longed for “the grace of God that bringeth salvation” (Titus 2:11). In these souls, Christ’s words of greeting awakened hope; they saw that their lives were under the benediction of God.

Jesus had presented the cup of blessing to those who felt that they were “rich, and increased with goods” (Revelation 3:17), and had need of nothing, and they had turned with scorn from the gracious gift. He who feels whole, who thinks that he is reasonably good, and is contented with his condition, does not seek to become a partaker of the grace and righteousness of Christ. Pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give. There is no room for Jesus in the heart of such a person. Those who are rich and honorable in their own eyes do not ask in faith, and receive the blessing of God. They feel that they are full, therefore they go away empty. Those who know that they cannot possibly save themselves, or of themselves do any righteous action, are the ones who appreciate the help that Christ can bestow. They are the poor in spirit, whom He declares to be blessed.

Whom Christ pardons, He first makes penitent, and it is the office of the Holy Spirit to convince of sin. Those whose hearts have been moved by the convicting Spirit of God see that there is nothing good in themselves.

They see that all they have ever done is mingled with self and sin. Like the poor publican, they stand afar off, not daring to lift up so much as their eyes to heaven, and cry, “God, be merciful to me the sinner.” Luke 18:13, R.V., margin. And they are blessed. There is forgiveness for the penitent; for Christ is “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. God’s promise is: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” “A new heart also will I give you.... And I will put My Spirit within you.” Isaiah 1:18; Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

Of the poor in spirit Jesus says, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This kingdom is not, as Christ’s hearers had hoped, a temporal and earthly dominion. Christ was opening to men the spiritual kingdom of His love, His grace, His righteousness. The ensign of the Messiah’s reign is distinguished by the likeness of the Son of man. His subjects are the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted for righteousness’ sake. The kingdom of heaven is theirs. Though not yet fully accomplished, the work is begun in them which will make them “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Colossians 1:12.

All who have a sense of their deep soul poverty, who feel that they have nothing good in themselves, may find righteousness and strength by looking unto Jesus. He says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden.” Matthew 11:28. He



bids you exchange your poverty for the riches of His grace. We are not worthy of God's love, but Christ, our surety, is worthy, and is abundantly able to save all who shall come unto Him. Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness. He presents us to the Father clothed in the white raiment of His own character. He pleads before God in our behalf, saying: I have taken the sinner's place. Look not upon this wayward child, but look on Me. Does Satan plead loudly against our souls, accusing of sin, and claiming us as his prey, the blood of Christ pleads with greater power.

"Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.... In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." Isaiah 45:24, 25.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4. The mourning here brought to view is true heart sorrow for sin. Jesus says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." John 12:32. And as one is drawn to behold Jesus uplifted on the cross, he discerns the sinfulness of humanity. He sees that it is sin which

scourged and crucified the Lord of glory. He sees that, while he has been loved with unspeakable tenderness, his life has been a continual scene of ingratitude and rebellion. He has forsaken his best Friend and abused heaven's most precious gift. He has crucified to himself the Son of God afresh and pierced anew that bleeding and stricken heart. He is separated from God by a gulf of sin that is broad and black and deep, and he mourns in brokenness of heart.

Such mourning "shall be comforted." God reveals to us our guilt that we may flee to Christ, and through Him be set free from the bondage of sin, and rejoice in the liberty of the sons of God. In true contrition we may come to the foot of the cross, and there leave our burdens. The Saviour's words have a message of comfort to those also who are suffering affliction or bereavement. Our sorrows do not spring out of the ground. God "doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." Lamentations 3:33. When He permits trials and afflictions, it is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." Hebrews 12:10. If received in faith, the trial that seems so bitter and hard to bear will prove a blessing. The cruel blow that blights the joys of earth will be the means of turning our eyes to heaven. How many there are who would never have known Jesus had

not sorrow led them to seek comfort in Him!

The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace.

The Lord will work for all who put their trust in Him. Precious victories will be gained by the faithful. Precious lessons will be learned. Precious experiences will be realized.

Our heavenly Father is never unmindful of those whom sorrow has touched. When David went up the Mount Olivet, "and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot" (2 Samuel 15:30), the Lord was looking pityingly upon him. David was clothed in sackcloth, and his conscience was scourging him. The outward signs of humiliation testified of his contrition. In tearful, heartbroken utterances he presented his case to God, and the Lord did not forsake His servant. Never was David dearer



to the heart of Infinite Love than when, conscience-smitten, he fled for his life from his enemies, who had been stirred to rebellion by his own son. The Lord says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." Revelation 3:19. Christ lifts up the contrite heart and refines the mourning soul until it becomes His abode.

But when tribulation comes upon us, how many of us are like Jacob! We think it the hand of an enemy; and in the darkness we wrestle blindly until our strength is spent, and we find no comfort or deliverance. To Jacob the divine touch at break of day revealed the One with whom he had been contending—the Angel of the covenant; and, weeping and helpless, he fell upon the breast of Infinite Love, to receive the blessing for which his soul longed. We also need to learn that trials mean benefit, and not to despise the chastening of the Lord nor faint when we are rebuked of Him.

"Happy is the man whom God correcteth.... He maketh sore, and bindeth up: He woundeth, and His hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee." Job 5:17-19. To every stricken one, Jesus comes with the ministry of healing. The life of bereavement, pain, and suffering may be brightened by precious revealings of His presence.

God would not have us remain pressed down by dumb sorrow, with sore and breaking hearts. He would have us look up and behold His dear face of love. The blessed Saviour stands by many whose eyes are so blinded by tears that they do not discern Him. He longs to clasp our hands, to have us look to Him in simple faith, permitting Him to guide us. His heart is open to our griefs, our sorrows, and our trials. He has loved us with an everlasting love and with loving-kindness compassed us about. We may keep the heart stayed upon Him and meditate upon His loving-kindness all the day. He will lift the soul above the daily sorrow and perplexity, into a realm of peace.

Think of this, children of suffering and sorrow, and rejoice in hope. "This is

the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4.

Blessed are they also who weep with Jesus in sympathy with the world's sorrow and in sorrow for its sin. In such mourning there is intermingled no thought of self. Jesus was the Man of Sorrows, enduring heart anguish such as no language can portray. His spirit was torn and bruised by the transgressions of men. He toiled with self-consuming zeal to relieve the wants and woes of humanity, and His heart was heavy with sorrow as He saw multitudes refuse to come to Him that they might have life. All who are followers of Christ will share in this experience. As they partake of His love they will enter into His travail for the saving of the lost. They share in the sufferings of Christ, and they will share also in the glory that shall be revealed. One with Him in His work, drinking with Him the cup of sorrow, they are partakers also of His joy.

It was through suffering that Jesus obtained the ministry of consolation. In all the affliction of humanity He is afflicted; and "in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." Isaiah 63:9; Hebrews 2:18. In this ministry every soul that has entered into the fellowship of His sufferings is privileged to share. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." 2 Corinthians 1:5. The Lord has special grace for the mourner, and its power is to melt hearts, to win souls. His love opens a channel into the wounded and bruised soul, and becomes a healing balsam to those who sorrow. "The Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort ... comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4. —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 6-13. Amen.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew 5:5.

By Tzvetan Petkov, U.S.A.

Meekness is an important part of the divine character and will be part of the character of all who inherit the new earth and the heavenly kingdom. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Matthew 11:29. “The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.” Psalm 22:26.

To understand true meekness and its importance, we want to see what “meek” really means. The Greek word translated “meek” in Matthew 5:5 comes from the root word *praeis*, meaning “mild,” “gentle,” and “soft.” A meek person is gentle, tenderhearted, patient, and submissive. Synonyms for “meekness” are “mildness” and “gentleness.” In general, the term “meekness” describes people who submit their own wills to the judgment of the Lord and are ready to accept everything, good or bad, as the will of the Lord.

Do not resist evil

“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Matthew 5:39.

One of the most important aspects of meekness is the willingness to submit to the will of

God and to be part of His army on this earth. The Lord fights and overcomes evil through the influence of goodness and love. To be sons and daughters of our Father in heaven, we need to pray for our enemies and not hate them.

“If any man will sue thee at the law,” the Lord stated in the Sermon on the Mount, “and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, 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.” Matthew 5:40–45.

In the time of the apostolic church, Christians did not oppose Roman persecution with violence. They were tortured and killed before the eyes of the multitude, but the very example of meekness and love converted unbelieving spectators. Every drop of Christian blood became gospel seed—and produced fruit.

The history of God’s church is written with the blood of its martyrs.



In all ages, God has His faithful children. The faithful remnant of the church of God, during the world wars, preferred perishing as martyrs to compromising with sin. Even now, their examples of meekness and sacrifice have the power to attract earnest believers. In our modern time, in Rwanda, Burundi, and other war-torn areas, for example, faithful members of God's church have died as martyrs.

The righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ enables His followers to obtain His character, including meekness, which becomes visible in times of trial. Christ Our Righteousness is not a theory, nor a clever theological definition, but power from heaven revealed in action. Revelation 12:11 mentions some of the important attributes of those who will be saved. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."

Faithful followers of Christ do not fear death because they have the love of God in their hearts. Nothing can take from them the faith and the wonderful hope of eternal life kept before their eyes. Like Abraham, they long for the heavenly home. With the apostle Paul, they can say: "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Hebrews 10:39. The Holy Spirit and the holy angels comfort the followers of Christ. Do you want to be one of them?

Recognize the true enemy

"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." 1 Corinthians 9:26.

To understand and exemplify meekness, we need to have always before our eyes the true

enemy of our souls. The apostle Paul stated in the verse above that he did not want to waste energy in his spiritual fight. He constantly kept in mind who the enemy is. (Are you and I aware of who our enemy is?) He is identified in Ephesians 6:11, 12. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the

possible, the very elect. Spiritualism is at work, miracles are performed. Even fire will fall from heaven to deceive poor, ignorant people and prepare them for destruction and eternal death.

Now, as never before, the people of God need to wake up and demonstrate with heavenly power the character of Christ. The true enemy needs to be clearly distinguished. Jesus Christ, dying on the cross, remembered and prayed for His persecutors: "Father,



darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

The true enemy is not our brother or sister, not our neighbor, not even the unbeliever who mocks our faith. Millions of ignorant people of different denominations blindly follow their faith and conviction without knowing the present truth. The second and third angels' messages declare that Babylon is fallen. All members of the apostatized churches are in terrible danger. They need to be warned and enlightened. The false prophet of Revelation 16:13 and the unclean spirits encircle the world to deceive its inhabitants. Fallen angels make every possible effort to deceive, if it were

forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. This magnificent example, the center of our belief, has attracted humanity over the centuries.

An example of goodness and love has strong influence. When king Saul persecuted David, he did not respond with evil for evil. Although the Lord gave the life of Saul into the hands of David several times, he did not take revenge but set an example of goodness and love. The hardened heart of Saul was broken, and he confessed his sins publicly: "Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." 1 Samuel 24:17. David was tested hard and tempted by his friends, who

advised him to kill Saul. David did not want to follow the desire of the flesh but, guided by the Holy Spirit, he left judgment in the hands of the Lord. Do you want to overcome evil? Follow the example of Christ. Meekness is the strongest weapon with which to destroy the bondage of Satan and deliver many precious souls. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” Isaiah 61:1.

Resist the devil

Let us not misunderstand meekness. This quality is not fearful, undecided passivity. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:7. The daily Christian life is one of hard battles, requiring quick and correct decisions. The war against the enemy of our souls is one of the most severe ever fought. Every single moment we need a clear mind and a spiritual connection with the Holy Spirit.

A believer was asked by his fellow students why he did not use alcohol. The believer answered with a question: “Would you use alcohol if you were driving your car at 200 km/h [160 mph]?” His friend answered in astonishment: “Of course not!” Then the believer said: “Do you think that it is easier to drive through the streets of life than to drive your car on the highway?”

Alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and other harmful substances affect our minds and the ability to make right decisions. The complete truth of health reform has been revealed to us to keep our bodies and minds in the best condition in order to maintain an uninterrupted connection with our Lord. A wrong combination of foods produces alcohol and often, in very

decisive moments, can cloud the mind and stir up our passions. One wrong step in our behavior or words may cause severe consequences for this life and for eternity. Daily Bible study, hours of prayer, and the exercise of obedience to



the will of God are the only solution for us sinful men and women.

The Lord Jesus Christ “cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.” Matthew 21:12, 13. Meekness conflicts with unrighteousness and sin. Christ was meek with sinners while fighting the false teachings and hypocrisy of the Pharisees. True believers need to stand up like a wall against false teachings and the apostasy in the church. We are to be “the pillar of the truth,” “the temple of the Holy Spirit,” “the salt of the earth,” “the light of the world.” We need, as never before, to give the right sound to the trumpet, to preach the present truth without fear and intimidation. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” Psalm 1:1.

The world needs to see the holy character of Christ revealed in His followers. The life of Enoch shone like a burning light before the eyes of his neighbors; he was taken alive to heaven. Moses, well-known for his meekness, led the people of God through the wilderness to the Promised Land and was privileged to speak with God face to face. Solomon humbly submitted himself to the will of God and was rewarded with wisdom greater than anybody else in this earth. John the Baptist left his career as a priest to become an example of faithfulness that reaches to our days.

Do you want to shine like Enoch, Moses, Solomon, and John the Baptist did? Then follow Christ, and pray for His meekness. The meek shall inherit the earth—not this sinful and corrupted world, but the perfect new earth, where all “shall be ... righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.” Isaiah 60:21. Amen.

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

By A. Ringelberg, Holland, 1896-1980

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8.

Again and again we meet Christians to whom the concepts of the law and the gospel, or obedience and grace, present difficulties. They believe that a life under grace frees one from obedience to God’s law. Others fear that obeying the commandments of God brings about less reliance upon the mercy of God. The reason for these difficulties comes from not understanding the right relationship between the law and the gospel, or obedience to God’s commandments and the proffered grace of Christ. One does not give grace and obedience the proper place in a life with God.

A person may possess a treasure of great value; but if he is not aware of its value, the treasure is useless. A story will illustrate this: A poor old mother, living in the country, had a son in America. The mother, who had no relatives other than this son, was so poor that she almost starved to death. The neighbors said it was a shame that the son had forgotten his old mother and did not help her. Finally the pastor of the village was commissioned to investigate the matter. He visited the woman and asked whether she had heard anything from her son in America. “O yes,” said the woman, “he writes a letter now and then, and includes a strange-looking slip, but I do not know what it is all about; I cannot write myself to ask him what those slips mean.”

Following this, the woman went to get “those slips” and showed them to the pastor. What were they? They were not unimportant slips at all, but valuable American currency that the son had sent his mother for her support. She had carefully kept the valuable banknotes because they were from her son, whom she loved. She was rich but did not know it.

This story is symbolic of many ignorant Christians who own a large treasure. This treasure is hidden in God’s Word with its many precious promises. Whoever does not know how to apply the Word, and what its true value is, remains poor in the blessings of the Lord. A further result of this ignorance is that the spiritual life becomes dwarfed, for the hunger of the soul is not stilled. Just what is the clear, distinct relationship between grace and obedience?

What the law does for the sinner

“By the law is the knowledge of sin.” Romans 3:20. The apostle refers here to the Ten Commandments, because he later mentions the tenth commandment, “Thou shalt not covet.” Romans 7:7.

The law of God awakens a sense of guilt in the heart, as Paul says in Romans 3:20. An example helps explain this. If anyone drives his car through a red light, a policeman will stop the person and explain his violation of the traffic rules. Ignorance does not save him, or make him innocent. It is the same with the divine

law, the transgression of which places all people, without exception, under guilt before God. Romans 3:23.

The law is a mirror

God’s law is a spiritual mirror. James 1:23, 24. The apostle James uses this illustration and describes what it means for the sinner to look into this mirror. “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, ... is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.” James 1:25, 23.

The law of God, being perfect, is a clear mirror. Without it, a man cannot really visualize his sinfulness. He is also not really conscious of his guilt and does not feel the need of mercy and of a Redeemer.

David says of this law, or looking glass, that it is perfect. Psalm 19:7. Here every spot in a person’s character is shown, no matter how small it may be. In a fruit-packing plant, where apples were sorted, there was a slogan: “A spot today is a rotten apple tomorrow.” Thus God’s law tells us, “A small sin today lays the foundation for greater sins in the future.”

We all can see that God’s wisdom is revealed in giving us His law so we may become acquainted with our sinfulness and seek refuge in the Source of our redemption.

Without the knowledge of God’s law, man is like someone suffering from a terminal disease but not aware of it.

The heart of man is not able to receive the healing power of the gospel, unless he is first pierced with the arrows of the law.

We have now seen that the law is an absolute necessity and that the mirror of the law is indispensable to awaken in us a feeling of need, so we will avail ourselves of divine grace.

What the law is not able to do for the sinner

The law cannot forgive any sin, or justify the sinner. And yet the sinner must be justified from sin. Of the publican in the parable, Jesus said: "This man went down to his house justified." Luke 18:14. Paul declared, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Romans 3:20. Even though the law is perfect, it cannot make man perfect, but places all men under the curse, "under the law."

Only the Lawgiver can forgive the transgression of the law. The law is not a needle that can sew up the wound that was caused by sin. The law is also not able

to give the sinner power to conquer sin. Victory over sin is called "sanctification," and this cannot take place through the law, but only through love and the reconciling power of Christ. Therefore Paul wrote, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." Galatians 3:21. As it is impossible to clean oneself with a mirror, it is also impossible for the law to cleanse man from sin.

The meaning of grace

When a sinner has become convinced through the law of his guilt and sinfulness, he seeks for an escape. This escape is in Christ. That which the sinner cannot obtain through the law, Jesus Christ imparts to him as a gift. This is what was experienced by the woman who was caught in adultery. The law on which the Pharisees relied could not save her from death, but the grace of Christ was her only salvation.

John, the beloved disciple, said, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world

through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3:17, 18. Furthermore, "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.

"For what the law could not do," wrote Paul, "in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Romans 8:3. Thus Jesus Christ was "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Corinthians 1:30.

An example from life illustrates the meaning of grace: In the nineteenth century, many people migrated to America to search for gold. One emigrant became very rich in a short time, so he wrote to his wife that she should come to America with their eight-year-old son. Their journey went smoothly to Cape Horn. There the ship encountered a terrible storm. The



passengers had to leave the ship and take their places in the lifeboats, for the ship began to sink.

The woman and her son were some of the last to reach the lifeboats. There she saw that all the boats were filled except for one place. It was the last moment, and quick action was essential. The mother did not hesitate—but placed her son in the boat and bade him farewell. The boat was launched, and the woman, with a few others, remained on the sinking ship. Her last words to her son were, “When you come to your father, tell him Mother died for you.” Then she sank down into the furious waves of the ocean.

What power love has! It is always ready for sacrifice! And yet Jesus revealed an even greater love, for He died for us when we were still His enemies; He died so we might find grace before God.

What is the law’s role in the lives of those saved by grace?

This is a very important question. What does the law have to do with the person whose sins are forgiven and who is saved by grace? Some people say, “Nothing whatsoever!” Is this correct? No! “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” Romans 3:21.

How simple and beautiful this truth is! The sinner looks into the mirror, the law, and recognizes his sinfulness. Then he goes to the place where he can obtain mercy—to Calvary—and asks for forgiveness and cleansing from his sins. He receives forgiveness and cleansing and, through the righteousness of Christ, is pronounced justified. Following this, he again looks into the law, into the mirror, and here he is assured that all is now well, that he is clean.

The same law that before declared him guilty and unclean tells him now, “I, the law of God, give witness to your righteousness which I, myself,

could not give you; I acknowledge the righteousness which you have received through Jesus Christ.”

The new life—the life with Christ

Law and grace have now found their rightful place in the life of the believer. This is the beginning of a new life, and joy thrills the soul. The imputed righteousness now becomes an energetic righteousness because the converted man will put forth efforts not to fall into sin again by transgressing the law of God. Once he felt the curse of the law, but now, justified by grace, he will attempt to walk in the way of obedience to honor his Redeemer. “Let him that stole steal no more,” and so on.

The glory of redemption consists of having close communion, and living in harmony, with the will of God.

Love—the fulfillment of the law

Grace and the law are not two hostile concepts in the plan of redemption. They are two inseparable necessities for eternal life. This is why Paul says, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” Romans 3:31.

Grace, faith, love, and the law all have the same origin: God. All of them together come from God Himself and are placed into His service for the salvation of the sinner, to grant him eternal life. If a criminal or felon has been pardoned and his guilt is canceled, he does not thus receive license to commit new crimes and remain a convict.

Faith may be compared to a hand that is stretched out to accept the proffered grace. It also imparts to the believer strength to walk in the commandments of God. 1 John 5:4.

Love is the fulfilling of the law. Romans 13:10; John 14:15. Salvation by grace means a life in harmony with the will of God and activated by love. Amen.



“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” Matthew 5:7.

By Vladimir Marinov, Finland

We live in a world where unrighteousness reigns, where many innocent people suffer. People who try to do the best they can for their neighbours are sometimes misunderstood. Human nature is degraded. As the struggle for survival in this crisis-ridden world becomes ever more difficult, more people seek security and mercy. In these last times, when people often take advantage of the mercy shown to them, we really need to ask God to guide us in practicing mercy in the right way.

Job, “the father of the poor”

“When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out.” Job 29:11-16.

Job lived a righteous life, remembering those around him who needed help. Mercifully, he shared the blessings God gave him with the needy.

Satan, allowed to test Job, tried to sow in the heart of the

patriarch mistrust in God’s promises, but Job’s faith remained firm. He continued to believe that the merciful God would be at his side. “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” Job 19:25-27.

The enemy of souls tries to rob us, too, of God’s present and future blessings. Satan is sad when God’s children lead a righteous life and receive blessings from above. He does his best to make us unhappy, to make us believe that we shall receive no mercy even if we are merciful with others. But let us remain as firm as Job did! Even when, during trials, we may not always see or feel God’s mercy, let’s trust in Him and His promises. He has prepared a great reward for us in heaven. If we remain faithful, we shall receive it.

Being a Good Samaritan requires sacrifice

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care

of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.” Luke 10:33-35.

The Good Samaritan did all he could—using his own strength, time, and money—with no thought of reward. We cannot practice mercy either without making sacrifices. But being merciful is not a natural trait of human beings. We tend to find excuses for ourselves: “I have no time. I have no money. I have no opportunities.”

The Word of God says, however, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” Luke 6:38.

From this text we understand that our giving should be generous and enthusiastic. Unfortunately, many times our measure is not what the Word of God advises. Many people want mercy but do not support God’s work. Other people clamor for love but do not manifest love for others. I must examine my measure, while you examine yours, to see if our measures are God’s measures.

“The heart of man,” however, “is by nature cold and dark and unloving; whenever one manifests a spirit of mercy and forgiveness, he does it not of himself, but through the influence of the divine Spirit moving upon his heart. ‘We love, because He first loved us.’ 1 John 4:19, R.V.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 21. May the merciful Lord give us merciful hearts.

Man easily forgets God's mercy

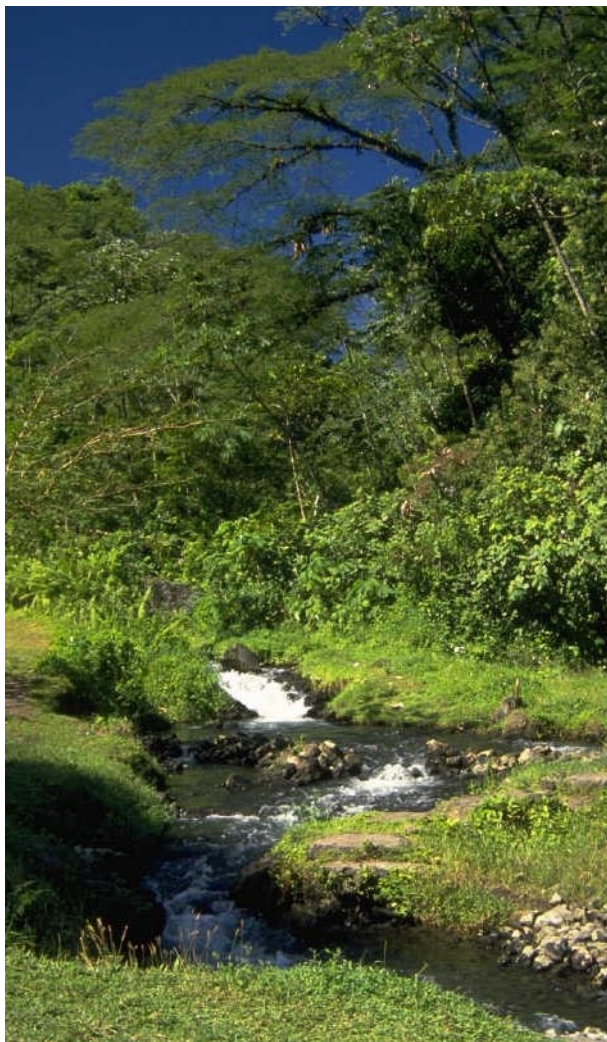
"And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

"But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

"So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

"And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Matthew 18:24-35.

When we confess our sins and ask God for forgiveness, He is merciful with us. Yet how do we treat our neighbors when they ask forgiveness for their mistakes? Many friendships and marriages break up only because no one is willing to say, "I forgive you." Many



people die pleading for forgiveness but receiving none.

Remember God's warning about withholding forgiveness. "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." James 2:13.

Often wrongdoers refuse to admit fault but, instead, blame someone else. How should we act in such cases? Jesus, and later Stephen, forgave their murderers! Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60. Our compassion and mercy should extend to all people.

Let it alone this year also

"Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I

shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Luke 13:7-9.

God wants us to be "trees of righteousness" in His garden. Isaiah 61:3. He will be happy to see the fruits of the Spirit in our characters. Jesus, the Dresser of the vineyard, does everything possible so that we may bear fruit. Let us not repeat the history of ancient Israel.

"The warning sounds down along the line to us in this generation. Are you, O careless heart, a fruitless tree in the Lord's vineyard? Shall the words of doom erelong be spoken of you? How long have you received His gifts? How long has He watched and waited for a return of love? Planted in His vineyard, under the watchful care of the gardener, what privileges are yours! How often has the tender gospel message thrilled your heart! You have taken the name of Christ, you are outwardly a member of the church which is His body, and yet you are conscious of no living connection with the great heart of love. The tide of His life does not

flow through you. The sweet graces of His character, 'the fruits of the Spirit,' are not seen in your life." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 216.

Dear brother, do you, through these words, feel the influence of the Holy Spirit in your hearts? Dear sister, do you feel the same? Do you each realize your spiritual condition? Will you admit where you have erred? Can you, with the eyes of faith, see the High Priest, Jesus Christ, in the heavenly sanctuary, and hear His prayer for you? He pleads for more time for each one of us: "Let it alone this year also." He is patient and merciful. Can you see good fruit in your life? Jesus, the Gardener, wants to continue His work in us. But He must cut off the useless branches, so that we may produce fruits of righteousness. Let us give Him that possibility by cooperating with Him.

The source of all mercy

“God is Himself the source of all mercy. His name is ‘merciful and gracious.’ Exodus 34:6. He does not treat us according to our desert. He does not ask if we are worthy of His love, but He pours upon us the riches of His love, to make us worthy. He is not vindictive. He seeks not to punish, but to redeem. Even the severity which He manifests through His providences is manifested for the salvation of the wayward. He yearns with intense desire to relieve the woes of men and to apply His balsam to their wounds. It is true that God ‘will by no means clear the guilty’ (Exodus 34:7), but He would take away the guilt.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 22.

Jesus urged His followers to be merciful as His Father is merciful. Luke 6:36. We have a perfect example—our Father, full of love and mercy—and may learn from Him. Is this not a great privilege? He accepts us as His children and yearns to imprint in us His own character. Let us give Him the possibility by becoming instruments in His hands. God wants to glorify His name before the world through us. This is possible only if we remain in constant communion with Him. He wants to manifest His mercy to many people through us, as we invite them to be citizens of heaven.

“God imparts His blessing to us, that we may give to others. And as long as we yield ourselves as the channels through which His love can flow, He will keep the channels supplied. When you ask God for your daily bread, He looks right into your heart to see if you will impart the same to others, more needy than yourself. When you pray, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner,’ He watches to see if you will manifest compassion to those with whom you associate. This is the evidence of our connection with God—that we are merciful even as our Father who is in heaven is merciful.” —*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 164.

“We are called to represent to the world the character of God as it was revealed to Moses. In answer to the prayer

of Moses, ‘Show me Thy glory,’ the Lord promised, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before thee.’ ‘And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.’ Exodus 33:18, 19; 34:6, 7. This is the fruit that God desires from His people. In the purity of their characters, in the holiness of their lives, in their mercy and loving-kindness and compassion, they are to demonstrate that ‘the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.’ Psalm 19:7.” —*Counsels on Health*, p. 203.

God has placed us in a high position and has called us with a holy call to be Christ’s ambassadors. He wants us to reflect His character and reveal His law to the world. Let us, with His help, fulfill this holy mission.

The last word

We live in very dangerous times, the last hours of the history of this world. Soon our Mediator will finish His service in the heavenly sanctuary and pronounce the last words, “It is done.”

“I saw angels hurrying to and fro in heaven. An angel with a writer’s inkhorn by his side returned from the earth and reported to Jesus that his work was done, and the saints were numbered and sealed. Then I saw Jesus, who had been ministering before the ark containing the ten commandments, throw down the censer. He raised His hands, and with a loud voice said, ‘It is done.’ And all the angelic host laid off their crowns as Jesus made the solemn declaration, ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.’” —*Early Writings*, p. 279.

Soon probation will end. Then we can do nothing for our own salvation or that of others. Imagine the time of Noah! The door of the ark closed; outside, the terrible storm began. Then people

sought salvation, but it was too late—just like when the door of grace closes. So let’s hurry up and get to work! Let’s examine our hearts to see whether they are clean and fully consecrated to God. Do we reflect the character of Jesus? Only then can we say, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” Revelation 22:20.

In the eternal home

Are you—brothers, sisters, friends—tired of walking toward the eternal home? Do you find the way too long, too stony, too steep? Are you exhausted and about to give up? Don’t! Remain firm until the end! Look upward—there, where our eternal home is, in the New Jerusalem! There the host of angels are preparing to make a seven-day trip. Our beloved Saviour will soon come with that host of holy angels! We shall soon hear music and hymns that we have never heard before! Soon shall we hear the wonderful voice of Jesus saying,

“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Matthew 25:34-40.

God will be merciful with us if we practice mercy in our lives. We shall soon be in our eternal home! Our long struggle will be over; we shall enjoy wonderful rest and peace, eternal joy and happiness! May the Lord help us to be citizens of the heavenly home! Amen.

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8.

By Gerhard Hunger, Germany

The blessings from the Sermon on the Mount are some of the most precious jewels from the treasury of God’s loving promises. They express the Lord’s desire for our happiness, the secret of our present and eternal well-being. “The Sermon on the Mount is a wonderful production, yet so simple that a child can study it without misunderstanding.” —*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 439. “The beatitudes were His greeting to the whole human family. Looking upon the vast throng gathered to listen to the Sermon on the Mount, He seemed for the moment to have forgotten that He was not in heaven, and He used the familiar salutation of the world of light. From His lips flowed blessings as the gushing forth of a long-sealed fountain.” —*Education*, p. 79.

One of the many blessings Jesus offered to the repentant and converted was this: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8.

David had composed a similar message in Psalm 24, probably to celebrate the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem. “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” Psalm 24:3-5.

This description does not refer to outward cleanliness. “The Jews were so exacting in regard to ceremonial purity that their regulations were extremely burdensome. Their minds

were occupied with rules and restrictions and the fear of outward defilement, and they did not perceive the stain that selfishness and malice impart to the soul. Jesus does not mention this ceremonial purity as one of the conditions of entering into His kingdom, but points out the need of purity of heart. The wisdom that is from above ‘is first pure.’ James 3:17. Into the city of God there will enter nothing that defiles. All who are to be dwellers there will here have become pure in heart.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 24.

Blessed

The meaning of the Greek word for “blessed,” *makarioi*, is “happy,” or “fortunate.” The word corresponds to the Hebrew *’ashre*, meaning “happy,” or “blessed.” Jesus knows the human being in depth and his inward desire to be happy. This is because He himself implanted this longing in man when creating him in His image. When we choose Christ as our Saviour and Lord and walk along the narrow path, obeying His rules of love, we are citizens of the kingdom of grace. We receive His promised peace, forgiveness, and salvation—not the temporary pleasure offered by the amusements of the world, but a peace that lasts even when the wind of adversity shakes us with its trials. But having this peace is conditional upon having a clean heart.

A clean heart

When speaking about a “clean heart” we think mainly of sexual purity. It is true that a pure life excludes any sexual relations

outside the bond of marriage, and he who desires purity of heart will not give loose rein to his fantasies and thoughts about low and sinful passions. “But the words of Jesus, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart,’ have a deeper meaning—not merely pure in the sense in which the world understands purity, free from that which is sensual, pure from lust, but true in the hidden purposes and motives of the soul, free from pride and self-seeking, humble, unselfish, childlike.” —*Ibid*, p. 25.1.

“In one who is learning of Jesus, there will be manifest a growing distaste for careless manners, unseemly language, and coarse thought. When Christ abides in the heart, there will be purity and refinement of thought and manner.” —*Ibid*, p. 24.

He who has a clean heart will not live a life criticizing others, because putting others down in order to uplift oneself shows arrogance and pride. People with pure hearts will refrain from the poison of jealousy, envy, and gossip.

Resentment and hate are worse than cancer because they pollute our hearts and separate us from God. “If ye forgive not men their trespasses,” Jesus said, “neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:15. “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man.” Matthew 15:19, 20.

Two-faced people, who praise you in your presence but criticize you when you turn your back, have unclean hearts. “They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things.” Psalm 12: 2, 3.

He who wants a clean heart will not spend hours in front of the TV watching sin, worldliness, violence, immorality, and spiritualism. He will not pollute his soul reading novels and jokes. He who has a pure heart will always speak the truth, even if he loses; neither will he speak half-truths to deceive others or distort reality.

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.” —*Education*, p. 57. Men and women with such principles are pure in heart.

Have you and I returned all that we have borrowed? Have we paid our debts? The passing of time does not lessen our duty. When we find things, do we seek the owners—or find excuses to keep the items for ourselves? Cleanliness of heart relates to practical Christianity, to our responsibility toward others.

Fruit of a clean heart

“When one is fully emptied of self, when every false god is cast out of the soul, the vacuum is supplied by the inflowing of the Spirit of Christ. Such a one has the faith which works by love and purifies the soul from every moral and spiritual defilement. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, can work upon the heart, influencing and directing, so that he enjoys spiritual things. He is ‘after the Spirit’ (Romans 8:1), and he minds the things of the Spirit. He has no confidence in self; Christ is all in all. Truth is constantly being unfolded by the Holy Spirit; he receives with meekness the engrafted word, and he gives the Lord all the glory, saying, ‘God has revealed them unto us by his



Spirit’ (1 Corinthians 2:10). ‘Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God’ (verse 12).

“The Spirit that reveals also works in him the fruits of righteousness. Christ is in him ‘a well of water springing up into everlasting life’ (John 4:14). He is a branch of the True Vine, and bears rich clusters of fruit to the glory of God. What is the character of the fruit borne? ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love.’ Mark the words—love, not hatred; it is joy, not discontent and mourning; peace, not irritation, anxiety, and manufactured trials. It is ‘longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law’ (Galatians 5:22, 23).

“Those who have this Spirit will be earnest laborers together with God; the heavenly intelligences cooperate with them, and they go weighted with the Spirit of the message of truth which they bear. They are a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. They are ennobled, refined, through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. They have not brought into the treasury of the soul wood, hay, stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stones. They speak words of solid sense, and from the treasures of the heart bring forth pure and sacred things according to the example of Christ.” —Home Missionary, Nov. 1, 1893, *Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 91.

Today we receive blessings, both spiritual and physical, from the kingdom of grace; today we are comforted, helped, justified. We receive the right to, and fitness for, heaven and can rejoice in Jesus.

“He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.” Proverbs 22:11. “By faith we behold Him here and now. In our daily experience we discern His goodness and compassion in the manifestation of His providence. We recognize Him in the character of His Son.... The pure in heart see God in a new and endearing relation, as their Redeemer; and while they discern the purity and loveliness of His charac-

ter, they long to reflect His image. They see Him as a Father longing to embrace a repenting son, and their hearts are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” —*Maranatha*, p. 88.

“The pure in heart discern the Creator in the works of His mighty hand, in the things of beauty that comprise the universe. In His written word they read in clearer lines the revelation of His mercy, His goodness, and His grace. The truths that are hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to babes. The beauty and preciousness of truth, which are undiscerned by the worldly-wise, are constantly unfolding to those who have a trusting, childlike desire to know and to do the will of God. We discern the truth by becoming, ourselves, partakers of the divine nature.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 26.

“Too many Christians become spiritually cross-eyed in the attempt to keep one eye fixed on the heavenly Canaan and the other on the ‘pleasures of sin’ (Hebrews 11:25) and the ‘flesh pots’ of Egypt (Exodus 16:3). Our only safety is to live by principle, to make God first in the life. Those today who see that the things of the world are to be ‘desired,’ whose attention is fixed on the glittering baubles of earth that Satan displays, will never see the greater value of obeying God. The window of the soul must be kept clean if we would ‘see God.’” —*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, p. 328.

The promise says that “the pure in heart ... shall see God.” Matthew 5:8. “For three hundred years Enoch had been seeking purity of soul, that he might be in harmony with Heaven. For three centuries he had walked with God. Day by day he had longed for a closer union; nearer and nearer had grown the communion, until God took him to Himself. He had stood at the threshold of the eternal world, only a step between him and the land of the blest; and now the portals opened, the walk with God, so long pursued on earth, continued, and he passed through the gates of the Holy City—

the first from among men to enter there.” —*My Life Today*, p. 341.

Jesus will soon come to take us, too, to heaven. The signs of the time, the fulfilment of prophecy, clearly announce His coming. Yes, Jesus will soon take us to that home of perfect bliss, to a heaven unshadowed by sin and death, where the stigma of evil will have vanished forever. The only reminder will be the wounds in our Saviour’s hands. We’ll ask, “What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.” Zechariah 13:6.

How can we obtain a clean heart?

Do you wish to have a clean heart? Make up your mind to depart from sin; make this a ruling principle in your life, and consecrate your life entirely to God, through Christ’s grace. Abandon your errors of the past and say, like Paul, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:13, 14.

“When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” Matthew 8:1-3.

Tell your beloved Jesus the same thing: “Lord, if you want to, you can cleanse me from the polluting leprosy of sin, from the filthiness of my dirty heart, from the deformity of my rebellious character.” Plead with the Master to forgive your sins. But at the same time make a firm decision to put aside, with His help, every sinful habit. Jesus will lovingly stretch out His hand toward you and say, as He told the leper, “I will; be thou clean!”

Although David had committed a terrible sin, he contritely made no excuse for what he had done. “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,” he said, “and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my

sin is ever before me.... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.... Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.” Psalm 51:2, 3, 7, 10-12.

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” Psalm 32:3-5.

Only Jesus can clean us. “A new heart also will I give you,” He has promised, “and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

Let us pray earnestly for a spiritual revival. Let us analyze our past and confess to God all our sins, without holding anything back or finding excuses. Let us speak with Him about the things we should have done but have not, about our selfishness, impure thoughts and words and acts, resentment and bitterness, and everything else that has polluted our hearts. Let’s trust in the redeeming blood of Jesus and enter a new stage in which we feel grateful and happy for the new birth we experienced, for the imputed righteousness of Christ and for the opportunity of being washed in His blood.

We want to see God—not only through the eyes of faith, but in His glory. We want to see Him come in the clouds of heaven, and to be always with Him in a place where there are only clean hearts, washed in the precious blood of the Son of God.

Let us pray and work to gain victory; let us cling to God’s promises. Let us serve with thankful hearts for what He has done, does now, and will do in our lives. Let us hear the echo of the Sermon on the Mount, from Jesus’ own lips, when He exclaimed, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Amen.

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

By Héctor O. Paz, U.S.A.

According to the dictionary, peacemakers are those who make, or re-establish, peace. Throughout history, many people have dedicated their lives to re-establishing peace among men. Unfortunately, in spite of a great many efforts to accomplish this goal, with awards for outstanding performances acknowledged worldwide, none of these achievements have produced lasting results.

Why? Although we may look everywhere for answers, the only trustworthy source of answers is the Holy Scriptures. Long ago, the Almighty God said to His servant Daniel, “they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another.” Daniel 2:43. In other words, their peace will not last long. The prophet Jeremiah said the same thing: “Everyone dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.” Jeremiah 6:13, 14.

“Men cannot manufacture peace. Human plans for the purification and uplifting of individuals or of society will fail of producing peace, because they do not reach the heart. The only power that can create or perpetuate true peace is the grace of Christ. When this is implanted in the heart, it will cast out the evil passions that cause strife and dissension. ‘Instead of the thorn shall

come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree’; and life’s desert ‘shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.’ Isaiah 55:13; 35:1.” –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 302.

Centuries ago, the night before His death, Jesus Christ Himself spoke to His disciples. “His last legacy to them was a legacy of peace.” –*Ibid.*, 672. “Peace I leave with you,” He told them. “My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:27.

Christ’s disciples would now be peacemakers, ambassadors of peace for God.

The servant of the Lord in her book *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (p. 28) writes, “Christ’s followers are sent to the world with the message of peace. Whoever, by the quiet, unconscious influence of a holy life, shall reveal the love of Christ; whoever, by word or deed, shall lead another to renounce sin and yield his heart to God, is a peacemaker.”

Dear brother and sister, are you aware you have been called to be peacemakers?

The psalmist says, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” Psalm 119:165. Let nothing or nobody disturb your work! Do not give up! Be a true ambassador of Christ, and manifest the peace that Christ has put into your heart!

Jesus Christ is “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6) and “the Lord

of peace” (2 Thessalonians 3:16). The heavenly angels sang their lovely song about “peace on earth” when Christ was born as a man, when God the Father willed peace for this fallen race.

Christ was commissioned to reconcile man with God. “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:19. The apostle Paul himself concludes, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, Be ye reconciled to God.” Verse 20.

Today, as in the time of the apostles, we have to accept the responsibility that has been given us; we are to proclaim “the acceptable year of the Lord.” Isaiah 61:2.

Before the imminent encounter with his brother Esau, when Jacob was on the way back to Canaan, “He therefore dispatched messengers with a conciliatory greeting to his brother.... Jacob told the servants they were sent to ‘my lord Esau’; when brought before him, they were to refer to their master as ‘thy servant Jacob.’...”

“He sent from his vast flocks generous presents to Esau, with a friendly message. [Jacob] did all in his power to atone for the wrong to his brother and to avert the threatened danger, and then in humiliation and repentance he pleaded for divine protection....

“[Jacob] had decided to spend the night in prayer, and he desired to

be alone with God. God could soften the heart of Esau. In Him was the patriarch's only hope." *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 196.

After a long night of wrestling with Someone much more powerful than he, "Jacob had received the blessing for which his soul had longed." *—Ibid.*, p. 198. "Through humiliation, repentance, and self-surrender, this sinful, erring mortal prevailed with the Majesty of heaven." *—Ibid.*, p. 197.

When finally the moment came to meet his brother, whom Jacob feared, Jacob "was pale and disabled from his recent conflict, and he walked slowly and painfully, halting at every step; but his countenance was lighted up with joy and peace.

"At sight of that crippled sufferer, 'Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.' As they looked upon the scene, even the hearts of Esau's rude soldiers were touched." *—Ibid.*

Yes, "the time of Jacob's trouble" is before us. It is now that we need to reconcile ourselves with our neighbours and with God, "for he that

loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" 1 John 4: 20. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Matthew 5:23, 24. We should "follow peace with all men." Hebrews 12:14. "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly." Zephaniah 1:14.

Now is the time to make peace with your brother. Now is the time to proclaim the message of reconciliation. Do not miss the opportunity! Do not allow pride to lead your soul astray. Like Jacob, we have to wrestle with ourselves first. If by faith, with genuinely contrite and repentant hearts, we cling to our beloved Saviour Jesus Christ, we shall also overcome our pride and vanity.

Sometimes differences among brethren, in the family, and with friends are caused by misunderstanding a word or action. Our lack of understanding and mercy creates before us an insurmountable

mountain that so separates us from our loved ones that reconciliation seems impossible. When we invite suspicion, mistrust, jealousy, and pride into our hearts, we place ourselves on dangerous ground, on the enemy's territory, and under the ruling power of evil. The apostle James says, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" James 4:1. "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." James 1:15.

Grievances played a part in the inability of nine of Christ's disciples to free a lunatic from the demon that possessed him. Matthew 17:20. "The words of Christ pointing to His death had brought sadness and doubt. And the selection of the three disciples to accompany Jesus to the mountain had excited the jealousy of the nine. Instead of strengthening their faith by prayer and meditation on the words of Christ, they had been dwelling on their discouragements and personal grievances. In this state of darkness they had undertaken the conflict with Satan.

"In order to succeed in such a conflict they must come to the work in



a different spirit. Their faith must be strengthened by fervent prayer and fasting, and humiliation of heart. They must be emptied of self, and be filled with the Spirit and power of God. Earnest, persevering supplication to God in faith—faith that leads to entire dependence upon God, and unreserved consecration to His work—can alone avail to bring men the Holy Spirit's aid in the battle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in high places.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 431.

Maybe your neighbor did not mean to offend you when he said or did something that made you feel bad. Perhaps he just wanted to help with something that interested or worried him, and he did not know how to express himself or how to act—and his intention was misunderstood. Ask the Lord for tact and wisdom to solve such situations. Maybe the Lord allows them to test us. Let's humble ourselves before the all-knowing God and ask for help. Then, trusting in His infinite love and mercy, let us make peace with our neighbors. Remember, “a soft answer turneth away wrath.” Proverbs 15:1. Maybe, like those nine disciples, we also need to increase our faith, to pray and fast more often so as to be overcomers. The father of the lunatic mentioned above asked Christ, “Help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24), and it was his faith that defeated the demon.

“‘Blessed are the peacemakers.’ ... There is no other ground of peace than this. The grace of Christ received into the heart, subdues enmity; it allays strife and fills the soul with love. He who is at peace with God and his fellow men cannot be made miserable. Envy will not be in his heart; evil surmisings will find no room there; hatred cannot exist. The heart that is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven and will diffuse its blessed influence on all around. The spirit of peace

will rest like dew upon hearts weary and troubled with worldly strife.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 27.

People of different cultures, education, and customs surround us. In our relationships with them, our only sure guide is God's Holy Spirit. We are as bound to err as they are. If we have offended someone, our duty is to acknowledge our mistake and correct it. “Those who have not humbled their souls before God in acknowledging their guilt, have not yet fulfilled the first condition of acceptance. If we have not experienced that repentance which is not to be repented of, and have not with true humiliation of soul and brokenness of spirit confessed our sins, abhorring our iniquity, we have never truly sought for the forgiveness of sin; and if we have never sought, we have never found the peace of God.” —*Steps to Christ*, p. 37.

We must be honest when confessing our faults before men and God. “The spirit of self-justification originated in the father of lies, and has been exhibited by all the sons and daughters of Adam. Confessions of this order are not inspired by the divine Spirit and will not be acceptable to God. True repentance will lead a man to bear his guilt himself and acknowledge it without deception or hypocrisy....

“The examples in God's word of genuine repentance and humiliation reveal a spirit of confession in which there is no excuse for sin, or attempt at self-justification. Paul did not seek to shield himself; he paints his sin in its darkest hue, not attempting to lessen his guilt. He says: ‘Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.’ Acts 26:10, 11. He does not hesitate to declare that ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.’ 1 Timothy 1:15.” —*Ibid.*, p. 41.

In the Holy Scriptures are other examples of peacemakers: When the herdsmen of Abraham and his nephew, Lot, for example, argued about grazing land, “Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.” Genesis 13:8. So peace prevailed.

In Beersheba, Isaac nobly accepted peace overtures from Abimelech. Genesis 26:29.

Mordecai the Jew, another peacemaker, “was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.” Esther 10:3.

“I am for peace,” David declared, “but when I speak, they are for war.” Psalm 120:7.

After Joseph's life was threatened, he was deprived of his freedom and the loving care of his father's home, then sold as a slave and taken to a strange land. There he had to adapt to a different kind of life. Nevertheless, when he again met his brothers, who had done him so much harm, he forgave them like a true peacemaker would.

All the experiences Joseph had gone through when he lived in Egypt had strengthened his integrity. He remembered his parents' advice and determined to remain faithful to the principles he had been taught as a child. In jail, he was like an angel to those around him. Joseph found grace before the Egyptian monarch, becoming second in command of the country. With unshakable faith, Joseph chose not to take revenge against his brothers, but did all that was possible to unite his beloved family. He succeeded in his role as peacemaker.

“Christ is ‘The Prince of Peace’ (Isaiah 9:6), and it is His mission to restore to earth and heaven the peace that sin has broken. ‘Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Romans 5:1. Whoever consents to renounce sin and open his heart to the



love of Christ, becomes a partaker of this heavenly peace.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 27.

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.’ The spirit of peace is evidence of their connection with heaven. The sweet savor of Christ surrounds them. The fragrance of the life, the loveliness of the character, reveal to the world the fact that they are children of God. Men take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus.” —*Ibid.*, p. 28.

Our heavenly Father is the author of peace, as the Holy Scriptures reveal: “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” 1 Corinthians 15:33. “He maketh peace in thy borders.” Psalm 147:14. “Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” 1 John 4:7. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Romans 8:14. He Himself says: “Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.” Isaiah 27:5.

“It is the love of self that destroys our peace. While self is all alive, we stand ready continually to guard it from mortification and insult; but when we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God, we shall not take neglects or slights to heart. We shall be deaf to reproach and blind to scorn and insult. . . .

“Happiness drawn from earthly sources is as changeable as varying circumstances can make it; but the peace of Christ is a constant and abiding peace. It does not depend upon any circumstances in life, on the amount of worldly goods or the number of earthly friends. Christ is the fountain of living water, and happiness drawn from Him can never fail. . . .

“Far better would it be for us to suffer under false accusation than to inflict upon ourselves the torture of retaliation upon our enemies.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 16.

Dear brother and sister, another year has passed. Have we reconciled ourselves with our neighbors? Have we reconciled with God? Unless we do the former, we cannot do the latter. Have

we been faithful to the Lord? Have we experienced God’s mercy in our lives? Is there so much peace in our hearts that we can share it with others? Have we taken the message of reconciliation to the world? We are God’s messengers of peace to this world full of violence and wickedness. Have we our credentials in our hands so that the world can acknowledge us immediately?

“Trials patiently borne, blessings gratefully received, temptations manfully resisted, meekness, kindness, mercy, and love habitually revealed, are the lights that shine forth in the character in contrast with the darkness of the selfish heart, into which the light of life has never shone.” —*Ibid.*, p. 44.

“It is thus that God’s purpose in calling His people, from Abraham on the plains of Mesopotamia to us in this age, is to reach its fulfillment.” —*Ibid.*, p. 43.

“The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.” Micah 5:7.

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” Psalm 126:6. “Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places; when it shall hail, coming down on the forest; and the city shall be low in a low place. Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.” Isaiah 32:15-20.

“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. Amen.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” Matthew 5:10.

By Branko Cholich, U.S.A.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” Matthew 5:10-12.

Steps to persecution

The following Bible story explains how persecution develops: Eve, after bearing Cain, “bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.... And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.” Genesis 4:2-5, 8.

“Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam, differed widely in character. Abel had a spirit of loyalty to God; he saw justice and mercy in the Creator’s dealings with the fallen race, and gratefully accepted the hope of redemption. But Cain cherished feelings of rebellion, and murmured against God because of the curse pronounced upon the earth and upon the human race for Adam’s sin. He permitted his mind to run in the same channel that led to Satan’s fall—indulging the de-

sire for self-exaltation and questioning the divine justice and authority....

“Cain, disregarding the Lord’s direct and explicit command, presented only an offering of fruit. There was no token from heaven to show that it was accepted. Abel pleaded with his brother to approach God in the divinely prescribed way, but his entreaties only made Cain the more determined to follow his own will. As the eldest, he felt above being admonished by his brother, and despised his counsel....

“Cain obeyed in building an altar, obeyed in bringing a sacrifice; but he rendered only a partial obedience.” — *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 71, 72.

Cain’s actions demonstrate a few of the steps taken before someone becomes a persecutor. (1) Disobedience: Not at peace with God in the matter of the sacrificial system, Cain disobeyed the instructions given to him. (2) Envy: When God accepted his brother’s sacrifice, while Cain’s was rejected, Cain envied his brother. (3) Hatred. Cain’s hatred led to persecution, which culminated in murder.

Not every sinner reaches the final step in this process. Some stop at envying, others at hating, but the true enemy of God’s people goes through all three steps. We find this pattern in many other cases of persecution recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

King Saul’s persecution of David

When King Saul, in direct disobedience to the instruction of God, did not destroy all the animals in his war against the Amalekites, keeping them instead for sacrifices, Samuel rebuked him:

“Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying

the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.” 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

Samuel rightly described Saul’s deed not only as disobedience but also as “rebellion.” Rebellion is deliberate disobedience. Because of Saul’s continual rebellion against God, “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.” 1 Samuel 16:14.

“And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.

“And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul’s hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him.” 1 Samuel 18:6-12.

Saul, understanding well that public opinion was against him but in favor of David, hated the young man and even wanted to kill him.

When a man is disobedient to God, he envies the righteous, hates him, and finally persecutes him. Although David, the king admitted, was much better than he, Saul remained unconverted.

The persecution of Daniel

The story of Daniel, called “greatly beloved” by a heavenly messenger (Daniel 9:23), is well known to every Bible reader. We are acquainted with Daniel from his captivity in Babylon to the time of persecution for his faith in the kingdom of Persia. Knowing Daniel’s performance in the Babylonian court, King Darius made Daniel the first prime minister in the Persian kingdom.

Other ministers, in lower positions than Daniel, envied him. Because they were pagan, they had never been obedient to the God of heaven—so their envy quickly turned into hate. They might also have envied Daniel if he were Persian, but they actually hated him because he was a faithful Jew and an excellent officer. We know very well how they persecuted him.

Daniel’s story illustrates the steps that lead to persecution: disobedience to God, envy, and hatred. Those who obey God will not envy, hate, or persecute other people.

“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” 1 John 5:18.

Christ’s persecution

“From the time of their entrance to the land of Canaan, [the Israelites] departed from the commandments of God, and followed the ways of the heathen. It was in vain that God sent them warning by His prophets. In vain they suffered the chastisement of heathen oppression. Every reformation was followed by deeper apostasy.

“Had Israel been true to God, He could have accomplished His purpose through their honor and exaltation. If they had walked in the ways of obedience, He would have made them ‘high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor.’” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 28.

When Jesus came to this earth, the Jewish nation was deep in apostasy and disobedience to God. Christ’s wonderful work



and teaching were met with envy and hatred, culminating at Calvary. This nation continued to persecute Him by persecuting His followers but, clearly, their first step toward persecution was disobedience to God.

Persecution in the early Christian era

Christians who preached the gospel of Christ in pagan countries reaped persecution because they strongly opposed idolatry as well as the immorality of paganism. The Christian message disturbed the lives of those who enjoyed the pleasures of sin. In Greece and Rome, the upper classes engaged in pagan festivals that included orgies deeply contradictory to Christian morality and righteousness. For rebuking such sins, Christians were persecuted.

Persecution in the Christian era

The longest period of severe persecution during the Christian era was the 1,260 years at the hands of the dragon and the first beast of Revelation 13:1-10.

We know that the persecution mentioned above was brought to an end prior to 1798 through the influence of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Then the two-horned beast ascended to world power. Today, the people of God in the territory of the two-

horned beast do not suffer religious persecution. But we should not forget that a great part of this world is now under the direct dominion of the dragon, paganism. At the hands of non-Christian nations, many who keep the commandments of God suffer a certain kind of persecution today.

According to Daniel 7:12, the dominions of all beasts but the dragon were limited to “a season and time.” But with the dragon we have a different experience. “And the dragon was wroth with the woman [the church of God], and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 12:17. This war had been brought from heaven down to this earth. Genesis 3:16. The persecution of God’s people started right then. The seed of the woman, “which is Christ” (Galatians 3:15), was also persecuted, but not devoured, by the dragon.

The remnant of the seed of the woman is a faithful people. This war will come to an end after the millennium, when the dragon (Satan) and Gog and Magog (all unsaved people) will finally be destroyed.

Satan uses not only pagans to persecute the people of God but also their own relatives, apostate Christians, and false brethren in the church. “There have ever been two classes among those who profess to be followers of Christ. While one class study the Saviour’s life, and earnestly seek to correct their defects and conform to the Pattern, the

other class shun the plain, practical truths which expose their errors.” —*The Great Controversy*, p. 43. See also Isaiah 66:5; 2 Corinthians 11:26; Matthew 10:21.

Persecution in the Laodicean era

The third angel’s message began in 1844 and will continue to the end of the time of mercy. The message is very short, but it will be given to the entire world with great power and glory in the time of the loud cry. We understand that everything is now in preparation for the persecution of God’s people. But this does not mean that the people of God will not go through any crisis before that time.

Forty years after the third angel’s message started, the following statement was made in *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, pp. 49, 50: “Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber? ... It is only because of the spirit of compromise with sin.... Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled.”

Thirty years after this statement was made, a revival of the faith and power of the early church took place among some of those who were preaching the third angel’s message, and the fires of persecution were rekindled against faithful believers. In the time of World War I, in 1914, the faith of God’s professed people was severely tested in Europe. In those years, Europe was the cultural center of the world, and the center of the military power of all nations.

God permitted this test to happen in Europe. History reveals that the great majority of Sabbath-keepers disobeyed God’s commandments. This was the first step that led to persecution. Envy and hatred against the faithful people followed. Then the faithful ones were persecuted, and some of them even suffered death. This is in harmony with the statement from *Spirit of Prophecy* given above, that when there is a revival of faith and power, the fire of persecution will be rekindled.

In the very beginning of the war in Europe, on the first two Sabbaths, members of certain churches had different opinions about taking part in war. Most of the ministers agreed that church members had to obey the order of the government and take part in the war. Those who rejected this new teaching were disfellowshipped from the church and forbidden to attend its meetings. Some who

were drafted to do military service but hid instead, were betrayed by apostate ministers. The faithful ones were persecuted, and some of them even suffered death. In this way, the membership was divided into two parts—a few faithful ones and the great majority, who fell in apostasy. Since that time, two churches have existed. The faithful ones were envied,



hated, and persecuted by those who were disobedient to God.

After World War I came to an end, many efforts were made by Reformers to reconcile differences with the other group. The leaders of this great multitude acknowledged that their apostasy had been an error and apologized, saying that those who had committed that error sincerely regretted it. But then God permitted World War II to reveal how sincere their confession was. Their disobedience was more evident than in World War I, and the fire of persecution was

rekindled against those who were faithful to their covenant with God.

“Never does man show greater folly than when he seeks to secure acceptance and recognition in the world by sacrificing in any degree the allegiance and honor due to God.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 151.

Last-day persecution

“As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel’s message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position, and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbath-keepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them.” —*The Great Controversy*, p. 608.

When the Sunday law is issued, the faith of God’s people will be severely tested. Those who are disobedient to the commandments of God will not only apostatize, but will be bitter enemies of God’s faithful people. Persecution will take place within the family, among relatives, friends, members and leaders of the church. All this stormy persecution will culminate in the issuance of the death decree.

The end of persecution

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” 2 Timothy 3:12. God’s promised blessing to those who will be persecuted for righteousness’ sake is the kingdom of heaven. God did not promise His people a smooth life on this earth, but a faith strong enough to endure all difficulties, including persecution. The apostle Paul stated that nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death. By faith we can be obedient to God and never fall in apostasy. All those who endure to the end shall be saved. Amen.