

THE HARVESTER

"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)

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BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

Many years ago I was walking in a cemetery in Tennessee with my earthly father, Harris R. Eldridge Sr. We were reading names and dates. Although epitaphs are concise, I find them very interesting. Many times you'll find "Gone but not forgotten" and so forth. After I read my Uncle Hamp Spicer's epitaph I have never forgotten it. In fact it is from Matthew 5:8: *"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."* After I read that Bible verse on my uncle's headstone, the finality of life vividly came into focus. If we want to see God at the end of our lives we are going to have to keep and maintain a "pure" heart. Our heart is our "mind" where our faith is. How do we

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maintain a pure mind (heart) toward God so that we can be with Him in eternity?

In Romans 10:17, we clearly understand that faith comes from reading and studying the Bible: “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” After we have OBEYED the Gospel (Rom. 1:16, Rom. 6:17, Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:38), we are to “*go on unto perfection*” (Heb. 6:1) by adding to our faith. The inspired apostle Peter plainly teaches in 2 Peter 1:5-10:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

We are plainly taught via the Holy Spirit that we are to add the 7 Christian graces of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, Godliness, brotherly kindness (*phileo* or love for the brethren), and charity (*agape* love) to our faith. And if we do not “*do these things*”, we will fall from grace. If we faithfully continue in the 7 Christian graces, we make our “*calling and election sure*”. Are you sure of your calling and election via the Gospel of being baptized in water by faith? Let us begin to investigate these 7 areas of Christian growth.

Virtue. Virtue primarily means courage. Courage is the “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger fear or difficulty.” “The determination to do that which is right.” If our faith is strong we will have the strength and ability to live righteously (1 John 3:7, 10). We will be will-

ing to stand up for God even in the face of danger. With strong faith and hope we can withstand life's hardships: sickness, death, hunger, and such like. Jesus gives us strength by living according to the word of God: "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Php. 4:13).

Knowledge. Knowledge is the "the condition of knowing something." God's finger prints are readily observable by the things He has made. Paul teaches us in Romans 1:20,

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

We note that the human eye is much better designed than a camera which humans have made. The DNA, found in the chromosomes of all living things, is described as a "code". Only a Mind can make a code. These examples and a multitude of others allows the honest and humble heart to observe that fact that God exists. However, we don't know "who" God is until we open and read the pages of inspiration. God is pitiable to the human condition and is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). We learn from God's Word that we cannot please him without faith. In the Book of Hebrews we learn,

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6).

Faith comes from the Word of God, the Holy inspired Bible (Rom. 10:17). James tells us that "*faith without works is dead*" (Jas. 2:14-26). Our faith itself is a WORK (John 6:28-29) that is a COMMAND (1 John 3:23-24). Thus our faith is an active work that we are to continue that is based on understanding, believing, and doing the will of God as found in The Bible. On the Day of Judgement we are going to be judged according to what we have done. From 2 Corinthians 5:10 we learn,

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Thus, having knowledge of God's Word and putting it into an active/obedient faith is of ETERNAL importance.

Temperance. Temperance "denotes self-government, discipline, the ability of one to control his own life." "To take a grip of one's self". Without having discipline or self-government we are not going to see God in eternity. This is based on how strong our faith is. If we really and truly believe and understand in our minds that God exists, and we are going to be judged according to what we have done in our body (good or bad) and we don't want to be eternally lost – we will develop a strong resolve to do what God wants us to do. Anything God commands us to do He is not going to do for us. We are to draw near to Him and live for Him according to His will. He would not have asked us to believe and obey the Gospel if He hadn't given us the ability to choose. Our choices are NOT done for us. We must be determined to comply with God's Holy mind. In the book of Revelation we read,

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (Rev. 22:12-14)

As you can see, there are many important facets to this study. Think on these 3 areas of Christian growth. Are there ways that you can improve to make sure that you are following Christ? In the next issue, we will look to add more areas of growth so that we can continue to make our "*calling and election sure*".

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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. On what mountain did Moses receive the law from God?
2. What did Naomi tell the people in Bethlehem to call her?
3. What miracle had Jesus performed when he said, "It is I; be not afraid"?
4. What was the name of the place where Jesus Christ was crucified?
5. Who wrote the book of Acts?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month's questions?

1. How old was Abraham when his son Isaac was born?
100 (Gen. 21:5)
2. Who did Samuel anoint as the first King of Israel?
SAUL (1 Sam. 10:1,19-24)
3. In which city in Judah did Cyrus tell the Israelites to build the temple? JERUSALEM (Ezra 6:3)
4. What affliction did Paul strike Elymas the sorcerer down with? BLINDNESS (Acts 13:8,11)
5. Which church did Jesus accuse of being lukewarm? LAODICEA (Rev. 3:14-16)

GRACE, LOVE, AND COMMUNION

The apostle Paul wrote thirteen of the books of the New Testament. These books are actually letters that he wrote to churches or to individuals. In each of these letters, he closes with a blessing that he gives to the church or individual. A typical blessing is like the one in Romans 16:20b: "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*" However, I am greatly impressed with the blessing he gave at the end of the second Corinthian letter: "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen*" (2 Cor. 13:14). Let us analyze this blessing.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is good to meditate about the grace that God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ have for you. Grace is the friendly disposition that God and Jesus have, demonstrated in their loving-kindness, mercy and blessings given to you. Grace is sometimes described as unmerited favor. What if God was not a gracious God? What if instead He was always your enemy and had nothing kind or good to give you? If that were the case, there would be no salvation, no hope, and no joy. But praise be to God and Jesus Christ that they are full of grace towards you.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where-with he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (Eph. 2:4-5)

Even though mercy is a very important part of grace, you must not think that grace is limited to mercy.

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: (1 Cor. 1:4-7)

You are enriched in everything through God’s grace. *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”* (Heb. 4:16). Through grace, you find help in your time of need. *“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”* (2 Cor. 9:8). God’s grace gives you every-

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thing you need to accomplish every good work.

“The love of God.” Closely associated with grace is the love that God has for you. The greatest scripture that tells us of God’s love is John 3:16-17:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:5-8)

The extent of God’s love is demonstrated by His love to you when you were sinful and separated from Him. *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Rom. 8:32). The relationship between God and you is described as the relationship between a loving Father and His child.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3)

Nothing can separate you from the love of God.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present,

nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39)

“The communion of the Holy Ghost [Spirit].” The word translated communion can also be translated fellowship as in Philippians 2:1-2:

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

As a Christian, you have the Spirit of God in you.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (Rom. 8:9)

As a child of God, you should be led by the Spirit. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). The Spirit helps you in your weaknesses and intercedes for you.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Rom. 8:26)

You have fellowship with the Holy Spirit; you have the Spirit within you and that Spirit leads you in your life. How wonderful to have the Spirit of Almighty God within you and leading you!

The blessing given by the apostle Paul to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is the ultimate blessing. Nothing can be greater than to have these great blessings from Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit. Now I send these blessings to you. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen. Be greatly encouraged and filled with joy.

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