

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ 1 Peter 5:8

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GOD WHO IS TRUE**

The God of Comfort Tom Larkin

That God truly is the God of comfort is readily discernible in Scripture. This is the substance of Paul’s affirmation to the Corinthians – “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). This is the significance of Jesus’ declaration in the early lines of the Sermon on the Mount – “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). This is the subject of Paul’s supplication for Thessalonian Christians – “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work” (2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17).

God comforts through various means. For example, God’s comfort is given through His people. While on this earth Jesus showed compassion on the downtrodden and hurting—He fed the hungry, He befriended the outcasts of society, He cried with the bereaved. While He is now in heaven, the church carries on this work. In fact, Paul says that we are comforted of God “in all our tribulations, that we

may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

When a fellow Christian comforts, it is far more effective than that which is offered by those outside of Christ. This is just as we would expect it to be. Paul longed to see the Christians at Rome and be comforted in their “mutual faith” (Romans 1:12). We are encouraged to “rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15). Our mutual love for God and desire for those things that are heavenly enables us to give effectual comfort to those in need of it. When Paul sought to encourage and comfort fellow Christians, he often sent his fellow workers. Paul told the Thessalonians that he was sending Timothy “to establish you, and comfort you concerning the faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:2). Paul told the church at Ephesus and at Colossae that he sent Tychicus to “comfort your hearts” (Ephesians 6:22; Colossians 4:8).

God also offers comfort to His people through His word. In the midst of trouble, the psalmist declared, “This is my comfort in my affliction:

for thy word hath quickened me” (Psalm 119:50). Comfort is the result when God’s word is brought to mind. Again, the psalmist states, “I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself” (Psalm 119:52). To offer comfort to the child of God is a major purpose of the Old Testament scriptures. Paul wrote, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). We cheat ourselves of God’s comfort if we fail to read and study the Old Testament scriptures. Think of how much comfort has been given down through the years from Psalm 23. Think of the encouragement that has been gained by studying the faithful lives of Old Testament men and women. Let us resolve to take advantage of this source of divine comfort.

Truth has a comforting effect. The Thessalonians’ had grave misunderstandings concerning the second coming of Christ.

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EDITORIAL GOD—WHO IS TRUE

There are many characteristics of God. God is love. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7,8). God is just. “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” (2 Cor. 5:10). God can be severe. “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom. 11:22). God is true. This is the characteristic on which we will now focus.

It is the nature of God to be true. “That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:18). “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deut. 32:4). “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God: Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth forever” (Psa. 146:5,6). “That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth...” (Isa. 65:16). “God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged” (Rom. 3:4).

Seeing that it is the nature of God to be true, He has provided man with

means to know truth -- His word! “And now, O Lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant” (2 Sam. 7:28). “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16,17). “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:31,32). “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (Jn. 17:17).

Since God is true and His word is true, what does this mean to man? The scriptures give man the opportunity to obtain knowledge. Christ said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (Jn. 5:39). Solomon wrote, “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding” (Prov. 3:13). “Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth” (Prov. 4:5). “Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (Prov. 23:23). God has provided the means whereby we can know, but knowledge is not going to be given to us through the process of osmosis. It will be our responsibility to study to obtain the knowledge (Heb. 5:12-14; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:5-10).

They give man direction. Solomon tells us, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). Man is lost and undone without the truth of God’s

word. The questions of life, “Why are we here?” and “After death, then what?” are unanswerable without the Bible. It is the word of God that gives our lives meaning. It is the word of God that points us to our final reward. There is no way to determine right and wrong without the word of God. Man has tried and failed miserably! During the time of the judges we read, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Do you know what that is called? Chaos or anarchy! There is no direction there. Man has tried alternatives to what God is offering. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12). But the truth remains that Christ is the only way. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Without the truth of God’s word, how would we know which way to go?

The scriptures give man assurance. God is true. His word is true. Therefore, man can be assured of the promises and hope in Him. Paul told Timothy, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of...” (2 Tim. 3:14). This is why Paul could say to Timothy, “...for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). I love that God is true because I can know where I stand with Him. So can you!

GOD OF SALVATION

Bobby Liddell

SALVATION IS A GREAT DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S LOVE

What greater love could God show for hopeless mankind than to give His only begotten Son to save man (John 3:16; 1:29; Phi. 2:5-9; Rom. 5:8-9)? The love of God manifested itself in providing for man's salvation, paying the price which man could not pay. What else would God have to do to show His love for wretched, sinful man? We should be moved to tears when we contemplate the love and mercy of God.

"God is love" (1 John 4:16), and His love is pure and giving. His love and mercy go hand in hand (Eph. 2:4). By His mercy ("grace in action"), we are saved (Tit. 3:5), when we respond in faith (Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 5:8-9). God's mercy is great (Num. 14:19), plenteous (Psa. 86:5), and tender (Luke 1:78). In spite of man's rebellion, God still holds out the hope of salvation, if man will repent and obey (Dan. 9:9).

Salvation means one is forgiven, his sins are remitted; he is redeemed, and justified; and, his sins are washed away. God has offered salvation to all, but there are conditions placed by God. Salvation is not cheap, but it is freely given to those who will obey God. It is the greatest manifestation of God's love toward man.

GOD OFFERS SALVATION BECAUSE OF MAN'S SIN

Sin is a transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). When one sins, he goes across the boundary which God has set. To sin is to "miss the mark." As a bowman would seek to hit the bull's-eye, so we seek to be on target in our efforts to live in accordance with God's will. If we fail to do so, we sin. "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 15:17; cf. Gal. 5:19-21). Righteousness is right doing, in the keeping of God's commandments (Psa. 119:172; Luke 1:6). When one

fails to walk in the commandments of the Lord, he sins. A failure to do good is sin (Jam. 4:17). Sin may involve not doing the good one knows he should as well as doing the wrong one should not do.

Sin entered the world when man was tempted by Satan, and heard, believed, and obeyed the lie Satan offered (Gen. 3:1-24; John 8:44). In doing so, man rejected the truth from God, and suffered the punishment for disobedience (Rom. 5:12). Man does not inherit sin, but is born pure, innocent, and free from sin (Mat. 18:3; Eze. 18:20). However, when he sins, he is separated from God (Isa. 59:1-2). If continued in, sin brings death (Gen. 2:17; Eze. 18:20; Rom. 6:23; 1 Tim. 5:6; Rev. 21:8).

God hates sin (Pro. 6:16-19)! Man's sin resulted in the death of God's Son! Sin corrupted God's creation, and threatens His children. Surely, God hates sin, but He loves man. Therefore, God has provided salvation from sin through the Savior (Luke 19:10; John 1:29; 3:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 3:9; 1 John 4:14). God has done His part that man might be saved. The inescapable, undeniable truth is that man must do his part also--if he would have salvation (Rom. 5:8-9; Phi. 2:12; Tit. 2:11,12; Heb. 5:8-9).

WHO NEEDS SALVATION?

Little babies, young children, and those mentally, intellectually, or emotionally as children are not sinners. They can neither keep nor transgress God's law (1 John 5:17). They are not accountable; thus, they are not lost, but are safe. Should one die in such a condition, neither he nor his parents should fear for him (cf. Mat. 18:3; 19:13-15). They cannot, as accountable people must, hear the Word (Rom. 10:17), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of sin (Acts 2:38), confess faith in Christ (Mat. 10:32), and be baptized scripturally (Mark

16:15-16), nor can they live faithful Christian lives (Rev. 2:10).

Those who are mature and responsible are accountable to God for their thoughts, words, and actions, and have responsibility for sin (cf. Rom. 3:23). Such a person will continue to bear that heavy burden of guilt (Heb. 12:1) until he obeys the gospel to be saved (Mark 16:15-16; Gal. 3:26-27). One in Christ, who has been forgiven, must continue to walk in the light (1 John 1:6-10). When one in Christ sins, he does not have to be baptized again, but he must repent of his sin, confess it as publicly as the sin was known, and seek forgiveness through prayer (Acts 8:13-24).

Sin separates one from God; thus, putting him at enmity with God (Isa. 59:1-2; Jam. 4:4), not because God has chosen to be his enemy, but because he has chosen to be God's enemy (Mat. 12:30). One in sin has no peace within or without for his relationships with God, his fellow man and his own soul are marred by enmity, turmoil, confusion, and despair. The crushing burden of sin is more than any mortal can bear. Peace, which each desires, is lost and cannot be obtained without salvation. On the other hand, how sweet is the peace which salvation brings (Heb. 8:12)!

God desires that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Therefore, if men are lost, they will not be lost because of God being unforgiving, nor because salvation is not available in Christ, but because of their lack of availing themselves of the great blessing freely offered by our loving God.

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GOD OF PROMISES

Andy Cates

What a blessed and beautiful thought: Our Heavenly Father is a God of promises. Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary defines the word “promise” as “a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified; a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of a specified act.”

God keeps His promises (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). What He says will be, will be. Man sometimes makes promises that he cannot keep. It may be that something may develop outside a person’s power which keeps him from keeping a promise. However, God is omnipotent. Unlike man, this power is not limited; thus, He can (and does) keep all of His promises. Also, man is not capable of knowing everything, and he may learn that he cannot honor his promise. God is omniscient. He has complete knowledge. He knows He can keep whatever promise He makes.

Time may cause a man to fail to keep his promise, but God is eternal and sees from everlasting to everlasting. Moses made reference to this truth in Psalm 90:4, “For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.” Time is no object to God in carrying out His promises. For instance, the promise of God is recorded in Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” This prophetic promise was fulfilled four thousand years later with our Savior’s death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Indeed, “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). God is holy (Isa. 6:3), and He cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). These are two more reasons that we can know that

our Creator and Sustainer keeps every promise He has made.

Throughout the Bible, we find numerous promises from God and their fulfillment. During the universal flood of Genesis, “every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive and they that were with him in the ark” (Gen. 7:23). Following this catastrophe, God told Noah, “This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud...and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Gen. 9:12, 13, 15). There have been countless localized floods since that day, but just as God promised, none of a universal magnitude. Every time we gaze up at the sky and view a marvelous rainbow, we can remember that our God is a God of promises.

As we stay in the book of Genesis, we find the Abrahamic promise recorded. “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3). Let us consider the greatness and magnitude of this promise. Notice again Genesis 12:3, “and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” This is in reference to Abraham’s seed. Matthew 1:1 mentions “Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” This promise was fulfilled

in the coming of Jesus to this earth, His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:27). Yes, this promise of all promises had its fulfillment in Christ who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Because God is a God of promises, we can have the salvation found only in Christ. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). Yes, we can have the victory over Satan and sin.

What comfort this affords God’s faithful child. The same God, who led His people of old to the promised land of Canaan, prepared the way for His people today to the promised land of heavenly Canaan. Those who follow the path of righteousness by faithful obedience to God have the “hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit. 1:2). “He is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23). Are we faithful to Him?

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FROM THE ELDERS

We have several used copies of *Church Gospel Songs and Hymns* that we would like to give someone or a congregation. If you could use them, the only cost would be shipping charges. Call or email us for more information.

GOD OF STRENGTH

James E. Rogers

The God we serve is an amazing God. One must stand in awe of Him when His characteristics are considered. Our God is an omnipotent God and it is under this characteristic that we examine His strength. The omnipotence of God may be seen in the names by which He is designated in the Scriptures. One of those designations, which shows His omnipotence, is "God Almighty." "God" is from *El*, which is used to stress a number of God's characteristics in the Scriptures. Among those characteristics is His strength or power. He is especially shown to be all-powerful when compared to idols (Psa. 95:3; Jer. 32:16-25). Harris (R. Laird Harris, Ed., *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, 2:907) shows that "Almighty" is from *Shaddai*, which, as a divine title, is used forty-eight times in the Old Testament. Most often it appears in Job (thirty-one times), on the lips of almost every person in this drama . . . Of these forty-eight times *shaddai* is prefaced by 'el (God) seven times . . . The remaining forty-one times *shaddai* stands alone. The translation 'Almighty' goes . . . as far back as the LXX, which translates *shaddai* as *pantokrator* 'all-powerful.' This is also reflected in the Vulgate, *omnipotens*. The rabbinic analysis of this word is that it is a compound word composed of the relative *she*, 'who' and the word *day*, 'enough: *she-day*,' the one who is (self-) sufficient' (Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 12a).

"God Almighty" was especially meaningful to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exo. 6:3). To Abraham, Jehovah prefaced the command to "walk before me, and be thou perfect" on the fact that "I am God Almighty" (Gen. 17:1). When Isaac sent Jacob to Paddanaram he asked that "God Almighty bless thee" (Gen. 28:3). In appearing to Jacob upon Jacob's return from Paddanaram, God blessed Jacob

upon the basis that "I am God Almighty" (Gen. 35:11; 48:3). Jacob sent his sons back into Egypt to buy grain with the hope that Joseph would have mercy on them because of the work of "God Almighty" (Gen. 43:14). Jacob blessed Joseph and told of his future strength from "the hands of "the Almighty, who shall bless thee" (Gen. 49:25).

This designation was also meaningful to other Old Testament people. Balaam proclaimed that his "vision" was "of the Almighty" (Num. 24:4,16). Ruth showed her recognition of Jehovah as "the Almighty" (Ruth 1:20,21). Eliphaz referred to the "Almighty" in his speeches to Job (Job 5:17; 15:25; 22:3,17,23,25,26). Job referred to the "Almighty" in his speeches (Job 6:4,14; 13:3; 21:15,20; 23:16; 24:1; 27:2,10,11,13; 29:5; 31:2,35). Bildad referred to the "Almighty" (Job 8:3,5). Zophar referred to the "Almighty" (Job 11:7). Elihu made reference to the "Almighty" (Job 32:8; 33:4; 34:10,12; 35:13; 37:23). Interestingly enough, Jehovah referred to Himself as "the Almighty" (Job 40:2). The Psalmists knew Jehovah as "the Almighty" (Psa. 68:14; 91:1). When the "likeness of the glory of Jehovah" was shown to Ezekiel, the noise was described by Ezekiel as being "like the voice of the Almighty" (Eze. 1:24,28; 10:5). Joel described "the day of Jehovah" as coming "as destruction from the Almighty" (Joel 1:15).

In the New Testament, Paul and John refer to God as the "Almighty." In the admonition to "be not unequally yoked with unbelievers," Paul referred to "the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:18). The word translated, "Almighty," is *pantokrator*, which Vine (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1966, Volume 1, p. 48) defines as "almighty, or ruler of all." John records God's introduction of Himself as "the

Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). "The four living creatures" praise God as "the Almighty" (Rev. 4:8). "The four and twenty elders" gave thanks to "the Almighty" (Rev. 11:17). The "song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" addressed God as "the Almighty" (Rev. 15:3). "The altar" said, "Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments" (Rev. 16:7). The "spirits of demons" were seen as gathering together the "kings of the whole world . . . unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" (Rev. 16:14). John heard "as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty reigneth" (Rev. 19:6). The King James Version translates "Almighty" in this verse as "omnipotent." "The Word of God . . . treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty" (Rev. 19:15). In the "new Jerusalem," there was seen "no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof" (Rev. 21:22).

God showed Himself to be a God of strength to Daniel. He is the God of "ten times better" (Daniel 1), the God of an indestructible kingdom (Daniel 2,7), the God who is able (Daniel 3), the God who rules in the kingdom of men (Daniel 4,8,11,12), the God with the accurate balances (Daniel 5), the God with the mouth-shutting angel (Daniel 6) and the God of answered prayer (Daniel 9,10). These manifestations of God's strength help us to appreciate Him and motivate us to submit to Him.

Yes, indeed, our God is a God of Strength. Will you submit to His wonderful plan of salvation and, having become a Christian, live faithfully for Him on the earth?

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GOD OF CONSOLATION

Jerry L. Martin

There are so many wonderful attributes of God that attract us to Him and inspire our love for Him. While assuring saints at Rome that they had been given everything they needed to keep the faith, Paul refers to God as a God of consolation: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus" (Romans 15:5). What does consolation mean? We often use it today in a way that leaves the impression of less than the best. When someone does not finish first in a contest we give that person a "consolation" prize. The biblical use of the word consolation is different. It means to "exhort, encourage, elevate." With all of life's difficulties, challenges, and hardship the Christian has something the world does not have; a God who is faithful, at all times and in all ways. We can be confident that He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). What a consolation that is.

God's consolation is a means of exhorting us. He exhorts us through His Word. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Paul reminded young Timothy, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished

unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:14-17). The God of consolation challenges us to a higher way in life.

God's consolation is a means of encouraging us. He encourages us through His love. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16). Paul underscores the reason children of God should be encouraged. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Romans 5:8-11). The God of consolation invites and inspires us to love as we have been loved.

God's consolation is a means of elevating us. He elevates us through His promise. "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us

entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Hebrews 6:17-20). The God of consolation lifts us from the despair and despondence of this world and gives us confidence and courage to set our affections on things that are above.

How wonderful it is to serve a God of such compassion, care, and abundant provisions. No faithful child of God will ever have to settle for a second place prize (Rev. 2:10). God's consolation to His children is the comforting, confident assurance of salvation. "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings, which we also suffer: or whether we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation" (2 Corinthians 1:5-7). No one has to be left out of God's consolation. He desires that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). When we walk in truth we can let our request be known unto God and His peace will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6, 7). Do you know the God of consolation?

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THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

Raymond Elliott

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who feel severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:22, NKJV). One of the first truths that small children learn about God is that He is good. A prayer of Thanksgiving offered by boys and girls is: “God is great, God is good; let us thank Him for our food...”. The Bible speaks often of the goodness of God. “The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord” (Psalms 33:5). “For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations” (Psalms 100:5). “Oh, give thanks to the Lord for He is good! For His truth endures to all generations” (Psalms 118:29). It was said of the seed of Abraham, God’s chosen people, in ages past: “Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart” (Psalms 73:1). Yes, God blessed Israel abundantly as long as the people were faithful to Him.

Likewise, God’s goodness and mercy have been manifested toward all men in the giving of Jesus to die for the sins of mankind (Romans 5:8; John 3:16, 17). James declared in his epistle “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights with whom there is not variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). In order to enjoy the blessings of a spiritual nature in Christ, man has to turn to God in trust and in obedience. These blessings are “in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). And, the way a penitent believer gets into Christ through the act of baptism

(Galatians 3:26, 27). However, all men, both good and evil, enjoy the temporal and physical blessings (Matthew 5:45). The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 2:4: “or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

On the other hand, God is also a just God, exacting severity upon all those who disobey Him. Both the Old and New Testaments are replete with examples of God punishing the disobedient. Adam and Eve brought suffering and death to the human family through their sin (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:1-2). God also drove them from the Garden of Eden and from the tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24). The Lord placed a curse on Cain for murdering his brother Abel (Genesis 4:9-15). The people of Noah’s day were destroyed by water because of the greatness of their corruption and sin (Genesis 6:5-7). Nadab and Abihu, priests of God and sons of Aaron were consumed with fire because they dared to violate God’s law regarding the fire that should have been used in the offering of animal sacrifices (Leviticus 10:1-3; 6:8-13). The Lord even scattered Israel from off the land of Canaan because of their sins (Leviticus 26:33; Nehemiah 1:8). God is indeed one of severity.

Today, warnings can be found in the covenant of Jesus Christ concerning punishment for those who live in sin. The Lord taught that they who enter the wide gate and travel the broad way would eventually suffer destruction (Matthew 7:13, 14). Jesus frequently spoke of a place called

hell (Greek, Gehenna, see Matthew 5:22, 29, 30). The wicked will enter this place of eternal punishment when the Lord comes again (Matthew 25:46). Paul declared that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), that is, everlasting separation from God. The apostle John mentioned, “the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever. . .” (Revelation 14:11).

Yes, God is a God of love, goodness, mercy and grace, but He is also a God of justice and severity. Every sin not covered by the blood of His son must be dealt with and justice must be exacted. We all should desire to place our faith in Jesus Christ as being the Son of God and give our lives in humble submission to the will of the Heavenly Father (Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:8,9; Revelation 2:10).

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The God of Comfort ----- Thomas Larkin

Continued from page 9

After he corrected these misunderstandings, Paul wrote, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Earlier in this epistle, Paul had exhorted the Thessalonians to “walk worthy of God” (2:12) and later was very specific concerning sins to avoid and duties to perform. (see chapter 4). Listen to how Paul characterized such exhortations – “As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children” (2:11). It is a comforting thing to learn and apply what God desires for us to know do. Further, it is comforting to know what blessings He has planned for the faithful.

One purpose of our worship is that we may be comforted. As he dealt

with problems in the Corinthian congregation, Paul explained that “he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3). In the same chapter, Paul commanded that the prophets should speak “one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted” (v. 31). To assemble with people of like precious faith and to join together in praise of the One who loves us and died for us and to hear the marvelous message of salvation proclaimed should lift the spirits and comfort the hearts of the redeemed.

Jesus comforted His apostles on the night of His betrayal with the precious words of John 14:1-3 – “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my

Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” No matter how troubling life may be, looking toward heaven should comfort the heart. Let us be diligent students of God’s word, desirous of fellowship with God’s people and devoted in our worship so that we may be comforted with the comfort of God.

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