

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

February 2015

Wait on the Lord

*The late Andrew Mickelsen; June 1949 CM
Submitted by Dave Impola; Seattle, Washington*

I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

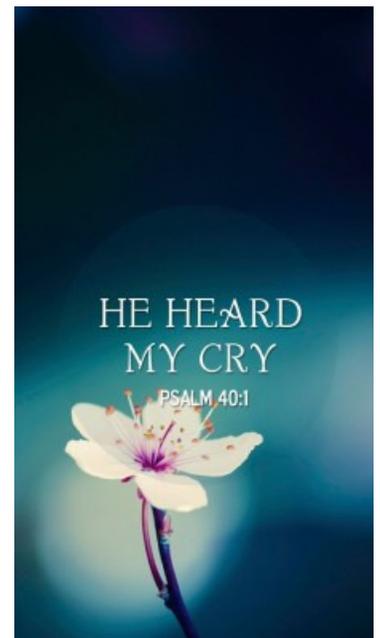
Psalm 40:1-4

THROUGH EXPERIENCE, KING DAVID HAD learned to say, *I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.* When God has awakened the conscience of man and stripped him of his own righteousness, he stands before God a sinner with nothing to cover his nakedness. He has nothing but sin, and, oh, how exceedingly sinful sin is in the sight of God! Such a soul is not demanding things from God. He does not say, "You must do this or that," but he casts himself on the mercy of God. He says, "I have nothing but a sinful heart to offer. You are righteous and able and mighty to save." He humbly awaits the Lord to accept his prayer. He is not telling the Lord to save him in his (man's) way but says, "Thy will be done."

For example, Saul of Tarsus became blind and bereft of all, but he waited patiently at Damascus and tasted neither food nor drink but prayed. What must his prayer have been? "If You would be merciful and forgive my sins." When God's time came, He sent Ananias unto Saul, from whom Saul received through the grace of God the forgiveness of sin, which is the most blessed gift of all; and he received his sight—all this from the hand of God Himself, even though God used His servant as His mouthpiece. Saul saw that the Lord inclined Himself unto him, too, and lifted him up out the horrible pit of unbelief. The sin-sick soul cannot lift himself out of this pit. When he, in fear and quaking, sees the open-mouthed pit of hell before him, with the unquenchable fires all about him, he awaits the verdict. "Is there grace for a sinner such as I?" In that horrible pit, the clay of sin clings and contaminates. Only

the power of God, only the blood of the Lamb can cleanse us from that mire and set our feet upon the Rock of Ages and put a new song in our hearts. Thanks be unto God, He is willing and waiting, eager to save, to fill our mouths with gladness and praise because He is a loving Father, though a righteous and vengeful God who will pour out His wrath upon those who have spurned His salvation. It is indeed terrible to fall into the hands of the living God.

It is true that no matter how man tries to flee, he cannot escape the wrath of God. Thanks to Him that He casts out the life-line of salvation to us who are in the pit of unbelief and realize not our condition. St. Paul says, *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth... (Romans 1:16)* This is the life-line we must grasp—Jesus Himself. If a natural life-line is thrown out to one and the sinking one does not grasp it, he will remain in the pit. So it is spiritually. If one does not hold on with the hand of faith he cannot be raised up. It is the Gospel of Christ that is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. Therefore we urge you to lay hold with the hand of faith upon the grace of God in the forgiveness of your sins and transgressions. The grace of God is mighty to save. As King David puts it, *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)* God's Word is irrevocable, changeless. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it.



The sinner finds newness of life in God, and His Spirit leads him in all truth. His love does all this for us who are so unworthy; we who have merited eternal condemnation are wholly saved and lack nothing in our salvation.

God does not remove us from this earth until our time comes, but He gives us advisers in the children of God and in His Spirit and the cross which we must bear. We walk not in a path of roses. Truly God does not put obstacles in our way but it is our adversary the devil. We must fight against a world that is evil and growing more and more sinful every day. Therefore we need not heed the world but heed the still small voice of the Spirit within. We need to walk in the Light as He is the Light. It is only the grace of God which carries us on from victory unto victory. Thanks be unto God that He has established our goings from grace to grace and has filled our hearts with praise.

We are not ashamed of our Savior Jesus Christ. There are times when He anoints our hearts with gladness that they overflow with love and adoration. Oh, how many there are who are offended to see the Christians rejoicing over this great salvation! God has used even this means to awaken souls to see how far they have drifted from the Savior.

No one can be saved by merely living a good upright life. Jesus says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). He says that ye must be born again or ye cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Yes, upright people are offended if we say they must also repent, but out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Trust in Him, ye His children! He will bring you to that shore where sorrow and sighing and tears are no more! God bless you all. Amen. ~

Love Is in the Air

Ryan Kandoll

Intern at Kingston (Minnesota) ALC

IT'S FEBRUARY AND LOVE IS IN THE AIR. With Valentine's Day fast approaching, many of us are thinking romantic thoughts. I find it intriguing that love and romance are such a huge part of most people's lives. Most of our stories throughout history involve an element of love and romance, and there are more songs dedicated to it than to any other topic. If love and romance have been a topic of great interest for so long, then it stands to reason that it is something important to most of you reading this as well.

Lately I've been asking a few more, "why" questions than normal. One of those why questions has been, why get married? What's the point? What's the goal?

It seems this desire is ingrained in us, put there by God for a purpose. But why is it there? In Genesis, after God makes man, He says it is not good for man to be alone and makes (in woman) a helper for man. After God made man and woman, the first commandment He gives them is to be fruitful and multiply. There we have it; love, marriage, babies and rulership. So now long before a boy goes through puberty he is concerned with how to get girls to like him. Little girls pretend to have babies to care for before they speak in complete sentences and begin planning their weddings from the day they see their first one. It's only natural.

With any task, I find that I have the most success when I start with the goal and work backward to discover steps to take in order to accomplish that goal. If God's point of love and romance is for us to get married and have a family, what does success look like? What steps should we take to succeed? And if two are better for doing God's work, what work should we be doing?

I'm not sure what outcome the answers to these questions will lead to for individual married couples. We each have our own unique situation to deal with. But is a successful family one that has a bunch of money and can pay for their children's college tuition? Is it to have the same or better stuff than one's neighbors? Do these serve the other larger goal?

Whether married or single, we all have a God-given calling, to follow Jesus, serve others and preach the Gospel. Does success for the Christian family mean a family of Jesus followers living on a mission to love Jesus by serving their neighbors and telling them about Jesus?

I myself am a bit of a romantic. I have a desire to marry and have a family. Because I am a follower of Christ, I want my family and I to follow Him together. If my family and I are going to live in accordance with the mission of following Jesus and serving others, there are a few things I need to do. One is to marry a Christian who cares about the Word and has a desire to learn so that she can help to teach our children well. More importantly, I need to develop my own character and to know the Scriptures, so I can lead them well.

This Valentine's Day let's consider the end, the purpose of romance. When we think of romance let's think of how we can grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And how, not only as individuals but also as families, we can serve Him through serving others. ~



Will You Forgive Her, as God Has Forgiven Her?

Submitted by Pastor Mark Matson
Pasco, Washington

A TEENAGE
GIRL STOOD
BEFORE the

congregation as her pastor made an unusual announcement and a special request. Looking at her that day, no one would have known; looking at her a few weeks later, many would have begun to suspect. She was pregnant. She was not married. What should she do now? What should her pastor do?

The End of Her Life as She Knew It

Her pastor announced to the congregation that she had confessed her sin of fornication to him and that she was now with child. He furthermore announced that she had repented of her sin. She had acknowledged her guilt. She knew that she deserved nothing—that is, nothing but condemnation. But her pastor also said more.

The pastor announced publicly to the congregation what he already had announced privately to her: that God had forgiven her of all her sins, including this one; that in Christ she is a new creation; that through the Spirit of adoption, she is God's own dear child and an heir of everlasting life in His kingdom of grace. With confidence, she could look back toward her Baptism, knowing that God has washed away all her sins. With joy, she could look forward to receiving the Lord's Supper, knowing that Christ once and for all gave His body and blood for her redemption.

Her pastor did not stop there. He had a request as well as an announcement. "Will you, as her brothers and sisters in Christ, now also forgive her? Will you receive her back into this congregation as a fellow heir of everlasting life?" The congregation replied in the affirmative.

And that was the end of the matter, but also a new beginning.

A New Beginning

No longer did she live in fear, no longer would she wear the rags of shame. As the baby grew and she began to show, people did not whisper any of the standard inquiries: "Did you know she's pregnant?" "Which boyfriend was it?" "Doesn't she know any better?" "If my daughter ever...."

In place of gossip, there would be generosity. When people spoke about her it would be to help, not to humiliate. "Let's sit next to her this Sunday." "I'm sewing some booties for the little one's feet." "I wonder if she'll need help finishing high school. Perhaps I could tutor her this summer."

Most of all, there was grace. "I'm so glad you know you are forgiven," people could tell her. "I know I need God's forgiveness for my past, too. That's really what church is all about."



The Real Meaning of Church

Unfortunately, the young man who got her pregnant did not attend church. He did not step inside the building. Nor was he a member of the 501(c)3 organization registered as a church with the IRS. But the sad part has nothing to do with these externals and everything to do with the real meaning of church.

"The church," wrote the Lutheran reformers of the sixteenth century, "is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered" (Augsburg Confession VII, 1). When the pastor and the young lady met privately for confession and absolution, that was church. When the congregation gathered publicly around the same Gospel message that in Christ all our sins stand forgiven, that was church. As Luther explained (Large Catechism II, 55):

Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and Sacraments, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the grace of the Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but continuous, uninterrupted forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help each other.

Ordinarily, the mutual forgiveness of which Luther speaks can take place quietly. "Love covers all sins" (Proverbs 10:12). Sometimes, however, the situation requires a more open corrective. "For where the sin is public, the reproof also must be public, that every one may learn to guard against it" (Large Catechism I, 284). What a joy it is when public reproof is followed by public repentance and public reconciliation!

The preceding story is true. A young lady really did confess her sin before her congregation, and they really did forgive her. This happened on the basis of what Christ Himself accomplished for her and her congregation two thousand years earlier.

As in the Church, So Also in Our Homes

Because the Christian home is the Christian church in miniature, a cycle of reproof, repentance, and reconciliation regularly takes place within godly families, just as it does among the larger family of God. When a parent pauses to help two feuding children get to the root of the matter, apologize, and forgive, that parent models for them what occurs on a grander scale in the divine service when the members of a congregation confess their sins and the pastor absolves them in the name of Christ...

What a privilege parents have to herald that Gospel message in their homes, even as pastors proclaim it in their congregations. Wherever such a message is heard and believed, there the Holy Spirit grants lasting peace.

MacPherson, Ryan C. "Will You Forgive Her, as God Has Forgiven Her?"
The Hausvater Project, Oct. 2011. www.hausvater.org.

We Have Seen His Star in the East

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children, far and near,

God's peace to all of you young children of God, and also to the elder children of God who will read this. We are all children in God's eyes. We are encouraged in the Bible to become as little children, not in size but in heart, to enter into HIS kingdom. As I was pondering what to write, the account of the wise men coming to worship Jesus kept coming to mind. Such a beautiful thing happened to them. Let's take a look in *Matthew, chapter 2*.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Matthew 2:1-2

HERE WE HAVE THE SMALL TOWN of Bethlehem where Jesus had been born, the wicked King Herod who ruled over Jerusalem, and wise men from the east, some say from Babylonia (modern day Iraq).

These wise men are assumed to have been astrologers, ones who study the stars. The term "wise" means they were given a gift of wisdom to know and be shown things that were significant. I like the idea that maybe they did study the stars, as I like to look at stars myself. The heavens and the grandeur of them are amazing things.

These men had obviously read or heard about the coming King of the Jews. They had been given faith in His coming one day and had possibly always waited for word or a sign of His coming. When Jesus was born, they saw a new star in the sky over the place where they lived. It was revealed to them that this Child had been born; the best part is that they believed it.

They prepared for their journey, not knowing how long it would take. They prepared gifts, and I believe it was also given from God what the gifts would be and the meaning of each one. If people from the wise men's town were told the reason for their journey, I'm sure they laughed at the wise men, as Noah may have been laughed at for building the ark where no water was. I can imagine the townspeople thinking the wise men were crazy, possibly going to travel up to 1200 miles to see a Baby who was going to be a King!

But God was with the wise men and they set out with such hope, as they were going to see the One who was promised and prophesied to be King so long ago. They may have traveled for months and finally they were getting close. They could see Jerusalem ahead, sitting on a hill. How excited they must have become! Supposing that the king's palace in Jerusalem would be the place to find this Child, they went there to inquire.

The king knew of the prophecy about this Child. When the wise men asked him where the Child was, he was troubled, as he did NOT want anyone to take over his throne. He was not wise in thinking this.

Herod called in his chief priests and scribes (writers) and asked them where Christ would be born. They told him, *In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. (verses 5-6)* King Herod told the wise men to come back and tell him when they found the Child, so he could worship Him also. This was a lie.

When the wise men went outside of Herod's palace, the star that they had seen in the east was there in the sky. The star went before them until it came and stood over the place (a home) where the young child was. I love this part. Just imagine it. *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (verse 10)* Now that was some joy. Wow! How excited they were to know their journey of faith was nearly complete and the prophecy was to be seen with their eyes. Oh, God is good.



And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. (verses 11-12)

THIS ACCOUNT IS SO RICH and full of God and His goodness. "Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan! Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!" the songwriter William R. Newell writes. We are all on a journey to see the King of the Jews, the Prince of Peace, the Messiah. This journey must be walked by faith. It is not of ourselves, not of works that we may boast of the good life we live and the good things we are doing to attain heaven. It is only by faith alone, in Christ alone. Pray to walk by faith, not by sight. We praise and thank God for sending us His Son. I pray that He is the Light that leads each of you through your whole life. ~

The Difference Between the Law and the Gospel

Martin Luther

Concerning the Law

THE LAW IS THAT WORD by which God teaches what we shall do, as for instance, the Ten Commandments. Now, if human nature is not aided by God's grace,



it is impossible to keep the law, for the reason that man since the fall of Adam in Paradise is depraved and full of sinful desires, so that he cannot from his heart's desire find pleasure in the law, which fact we all experience in ourselves. For no one lives who does not prefer that there were no law, and everyone feels and knows in himself that it is difficult to lead a pious life and do good, and, on the other hand, that it is easy to lead a wicked life and to do evil. But this difficulty or unwillingness to do the good is the reason we do not keep the Law of God. For whatever is done with aversion and unwillingness is considered by God as not done at all. Thus the Law of God convicts us, even by our own experience, that by nature we are evil, disobedient, lovers of sin, and hostile to God's laws.

From all this either self-confidence or despair must follow. Self-confidence follows when a man strives to fulfill the law by his own good works, by trying hard to do as the words of the law command. He serves God, he swears not, he honors father and mother, he kills not, he does not commit adultery, etc. But meanwhile he does not look into his heart, does not realize with what motives he leads a good life, and conceals the old Adam in his heart. If he would truly examine his heart, he would realize that he is doing all unwillingly and with compulsion, that he fears hell or seeks heaven, if he be not prompted by things of less importance, as honor, goods, health and fear of being humiliated, of being punished or of being visited by a plague. In short, he would have to confess that he would rather lead a wicked life if it were not that he fears the consequences, for the law only restrains him. But because he does not realize his bad motives he lives securely, looks only at his outward works and not into his heart, prides himself on keeping the law of God perfectly, and thus the countenance of Moses remains covered to him, that is, he does not understand the meaning of the law, namely, that it must be kept with a happy, free and willing mind.

Just as an immoral person, if you should ask him why he commits adultery, can answer only that he is doing it for the sake of the carnal pleasure he finds in it. For he does not do it for reward or punishment, he expects no gain from it, nor does he hope to escape from the evil of it. Such willingness the law requires in us, so that if you should ask a virtuous man why he leads a chaste life, he would answer: Not for the sake of heaven or hell, honor or disgrace, but for the sole reason that he considers it honorable, and that it pleases him exceedingly, even if it

were not commanded. Behold, such a heart delights in God's law and keeps it with pleasure. Such people love God and righteousness; they hate and fear naught but unrighteousness. However, no one is thus by nature. The unrighteous love reward and profit, fear and hate punishment and pain; therefore they also hate God and righteousness, love themselves and unrighteousness. They are hypocrites, disguisers, deceivers, liars and self-conceited. So are all men without grace, but above all, the saints who rely on their good works. For this reason the Scriptures conclude, *All men are liars (Psalm 116:11); Every man at his best state is altogether vanity (Psalm 39:5); and There is none that doeth good, no, not one (Psalm 14:3).*

Despair follows when man becomes conscious of his evil motives, and realizes that it is impossible for him to love the law of God, finding nothing good in himself; but only hatred of the good and delight in doing evil. Now he realizes that the law cannot be kept only by works, hence he despairs of his works and does not rely upon them. He should have love; but he finds none, nor can have any through his own efforts or out of his own heart. Now he must be a poor, miserable and humiliated spirit whose conscience is burdened and in anguish because of the law, commanding and demanding payment in full when he does not possess even a farthing with which to pay. Only to such persons is the law beneficial, because it has been given for the purpose of working such knowledge and humiliation; that is its real mission. These persons well know how to judge the works of hypocrites and fraudulent saints, namely, as nothing but lies and deception. David referred to this when he said, *I said in my haste, all men are liars. (Psalm 116:11)*

For this reason Paul calls the law a law unto death, saying, *And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death (Romans 7:10); and a power of sin, And the strength of sin is the law (1 Corinthians 15:56); and in 2 Corinthians 3:6 he says, For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.* All this means, if the law and human nature be brought into a right relation, the one to the other, then will sin and a troubled conscience first become manifest. Man, then, sees how desperately wicked his heart is, how great his sins are, even as to things he formerly considered good works and no sin. He now is compelled to confess that by and of himself he is a child of perdition, a child of God's wrath and of hell. Then there is only fear and trembling, all self-conceit vanishes, while fear and despair fill his heart. Thus man is crushed and put to naught, and truly humbled.

Inasmuch as all this is caused only by the law, St. Paul truly says, it is a law unto death and a letter that killeth, and that through the commandment sin becomes exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13), provoking God's wrath. For the law gives and helps us in no way whatever; it only demands and drives and shows us our misery and depravity.

Concerning the Gospel

THE OTHER WORD OF GOD is neither law nor commandments, and demands nothing of us. But when that has been done by the first word, namely, the law, and has worked deep despair and wretchedness in our hearts, then God comes and offers us His blessed and life-giving Word and promises; He pledges and obligates Himself to grant grace and help in order to deliver us from misery, not only to pardon all our sins, but even to blot them out, and in addition to this to create in us love and delight in keeping His law.

Behold, this divine promise of grace and forgiveness of sin is rightly called the Gospel. And I say here, again, that by the Gospel you must by no means understand anything else than the divine promise of God's grace and His forgiveness of sin. For thus it was that Paul's epistles were never understood, nor can they be understood by the Papists, because they do not know what the Law and the Gospel really mean. They hold Christ to be a law-maker, and the Gospel a mere doctrine of a new law. That is nothing else than locking up the Gospel and entirely concealing it.



Now, the word Gospel is of Greek origin and signifies in German *Frohliche Botschaft*, that is *glad tidings*, because it proclaims the blessed doctrine of life eternal by divine promise, and offers grace and forgiveness of sin. Therefore, works do not belong to the Gospel, as it is not a law; only faith belongs to it, as it is altogether a promise and an

offer of divine grace. Whosoever now believes the Gospel will receive grace and the Holy Spirit. This will cause the heart to rejoice and find delight in God, and will enable the believer to keep the law cheerfully, without expecting reward, without fear of punishment, without seeking compensation, as the heart is perfectly satisfied with God's grace, by which the law has been fulfilled.

But all these promises from the beginning are founded on Christ, so that God promises no one this grace except through Christ, who is the messenger of the divine promise to the whole world. For this reason He came and through the Gospel brought these promises into all the world, which before this time had been proclaimed by the prophets. It is, therefore, in vain if anyone, like the Jews, expects the fulfillment of the divine promises without Christ. All is centered and decreed in Christ. Whosoever will not hear Him shall have no promises of God, for just as God acknowledges no law besides the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets, so He makes no promises, except through Christ alone.

But you may reply, is there not also much law in the Gospel and in the epistles of Paul? and, again, many promises in the writings of Moses and the Prophets? I answer: There is no book in the Bible in which both are not found. God has always placed side by side both law and promise, for He teaches by the law what we are to do, and by the promises whence we shall receive power to do it.

But the New Testament especially is called the Gospel above the other books of the Bible, because it was written after the coming of Christ, who fulfilled the divine promises, brought them unto us and publicly proclaimed them by oral preaching, which promises were before concealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore, hold to this distinction, and no matter what books you have before you, be they of the Old or the New Testament, read them with a discrimination so as to observe that when promises are made in a book, it is a Gospel-book; when commandments are given, it is a Law-book. Because in the New Testament the promises are found so abundantly, and in the Old Testament so many laws, the former is called the Gospel, and the latter the Book of the Law. ~

“Faith Cometh By Hearing”

2015 Annual Convention of the Apostolic Lutheran Churches of America

June 25th through 28th, 2015

The Spruce Grove Apostolic Lutheran Church Congregation of Wolf Lake, MN invites you to attend the 107th Annual Convention of the Apostolic Lutheran Church of America.

The convention will be held at the New York Mills Public School in New York Mills, MN from June 25th through the 28th, 2015. The address is 209 Hayes Avenue, New York Mills, MN 56567.

Information regarding service schedule and lodging information will be posted on the www.apostoliclutheran.org website, as well as our Facebook page (Spruce Grove ALC Convention 2015).

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. We look forward to seeing you soon and we pray for God's blessings as we continue to fellowship around His Word.

*On behalf of the 2015 ALC Convention Committee,
Raymond Aho, Chairman - 218-538-6735*

This Is True Love

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.** No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. **We love him, because he first loved us.** If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? **And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.***

1 John 4:7-21

WHAT IS TRUE LOVE? February with its valentines and chocolate, hearts and flowers, conveys a commercialized view of this deep emotion. The Apostle John wrote a great deal about love, which is mentioned 44 times in his first epistle, 27 times in chapter 4 alone! What can we learn about true love from the Apostle of Love?

Love is of God. God IS love. How did God show His love for us? He sent His one and only Son into the world so that we can live through Him. True love is not that we love God, but that He loved us. God loved us so much that He sent His Son as the payment for our sin. The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

Whoever loves is born of God and knows God. He is God's child. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he lives in God. Whoever lives in love, he lives in God and God lives in him.

If God loved us so much He sacrificed His Son, we should love one another in the same way. But oh! this is painful to our flesh who wants his own way, who never wants to serve his brother. No one has seen God. Whoever says "I love God" but hates his brother is a liar; if he does not love the brother he sees, how can he love God whom he does not see? Whoever does not love does not know God. If we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made perfect in us. We know that we live in Him—and He in us—because He has given us His Holy Spirit. We know and believe the love that God has for us.

We love Him, because He first loved us. God loved us first, and because of this we love Him. Without His love, shown to us in Christ and revealed by His Holy Spirit, we are haters of God and lovers of ourselves.

This commandment is from God: whoever loves God must also love his brother. God's command is not burdensome, though. Whoever loves God will also love God's children. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Anointed One is born of God and is our brother in faith. Because Jesus laid down His life for us, we know the love of God. So we should lay down our lives for our brothers. Let us not love in word, but in deed and truth. Let us serve one another in true Christian love. ~



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The Author and Finisher

Steven E. Anderson
Greer, South Carolina

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

GOD GIVES US GOOD HOPE and consolation in that our faith is in the power of Christ and under His keeping. We must have a good beginning in faith in order to have a successful end, as we see in the parables of the Ten Virgins and the Sower. Our great comfort is that Jesus is the Author who works the beginning of our faith. It is His work through preaching to prepare the heart to successfully receive the Gospel. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes by the Word of God (Rom 10:17). *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. (Luke 24:45)*

It is Christ who also sustains our faith unto fruitfulness, as it is written, one plants by preaching, another waters by preaching, but God gives the increase (1 Cor 3:7). What do we have that we have not received as a free gift (1 Cor 4:7)? The believer does not receive glory in bearing fruit, but God works fruitfulness in His children unto His own glory (John 15:8). Our faith stands in the power of God, and not in the wisdom of men (1 Cor 2:5), and He works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. (Phil 1:9-11)*

Jesus is the Finisher of our faith and promises to walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death until faith is turned to sight and hope to attainment. Since Adam in his innocence fell, how could we resist Satan by ourselves with our fallen nature? Therefore God promises that He who has begun a good work in us will perform it unto the end (Phil 1:6). We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation (1 Pet 1:5). It is the Lord who establishes us and keeps us from evil (2 Thess 3:3), *Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor 1:8-9) I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction. (Hosea 13:14)*

All power in heaven and earth is given unto our Lord, who now, seated at the right hand of God, reigns over all our enemies. *Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. (2 Cor 9:15)*

Refuge in the Lord God

Pastor Rod Johnson
Laurium, Michigan

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (Psalm 91:1-2)

For I know the thoughts (plans) that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end (a future and a hope). (Jer 29:11)

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (Heb 13:5-6)

AS WE HAVE BEGUN A NEW YEAR and look toward the future, there are many things about which we can become filled with anxiety. The economy, taxes, wars, threats of more wars and terrorism, and on and on. Peace from the earthly perspective often is almost nonexistent, or can be, if we do not rely upon the promises of the Almighty God, our Maker and our Redeemer.

When we consider the above verses that point us to the promises of God and His fulfillment of them, we find comfort and assurance. If we depend upon our ability to achieve peace and freedom from anxiety, we will most often fail. Therefore, remembering that He is our Refuge and Fortress, by trusting in Him we find the steadfast solution to all our fears.

He, the Lord, has plans for us that will be fulfilled. He will fill our future with hope and joy, as Jeremiah declared. This, along with the word in Hebrews that He is our Helper and will not forsake us, provides all that is needful, both for this life and that life which is eternal. ~