

THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

by
Dr. Brian J. Bailey

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The Goodness and Severity of God

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CONTENTS

Introduction	7
1 Balancing God's Goodness and Severity	9
2 Creation	19
3 The Children of Israel	25
4 The Giving of the Law	35
5 The New Testament Church	57
6 Old Testament Characters	61
7 New Testament Characters	73
8 Provision	83
9 Healing	97
10 Compassion	103
11 Forgiveness	105
12 His Literal Presence	111
13 Chastening	115
14 The Life of the Believer	135
15 Eternal Blessings and Eternal Judgment	143

INTRODUCTION

“Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God...”

Romans 11:22

This book was birthed to kindle a fresh desire in the Church to understand the ***goodness and severity*** of God, which are both expressions of God’s holiness. While the men of God of olden times knew and understood these aspects, they have been seemingly lost on this generation, particularly the severity of God.

This is the generation that will face the Antichrist and the False Prophet, in a time when apostasy will be great, the love of many will grow cold, and deception will abound. There are many erroneous doctrines circulating in the church today. Some declare that after death there is complete annihilation of the non-believers, others state that purgatory will eventually purify those who fall short of God’s standards, and still others believe that all will be saved, even the Devil. Many Christians will take the mark of the Beast, thinking that the Lord will understand, not realising that all who do so will be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 14:9-10). Wisdom and knowledge of the entirety of God’s character—His holiness, will hold the Christian steady in the turbulent times that lie ahead.

Through this study, we hope you will glean the deep truths of God’s goodness and severity that will keep you from

being swept off the path of holiness by false doctrines and apostasy.

We trust that a holy resolve will be engendered in your hearts, dear readers, to meet God for yourselves so that you will become partakers of His righteousness. The Apostle Paul cried out in Philippians 3:10, *“O that I may know Him...”* and we pray that this book will help you towards achieving this goal.

CHAPTER ONE

Balancing God's Goodness and Severity

The Goodness of God

The goodness of God towards His creation may be defined as considering that which is best for all of His creatures in any given situation. Succinctly put, goodness is doing what is best.

In introducing Himself to Moses upon Mount Sinai, the Lord used the following proclamation, “*The Lord, The Lord God, Merciful and Gracious, Longsuffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth*” (Ex. 34:6). Whilst the quality of goodness is listed in fourth place, nonetheless, it is accompanied with the adjective “abundant,” meaning that it is not an incidental attribute of our Lord, but one that animates His personality, and vibrantly so. He is the One with the bountiful eye, looking for those on whom He may pour out His goodness and blessing.

We may say that the goodness of God is entrenched in the beauty of holiness; it is permeated by the Light that no man can approach. Zechariah 9:17 reads, “*For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty...*” Many men seek to do good. The Apostle Paul even says in Romans 5:7-8, “*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*

sinner, Christ died for us.” In other words, he is saying while there are good men, none can compare with God in goodness. Why? **It is because His goodness emanates from the peerless character of the Godhead.** This is the sublime difference that puts His goodness apart from all others.

Thus, we are going to see a manifestation of the perfection of goodness that can never be challenged. It is a goodness that is infinite. It is a goodness from a pure motive, without any colour or variation or shade that might mar its perfect motive. It is without thought of pride or personal gain. It is a goodness that is incapable of doing evil to anyone and seeks only the ultimate best for all whom He has created.

God’s inherent goodness was revealed to me when He appeared to me on one occasion as Goodness. That virtue emanated from His very being. Then He stretched forth His arm and said, “Touch Me; I am altogether goodness.” Goodness is the quality He wishes to impart to and work out in all His people.

The Severity of God

The severity of God requires that the deserved judgment and ensuing punishment be meted out. The actual proportion of Scripture that describes God’s judgments with respect to disobedience far exceeds that which describes His blessings. We must be in no doubt whatsoever concerning the severity of His judgments upon the disobedient. For example, we realise that for nearly 2,000 years, Israel lost their sovereignty over their own land because of their disobedience.

Moses, who knew the Lord so intimately, gives us insight into His character in Psalm 90:7-8, *"For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."* Here, Moses speaks of living in the presence of God's anger, and that our sins are continually before Him. This is a picture of One who demands perfection at all times; not one little error is permitted to escape His scrutiny. This emphasis upon perfection must be understood in light of the fact that He does all things well.

It is like a teacher who has the pupil constantly under surveillance to ensure that his work attains the high standard of the teacher, and the pupil therefore honours the teacher. For example, in calligraphy, the teacher is particular regarding every dotting of the 'I.' Is not the teacher concerned when the student hands in work that is not up to standard? A blot or a misspelling calls for his correction. The Lord said that not one "jot" or "tittle" of His Word would be unfulfilled. We must indeed grasp the standards of heaven as evoked by our Lord.

In such an atmosphere did Moses live, for it was he who was admonished by God to build all things according to the pattern shown him on the Mount. That tabernacle had to be accurately built, according to the pattern of heavenly things – because it was to reveal, reflect, and illustrate heavenly and eternal truths to all generations.

Let us so live, realising that the unseen Teacher is looking over our shoulders and examining our work. May we be as

precise and particular as He is at all times. Remember, that we must give an account for *every* idle word. So then let us be careful, detailed, and particular in all things that we do, whether large or small.

God's Goodness and Severity from Scripture

Both these aspects of the goodness and severity of God are expressed succinctly in Deuteronomy 28. In the first part of this chapter, we see the promises and the blessings that the Lord will give to His people, Israel, if they will but keep His Commandments. We enumerate them as follows:

1. They shall be blessed in the city and in the field.
2. They shall be blessed with the fruit of the body, meaning good health and children.
3. Their ground, cattle, and sheep shall be blessed.
4. Their shopping basket and their bread shall be blessed.
5. They shall be blessed when they come in and go out of their houses.
6. Their enemies shall be smitten and shall flee before them.
7. They shall be blessed in all that they put their hand to do.
8. They will be established as a holy people.
9. They will be plenteous in goods.
10. They will lend to many nations, and be the head and not the tail.

Now let us consider the severity of God, which is manifested when His people become disobedient. The following curses shall come upon them:

1. They are cursed in the city and in the field.
2. They are cursed in the basket and in the store.
3. The fruit of their body shall be cursed, as well as the fruit of the land.
4. They are cursed when they come in and go out.
5. Sickness and pestilences will cleave to them.
6. The heavens will be as brass, and will give no rain.
7. The Lord will smite them with the sword, and their enemies will rule over them. Then we have a warning concerning the great Diaspora, when Israel would be taken in to Babylonian captivity. (The Diaspora was the name given to the period of time between 606 B.C. and 536 B.C. when Israel was in Babylonian captivity. It consisted of three distinct deportations in the reigns of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, kings of Judah.)

The Apostle Paul warns those who despise the riches of God's goodness that they, through the hardness of their heart, will reap the wrath of God on judgment day (Rom. 2:4-6).

Striking the Balance

There are many who simply dwell upon God's graciousness and His goodness and are wilfully ignorant of the terrors of

the Lord. I am reminded of an occasion which bears out this truth. Many years ago, when I was in the suburbs of London, my friend, who was a soloist for his church, desired to practise during our lunch break. He asked me to accompany him upon the piano; and so we thought that the best place to do so was in a church. We went to a local vicarage to ask for permission; and there, the conversation which I shall always remember took place.

In the course of asking the vicar if we might use the church piano, I enquired about his own salvation and his views on the Bible. He responded that he could not believe in a Jesus who would send people to hell; therefore, he did not believe in the Book of Revelation. He wilfully ignored all the warnings of Jesus related to eternal judgment and the Lake of Fire.

Was this an isolated case? I think not, for it is the firm belief held by many, even among Christians, that there is no such place as hell. Yet the Word of God is filled with warnings of eternal punishment. We shall examine a few that reflect the severity of God:

Revelation 20:15: *“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”*

Revelation 21:8: *“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”*

Jude 1:12-13: *"These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."*

Luke 12:47-48: *"And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."*

The position of the Lord Jesus in His dual capacity, as Lord of Heaven and Lord of Hell, may perhaps be illustrated and understood by a thought expressed to me by a former senior judge of Auckland, New Zealand.

When I asked him why he had resigned early from the bench, he replied that he was always so sad when he had to sentence anyone to prison. He wished that he could have had the right to set them all free, but he had to uphold the bar of justice; and because of their crimes, they had to be sentenced to prison.

Thus in like manner, we have the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, whose desire is that all would be saved. However, because some would not believe on Him, nor accept His so great

salvation when it was offered to them, the judgment written has had to be executed. They have had to be assigned to the required punishment in hell below.

Often, on trips through the nether regions of hell, the Lord would have to respond to the pleas of certain condemned souls who saw Him as He passed by. While they were living, He had tenderly pleaded with them, giving them so many opportunities, but they had refused His offer of mercy. Thus at death, He had to refuse their pleadings and mete out the judgment designated. The judgment is fixed, for Hebrews 9:27 reads, “...*it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*” None can doubt that the judgment is severe. Since we are dealing in heaven with eternal life, let us be clear that the punishment is likewise eternal, with absolutely no hope of escaping from the terrible torments of hell.

It is clear that God designates the punishment. We remember the words of David, “...*If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there*” (Ps. 139:8). Hell was designated for Satan and the fallen angels, but it is also the abode of the damned of mankind. The torments in hell are horrendous. The Lord Himself continually warned of the unquenchable fire that burns forever and forever without respite (Mk. 9:48). Therefore, both the beauties of heaven above and the terrors of hell below reflect the character of God.

May we at this point say that hell was created by God, and not by Satan. **Hell was designated for Satan.** Also, every

torture has been designed by God, and is administered by demons upon the members of Adam's race who have been condemned to those eternal places of doom. We must never forget the words of Paul in Hebrews 12:29, "*...our God is a consuming fire.*" **He is a fire that purifies the saints and also torments the damned in hell.** Yet the goodness of God is expressed through His forbearance and longsuffering, by which He leads us to repentance, if we so choose, to save us from hell (Rom. 2:4).

The Lord of Heaven, who is so joyful with His eternal blessings for the redeemed, is the same Lord of Hell, who is so severe with the eternal torments and judgments for the damned. He is the judge of all, giving to each one what one has earned while upon the earth. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living Judge (Heb. 10:31). Knowing the terror of the Lord, the Apostle Paul pleads with us to be reconciled to the Lord of Heaven and Hell (2 Cor. 5:11-21).



*The Lord of Heaven is also
the Lord of Hell.*

CHAPTER TWO

Creation

We are told that in the beginning, the earth was without form and void and darkness covered the deep. Then God said, “*Let there be light,*” and there was light (Gen. 1:3). From that moment onwards, God brought forth His wonderful creation.

With the decree of light, God separated the light from darkness, so that there would be a day and night. This was followed with an expanse, which separated the waters above from the waters below, and God called the expanse heaven. This was the second day (Gen. 1:6-8).

On the third day, God ordained the appearance of dry land, which He called earth. He also ordained the gathering of the waters, which He called seas (Gen. 1:9-10). The psalmist tells us that the Lord gave commandment to the proud waters that they should keep to their ordained boundaries. Psalm 104:9 says, “*Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth.*” Then the Lord commanded the earth to bring forth grass, and the fruit tree yielding fruit each after its kind (Gen. 1:11-13).

On the fourth day, God set the sun, moon and stars in their places in the heavens to give light upon the earth. On the fifth day, the Lord also created great whales and fish, as well as the winged fowl, each after its own kind; and He

blessed them, saying, “...*Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth*” (Gen. 1:14-23).

The sixth day saw God make the beasts of the field and everything that creeps upon earth. We note that God said, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature *after his kind*.” There is, therefore, no transmutation of the species. Rather, in God’s foreordained plan, all things He creates reproduce themselves in their own likeness. A potato will never, for example, bring forth an apple or another species of vegetation.

On the sixth day, God’s masterpiece, man, was also created from the dust of the earth. God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. As modern research into the human body advances, it becomes more and more evident how true David’s statement in Psalm 139:14 is – we are “*fearfully and wonderfully made*.” May we reverentially say that the Lord loves to create; and for that reason, it is a characteristic of man to seek to likewise create and build.

However, from the point of view of this book, there is another truth we would like our gentle readers to consider. After each day of creation, it is stated that God saw that His handiwork was good. Finally, on the sixth day we read in Genesis 1:31 that God saw everything that He had made, “and behold it was very good” (or we could say, the very best). **Therefore, all that the Lord God creates is good.** Then in continuing

the thought of the creation of all things, it is stated that, “... *Out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil*” (Gen. 2:9).

The goodness of God is revealed in His creation in that He does all things well. The manifestation of goodness is to always bring forth that which is good in the sense of having a standard of excellence, and also to bring forth what is best for all created beings. In effect, we can truly say that the whole of God’s creation manifests His goodness and that the earth is *full* of the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 33:5). The goodness of God is a point we would do well to take note of and emulate, so that all things that we do are also good.

While the goodness of God shows forth in His creation, we also see His severity. For example, God sent the Flood as a form of judgment against a generation whose every thought was evil, and who had filled the earth with violence and corruption! So fearsome was this judgment that when God sent the Flood in judgment upon the whole earth, *all* but eight souls perished (1 Pet. 3:20). He was grieved.

Yet, in the midst of judgment, God, in His goodness, chose to preserve a remnant. If it had not been for Noah, all flesh would have been destroyed through the Flood. The life of Noah, therefore, contains keys to being preserved in times of judgment.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord because he was perfect in his generation. He was a man of faith, in that when God told him to build an ark, he did so. It was no mean achievement, considering that it took him nearly 120 years to do so with very primitive tools. His was faith in action.

Moreover, Noah is listed with Daniel and Job as being one of the three most righteous men in Old Testament days. As Ezekiel 14:13-14 states, *“Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it. Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.”*

In contrast, there were many believers in the days of Noah that are termed “sometimes disobedient.” Nonetheless, these ones still perished in the Flood, as we read in 1 Peter 3:20: *“Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein **few, that is, eight** souls were saved by water.”*

Thus, in times of judgment, there is a far higher standard for preservation. This truth might be emphasised by quoting 1 Peter 4:18, *“And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”* In like manner, the standards for being preserved by His goodness will be far higher during the End Times with the Great Tribulation than

they are now. May God grant that we exude the righteousness of God like Noah, Daniel, and Job, and be preserved during times of judgment.

The goodness of God is revealed once more after the flood. The Lord God gave Noah the promise of the rainbow as a sign that He would never destroy the whole earth with a flood again. The Lord said to Noah, *“I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh”* (Gen. 9:13-15).

We read in Jeremiah 31:35-37 of a particular promise of God to Israel: *“Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.”* God gave His Word that the seed of Israel would remain before Him, as long as the sun, moon, and stars give their light.

Now in concluding this section concerning the goodness and severity of God in creation, we may see a pattern established that has continued throughout time. God is inherently good and delights to show forth His goodness to His creation, but He is limited by their conduct. When they are obedient, His goodness becomes their portion. However, as the just and righteous Judge of the whole world, He must be severe upon the disobedient.

CHAPTER THREE

The Children of Israel

Throughout the history of the children of Israel, we find that the Lord controlled their provisions to bring about His purposes, which are ultimately good.

Thus we have the very well known story of God sending Joseph into Egypt to prepare a place for his father Jacob and his brethren. When the appointed time came, God called for seven years of abundant harvests followed by seven years of famine. God gave Joseph the wisdom to store the harvest in order to have provision for the people during the famine. Those seven years of famine brought Jacob and his sons to sojourn in Egypt, where the children of Israel dwelt for several hundred years.

This was the means by which the scenario was set to begin the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to Zion. Egypt, typifying this world, is a land associated with death and hell according to Ezekiel 32:18, which says, *“Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit.”*

Exodus from Egypt

The journey of Israel was ordained of God before the foundation of the world. According to Paul, it was an event

that is principally for the spiritual instruction of God's people (1 Cor. 10:1-11). At the appointed time, God raised up Moses as the new leader for His people. He prepared him to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt through the manifestation of mighty signs and wonders, which He would send upon the Egyptians in judgment. The Israelites were protected from judgment by the blood of a Passover lamb that was sprinkled over the doorposts and lintels of their homes. This was a sign to us of salvation through the Blood of Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb.

After their exodus from Egypt, God led Israel through the Red Sea, which miraculously opened to them, so that they went over dry land. After that, the same waters closed upon Pharaoh and his armies, drowning them. In the wilderness, they were then led by a cloud by day to protect them from the sun and a pillar of fire by night to give them warmth and light. He opened up rocks from which flowed water in the desert. God faithfully provided for the needs of the people. Every morning, He fed them with manna (Ps. 78:13-25).

In Exodus 18:9-10, Jethro, father-in-law to Moses, lauds God for His goodness in delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage: *"And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the LORD, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians."* Thus we may say that the

journey of the children of Israel manifests His goodness to His chosen nation in the way He cared for them and “bore them on eagles’ wings,” as a mother eagle carries her young eagles (Ex. 19:4).

The Wilderness

However, in the subsequent trials in the desert, the Lord dealt severely with the generation that was age 20 and over. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, they all died during the additional 38 years of desert wandering for their disobedience. The Lord said of these ones, *“Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me”* (Num. 32:11).

In 1 Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul defines the reasons for God’s displeasure and His severity in overthrowing them in the wilderness:

1. They lusted after evil things, and God caused the things they lusted after to become loathsome to them (Num. 11:4, 20).
2. They were idolaters, in that they sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play and were almost destroyed by the Lord, had Moses not pleaded with Him (Ex. 32:6-14).
3. They committed fornication and in one day, 23,000 were slain (Num. 25:1,9).

4. They tempted the Lord and were plagued with serpents (Num. 21:6).
5. They murmured and were destroyed by the destroyer (Num. 14:35-37).

Another example of the Lord's severity is seen when Balaam counselled Balak, king of Moab, to send their daughters to commit whoredom with the young men in Israel (Rev. 2:14). We read in Numbers 25:1-5: *"And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor."* Thus, those who joined themselves to Baalpeor and ate the sacrifices of the dead (Ps. 106:28) had their heads hung up before the Lord. But those who clave unto the Lord remained alive and crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land (Deut. 4:3-4).

Crossing Over into the Promised Land

God then gave the children of Israel a new leader, Joshua, by whom He led them across the River Jordan at harvest time, miraculously passing over on dry ground into the land of Canaan, the land of promise (Josh. 3:15-17). Through

divine direction, the walls of Jericho miraculously fell down (Josh. 6:1-20). The Lord was with them as they conquered 31 kings in the land of Canaan (Josh. 12). One of the significant features of the time of Joshua was that the Lord met him at the beginning of the conquests as the Captain of the Lord of Hosts (Josh. 5:13-15). He gave him the battle plan for the taking of Jericho. Thereafter, as long as they enquired of the Lord in each battle, they were successful. They were defeated when they neglected to ask counsel of the Lord.

This essential principle of enquiring of the Lord before undertaking any project applies to all of God's loved ones. In so doing, one can save oneself from many a grievous and costly error. A certain event illustrates this in a very poignant manner.

We were contemplating building an addition to our college campus and sought many tenders. Finally, we narrowed down the list of choices to three. One was to build, essentially using a kit, which we would have had to assemble ourselves. In order to do so, we would have needed to recall several missionaries from their respective fields of labour. The overall cost of this choice would have been very low.

Another choice involved hiring a Christian firm. While the cost was much higher, they would have done all the work, so that we would have been able to keep the missionaries on the field.

Then a non-Christian firm submitted a bid, which was considerably higher. To our surprise, the Lord indicated that this was the bid that we should accept, which we did. The result was

that when the building was completed, we saw the goodness of the Lord. It has been virtually maintenance free, our heating costs in winter are lower, and those who stay there are delighted with the accommodation and are very complimentary.

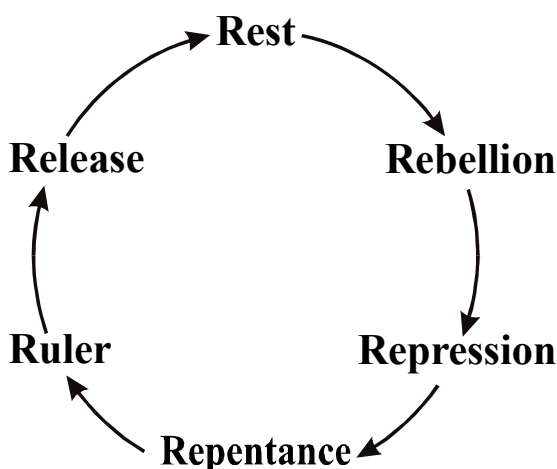
Nehemiah 9:24-25, 35 speaks of the children of Israel possessing the land of promise, *“So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness...For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works.”*

The promised land was a good land, as the Lord said in Jeremiah 2:7, *“And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination.”* Thus, the occupation of the land of Canaan by Israel was attributed to the goodness of God.

The Era of the Judges

Then came the period of the Judges, which was one of REBELLION, when the children of Israel sinned against

God in manifold ways. As a result, the Lord sent against them enemies who **REPRESSED** them. When they **REPENTED**, the Lord had pity upon them and gave them a **RULER** who delivered them, even though the oppression was due to their disobedience. They were then **RELEASED** and entered into **REST**. This was a cycle that the Israelites followed continuously during the time of the Judges (as can be seen in the following chart):



Here, we see the goodness of God in sending repression to bring them to repentance and eventually into rest. God's purpose and promise in chastening a man is to give him rest in his latter days. *"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked"* (Ps. 94:12-13).

Another instance of God's withholding provision in order to control the destinies of His people for their good, is found

in the Book of Judges. During the age of the Judges, there was a notable famine. A man of Bethlehem, Judea, named Elimelech, and his wife, Naomi, went into the land of Moab to seek food. Their two sons married Moabitish women, after which the three men died, leaving the women as widows (Ruth 1:1-5). One of these widows, Ruth, returned with Naomi to her land after Naomi had heard that the Lord had visited the land, giving His people bread. Ruth later married Boaz and thus became the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:13-17). As a result of her faithfulness, Ruth was in the lineage of Christ.

This is a very vivid example of God's using a famine to illustrate the Gentile Bride of Christ in the form of Ruth, the Moabitish woman. It also shows forth the thought that Ruth, having been a Gentile, then became joined to God's own nation by her marriage to Boaz, her kinsman redeemer. It points to the way we, as Gentiles, change our allegiance from the things of this world to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of the universe. This type also reveals God's goodness in allowing the Gentiles to be joined with the Jews in receiving the blessings of so great a salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Kingdom Divides

The era of the judges terminated with Samuel the prophet. He continued to judge Israel until the people demanded to be like other nations and have a king. The Lord gave them the desire of their hearts and anointed Saul, of the tribe of

Benjamin, as king over the united kingdom of Israel. Saul, however, disobeyed God and was consequently rejected by the Lord.

Then God declared that He had found David, a man after His own heart who would do *all* His will (Acts 13:22). Thus, God gave the children of Israel David, by whom He might show forth His goodness to His chosen people. It was through David, who was a type of Christ (a prophet, priest, and king) that the Lord brought Israel to Mount Zion, the mountain of His holiness.

However, in the ensuing reign of Solomon, Israel turned back to idols. In His anger, God divided the kingdom. Israel, comprising the ten northern tribes, became idolatrous from the beginning. In 722 B.C., God gave the northern kingdom over to Assyrian captivity, and it ceased from being an independent nation. Judah, the southern kingdom, was faithful in the beginning but afterwards fell into idolatrous corruption. Jeremiah 25:8-14 states that because Judah had not heeded the words of the Lord, she would go into Babylonian captivity for 70 years. The period of captivity in Babylon (which was the seat, centre, and source of idolatry) purified the blood of the Jews from idol worship.

There are occasions in our own lives when we feel that we are in prison-like circumstances. These times can well be God's way of purifying us from certain vices in our nature so that we, too, will never permit such sin to occur in our lives again.

I knew a French girl who had been a student of ours in Switzerland. After completing her courses, she went to England and backslid, ending up in immorality. Then she returned to Switzerland and in a counselling session, she disclosed that the Lord had spoken to her concerning the fact that He would lead her into a spiritual Babylon to purify her. Her spiritual Babylon consisted of a heart-breaking situation where she suffered much. However, she came out of that purified. Then she married a French missionary, went to the foreign field and had five beautiful children. Babylonian experiences do indeed purify and prepare us for His service.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Giving of the Law

The Value of the Law

While tasting of the fruit of the tree of knowledge gave man the ability to **know** both good and evil, the giving of the Law set before man the **choice** between **life and goodness**, or **death and evil**. The Lord assured the Israelites that if they kept His Law, He would bless them in the land He had given them (Deut. 31:15-16). In other words, the keeping of the Law ensured that the believer would be the recipient of the goodness of the Lord.

The Law was given by God upon Mount Sinai, through Moses, to His chosen people Israel. It was part of the manifestation of His goodness towards them, as the following scriptures demonstrate:

*“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. **Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations**, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set*

before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deut. 4:5-9).

The **giving** of the Law set Israel apart from all other nations of this earth. Through the **keeping** of that Law, Israel became wise. As King David admonished Solomon (and in fact, all of the children of God) in Proverbs 4:7, *"Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore, get wisdom..."* We are also told in Proverbs 8:11, *"For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it."* The beginning of the pursuit of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Prov. 9:10), which is His treasure (Isa. 33:6). The fear of the Lord is given to those who please Him, and this includes keeping His laws, *"For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy..."* (Eccl. 2:26).

God, in His infinite goodness, was giving His very best to Israel. He gave them His laws, His wisdom, and the fear of the Lord – in effect, He was giving the true riches of this life and that which is to come. David, in his prayer for Solomon and the nation of Israel, brought out the fact that we please God by walking uprightly, fixing our hearts on Him, and keeping His commandments (1 Chr. 29:17-19).

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments, which form the basis of all judicial laws, were written by the finger of God upon two tablets of

stone and given to Moses upon Mount Sinai. In His teaching of the Beatitudes upon the Mount, our Lord Jesus gave a very solemn warning, “Think not that I am come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it” (Mt. 5:17). **The Law is to be upheld throughout all generations.** It is not just applicable to Old Testament times.

Now, let us consider the Ten Commandments, since they will be the standards whereby we shall be measured before the throne of God:

1. *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”* (Ex. 20:3). This could well be interpreted in the sense that when we come before the Lord, we do not have a divided heart that also is given to other pleasures, worldly lusts, or idols. We must have singleness of eye so that we worship Him wholeheartedly. The commandments must be viewed as being given in the order of divine importance. Thus, of prime importance is the fact that we must have no other God but the Lord Jehovah.

2. *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments”* (Ex. 20:4-6). This refers to the culture of the heathen nations, whose people made carvings of animals, fowls, and fishes,

and worshipped them, claiming that they were their gods. We are not to make any graven image, since it is impossible to define His likeness. Any attempt to define His likeness would be idolatrous.

3. *“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain”* (Ex. 20:7). This would include using the name of the Lord in a derogatory fashion as, for example, in swearing or in a blasphemous manner.

4. *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it”* (Ex. 20:8-11).

The Sabbath is the seventh day, when the Lord rested from His work of creation. The Sabbath Day was consecrated as a day of rest because on the seventh day, the Lord God rested from all His work. It is a day consecrated to the worship of God. He has ordained that no servile work be done on the Sabbath. We see the seriousness of this commandment in Numbers 15:32-36: *“And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering*

sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.” The punishment for breaking the Sabbath was severe, as seen in the punishment of the man who was stoned to death.

We are created to work six days and then to rest on the seventh. Isaiah 58:13-14 says, *“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.”* The Church changed the Sabbath day to Sunday to honour the resurrection of our Lord. However, the Sabbath Day has also a profound spiritual significance, as it signifies entering into the rest of God, where we cease from our work, and God works through us (Heb. 4:10).

5. *“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee”* (Ex. 20:12). The Apostle Paul called this “the first commandment with promise,” and it is of great importance

(Eph. 6:2). In honouring our father and mother, we are honouring the Lord, since the earthly father is a type of the Heavenly Father and the earthly mother, a type of the Church.

***In honouring our
father and mother,
we are honouring
the Lord.***

If the parents are not godly, the situation changes. This is seen with the case of the Levites. When the Israelites were unrestrained in worshipping the golden calf and revelling at Mount Sinai, the Levites stood on the Lord's side and executed His judgment on Israel (Ex. 32:25-29, Num. 1:53; 3:6, 12). With respect to this tribe, we are told, *"Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant"* (Deut. 33:9). He was saying that he had no regard for them. He did not recognise his brothers or acknowledge his own children, but he watched over God's Word to perform it and guarded His covenant.

Sometimes, we are placed in an unbelieving home, as I was, and yet we have to be true to God and His Word. Obeying God takes pre-eminence over our obedience to our family. We must at all times honour (by speaking well of) our parents, but we cannot obey them if they command us to do things that are contrary to the will of God.

The fifth commandment is of great importance, since our father and mother typify the Holy Father and His Church.

An example of the punishment of a rebellion is given in the law: *“And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death”* (Ex. 21:17). He was stoned. In the book of Proverbs, we read, *“Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness”* (Prov. 20:20).

Proverbs 30:17 states: *“The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.”* This proverb has become a reality to me.

In Switzerland, a German pastor brought a son who was constantly verbally abusing his parents to a conference centre, with the thought that in the presence of the Lord, he would repent. However, sadly, this was not the case. In fact, the evil spirits that were within him seemed to be greatly stirred. One evening, he phoned his parents in the presence of the pastor and shouted abuses to his weeping mother. Then with what seemed to have been demonic strength, he walked speedily down the road from the conference centre and then with apparently ever-increasing determination, outstripping the efforts of the pastor to keep up with him, he climbed up the path of a mountain not far away. Before the pastor could stop him, he hurled himself over a precipice into a stream below. The Swiss police were alerted but could find no trace of his body until three days later, where it had been washed up many miles downstream. The birds of the air had eaten his eyes out. What a poignant warning to those who mock their parents.

6. “*Thou shalt not kill*” (Ex. 20:13). The punishment for breaking the sixth commandment by killing another is expressed in several ways. In Judges 1, the men of Judah fought against Bezek and slew 10,000 men. They captured their king, Adonibezek, and cut off his thumbs and great toes. Adonibezek said, “...*Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me...*” (Jdg. 1:7). He had cut off the thumbs and great toes of 70 kings and God requited him by causing him to reap what he had sown.

The end of a murderer is very poignantly described in Proverbs 28:17: “*A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.*” Here at his own death, the murderer is described as one who hastens to the pit and no man is to stop him. Many who have committed genocide such as the Nazi leaders Adolf Hitler, Hermann Goring, and Heinrich Himmler, have also committed suicide. Joseph Stalin experienced terrible torment on his deathbed, whilst Saddam Hussein and his henchmen were all hanged.

In Alan Bullock’s *Hitler and Stalin* (1993), we are given the account of Stalin’s deathbed scene, as described by his daughter Svetlana:

The death agony was terrible. God grants an easy death only to the just. He literally choked to death as we watched. At what seemed like the very last

moment he suddenly opened his eyes and cast a glance over everyone in the room. It was a terrible glance, insane or perhaps angry and full of fear of death. . . . Then something incomprehensible and terrible happened that to this day I can't forget. . . . He suddenly lifted his left hand as though he were pointing to something up above and bring down a curse on us all. The gesture was incomprehensible and full of menace. . . . The next moment, after a final effort, the spirit wrenched itself free of the flesh.

Bullock immediately adds (pg. 968),

Like Hitler, Stalin preserved his image of himself intact to the end, without retraction or regret. Both men died defying their enemies.

In His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord raises the significance of this sixth commandment to a higher level. He associates killing with anger, and the danger of hell fire as the consequence. He said, *"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire"* (Mt. 5:21-22).

7. *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* (Ex. 20:14). The Lord raises this commandment to a higher level when He likens

even a lustful look to the sin of adultery. He said, *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Mt. 5:27-28).

The punishment for those who break the seventh commandment may be illustrated by Reuben, who committed adultery with his father’s concubine. Reuben ended up losing his birthright to his undefiled brother Joseph. King David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, had 15 judgments meted out upon him. The judgements given out to those who frequent the house of whoredom are even more severe, for their destiny is in the chambers of death (Prov. 7:27).

8. *“Thou shalt not steal”* (Ex. 20:15). This commandment needs no further explanation. We are very cognisant even from early childhood that we must not take that which does not belong to us.

There is a spiritual curse placed upon them that steal: *“Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it”* (Zech. 5:3). They shall experience the death of the wicked and be far from God in the depths of hell. This is clearly shown in the case of Ahab, who stole the vineyard of Naboth, for he was slain in battle at Ramoth Gilead. Then all his seed was slain by Jehu, his successor as king of Israel.

However, there is a further consideration in Malachi 3:8: *“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.”* It is a law to pay tithes, and God graciously rewards one who pays his tithes. The Lord promises to open up the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive (Mal. 3:10)! If we choose not to pay tithes, this limits the work of God. Some have even seen visions of those who had not tithed in hell; they are regarded as thieves.

9. *“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”* (Ex. 20:16). The Lord elevates this commandment to the directive that we must not take oaths. In Matthew 5:33-37, the Lord said, *“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”* The Apostle James even emphasises this by saying, *“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation”* (Jas. 5:12). A man’s word should be his bond.

Those who gave false witness were judged according to the law, and received the same punishment as they thought to

inflict upon the one whom they had falsely accused, as we read in the following passage. *“If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you”* (Deut. 19:16-19).

10. *“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s”* (Ex. 20:17). We must ensure that our motives and thoughts do not engender a desire for the property of others.

Those who coveted flesh (or meat) in the wilderness were smitten by the Lord with a great plague while they were still eating (Num. 11:33-35).

The prophet Balaam was known for his greed. When Balak, the king of Moab, desired him to curse Israel, Balaam enquired of the Lord as to whether he should go with the princes of the king. God said to Balaam, *“...Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed”* (Num. 22:12). However, when Balak sent greater princes with greater rewards, Balaam again asked God if he could go.

This time, God answered according to the desire of Balaam's heart to receive those gifts of the king, saying, "*...If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do*" (Num. 22:20, see also Ezek. 14:4-9). Nearly being slain by an angel in the way, Balaam was not permitted by God to curse Israel, but instead blessed them.

Wishing however to please the king, Balaam told Balak to send young Moabitish girls into the Israelite camp. These girls led the young Israelite men to worship Baalpeor, a heathen Moabitish god and to commit fornication. Thus God's wrath came upon Israel, and He slew many (Num. 31:16). Balaam was later slain when Israel warred against the Midianites (Num. 31:8).

One of the most covetous of Old Testament kings was Jehoiakim. His covetousness led him to commit murder to obtain the treasures of others. We read in Jeremiah 22:17-19, "*But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.*" Jehoiakim would not be given a king's funeral with much lamenting and pleasant odours. Instead, his body would be drawn out of the gates of Jerusalem and cast forth beyond them.

God Gives Grace to Keep His Laws

These laws are immutable. Nonetheless, in the goodness of God, He made this promise whereby we might walk in His laws and fulfil them: *“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, 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”* (Ezek. 36:25-27).

The practical outworking of these commandments comes from the goodness of the Lord. Even in the Old Testament, there were promises from the Lord that the Law would be written upon the fleshly tables of our hearts. The Apostle Paul, citing Jeremiah 31:33, makes mention of this in the following passage, *“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* **In other words, because of Christ’s sacrifice, we have the power from God to keep the Law.** Thus, from our hearts, we will cherish His commandments and do them. This blessing does not come easily. The Lord requires that we diligently seek Him to do this for us (Ezek. 36:28).

In the light of so many Christians turning back, I have often asked myself what keeps a person. Obviously, it is the grace

of God. But to whom does He show grace? He shows grace to a person who exhibits these three virtues:

1. The one who is humble (Jas. 4:6).
2. The one who orders his conversation aright (Ps. 50:23).
3. The one who has the laws of God written upon the fleshly tables of his heart, which produces the virtue of integrity (Ps. 119:11).

This beautiful assurance that He will cause us to walk in His ways is another aspect of His goodness to His people. As we continue to walk with Him and keep His laws by His grace, we are assured of His blessing, and He will keep us on the road to eternal life.

Babylonian Captivity

This epoch provides a very rich and fertile field in which to study the goodness and severity of God. It covered a period of 70 years from 606 B.C. until 536 B.C., when Israel (but principally Judah) experienced three distinct deportations of their population into Babylonian captivity. These occurred during the reigns of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, kings of Judah in 606 B.C., 597 B.C., and 586 B.C. The final siege resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon.

Yet in His goodness, God had given His people solemn warnings of these events, even beginning with Moses on the plains of Moab before they entered the Promised Land

some 800 years beforehand: *“Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young”* (Deut. 28:47-50).

Nearer the time, the Lord raised up major prophets, beginning with Isaiah, who declared not only the destruction of Jerusalem but also her rebuilding. Isaiah even named the Persian king (Cyrus) who would give the order some 150 years before the rebuilding (Isa. 44:28).

Examining now the events from a closer perspective, we surely must start at the reign of the good King Hezekiah. He was known for his goodness and kindness towards all. However, after experiencing two remarkable miracles in being healed and then granted a divine deliverance from the siege by the Assyrian army, we are sorrowfully told that he rendered not unto God for all His goodness to him (2 Chr. 32:25). Both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem became proud. The consequences of Hezekiah’s disobedience were that his sons would experience Babylonian captivity and all the riches of Jerusalem would be sacked (Isa. 39:5-7).

It was during this time of pride that his son Manasseh who was to succeed him upon the throne was born. Manasseh ascended to the throne at the tender age of 12. He was easily induced by his courtiers to worship idols. He became the most wicked king of Judah who ever ruled. All kinds of wickedness then entered into the kingdom. It is recorded that he spilt much innocent blood. However, God in His goodness, restored Manasseh to the throne after a period in Babylonian captivity. He reigned for 55 years, which was the longest of any other king in either Judah or Israel. Although Manasseh repented, God was still determined to destroy Jerusalem because of his sins and those of the people. Manasseh's son Amon left the paths of righteousness and followed in the former ways of his father. Having known the right ways and having been instructed by his father's repentance and restoration, Amon experienced God's severity by choosing to sin. He was slain by his servants after only two years upon the throne.

One pastor friend of mine looked at his children and lamented to the Lord over certain adverse traits in their characters. The Lord responded that those were his traits when the children were conceived.

From this wicked King Amon came the long expected King Josiah, who had been promised by the Lord in prophecy to Israel some 350 years before (1 Ki. 13:2). Through the combination of Josiah, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah, God in His goodness gave the greatest revival that Israel had ever known. This revival involved not only a spiritual awakening,

but also the return of all the land of Israel that had been taken by the Assyrians (2 Ki. 14:25).

Regretfully, this revival terminated at the death of Josiah upon the battlefield against Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt. Pharaoh, speaking in the name of the Lord, told Josiah not to meddle with him, as he was commanded by God to go to Carchemish. However, Josiah would not listen. He was slain in the valley of Jezreel and carried away in his second chariot, signifying perhaps that he received God's second best for his life (2 Chr. 35:20-27). How tragic! Perhaps if he had lived longer there would have been a lengthening of the revival and prosperity for the land. We do not want to die before our time through some foolishness on our part!

The importance of the leader of a revival maintaining his course is well illustrated in Scripture and Church History. For example, Gideon, in not keeping a sound spiritual standard, led Israel into witchcraft, through consulting an ephod that he had had made. *"And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house"* (Jdg. 8:27).

In Church history, the Welsh revival under Evan Roberts collapsed with his moral failure. I, too, have experienced revivals that have ceased with like failures of the leaders.

Pharaoh, a heathen king, appointed Jehoahaz to succeed his father. Yet this king was so wicked that God declared He

would reject him. Pharaoh removed him when he returned some three months later after fighting at Carchemish. He took Jehoahaz into Egyptian captivity.

Pharaoh replaced Jehoahaz on the throne with Jehoiakim, who was extremely wicked. In his third year, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, besieged Jerusalem and Jehoiakim experienced the first captivity (although the king was restored to his throne). This king filled Jerusalem with drunkenness and all kinds of wickedness. He added to his sins by cutting up the prophecy of Jeremiah and throwing the parchment into the fire in his palace. He died undesired and was accorded the burial of a donkey (Jer. 22:18-19).

We see the consequence of Josiah's refusal to listen to Pharaoh Necho was that this trait reappeared in his sons Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, who all refused to obey the heathen King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chr. 36). The result was the destruction of Jerusalem. Our actions and attitudes will affect future generations.

While wicked kings ruled in Jerusalem, God in His goodness gave the deportees in Babylon a major prophet in Daniel. At times, Daniel ruled in that city and province under King Nebuchadnezzar and later under Darius the Mede, who took Babylon in 539 B.C. Daniel lived in Babylon during the whole of the captivity. He was given prophecies that showed forth God's plan for Israel throughout the Empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Then Daniel was shown the very last days of the Church Dispensation – even the

rule of the Antichrist, the Great Tribulation, and the return of our Lord (Dan. 2). Thus we see the severity of God to the wicked kings, and the goodness of God in caring for those in captivity who submitted to the Babylonians.

The king who succeeded Jehoiakim was Jehoiachin. He was also wicked. Yet he went voluntarily into captivity in 596 BC., and with him went the prophet Ezekiel. God granted unto Ezekiel many prophecies giving understanding of the fall of Jerusalem which took place some eleven years later, but also of the new temple that will be built when the Lord returns. He saw also that Jerusalem would be a glorious city after the return of our Lord. Thus, even at the final siege, we have the severity of God in judging and His goodness in giving promises.

Zedekiah succeeded Jehoiachin as king. At that time, God, through the prophet Jeremiah, promised that He would deliver the city, if they would but keep the Sabbath days (Jer. 17:21-27). However, they refused, and that which God declared came upon them: *“But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched”* (Jer. 17:27). God’s severity was such that the Babylonians searched out all those who were hiding in the tunnels of Jerusalem and slew both young and old. The wicked king Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadnezzar and had his children slain before his eyes. Then those very eyes were put out with a red-hot iron. He died in Babylonian captivity (Jer. 52:11).

In spite of the judgment on the wicked, God gave the assurance through his prophet in Ezekiel 9 that those who mourned for the sins of Jerusalem and sought to do those things that were right would be preserved. The angels who had charge of Jerusalem were told to put a mark upon the foreheads of these ones so that they would be spared.

Yes God's goodness is shown to those who will walk in righteousness, but His severity is shown to the wicked. This period in history is also a type of the Last Days. **Great judgments will be the hallmarks of His severity, yet great tenderness and care will be shown to those who love righteousness and walk in holiness.**

CHAPTER FIVE

The New Testament Church

While the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, is often depicted as the mild Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29), we must never forget that He is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5).

God the Father anointed His Son, who went about doing good and healing all those who were afflicted with diseases (Acts 10:38). Yet even in His ministry of compassion, His anger against sinners was revealed as He overturned the tables of the money lenders in the temple courts. He said to them, “...*Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves*” (Mk. 11:17).

One of Christ’s constant themes in preaching was the terrors of hell and the warning that the wicked would be cast into everlasting fire, which is never quenched. Most illustrative of this was His story of the rich man who had everything that one could desire on this earth (Lk. 16). His end was that he would be enveloped in a flame that would torment him forever and ever. Not even a cooling drop of water would be allowed to give momentary solace for his terrible suffering. The reason he was afflicted this way was because he had ignored (to his eternal peril)

***The mild Lamb
of God is also the
Lion of the tribe
of Judah!***

the teachings of Moses. Lazarus, however, who had nothing on earth but had accepted God's teaching, was enjoying the goodness of the Lord in heaven above.

The New Testament Church, too, manifested the goodness and severity of God. We see them filled with the Holy Spirit, doing miracles, healing the sick, and preaching the Gospel. Yet the manifestation of the severity of the judgment of God can be seen in the following account.

Ananias and his wife Sapphira lied to the Holy Ghost concerning the price for which they sold a parcel of ground. Peter, facing the husband first, condemned him for lying to the Holy Ghost, whereupon he fell dead at the feet of Peter. Young men took away his body to bury him. Upon their return, Sapphira was confronted by Peter and she, too, lied concerning the price, whereupon Peter said that the young men who buried her husband shall likewise bury her. She then, too, fell dead at the feet of Peter. Great fear then fell upon all those who heard. No man dared to join himself to the Church (See Acts 5).

In the ministry of Paul, we see the goodness of God manifested in numerous miracles, even to the raising of the dead. At the same time, we see God's severity in the smiting of Elymas with blindness when he sought to turn the deputy from the faith while Paul was witnessing to him (Acts 13:8). Thus in the coming revival we may expect that as the glory of God increases, so too will the severity of God's judgments upon those who sin in the manifest light of His presence.

In the writings of the Apostles, we find these two strains clearly defined. When Paul writes to the Roman Christians, he compares the Jews and Christians to branches from the Olive Tree – Christ. He likens the unbelieving Jews to branches that were broken off and the Christians to branches that were grafted in their place. However, Paul also gives this warning in Romans 11:21-22: *“For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. 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.”* **Patient continuance in well doing is essential to inherit eternal life.** Paul returns to the goodness of God as he continues in Romans 11:23: *“And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.”*

The Apostle Jude uses the illustration of the journey of the children of Israel to show forth God’s goodness in saving them out of the land of Egypt, and then His severity in destroying in the wilderness those who did not believe. He says, *“I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not”* (Jude 1:5). He also cites the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah as an example to all those who go after strange flesh (meaning homosexuality or having sexual intercourse with animals). They, too, will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 1:7). In the closing verses, Jude shows us again the goodness of God, *“Now unto him that is able to keep you*

from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24).

In his epistles, the Apostle Peter also reminds the believers of God’s judgment in reducing the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes. He emphasises that it is principally those who walk in the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, who will utterly perish in their own corruption (2 Pet. 2:10-12). They are those who have forsaken the right way and for whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever (2 Pet. 2:17).

Of those who knew the Lord Jesus Christ and have turned back from following Him, he warns, *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them”* (2 Pet. 2:20-21). Peter then prophesies of God destroying the earth with fervent heat. Nevertheless, he also writes of the new heavens and new earth, which all those who love Christ and endure to the end will enjoy (2 Pet. 3:13). Thus, God’s severity in judgment and His goodness are once again revealed.

CHAPTER SIX

Old Testament Characters

We have chosen to look at the following outstanding characters who merited and displayed the goodness of God in their lives: David, Hezekiah, and Daniel. Included also in this section are three other characters who warranted God's severity because of their evil lives: Jehoram, Athaliah, and Jehoiakim.

David

The goodness of God shines forth in all its brilliance and purity during and through the life of David. He was ever aware of the Lord's goodness towards him in all the facets of life.

In his psalms, David makes much of the goodness of God. Speaking of himself as the king and speaking also of the greater King, the Lord Jesus Christ, he says in Psalm 21:3, *"For thou preventest (meets) him with the blessings of goodness: thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head."*

In Psalm 23:6, David said, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."* One illustration of the fact that God's goodness and mercy followed David all the days of his life is shown in 2 Samuel 8:14: *"...the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went."*

Psalm 89 illustrates some of the blessings of the goodness of God to David. We may also inherit these blessings, if we live a life pleasing to our Saviour: *“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king”* (Ps. 89:15-18). Thus for the righteous, there are blessings of joy, light, and strength.

Another aspect of God’s goodness to David is His goodness to his offspring. It is important to understand that the parents can leave a legacy of good or evil to their children. The Lord warned that the children of wicked parents would suffer unto the fourth generation (Ex. 34:7). On the other hand, good parents may enter into the sure mercies of David, and leave an inheritance of blessings upon their offspring as we read now in the following psalm, *“If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail”* (Ps. 89:30-33).

I have seen in my lifetime, many children who have departed from the ways of God, to the chagrin of their parents. Yet because of the Davidic covenant that these parents have made with God, incredible testimonies of restoration have resulted.

One testimony comes to mind of a girl who was deluded into following some who became disenchanted with a holy life. She drifted and drifted like a ship without a rudder. Her eyes were opened when she realised where those whom she was following were going—down the path that leads to eternal death. It was as though God pulled her up abruptly. He brought remembrance of the times when she experienced the presence of God in the church that her parents attended. God graciously drew her back, and she was reunited with her parents and godly friends of her youth.

The goodness of God is also shown in His promise to David of building him an everlasting house, to which David said, *“And now, LORD, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O LORD, and it shall be blessed for ever”* (1 Chr. 17:26-27). Here, God is promising to establish the work of his hands unto all generations. This is a promise which Moses also entreated of the Lord in Psalm 90:17.

David, in Psalm 144:1-2, declares that the Lord is his goodness. It is as though David is drawing upon a huge reservoir of the goodness of God, *“Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My **goodness**, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.”* In Psalm 27:13, we see the source of David’s strength, *“I had fainted, unless I*

had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” This same hope gives each one of us the strength to face each day with confidence.

We need to receive a constant flow of the Lord’s strength.

As one goes through life, one understands why David and the other psalmists refer to God as the source of their strength. Advancement brings an increase of responsibilities, which leads to escalating pressures. These heavy loads are impossible to bear or support with our natural strength. In order to carry the load, we must have the strength that comes from above. Many leaders have given up because of the weight of these burdens. May we experience union and communion with the Lord that will enable us to receive a constant flow of His strength.

David gives a similar exclamation in the Psalms: *“Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the LORD: for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city”* (Ps. 31:19-21).

These passages hold such relevance for our own lives. **To the degree that we have walked with God and done what is pleasing in God’s sight, to that same degree we may, in times of need, draw upon the reservoir of His goodness.**

We may receive of His strength, as we wait upon Him, so that as Paul says, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).

Another aspect of God's goodness is for us to be hidden from the pride of man, which manifests in contemptuous speech against the godly, with arguments, strife, and mockings that afflict our soul. From these we are preserved in His presence, which is like a tabernacle of peace covering our soul (Ps. 31:20).

David also experienced God's goodness in battle. Second Samuel 7:9 makes it clear that God was with him wherever he went. This was because David put his trust in the Lord and always enquired of the Lord before every battle (1 Sam. 23:2, 2 Sam. 5:19, 23).

Sadly, David did not experience the same victory in the area of moral purity. In the laws for the king there is a commandment that a king should not multiply wives to himself (Deut. 17:17). David took many wives, resulting in a breach in his life. This weakness in David opened the way for the enemy to gain entrance into his life, and for sin to come in. He chose to commit adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband, Uriah. While David repented and was forgiven by God, he still had to face the consequences of his actions. God decreed 15 judgments, one of which was that the sword would visit his house (2 Sam. 12:9-12). Thus David experienced the severity of God against those who break his commandments.

Hezekiah

Hezekiah, the thirteenth king of the divided kingdom of Judah, was a man noted for his goodness. We are told that he did that which was “*good, right and truth before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart...*” (2 Chr. 31:20-21) Hezekiah encouraged those who taught the knowledge of God. He celebrated Passover and honoured God, the like of which had never been, since the days of Solomon.

The consequence of his goodness was that God prospered him. Hezekiah was exceedingly wealthy and had cattle in abundance, “*...for God had given him substance very much*” (2 Chr. 32:29). It was also because of his goodness that when Hezekiah was sick unto death, he received a remarkable sign from God that he would recover – the sun went back ten degrees (2 Ki. 20:8-11). God then healed him.

Moreover, God fought for Hezekiah against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, when they were greatly outnumbered. The angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who were camped around Jerusalem (2 Ki. 19:34-37). Thus does God show forth His goodness to those who please Him.

However, after Hezekiah had experienced God’s goodness in healing him, he did not render thanks unto God for all His

kindness, but became proud together with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. As a result, he encountered the severity of God, for he was told his children would go into captivity and all his treasure would fall into the hands of his enemies (Isa. 39:6-7).

Unfortunately, I have known others in the same situation as Hezekiah. While God had given them marvellous healings, they did not render unto Him for all His goodness to them. A story was told to me in South Africa of a certain evangelist. He had committed immoral acts, and was struck down by God with a serious illness. He repented, and God graciously healed him. However, he returned to his old ways of immorality. When confronted by some elders concerning his relationship with another woman, he vehemently denied it. He then foolishly said, "Let God strike me dead if I am lying." Ten days later, he was dead.

Daniel

Daniel is singled out by God as being one of the three most righteous men, along with Noah and Job (Ezek. 14:14). He was one who purposed in his heart not to defile himself (Dan. 1:8) and is termed on more than one occasion a man greatly beloved of the Lord (Dan. 9:23; 10:11, 19).

Daniel held high government posts in the Babylonian, as well as the Median and Persian empires. He was the confidante and friend of the great kings Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, and Cyrus (Dan. 1:19-20; 6:3, 28).

He experienced one of the most miraculous deliverances when thrown into a lion's den by his adversaries. Because of his innocence of the charges levelled against him, an angel was sent to shut the mouths of the lions. Daniel himself testified, *"My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt"* (Dan. 6:22).

Daniel was noted for his wisdom concerning the interpretation of dreams at an early age. Even to a ripe old age, well into the eighties, he was visited by the archangel Gabriel, who gave him skill in the understanding of the prophetic events of the last days (Dan. 10–12). His prophecies are relevant to those days which lie ahead, even to the time of the Antichrist and the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and His millennial kingdom.

In His goodness, God gave Daniel the assurance of his eternal reward with the promise that he would stand in his appointed lot in heaven throughout all eternity (Dan. 12:13). He was truly a pious and faithful servant of our wonderful Lord, who reflected and thus received the goodness of God.

I remember being told of a certain godly brother who was promised by God that he would have no more trials. His course was finished, and he had fulfilled God's purpose for his life. May we, too, have that testimony as we come to the end of our lives.

We have chosen three rulers of evil character to consider their wicked deeds and the severity with which God meted out His wrath upon them.

Jehoram

Jehoram was the fifth king of Judah, and son of the righteous King Jehoshaphat. When he became king, he strengthened himself and slew all of his brethren, who were better than himself (2 Chr. 21:4). He caused Judah to commit fornication and to worship idols because he had the daughter of the wicked king Ahab as his wife (2 Chr. 21:6). This was the awesome consequence of the alliance of his father King Jehoshaphat with Ahab, in spite of the warnings from God by His prophets that he should not love those who hate the Lord (2 Chr. 19:2).

The punishment of Jehoram was that God smote his people, his children, his wives, and all his goods with a great plague. Personally, Jehoram was afflicted with terrible sickness, and he died. Moreover, God stirred up the spirit of the Philistines and of the Arabians, who carried away all his wives and sons, so that only the youngest remained (2 Chr. 21:12-19). Second Chronicles 21:19 records this of Jehoram, “...so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers.” His epitaph was that he “departed without being desired” (2 Chr. 21:20).

I knew of a man whose life was a wasted opportunity. He was an alcoholic, a wastrel, and one who treated his wife cruelly

until she divorced him. He was nicknamed, “the frog” by his friends, if indeed they were, for no one really wanted to be known as his friend. Because of circumstances, I attended his funeral, which took place in the funeral home of a city. The walls of the home were clammy, like that of a frog, and I can only imagine the atmosphere of hell into which he now resides. There were no testimonies of his life. None expressed regret at his funeral, and when it was finished, no one accompanied his casket to the cemetery. He departed undesired.

Athaliah

Athaliah (daughter of Ahab, wife of Jehoram, and mother of Ahaziah) reigned over Judah for six years after having killed the royal seed of Judah. She also caused a house to be built to Baal and filled the land with idols. After the death of Athaliah, *“...Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars”* (2 Chr. 23:17).

Jehoshebeath (daughter of King Jehoram, sister of Ahaziah, and wife of Jehoiada the High Priest) had preserved Joash, the son of Ahaziah, from being killed and hid him in the house of the Lord for seven years with his nurse (2 Chr. 22:10-12).

In the seventh year, Jehoiada the priest caused Joash to be proclaimed king. They anointed him in the temple, saying, “God save the king!” *“Now when Athaliah heard the noise of*

the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of the LORD: And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of musick, and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, Treason” (2 Chr. 23:12-13). Then Jehoiada commanded that she be taken out of the house of the Lord and slain (2 Chr. 23:1-15). Thus, the Lord requited the wickedness of Athaliah with great severity.

“We reap what we sow” is an old adage that flows through Scripture and is echoed on the lips of the sages from time immemorial. Nature teaches us that if we sow potatoes, we are going to reap potatoes. If we sow grass, we shall have a nice lawn, but if we sow weeds, that is what will spring up and ruin a nicely manicured lawn.

If we sow righteousness, we shall reap peace. If we sow deceit, what a web of deception we reap. If we cover evil works by lies, our end will be truly miserable! Think of how many politicians and pastors have discovered that, to their sorrow. Presidents and presidential candidates (such as William Jefferson Clinton and John Edwards, to name a few) have ruined their reputation and lives by so doing.

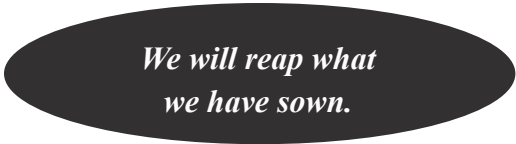
Jehoiakim

Jehoiakim, the seventeenth king of Judah and the son of righteous Josiah, was one of the wickedest kings who reigned

in Judah (2 Ki. 23:36-37). He was impious to the extreme. In fact, he cut with a penknife the scrolls on which the prophecies of Jeremiah were written and cast them into the fire, in spite of the protests of his princes (Jer. 36:23-25). He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and God sent King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon against him. He became his servant in the fourth year of his reign (2 Chr. 36:6).

This was what the Lord said of Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 22:13-15, *“Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour’s service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is cieled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar?”* Jehoiakim was one who did not pay the labourers who built his house. His heart was filled with covetousness, and he shed much innocent blood by oppression and violence (Jer. 22:17).

He was buried with the burial of a donkey. His body was cast forth outside the gates of Jerusalem, and no man mourned for him (Jer. 22:18-19). Thus we see the severity of the Lord in the judgment decreed upon this wicked man.



*We will reap what
we have sown.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

New Testament Characters

With respect to those of us who live in the Church Age and are governed by His Holy Spirit, we are commanded to fulfil all His good works that we have been foreordained to do (Eph. 2:10). We are to be full of good works. With this in mind, we have selected three New Testament characters whom we feel not only fulfil this commandment but are also role models who will inspire us to good works. They are Dorcas, Gaius, and Philemon.

All the aforementioned characters experienced the goodness of God, in that their names, will be remembered in all generations, for the accounts of their lives are recorded in Scripture.

Dorcas

One woman who is the epitome of good works is Dorcas, who is mentioned in Acts 9. Scripture records that she was sick and died. Knowing that the Apostle Peter was nearby, certain disciples sent for him. When he came, all the widows stood by him, weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made for them when she was alive. Then we read of how the Lord miraculously raised her from the dead, *“But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, [Dorcas] arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive”* (Acts 9:40-41).

Dorcas is a true role model for all women, since she fulfils the admonition of the Apostle Paul to Timothy concerning women in his church in 1 Timothy 2:9-10: *“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”*

Dorcas is a name synonymous with good works. A well-known English evangelist, Reverend Tom Rees of the 1950s showed me his car when I was at his residence in Hildenborough Hall. He said, “I call my car Dorcas because it is full of good works.” May we too be zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14) and become *“...teachers of good things...”* (Tit. 2:3), reproducing ourselves in others (Tit. 2:3, 7).

This godly woman was rewarded with the exemplary goodness of God when He raised her from the dead. She is one of the few mentioned in the New Testament who was resurrected.

Gaius

Gaius, called “well beloved” by the Apostle John, was apparently one of his spiritual children. The Apostle, writing in his third epistle, had received an excellent report from the brethren about Gaius that gave him much joy. He writes to Gaius, *“For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children*

walk in truth” (3 Jn. 1:3-4). Gaius was a man given to much hospitality to those of the brethren and to strangers likewise (3 Jn. 1:5-6). Known for his love, he certainly was a worthy recipient of the Apostle John’s love, who in turn was known as the Apostle of Love.

Therefore from the life of Gaius, we are exhorted to be filled with truth and to walk in it. We are also exhorted to walk in love as Gaius did, by which we may be given to much hospitality. The goodness of God flowed through his life in the realm of hospitality – a grace that all of God’s children are encouraged to practice.

Philemon

Philemon was the much-beloved Bishop of Colosse, who was a spiritual son of the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul wrote an epistle to him, which was named after him. In this epistle, Paul pays credit to Philemon’s peerless character. Philemon opened his house for church meetings. He was also evidently a teacher of repute, since Paul encourages him to communicate his faith by acknowledging all the good things that Christ had done in him (Phlm. 1:6). Moreover, he was well known for the manner in which he cared for the needs of the believers. Paul writes, “...*Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints*” (Phlm. 1:5).

The intent of the letter is to ask Philemon to receive back a runaway slave, Onesimus, who had evidently stolen from

Philemon. Knowing the loving, forgiving nature of Philemon, Paul asks that he receive Onesimus no longer as a slave, but as a brother. Onesimus had since been converted through Paul's teachings. Philemon evidently did as Paul requested, since Onesimus became a very profitable and beloved Bishop of Ephesus in his later years.

In the words of the Apostle John in 3 John 1:11, “ *Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.* ”

The goodness of God was manifested through Philemon when he not only received back his runaway slave, Onesimus, but he also elevated him to the ministry. Because of this act of the goodness of God in restoration, Onesimus eventually became the bishop of Ephesus. One New Testament saint, passing through Ephesus, wrote that Onesimus (meaning profitable) was profitable in name, and in deeds. Such was the fruit of the goodness of God in the life of Philemon.

We have chosen the following persons as those who, by their lives, merit to be called evil: Demas, Alexander the coppersmith, and Judas. They serve as lessons and warnings to all generations of God's people. Regretfully, during our journey from earth to heaven, we may see these three evil characters reproduced in many lives.

Demas

Demas was a companion of the Apostle Paul, and as such, journeyed with him. He is linked with the beloved physician,

Luke, in sending greetings from Rome to the converts in the Colossian church (Col. 4:14). The epistle was written from Rome on the occasion of Paul's first imprisonment. Demas had therefore seen the miracles God performed through the apostle and the wisdom that flowed from his teachings. Yet six years later, Paul writes in his second epistle to Timothy during his second imprisonment: "*For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia*" (2 Tim. 4:10).

Sadly, many who have started well, and have been fruitful for many years in the ministry, turn away at the end. Scripturally, we may think of Abiathar the priest, who served David so faithfully nearly all his life, but turned away to follow Adonijah instead of Solomon. In one fellowship, we regretfully have had our Abiathars, who have served faithfully in times of great difficulty but then at the end, turned aside, many into immorality. May God keep us faithful unto the end!

We see the severity of God in the life of Demas. The Apostle John stated that if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us (1 Jn. 2:15).

Demas is cut off eternally from fellowship with the Father and Jesus! He now experiences the terrors of hell's torments.

***May God keep
us faithful
unto the end!***

Alexander the Coppersmith

Alexander the coppersmith did much evil to the Apostle Paul. It appears that he was one of those, along with silversmiths at Ephesus, whose trade was threatened by the preaching of the Gospel. Demetrius is mentioned as one of the leading silversmiths who stirred up others to oppose Paul (Acts 19:24-27). It was from the making of shrines to the so-called goddess Diana that these workmen became wealthy. Paul had declared and persuaded the people that there were no gods made with hands. Thus, the trade of Alexander would have also been threatened, and his livelihood considerably diminished. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:14-15, *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.”*

What is the end of Alexander? The prayer of Paul tells us that he will be rewarded according to his works. There will be no heaven for Alexander, but a life of fire, brimstone, and torment forever and ever.

Judas

Judas, one of the original twelve apostles of the Lamb, was afforded an awesome opportunity – to walk with the Master for three and a half years. Yet his heart was full of covetousness. Although he was anointed with power and healed the sick, the things of God were not precious in his sight. Instead, he loved cursing and clothed himself with

cursing, as with a garment (Ps. 109:17-18). Moreover, he was a thief, for he stole from the moneybag of the disciples (Jn. 12:6). It is clear from Scripture that his parents were also wicked, for Psalm 109:14-15 states, *“Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the LORD; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the LORD continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth.”* In other words, their sins will never be forgiven.

It is interesting that Jesus, when speaking of Judas, told His disciples “one of you has a demon” (Jn. 6:70), revealing perhaps that from birth Judas was possessed. Yet if his heart had been towards the things of God, should he not have asked the Master to deliver him?

So many of our Lord’s parables involved illustrations concerning money, yet Judas did not hearken. We read of the night that he betrayed Jesus: *“And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night”* (Jn. 13:27-30).

Matthew 26:47-50 gives a further description of this account: *“And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that*

betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.” The cursing and covetousness, which Judas loved, controlled him.

This account of Judas ends with Matthew 27:3-8: *“Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.”* This love of money led Judas to betray the Son of glory for 30 pieces of silver.

Acts 1:16-19 confirms this: *“Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers*

at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood."

We are told that his wife and children became beggars (Ps. 109:9-10). In Mark 14:21, we read, "*The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born.*" The name Judas was entered into the vocabularies of many languages being synonymous with traitor. What eternal shame is heaped upon him!

CHAPTER EIGHT

Provision

One of the Lord's names is Jehovah Jireh – “the Lord sees and provides.” This name was first declared by Abraham in response to Isaac's question, “Where is the lamb?” when Abraham answered, “The Lord will provide for Himself a lamb for the burnt offering.” Shortly after this declaration of faith, Abraham espied a lamb caught in the thicket, the timely provision of Jehovah Jireh (Gen. 22:7-8, 13).

God's Goodness in Meeting the Needs of His Creation

The goodness of the Lord is associated with His provision for His creation. Thus we read in Psalm 104:10-18, *“He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth. And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart. The trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; Where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.”*

Here, we see that the Lord sends forth springs of water into the valleys to give drink to every beast of the field. The grass grows for the cattle, and herbs for man that he may bring forth food from the earth. Then the trees of the field are described as being full of sap. The birds make their nests in these trees, while the high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks are a home for the conies.

The psalmist declares that the Lord makes darkness a time when all the beasts of the forest creep out. With majestic solemnity the psalmist depicts the young lions roaring after their prey and seeking their meat from God: *"Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God"* (Ps. 104:20-21). Thus, he depicts the Lord as a God who is intimately involved with the needs of all His creation. The psalmist then breaks forth into an ode of praise for the wisdom of God through which He has created all His works: *"O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches"* (Ps. 104:24).

He then goes on to say, *"So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein. These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good"* (Ps. 104:25-28). The seas are filled with all kinds of fish which wait upon the Lord for their food in due season.

This theme is repeated in another psalm, where we see that all living creatures look to the Lord for their sustenance, and He bountifully supplies their need: *“The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing”* (Ps. 145:15-16).

In Matthew 10:29-31, the Lord said, *“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”* When we contemplate the greatness of the Lord in Creation and His constant provision for all His creatures, we should not be surprised at His words when He was upon the Mount of Beatitudes, *“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”* (Mt. 6:25-26).

We ourselves must come to know Jesus as Jehovah Jireh, the Great Provider. It starts with our Lord answering our prayer for little needs. For my wife and myself, a situation was created whereby we were in the depths of the cold of a North American winter and had no money, food, or oil to heat the house. There was a telephone, which would have enabled me to call friends who would have joyfully supplied all our needs. However, the Lord said, “Touch that phone and I am

finished with you.” We therefore prayed. After three days, a lady from the church came with food and a little money, enough to meet our immediate needs. From that experience we began to know Him as Jehovah Jireh. Since then we have seen Him faithfully supply for many personal needs and also for the needs of others on the mission field.

God’s Goodness in Provision through the Seasons

Continuing the thought of the goodness of God, we now contemplate His giving of the seasons, which are essential for the maintenance of life upon this planet. In God’s provision of these seasons, we can see both His wisdom and His goodness.

In Genesis 8:22, the Lord said, *“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”* Then there was the promise of rain that the Lord would give in due season. Deuteronomy 11:13-15 reads, *“And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.”* The first rain and the latter rain enabled the children of Israel to gather in their grain, wine, and oil. All these were conditional upon the Israelite of old keeping the commandments of God.

Even in times of drought, the Lord still gives rain to those of His saints who cry out to Him. Testimony after testimony could be given concerning the Lord's controlling of the elements for the benefit of His people. Perhaps the following three accounts will help.

John Wesley (1951) recounts in his journal that he was preaching at a time of intense sunshine:

Thursday, 24.—We rode in less than four hours the eight miles (so called) to Newell Hay [from Bolton]. Just as I began to preach the sun broke out and shone exceedingly hot on the side of my head. I found that if it continued, I should not be able to speak long, and lifted up my heart to God. In a minute or two it was covered with clouds, which continued till the service was over. Let any who please, call this chance: I call it an answer to prayer.

Thus, through prayer, the Lord graciously caused a cloud to appear to give him and his congregation solace from the hot sun.

On another occasion, when he was on a ship in the Irish sea, the ship was in the doldrums, and there was no movement because of lack of wind. At that time, Reverend Wesley (1951) was below deck, and this is what he wrote in his journal:

“Thur. 30. Having no wind still, I desired our brethren to come upon the quarter-deck; where we no sooner began singing a hymn, than both passengers and sailors gladly

assembled. The wind sprung up almost as soon as I began, and about nine the next day we entered Dublin-Bay; after so smooth and pleasant a passage as the Captain declared he had not had, at that time of year, for forty years.”

Thus, the Lord caused the wind to come, blowing the ship to its desired haven.

A friend of mine, the Reverend Joseph Blakeney, was preaching outside under some trees in Africa about the fact that nothing was too hard for God. When he was warned of an approaching storm, he was unperturbed, and had the congregation pray. They all then beheld the storm suddenly change course and circumvent their meeting place. Heavy torrential rain hit the surrounding areas, but did not come nigh them. So the meeting continued undisturbed.

Just recently there were reports from Burkina Faso of Christian families prayerfully sowing in faith in a time of drought, and of the rain falling steadily the following day. Our God controls the climate for the good of His people who earnestly seek Him.

God’s Goodness in Miraculous Provision

In the Old Testament, God’s provision was not simply confined to His normal sources to supply the needs of His people; but He, on occasions, intervened by the miraculous.

Throughout the 40 years in the wilderness, the Lord’s goodness was shown forth in that the Israelites’ garments did

not wax old nor did their feet swell. He fed them with manna from heaven. As Moses recounted in Deuteronomy 8:3-4, *“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.”* We may also add that in His goodness, the people were never sick (Ps. 105:37).

When the prophet Elisha met a poor widow of one of the sons of the prophet, he provided for her through the miraculous pouring out of oil from a cruse into every available pot. The cruse of oil did not run dry until the last pot was filled. She then sold the oil, providing for herself and her two sons (2 Ki. 4:1-7).

The Lord Jesus taught extensively on God’s provision: our Heavenly Father knows what we need. When the disciples had returned from a ministry trip, the Lord asked them, *“...When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing”* (Lk. 22:35). Thus we see that in His goodness, the Lord provides for all things in life.

This is again illustrated by the miracle of the feeding of the crowd of 4,000 people, which we quote verbatim, *“In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them,*

I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness. And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away” (Mk. 8:1-9).

Another illustration of the Lord’s provision is illustrated in the following story. Taxes have always been a source of bane for mankind. Was it not Benjamin Franklin who said that there are only two things that are certain in this world—taxes and death? Yet the Christian, like his Master, must be diligent in paying those taxes that are levied by responsible authorities upon us.

We refer to the following incident in the life of our Lord, as recorded in Matthew 17:24-27. The temple tax collectors came to Peter asking if his Master paid tribute money. Now we quote the reply of Jesus from Matthew 17:27, *“Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou*

hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee."

Testimonies of Provision

When studying the wondrous goodness of our Lord, it is important to look at testimonies of His goodness today. We can all be recipients of His goodness in our day-to-day life, as were His disciples of yore. We have included a few diverse tributes to that goodness from His saints that are alive today.

A recent testimony comes to us from one of our missionary families. They had given and given of their own personal finances to help the poor, and then realized that they needed to pay their own taxes. Through prayer, God graciously caused a stranger to send a cheque, which covered the amount of tax owed.

Many years ago in Switzerland, I was attending a pastor's convention. Among the various testimonies of the goodness of God, this one struck me as being very instructive. One pastor got up and said that for several weeks, he had prayed for money to buy a pair of shoes. Nothing happened, and he became somewhat discouraged. Then the Lord spoke and said, "What do you want Me to provide for you?" "A pair of shoes," the pastor responded. The Lord said, "Then why don't you ask Me for a pair of shoes instead of asking me for money?" Thereupon the pastor asked the Lord for a pair of shoes. Within a matter of a day or two, a pair of fine shoes was given to the pastor. The pastor tried them on, wondering if they were the right size. They were a perfect fit,

and of a higher quality than what he himself would have bought.

The lesson is to ask God precisely for what you want.

The above is somewhat reminiscent of the testimony of George Muller, who raised up the homes for orphans in Bristol, England (Reese, E., 1975):

One morning the plates and cups and bowls on the table were empty. There was no food in the larder, and no money to buy food. The children were standing waiting for their morning meal, when Mueller said, "Children, you know we must be in time for school." Lifting his hand he said, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat." There was a knock on the door. The baker stood there, and said, "Mr. Mueller, I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you didn't have bread for breakfast and the Lord wanted me to send you some. So I got up at 2 a.m. and baked some fresh bread, and have brought it." Mueller thanked the man. No sooner had this transpired when there was a second knock at the door. It was the milkman. He announced that his milk cart had broken down right in front of the Orphanage, and he would like to give the children his cans of fresh milk so he could empty his wagon and repair it. No wonder, years later, when Mueller was to travel the world as an evangelist, he would be heralded as "the man who gets things from God!

God's Goodness in Withholding Provision to Bring Repentance

God showed His goodness to His people when He provided for them, and also when He withheld provision from them. His

withholding was a means of chastening His children to bring them back to Him. The following story illustrates this truth.

When the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land, the Lord promised that it would be a good land of brooks and fountains, abundant in wheat, barley, olives, vines, fig trees, and pomegranates. There, they would eat bread without scarceness and they would not lack any good thing (Deut. 7:8-10). They were promised that if they kept God's Law, all these blessings from the hand of God would be theirs.

However, after the death of Joshua and the elders who had served God with him, the children of Israel rebelled. We then enter the times of the Judges, with cycles of disobedience, followed by judgments, and then by repentance, at which time God would send a deliverer. An example of this is recorded in Judges 6, when the Midianites greatly impoverished the Israelites by consuming all the crops of the land. This was God's severe judgment, which ultimately caused Israel to repent and cry out to the Lord. He sent them Gideon, who delivered them from the Midianite aggressors.

A certain missionary with whom I had been acquainted many years ago told me his own personal testimony. He had entered the mission field that God had sent him to. He worked hard and all the needs for himself and his family were being met. Then he started to become less diligent and, quite frankly, very lazy. Provision started to diminish and even prayer prompted no response. Then he asked the Lord why. Essentially, the Lord told him He would not pay a lazy worker (Mt. 25:26-28).

Another example of the Lord chastening through withholding provision was during the reign of King David, when the Lord called for a three-year famine to draw the king's attention to the sins of King Saul. We read in 2 Samuel 21:1, *"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites."* When these sins were atoned for, the famine ceased.

Perhaps the most famous famine of all was during the time of the divided kingdom, when no rain fell upon the territory of the northern ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel. This was occasioned during the reign of wicked King Ahab, when Elijah, that great prophet, declared that there would be no rain except at his word. The heavens withheld rain for three-and-a-half years, after which, at the word of Elijah, the rain came again (see 1 Ki. 17–18). Sadly, even though Ahab saw the miracles of God, and His fire falling upon the evening sacrifice, he did not repent of his sins.

We may close this section on the goodness of God by noting that the Lord is of tender mercies and is ever willing to care for His people. Even in His withholding of His provisions, He always has their ultimate good in mind – that they will be drawn to repentance and consequently return to their Creator. The Lord makes this clear in the following passage, *"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early"* (Hos. 5:15). We read in Psalm 119:67, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word."*

We also see the goodness of God in warning and preparing His people for famine. In the time of Elisha the Lord caused the prophet to warn the Shulamite woman of a seven year famine, instructing her to leave Israel for the land of the Philistines, which she did (2 Ki. 8:1-2). In the New Testament, a certain prophet named Agabus signified by the Spirit that there would be a great dearth (famine) upon the world that came to pass in the days of the Emperor Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:28). The New Testament saints were thus able to make provision for the brethren in Judaea.

There is another example of God's loving mercy and compassion for His people. It is illustrated during the time of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. Because of his evil ways, Israel was in very dire straits. Second Kings 14:26-27 states: *"For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash."* On this occasion, the Lord had mercy and blessed Israel in restoring many of the lands extending from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Galilee that had been lost. Thus, God even used an ungodly king to save Israel from the bitter affliction of Syria. This illustrates God's goodness in the midst of judgment.

***We ourselves must come to know
Jesus as Jehovah Jireh,
the Great Provider.***

CHAPTER NINE

Healing

The importance of healing the sick can only truly be appreciated when one has personally suffered through serious sickness, as certainly my wife and I have. Pastoring a particular church many years ago, I had an elder who asked me, “Why do you preach divine healing? It does not seem necessary to me.” This elder was a carpenter and engineer who had a wife who was hale and hearty. She lived to a ripe old age without suffering any physical ailments whatsoever.

“Quite right,” I replied, “You have never experienced a deep illness in your life. However, if you suffer the anguish and pain of sickness, then you will be very grateful to be able to pray to the Saviour, who gave His back to the smiters. Isaiah 53:5 says we are healed by His stripes.”

Sir Maxwell Aitken, the first Baron Beaverbrook, the media mogul of his day, although unsaved, had certain words of wisdom that we would do well to reflect upon. This famous, rich and successful man once said (I am paraphrasing this) that in essence, success is insignificant in comparison to health. **You can be the richest, most famous and successful man in the whole world, but if you have lost your health, you will be a very unhappy man. Success will mean nothing.**

God's Healing

We must start with Acts 10:38: *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."* From this verse, we may easily deduce that one form of the goodness of God, as manifested through Jesus, was His healing of the sick.

The healing ministry of Jesus had been foreshadowed by the words of Isaiah 53:5, which declared that Jesus would, by His stripes, heal us. This is confirmed by the words of the Apostle Peter, who said of the Lord Jesus, *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed"* (1 Pet. 2:24). Matthew 8:16-17 substantiates this: *"When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."*

The Lord, with eyes of benevolence, saw the multitude and healed them. I wish to link another aspect of the goodness of God with healing, namely, forgiveness. We are told in Psalm 103:2-3: *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases."* Worthy of note is that in His earthly ministry, these two virtues were so often linked.

We may refer to the following scriptures to see the relationship between healing and the forgiveness of sin. We have the account in Mark 2:2-12 of the man sick of the palsy, who was lowered through the roof of the house Jesus was preaching in. This man was greeted with words of compassion by the Lord: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." When the Lord was challenged by the scribes and Pharisees on His right to forgive sins, this was His response: "...*Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*"

Another example of the association of forgiveness and healing is found in the writings of the Apostle James, "*Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him*" (Jas. 5:14-15).

When God Chooses Not To Heal

The question, "Why does the Lord not heal everyone on every occasion?" is often raised. I have personally known

of cases where God's healing would have destroyed people. This infirmity, sickness, or in some cases, death, was the revelation of God's *goodness*. Ill health kept these people near to God. In the fullness of health, they would have followed other pursuits and pleasures, which would have led them away from church to their ultimate destruction. I submit as a basis the following testimonies:

In France, there was a mother who held her dying child in her arms, went into a church, and before the altar cried out, "My God, I will not let You take my son. Heal him!" The boy recovered from his sickness, lived to the age of 20, and was executed by the guillotine for murder. If only the mother had accepted God's wisdom.

I have been asked many times by parents, "If God is good, why did my child die so early? Why did God permit my son or daughter to be killed in a car accident?" According to His foreknowledge, your child might well have turned off the path of righteousness later on. I firmly believe that it was the goodness of God, for He was probably saving your child from eternal death.

Near to where we live, there was a terrible accident to young men of ages 17 and 19. They were killed in a truck that they were driving. I was asked why. I asked what the tendencies of these young men were, and discovered that they were into drinking and immorality. Perhaps, God in His goodness, was sparing the parents from great grief later on as a result of what these boys could easily have become.

Several other cases of early deaths have evoked the same realisation – God in His goodness and wisdom, spares many a parent deep grief in later years by taking their children before they bring their parents shame, sorrow, and disgrace.

We have also known, on occasions, at the deathbed of loved ones, that God was taking them in His goodness. The Lord has graciously given understanding in these situations that He knew the way that they would take – a way contrary to His wishes, which would end their lives disastrously. Therefore, in taking them, God was preserving them from eternal torment in hell.

CHAPTER TEN

Compassion

In considering the compassion of God, we must remember Paul's statement in Romans 9:15, "*I [God] will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*" Paul was quoting Exodus 33:19. I well remember a fellow minister in the western United States recounting an experience that he had had in prayer. He was asking God for compassion, and the Lord responded, "Compassion is mine." We therefore should have a godly fear. **We must never assume that we can live carelessly and expect to receive mercy and compassion.**

Psalms 145 speaks of the great goodness of God towards the sons of men throughout all generations. David praises Him in particular for His compassion and the tenderness with which He lifts up those who are bowed down. David says, "*The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works...The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down*" (Ps. 145:9,14).

To illustrate this aspect of our Lord, I would like to give a testimony of my own lovely wife. She had been suffering for a long time in her physical body and was in a very weakened condition. In this pathetic state, she cried out to the Lord, "Lord are you going to crush me and extinguish my life in this frail condition?" His reply was very gracious, as He tenderly led her to those words of His in Isaiah 42:3, where He declares "*A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking*

flax shall he not quench...” Then with His consummate tenderness, He touched my wife, and gradually His strength flowed through her body, making her strong again.

The following scriptures epitomise the compassionate nature of the Lord: ***“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust”*** (Ps. 103:13-14). The Lord’s compassion during His earthly ministry was manifested through healing the sick, and caring for the multitude who were like sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:36).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Forgiveness

Another side of the goodness of the Lord is to forgive the delinquent sinner. But first let us direct our thoughts towards the following passage in Hebrews 12:13: *“And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”* Here, the thought is clearly of the necessity of a spiritual healing, and not simply a physical manifestation of correcting lame legs.

Two incidents illustrate our point. When those friends placed the one sick of the palsy before Jesus, He said, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” Only afterwards did He heal him (Mk. 2:3-12), obviously showing clearly that the greatest goodness that He can show to mankind is to forgive us our sins. A physical healing is a lesser blessing than a spiritual healing. In light of eternity, I think we would all agree.

The second illustration is the goodness of the Lord towards the woman taken in the act of adultery, recorded in John 8:1-11. Here, we read that Jesus said to her, “I do not condemn thee,” but He also added, “Go, and sin no more.” We must ever be mindful of the fact that Jesus had compassion upon the sinner, but not on the sin.

Isaiah 38:17 says, *“Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.”*

Micah 7:19 clearly states, *“He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”*

To illustrate this scripture, we will look at a little story to delight the heart. A certain dignified churchman was placed in a situation in which he was called upon to provide hospitality to a very evangelical preacher. This preacher punctuated his speech with a “Praise the Lord!” followed by a loud “Hallelujah!” after almost every sentence. The churchman found this most irritating. Then he hit on a very sound method of quieting those expressions of enthusiasm. He invited the fired-up preacher to go to his study, and gave him a book on geography. There was a time of blessed quiet, to the relief of the churchman. Then a resounding “Hallelujah, praise the Lord!” emanated from his study. The irate churchman entered his study and demanded to know how the preacher could find anything in a geography book to enable him to praise the Lord. “Why,” said the preacher, “I have just read that in certain places, the oceans are many miles deep, and I know that is where God has cast all my sins.”

The subject of forgiveness is an integral part of the goodness of the Lord. The sacrifice of Christ was ordained before the foundations of the world. His sacrifice permitted the Holy Father before the Bar of Righteousness to forgive us our sins and trespasses. To show the magnanimity of His nature, the Lord Jesus said that we should forgive 70 x 7 times (Mt. 18:22). Moreover, all manners of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, except for the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

(Mt. 12:31). In the following scriptures, we will look at the matter of repentance.

In the Old Testament, God's readiness to forgive repentant sinners is shown in Jeremiah 3:13, 22: "**Only acknowledge thine iniquity**, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD...**Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.** Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.

Jeremiah 7:3-7 reads, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: '**Amend your ways and your doings**, and I will cause you to dwell in this place...For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.'"

Jeremiah 26:3 says, "If so be they will **hearken, and turn every man from his evil way**, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings."

Ezekiel 3:19-21 states: "Yet if thou **warn the wicked**, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again,

*When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. **Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned;** also thou hast delivered thy soul."*

Ezekiel 14:4-11 gives this account: *"Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; **Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols;** and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my*

hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord GOD.”

The essence of these verses is a very important theological truth – that the Lord desires for His backslidden children to return to Him. From these scriptures, the way back to God may be composed of the following steps:

1. To acknowledge one's sins
2. To repent and turn away from one's sins
3. To call out to God for forgiveness
4. To accept any punishment and consequences that God deems necessary

We also note that there is no forgiveness for those who do not forsake their sins. Cain is an example of one who was rebuked for his sinful ways, but hardened his heart to eventually commit murder. He did not receive forgiveness, but became a warning unto all generations (1 Jn. 3:10-12). Esau likewise was rejected, having once sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. Hebrews 12:17 says of him, *“For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”*

CHAPTER TWELVE

His Literal Presence

His goodness is manifested in His person by His glorious presence. We see this in Exodus 33:18-19, “*And he [Moses] said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he [the Lord] said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.*” His presence, therefore, is His goodness. To be in His presence means that we sense and receive of His goodness. Psalm 16:11 bears this truth out, “*Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*”

The main message of the days of David was that he brought the nation to Mount Zion, the dwelling place of God. We must consider the goodness of God, as He has chosen to reveal it, in the truths that are associated with Mount Zion, that hill which is termed His holy mountain. We are told in Psalm 132:13-14, “*For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*”

King David then also gives the qualifications for those who are called to ascend the Holy Mount as we read in Psalm 15:

1. He that walketh uprightly
2. Worketh righteousness
3. Speaketh the truth in his heart
4. He that backbiteth not with his tongue
5. Nor doeth evil to his neighbour
6. Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour
7. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned
8. Honoureth them that fear the LORD
9. Swareth to his own hurt, and changeth not
10. Putteth not out his money to usury
11. Nor taketh reward against the innocent

Thus Psalm 15 gives 11 of the 15 qualifications to ascend His Holy Mountain.

Psalm 24:3-4 gives the other four clear prerequisites for entering into the literal presence of God:

12. He that hath clean hands
13. A pure heart
14. Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity
15. Nor sworn deceitfully

This glorious experience would be analogous to entering into the Holy of Holies with Christ, where the laws are written upon the fleshly tables of our hearts (Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10, Heb. 10:16). This is possible through the receiving of that promise written in Psalm 65:4, *“Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the*

goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.” Such are the manifestations of His goodness to His chosen ones.

However, we must understand that in order to approach a holy God, we must first prepare our hearts and obey His commandments. His severity is shown when those conditions are not met. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, approached the altar with false fire. The fire of God’s presence came from off the altar and slew them. No mourning was permitted for them. Likewise in New Testament times, during a time of revival, Ananias and Sapphira were slain in the presence of Peter for lying to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:1-11).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Chastening

Then another aspect of His goodness is declared by Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews, *“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth...that we might be **partakers of his holiness**. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby”* (Heb. 12:6, 10-11).

Moreover, Psalm 94:12-13 declares the blessedness of the man whom the Lord chastens: *“Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.”* God reveals His goodness to those whom He chooses, by bringing them into His presence and giving them blessed rest from all their enemies.

We may see the importance of chastening from the following scriptures:

“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word” (Ps. 119:67).

“Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Prov. 22:15).

“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Prov. 23:13-14).

From these verses we may well understand that the Lord chastens us for our ultimate good that we may attain unto His holiness. It is through chastening that the Lord, in His goodness, teaches us His ways. This is substantiated in Psalm 25:8-9,12, where we read, *“Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way...What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.”*

The Book of Hosea expounds the ways of the Lord with the backslidden nation of Israel, whom He seeks to bring back to Himself. It is full of chastening and conviction, but ends with the following admonition, *“Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein” (Hos. 14:9).* It is, after all, the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

An example of God’s chastening is found in the life of King Jehoshaphat, where we see God dealing with a particular flaw (a propensity to love those who hated the Lord) time and time again. He was reproved by a prophet because he went with the wicked King Ahab into battle against Ramoth Gilead in 2 Chronicles 19:2, *“And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went*

out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.”

Then Jehoshaphat made an alliance with the son of Ahab, King Ahaziah. Second Chronicles 20:35-37 states: “*And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongaber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.*” This resulted in the destruction of their combined navies.

Sadly, Jehoshaphat did not learn from the destruction. He joined himself to Jehoram, the brother of Ahaziah and son of Ahab. The consequence of this series of alliances was that Jehoshaphat’s son (also named Jehoram) married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab (2 Chr. 21:6). She was responsible for leading Judah into deep sin.

The characters of King Jehoshaphat (the father) and King Jehoram (the son) were very dissimilar. Jehoshaphat was a righteous man, a true son of God. Therefore, God loved him and chastened him. The fault of Jehoshaphat was that at times his love was humanistic and not divine. **Divine love separates in its disposition between him that serves God and him that does not.**

However, his son Jehoram was a wicked man and led the people into sinful ways. He was in no wise joined to God. Therefore, God did not chastise him, but abandoned him, and his death, as we mentioned earlier, was God's judgment on him (2 Chr. 21:12-15).

Many, regrettably, are the occasions where I have seen those who have crossed the line of no return. They are those who are described in Hebrews 6:4-8: *"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."* Those who have once known the Lord as their Saviour and then turned away will be cast into the lake of fire, where they will burn eternally.

A young French evangelist comes to mind. We served together in the same Pentecostal church, but he took offense and left. Some years later, he ended up as a priest – smoking, drinking, and being quite miserable, too. Sadly, the senior pastor of that same church fell into immorality. Although he confessed his sin, he somehow could not meet God. He ended his life a few years later by hanging himself. By the grace of

God, I have been preserved and have continued preaching for well over 50 years after having left their company.

We see so poignantly this line being crossed by Pharaoh, who hardened his heart ten times. As a result, his heart was hardened by God ten times so that he **could not** repent. We must always remember that repentance is a gift from God. Then as we read in Exodus 14:4, the Lord said, *“And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so.”* Following the Lord’s instructions, *“...Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them”* (Ex. 14:27-28).

God’s Severity to the Unrepentant

We will now address the nature of our blessed Lord. While He is compassionate with those who repent, He is very severe with the unrepentant.

I well remember the case of a British government minister, John Belcher, in the administration of Prime Minister C.R. Attlee in the 1940s, who had been lifted up from obscurity as a railway clerk. His little girl was in the same Sunday

School in which I was a teacher. She had warned her father to give God the glory for His goodness in favouring him with this high position. Sadly, the father rejected her advice and attributed his success to his own abilities. After ignoring repeated warnings by his daughter, it resulted in his being involved in a business scandal. He was forced to resign in disgrace, ending in very meagre circumstances.

There have been famous preachers who have been exalted to great heights but have come tumbling down. Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe (who was the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), was such a case. Between 1847 and 1870, he was the most influential preacher in America. He lived an undisciplined life when young. He had not been a good student, but it was his oratorical skills that made him famous. In 1870, Theodore Tilton accused him of adultery with his wife, to which Beecher would never confess. The result was that he was given up to erroneous doctrines such as evolution. His after life is very doubtful. **An undisciplined life knows few boundaries and certainly lacks the wisdom that keeps the laws of God.**

Another preacher of the 1950s had a similar remarkable elevation only to end his life miserably. Having been rescued by the Lord from drunkenness, he was then called to the ministry. He became a very famous evangelist, renown on several continents, who preached to vast crowds, but the love of money became his downfall. In meetings he would offer to pray a blessing upon those who would bring large denomination banknotes to the platform. He

became wealthy through this means. The displeasure of the Lord was evident, for at the end of his life, a pastoral colleague of mine testified that he found many bottles of liquor in his bathroom. However, he would not confess to being an alcoholic. He died, as he was, a drunkard far from God.

It is crucial that we understand it is only God's goodness which enables us to be what we are. Let us not tempt God, as many have done, by thinking we are special because we have been blessed, and thus can live carelessly and play with sin. If we do so, we shall suffer His severity slowly but surely.

In examining His severity towards the unrepentant, we have decided to focus on the sins of slothfulness and criticism. We have chosen examples from Scripture concerning slothfulness since it is one of the seven deadly sins listed by Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century. We have chosen the sin of criticism because of the severity of punishment God deems on those who criticise (Mt. 7:1-5).

These sins are not considered harmful by many of God's people, yet they can so easily beguile us into a false sense of security, while causing us to lose our eternal salvation.

The Slothful

We see this in the case of the following parable from the Gospel of Luke 19:12-26:

*He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have **kept laid up** in a napkin: For **I feared thee, because thou art an austere man:** thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.*

*And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, **thou wicked servant.** Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him*

the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

Then the case of the one who was given one talent:

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

*His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, **I knew thee that thou art an hard man**, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And **I was afraid**, and went and **hid thy talent in the earth**: lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

*His lord answered and said unto him, Thou **wicked and slothful servant**, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the **unprofitable servant** into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*
(Mt. 25:14-30)

We should diligently note that in both these parables, the Lord is referred to as “a hard and an austere man.” He does not seek to deny this description of Himself. In the Hebrew, the word “austere” can be translated as “severe.” The seriousness of these two parables is augmented by the second where the one who buried the talent was definitely cast into the “outer

darkness.” Therefore, particular warnings should be given to all those who are not stirring up the gifts that the Lord has given, or who, like Archippus, are not using the ministry that the Lord had given them. The Apostle Paul had warned Archippus in Colossians 4:17, “...*Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*”

The indictment of being wicked and slothful needs to be examined very closely indeed. In what way did this servant merit the term wicked? It was because he did not put His Lord’s talent in the bank to receive interest. In our book entitled *Heaven’s Glories and the Untold Terrors of Hell*, we make the point that many Christians were condemned to hell because they were not paying tithes. Not only does the tithe belong to the Lord (Mal. 3:8-10) – if it is withheld, the Church is deprived of an income that could be used in propagating the gospel for the salvation of souls. Likewise, the slothfulness of one can affect the eternity of many. That this servant also merited the denunciation of being slothful, none can deny.

The five foolish virgins were slothful in that they neglected to provide sufficient oil for themselves. They were barred from entering into the marriage feast. The Lord even refused to acknowledge them, saying, “I know you not” (Mt. 25:8-12). Such is the seriousness of a slothful life!

Diligence is a virtue lauded in Holy Scripture. From the quotations below, we can see that the diligent are commended and amply rewarded in this life. Hard work ensures a person of the following blessings:

- The diligent shall be financially comfortable. We quote Proverbs 10:4, *“He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.”* (See also Prov. 13:4, 21:5.)
- The diligent shall have recognition amongst their peers and overseers. *“Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men”* (Prov. 22:29).
- The diligent shall rule over their brethren. Proverbs 12:24 says, *“The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.”*

The Lord indicates that the diligent will be called to rule, when He rewarded the one who gained ten pounds by putting him over ten cities, and the one who gained five pounds by putting him over five cities. At the same time, remember the severity with which the one who hid the pound or the talent was treated.

A good illustration of diligence can be seen in the honeybee. Actually, the Hebrew word for “honeybee” is “Deborah” – the same as the girl’s name, with which we are familiar. A honeybee is very energetic, well organized, fruitful, and diligent to take good care of its young. I think that describes one who produces ten pounds or five talents.

The Critical

As we return to the severity of the Lord with respect to judgment, let us consider the Sermon on the Mount. In

Matthew 5:22, the Lord said, *“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”*

The word “fool” (*moros*) can be defined as “dull,” or “stupid.” Therefore, we need to take serious heed regarding how we address each other – in our *thoughts*, *words*, and *actions* toward one another. Our actions in this matter will affect our eternal position and may even determine our abode, whether we will end in heaven or in hell.

Leaders must be very careful not to criticise those in superior positions. The classic case in Scripture is when Miriam and Aaron criticised their younger brother, Moses, for marrying an Ethiopian woman. We read in Numbers 12:2, *“And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.”* Miriam, obviously the perpetrator, was smitten with leprosy for seven days.

I have experienced, in the course of over 60 years of ministry, several women who have criticised leadership. There was a lady in France who would regularly rise at four o’clock in the morning and spend much time in prayer. However, she plagued the pastor by criticising him to members of the congregation and causing much trouble. She refused to repent.

Regretfully, she is not in heaven, for in the last sermon that I preached in that church, the Lord described her judgment. I can remember stamping my foot on the ground to emphasise the word of the Lord. He would crush her, just as one would crush the head of a serpent. She left the church that day telling her friend, “I am finished.” She knew.

On a certain Sunday morning when she was driving to church to partake of Holy Communion, it was as though an unseen hand swept the car from the road and wrapped it around a tree by the roadside. They could not get her out. She died undesired.

The sin of criticism has a profound imprint upon the lives of others. One well-known evangelist of the 20th century, George Jefferies, often declared that criticism caused cancer in those who were criticised. This may well be true since life and death are in the power of the tongue (Prov. 18:21).

Essentially, the golden rule “do unto others as you would have them do to you” should be a way of life. Speak well of others, and life, health, and blessing will be your portion.

Greater Light

The case of the severity of God should also be examined in the light of visions that are being increasingly given in the Church as warnings to the Christians. These visions show Christians who have strayed from the pathway of

righteousness, died and gone to hell. The visions have shown them there with their Bibles, grasping for the impossible, thinking that somehow they will escape the pit to which they have been assigned.

We would do well to consider Matthew 7:21-22, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”* Here we see Christians who have been used of God to prophesy, heal the sick, and cast out devils being told by the Lord that He never knew them. They never came into fellowship with Him to have their character changed. The Lord calls them wicked because in spite of their being used by Him, they were still living in their sins.

Let us firstly examine scriptural warnings, which are plentiful in number. In the parable of the True Vine, our Lord Jesus states clearly that He is the Vine, His Father is the Husbandman, and we are the branches. Then He clearly states in John 15:2, *“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he [God the Father] taketh away...”* He continues by revealing that the key to fruitfulness is to abide in Him. We know that fruitfulness is essential to being accepted by Him; and fruitfulness consists of bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit in our lives – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22-23).

He then goes on to say, *“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned”* (Jn. 15:6). As Christians, we are the branches, if we no longer abide in Him (the Vine), we are rejected and go to the pit of hell.

Along with this warning, there is another that flows in the same vein. We read in Romans 11:11-22 that the Israelites, God’s chosen people, were cut off and cast away because of their unbelief, but the believing Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree. Yet the Apostle Paul warns, *“Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. 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. 11:18-22). If we do not continue walking in His goodness, then God will not spare us.

The key, therefore, is continuance in well doing, as we see in the examples of the faithful and wicked servants in Christ’s teaching on the Second Coming. Reading in Matthew 24:45-51, we see that the faithful servant shall be blessed. In contrast, the wicked one says that His Lord delays His coming, and he begins to beat his fellow servants. Of the wicked servant Scripture says, *“The lord of that servant*

shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 24:50-51).

It is a fact attested to by those who have had revelations and visions of hell that Christians receive greater judgment than those who knew not the truth. We quote from the testimony of one of seven Colombian youth who had been taken by the Lord into hell (recorded by the international ministry Light for the Nations):

Then we started going through different sections. We came to the most terrible section of hell, where the worse torments happen; the center of hell. The most concentrated forms of torment; such torments that a human being could never express them. The only people here were those who knew Jesus and the Word of God. There were pastors, evangelists, missionaries, and all types of people that had once accepted Jesus and knew the truth; but lived a double life.

We quote Luke 12:47-48, *“And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”*

Greater Responsibility

After God had met Moses in the burning bush and commissioned him to go down into Egypt, Moses went with his wife and sons and stayed in an inn on their way. We read then that God sought to slay him. Exodus 4:24-26 reads, *“And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the **LORD met him, and sought to kill him.** Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.”*

Moses was saved by his wife Zipporah, who circumcised his two sons. Moses was the minister of circumcision, but he was not practising this in his own family. Perhaps we could say that this is one of the most poignant scriptures that should put a reverential fear into the hearts of all ministers who are preaching but not practising the truths that the Lord has entrusted to them.

The Apostle Paul develops this caution specifically in the following passages: *“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou **the riches of his***

goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile” (Rom. 2:1-9).

It behooves us, therefore, to walk circumspectly. We should remember the exhortation of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, “*I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*” If Paul was watchful over his life, so that he did not err from the Christian path, should we not be the more so?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Life of the Believer

Now since we are to be like our Master in all aspects of His glorious character, the attribute of goodness must be highly developed in our lives. Goodness is essentially the performing of good works with kindness and a generous, willing spirit, out of a heart of love.

The New Testament saints were continually exhorted to good works. It was these works that exemplified their faith in action. As the Apostle James said, *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (Jas. 2:26).

Furthermore, the Apostle wrote to illustrate this, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”* (Jas. 2:21-25). Yes, faith is demonstrated by our works.

One manifestation of good works is the giving of alms to the poor. The Lord Jesus Christ and the Early Church were consistently encouraging the care of the poor. Those in

nursing homes and prisons are also to be our concern. The Lord Himself said, "When I was in prison, did you visit Me?" This signifies that doing it to others is, in effect, serving Him (see Mt. 25:33-46).

In His teaching on the Mount of Olives, the Lord Jesus said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt. 5:3). He illustrated this with the story of "The Rich Man and Lazarus," which we have already mentioned. The rich man lived sumptuously upon earth while Lazarus the beggar was nourished by the crumbs from his table. However, at death, Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom while the rich man was enveloped by the flames of hell.

In the first Apostolic Council, one of the charges given to Paul was that he should remember the poor. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:10, "*Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.*" He faithfully carried out this charge and urged his sheep to do likewise.

Our fellowship has ministries to the poor, which we believe are pleasing to the Lord. We have the privilege of feeding many hundreds of poor and needy folk in Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world.

Good Works

We see the attribute of goodness developed in the lives of those two blessed kings Hezekiah and Josiah, as their chroniclers tell us:

Hezekiah

“And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered” (2 Chr. 31:20-21).

“Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel” (2 Chr. 32:32).

Josiah

“Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his goodness, according to that which was written in the law of the LORD, And his deeds, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah” (2 Chr. 35:26-27).

In considering the good works of the kings, Scripture says they sought the Lord, walked in His ways, administered justice to their people, and cared for the poor.

We are exhorted, admonished, and encouraged to major in good works, to become worthy to be the sons and daughters of God. Hence Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* Likewise he also says in Colossians 1:10, *“That ye might walk*

worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Through Jeremiah the prophet, the Lord made the point to King Shallum that Josiah, his father, knew the Lord as evidenced by his good works. *"Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD"* (Jer. 22:15-16).

Giving

It is in the realm of giving that goodness is perhaps manifested and seen the most. There are three fundamental rules for giving. They are enunciated in 2 Corinthians 8:4-5, which reads, *"Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."*

Thus, we see that the rules are:

1. To give oneself to the Lord, so that all giving is under His direction.
2. To give oneself to one's pastor, which essentially means to place oneself at his pastor's disposition so that one can be of assistance to him as need be.
3. To give a freewill offering for the needs of the saints and the poor.

There are other rules to be kept in giving. For example, the Lord said in Matthew 6:1-4, *“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.”* The sense here is that whenever possible, we give anonymously.

The Book of Proverbs sums up best the one who manifests the goodness of God by describing him as “having a bountiful eye.” He is one who sees the needs of others and meets them: *“He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor”* (Prov. 22:9).

We have already commented upon the fact that goodness is related to, or expressed by good works. This goodness is engrafted in creation, since the Lord, speaking of trees says, *“Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit”* (Mt. 7:17-18).

Therefore, good works spring from a person’s innermost being, as the Lord in effect was saying to the scribes and Pharisees, *“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good;*

or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Mt. 12:33-35).

True goodness radiates from the heart of a man. Therefore, we must attend to our heart as to a garden. It should be carefully cultivated so that all weeds (works of the flesh) and stones (areas of rebellion and hardness) are removed. Then it should be liberally sown with the seeds of spiritual cinnamon, which is a type of goodness. These seeds of goodness will produce acts of goodness towards all mankind, especially to those of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

The Beauty of a Life of Goodness

Moses, crying out to the Lord, said, *“I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory.”* To this, the Lord responded, *“...I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy”* (Ex. 33:19).

The prophet Zechariah exclaims, *“For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty...”* (Zech. 9:17). Therefore, His beauty radiates from His goodness.

Beauty pervades the life of the one given to goodness, as this story illustrates. One person who has, if I can say it in this fashion, fascinated me is a lady who founded a factory that made Victorian dolls. She employed herself in this way solely because she desired to give to certain charities. When interviewed and asked about her very substantial giving, she acknowledged that perhaps she was giving too much, but added that she gave to a very worthy cause. This lady, who was in her eighties at the time of the TV interview, had an aura of goodness that radiated from her.

In giving alms, all things are made clean to us as we abide in the love of God (Lk. 11:41). Giving purifies us from covetousness and the love of money, which we know is the root of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). However, we want to say that giving alone cannot save us. Our giving simply enhances our character and advances the kingdom of the beloved Son of God.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Eternal Blessings and Eternal Judgment

The very essence of God is goodness, and from Him flows goodness. One should also not forget that the desire of God towards His children is summed up by the Apostle Paul, when he says in Ephesians 1:3, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”* In Romans 8:32, he then depicts the love of God thusly by saying, *“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?”* Thus from God’s glorious being, His goodness radiates streams of pure delight to help all those who call upon His name in truth and faith.

God has rewards reserved for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We would do well to contemplate Hebrews 11:6, *“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.”*

We, as His sons and daughters, should seek to be filled with His goodness and lovingkindness so that we might be a pleasure to our God, our Heavenly Father. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 2:7, for those who patiently continue in well doing, *“...glory and honour and immortality, eternal life”* shall be their reward.

One's eternal position is determined by one's life and ministry on this earth. To the degree that we have been faithful and fruitful here unto every good work, so shall our eternal place and reward be. Nothing is forgotten.

A certain lady whom I knew who had been in heaven for many hours once told me that even a smile or a kind word is suitably rewarded. However, there is nothing but the fierceness of God's anger awaiting the backslider. "My soul," Jesus said, "Shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38). The key to eternal life is to give pleasure to our blessed Lord by living a life of fruitfulness cradled in love and holiness. The believer who brings forth much fruit glorifies the Heavenly Father.

On the other hand, the severity of eternal judgment is meted out to those who do not produce the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. This is shown in John 15:6 where the Lord says, *"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."* Here, the unfruitful branches are cut off from Christ the True Vine and are cast into the fire to be burned. This speaks of being cast into the Lake of Fire forever and forever. This thought recurs elsewhere in Scripture. Every tree that the Father has not planted will be plucked up by the roots (cf. Jude 1:12). We desire to be trees of righteousness that remain (Isa. 61:3).

In Matthew 25, where Christ taught the parable on the talents, the servant who hid his talent and therefore was unfruitful was cast into outer darkness.

Romans 2:8-11 says of those who are unrighteous: *“But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile...For there is no respect of persons with God.”*

***Few realise
the effects
our lives have
upon those
around us.***

Few realise the effects our lives have upon those around us and upon family and friends. The Apostle Paul declares in Romans 14:7, *“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.”* The Word of God tells us that judgment upon a wicked person endures unto the fourth generation. Those traits that we have developed in our lives are either going to be a blessing or a curse unto our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren, and our great, great grandchildren.

A case in point is King David to whom God promised to be a Father unto his children for many generations. He would chasten those who turned from the pathways of righteousness. Yet because of his own immorality, David left a terrible trait in his son, Solomon. Solomon broke the commandment to kings in Deuteronomy 17 by having many wives (mostly heathen), who took his heart away from God.

On a more personal basis, a friend of my mother-in-law made a very sad marriage. Her husband was an immoral drunkard.

The consequences were clear to this lady's two sons. She said, "If you touch alcohol, my sons, you will become like your father." Well, the elder son ignored his mother's warning, saying, "One glass will not hurt me." But wine is a mocker. That one glass for someone with a weak nature wrought havoc. He became a drunkard and an immoral man like his father.

The younger son was wiser. He went to church, becoming one of the pillars of the congregation. He touched no wine and remained faithful to his wife. He raised a beautiful family and his sons and daughters followed in his footsteps. Thus, he became an eternal blessing, raising a godly seed, whereas his brother has regretfully entered hell.

In considering the goodness and severity of God, may we patiently do those things that are good and pleasing in His sight. Our desire should be to hear those words, "*Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*" (Mt. 25:23). We may well conclude this little tome with the words of Moses: "*I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: **therefore choose life...***" (Deut. 30:19). Therefore, choose life, that you may be able to say with King David: "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever*" (Ps. 23:6). Amen, amen, and amen!

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The International Ministry of Light to the Nations is an evangelistic ministry founded by seven people (a revelation of Heaven and Hell to seven Colombian youths), who by the goodness, will, and purpose of God, had a series of collective experiences with the Lord Jesus Christ in Hell and in Heaven with the purpose of showing and sharing the message of God of the real and physical existence of these places as an extension and consequence of each person's lifestyle, not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance and salvation of souls.

This ministry is currently sharing these powerful experiences in different places and through different media. By God's mercy this message has been taken to more than 7000 churches in Colombia and different nations. The testimony has reached the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Honduras, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Panama, Venezuela, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico, Africa, France, Spain, Switzerland, Japan, Germany and

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