

The Witness of the Spirit

—Access to God's Peace

*“Peace I leave with
you, my peace
I give unto you.”
—John 14:27*

THE PEACE OF GOD IS that which comes through a realization of his divine power, his goodness, and his willing-

ness to hold us by his right hand as his children. (Ps. 17:7; 18:35; 63:8) God's peace is in contrast to the world's promise of peace, for it is not dependent upon outward circumstances, but upon a proper balancing of the mind and heart. (Phil. 4:7) Divine peace is permanent and firmly grounded in the promises of God's Word. We are told, “Since God is for us, who can be against us?”—Rom. 8:31, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

We need spiritual rest and peace to sustain us in these challenging times. There is no real peace outside of the Lord's gracious provision. Whatever our condition, whether in sickness or health, whether in extremely poor or in comfortable circumstances, those whom God is dealing with have the means by which to claim God's peace. Our access to peace

comes in a large measure through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in our heart and mind, and by its witness in our life. Paul stated: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."—Rom. 8:16

THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The Spirit of God is his invisible power, or influence. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament translated "spirit" is *ruach*, and in the New Testament the Greek word *pneuma* is the one rendered spirit in our English Bibles. The original meaning of these words was "wind" or "current of air," but through usage their import gradually broadened to include almost any kind of invisible power or influence. As the power or influence of God is invisible, *ruach* and *pneuma* came to be used by the writers of the Bible to describe divine power. God's influence is always holy, so it is properly said to be his "Holy Spirit."

The way that God's power operates is by appealing to the hearts and minds of those created in his image by a revelation of his will and inviting their obedience to it. We might speak of this as the power or influence of God's mind over ours. When we are thus endeavoring to be guided by his revealed will, we are being led by his Spirit, which will give us peace.

God reveals his will through his written Word. Thus, the words found in the Bible are a product of the Holy Spirit. The apostle explains that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Pet. 1:21) Likewise, the teachings of Jesus and the apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The one perfect example we have of doing

the will of God is found in the written record of the life of his only begotten Son, Jesus, which was a Spirit-filled life. Whenever, therefore, we open the pages of the Bible to seek instruction for our guidance in doing the will of God, it means that we are putting ourselves in contact with, or under the guidance of, the Holy Spirit.

Through the Word of truth, God not only directs his consecrated people in the doing of his will, but he encourages them with the assurance that he has accepted them into his family and will give them strength to follow in his Son's footsteps. It is these assurances that Paul speaks of in the text quoted earlier as the "witness" of the Spirit. The witness of the Spirit is in reality God's testimony to us of that wondrous love which he has bestowed upon us in making us his sons. (I John 3:1-3) It is only by being assured of this blessed sonship that we can, with peace and full confidence, look up to God and cry, "Abba, Father."—Rom. 8:15

THE WITNESS IN US

Through his Word, and therefore by his Holy Spirit, God has assured us in many ways of our standing with him, although only twice is the English term "witness" used in these assurances. One of these is in I John 5:9,10, which reads: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."

The expression, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself,” is a very important one. The Apostle John, who wrote these words, quotes Jesus as saying, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) This, then, is the “witness” that every sincere believer is assured of, namely, that the Father has drawn him to Christ, and that his knowledge of Christ and believing on him is because of God’s drawing power. This is a most important assurance of our relationship with God, and it is a witness of the Spirit because it was the Holy Spirit which inspired John to furnish this information.

So that we may have access to the peace of God, we should ask ourselves certain questions. Have we, through the truths found in the Bible, been drawn to God? Have these truths revealed to us his Son, Christ Jesus, and his part in the divine arrangement? Do we recognize that through him, and through the merit of his blood, is the only way by which we can approach unto God with the assurance of his acceptance? Has this knowledge revealed to us the invitation of the Scriptures to present ourselves in sacrifice, to make a full consecration of our all to do God’s will? Have we made such a consecration, and if so, has God since been blessing us with an ever-increasing appreciation of his love and a clearer understanding of his promises, particularly those “exceeding great and precious promises” whereby we “might be partakers of the divine nature”?—II Pet. 1:4

If these things be so, we have the witness of the Spirit through Jesus that the providences of God have been overshadowing and enlightening us, and that

we have been begotten by his Spirit to be a member of the house of sons over which Jesus is the Head. (Heb. 3:6) “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”—Rom. 8:17

The fact that we have been drawn to God through Christ and have been inspired by the Word of Truth to make a full consecration to do his will, witnesses that God himself is dealing with us, for no one can come to Christ otherwise, as has been stated. There is only one calling during the present age. (Eph. 1:18; 4:1,4) Just as the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the call and development of the church could not begin until God’s due time, which was at Pentecost, so it cannot continue beyond God’s fixed time. As long as it does continue, and we can see unmistakable evidences of it, we may be certain that God’s due time for the end of all opportunity to run toward the “mark for the prize of the high calling” has not yet come.—Rom. 11:25; Phil. 3:13,14

IF WE SUFFER WITH HIM

The other use of the term “witness” as descriptive of God’s acceptance of our consecration, and of us as probationary members of the body of Christ, is recorded in Romans 8:16-19, already partially quoted. In this passage the apostle explains that the Holy Spirit testifies that we are the children of God and joint-heirs with Christ, “if” we suffer with him. The scriptural background of this thought is very clear and definite. From I Peter 1:11 we learn that the “Spirit” of God caused the Old Testament prophets to testify “beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

In this epistle Peter emphasizes the very important truth of the Gospel that the consecrated followers of Jesus share in his sufferings which the prophets foretold. The meaning of the apostle's words is clear. If we have been drawn to God, consecrated ourselves to do his will, and are having the privilege of suffering with Christ, then the Holy Spirit is testifying, or witnessing to us, that we are having a share in the divine arrangements which his Spirit caused his prophets to record.—Mal. 3:16,17

Some may feel that they are doing very little suffering with Christ, hence wonder if this witness really belongs to them. However, we should not think of suffering as necessarily meaning bitter and painful persecution, beginning as we enter the narrow way, and continuing to its close. (II Tim. 2:11,12) Even Jesus did not suffer continuously. Indeed, he was never popular with the religious rulers of his day, but the common people loved Jesus and gladly accepted him. He was self-sacrificing in his service to others, but much of the time he moved within a circle of trusted and beloved friends, engaging occasionally merely in word battles with the scribes and Pharisees.—Matt. 23:13

Not until near the close of his ministry did the prince of darkness direct his hosts against the Master with such fury as to bring about his arrest and death. It was then that he experienced his real Gethsemane [Greek: oil press]. The important thing was that he was ready for the severe suffering when it came, and this is the essential consideration for us.—I Pet. 2:21-23

Meanwhile, are we keeping separate from the unholy spirit and attitude of the world and discovering

more and more each day how little interest we really have in its selfish ways? (Col. 3:1,2; I John 2:15,16) In keeping apart from the spirit of the world because our interests are on higher things, do we find ourselves being shunned from those of the world around us? Are we letting our light shine so that our friends and neighbors know that we do not share their views on politics and religion, and because of this do we sense their lack of interest in us? In other words, has our acceptance of the Truth and of Jesus, and our consecration to follow in his steps, caused us to realize more and more vividly each day that while we are in the world, we are not of its spirit? If so, God's Holy Spirit is bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God and are letting our "light so shine before men."
—Matt. 5:16

If we are presently in a favorable period of comparative calm in our Christian experience, let us zealously use this time to fortify ourselves in preparation for the more severe trials which may come later. Additionally, let us not be overly concerned about a possible great and final test of our loyalty to the Lord while perhaps neglecting the little opportunities that come our way each day of letting our light shine, of standing up for him, and of enduring hardness as a "good soldier" of Jesus Christ. (II Tim. 2:3) It is only those who, by leaning on God's grace, are faithful in small ways, who will grow "strong in the Lord" and thus be prepared for the more difficult trials which may lie ahead.—Eph. 6:10

Closely allied with the witness of the Spirit concerning our privilege of suffering with Christ are the words of the Master, "Whosoever therefore

shall be ashamed of me and of my words, ... of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father.” (Mark 8:38) How do we stand with respect to this matter? Do we have a longing desire to honor God and Jesus on every suitable occasion by bearing witness to the Truth concerning them and concerning the divine purpose in which their love for the church and the world is revealed? (II Tim. 4:2) If so, then we have this witness that the Master will be glad to own us “when he cometh in the glory of his Father.”

OVERCOMING THE WORLD

John wrote, “Every one who is begotten of God doth overcome the world.” (I John 5:4, *Young’s Literal Translation*) This begetting is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Truth. If we have been begotten of God it means that we have his Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts, and that his will, disposition, and love are the dominant factors governing our lives. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of love, and it is in direct contrast with the spirit of selfishness which rules the world. Do we have this spirit, and is it indeed causing us to live, not for ourselves as does the world, but for the Lord, for the Truth, for the brethren, and for all people as we have opportunity? (Gal. 6:10) If so, then we have another witness that we are the children of God.

The “victory” [Greek: means of success] which overcomes the world, the apostle says, is our faith. (I John 5:4) It is faith in God’s plans for the blessing of the people and faith in his will for us. A victorious faith will enable us to turn aside from the popularity which the world offers, (*Continued on page 36*)