

"Filled with All the Fullness 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 24.

Let us, in this quiet period of meditation together around the Word of God, endeavour to extract, in as full measure as we can, the transcendent comfort and deep spiritual adventure of these wonderful words.

Let us not, like so many, struggle to wring all the meaning and inspiration out of them in an effort to pull them down to our own natural, mundane level of thought and experience. Let us rather let their full impact flood over us and fill us with awe and reverent fear in the contemplation of the marvellous, eternal purpose to which we, by the grace of God, are related.

"Now unto him who is able to present you **FAULTLESS** . . ."

With God all things are possible. The only salvation for the Berean body, and for the Christadelphian movement as a whole, is—by the transforming inspiration of such heavenly promises—to develop generally an exalted frame of mind and habit of thinking that dwells on a far higher plane than the natural mind.

This **MUST** be the *general condition of the membership* if we are to be a part, in our day and generation, of the true, holy Bride of Christ developed through the travail of the ages. Otherwise we are, as a body, just deceiving ourselves—pretending to be completely different from all the rest of the perishing world, when actually we are not.

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . He that is spiritual discerneth all things . . . **We have the mind of Christ.**"

Here is the key. On this we stand or fall. "*We have the mind of Christ.*" There is no use just trying to talk people out of various foolish, worldly things—alien associations, following worldly sports, television, smoking, the literature, entertainments, activities and unclean habits of the heathen world around us.

The glorious Gospel of God is a positive, not a negative, thing. If we are to have any justification for separate existence as a body from the various Christadelphian sects and the world around us, we must generally develop and inhabit a spiritual plane of thought that will make an indulgence in godless habits and empty pastimes utterly unthinkable to us.

If we do not set ourselves to strive to attain to this general condition as a body, we might just as well give up the struggle and drift down the broad and easy way with the rest. "*We have the mind of Christ,*" says Paul—the fervent, devoted, spiritual viewpoint that Christ had. *Can we say it with him?*

"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."

Are we boldly taking advantage of the ecstasy of these glorious, heavenly things? Or are we blindly endeavouring to be content with natural poverty and gloom while within reach of unsuspected, limitless spiritual riches and light? Are we vainly, frustratingly labouring to lift ourselves by inches, when we could—if we would only believe it possible—be carried away by the Spirit to the limitless heights and grandeur of the "heavenlies in Christ."

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"God hath chosen us in Christ that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

Do we comprehend the testimony of such Scriptures? Do we, in fact, attach any deep meaning to them *at all*? Or do we just dutifully plod over them in our Daily Readings—*wholly oblivious to their stupendous import*?

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"Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are **His** workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:9).

We do nothing of ourselves. Even Jesus himself, who rendered perfect obedience in every respect to his Father's will, said—

"I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30).

But those few who, like him, completely give up their own will and desires, and submit themselves to the Divine Hand, are shaped by God into glorious vessels of beauty and honor—"We are *His workmanship*."

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"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word: that he might present it to himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be **holy and without blemish**" (Eph. 5:27).

Are we afraid to face and analyse the import of these teachings, and to compare ourselves with them? The great purpose of God—and this is a most vital point—the great purpose of God through Christ is to purify and perfect, *not just in type and shadow and imputation like the purifications of the Law* but in LIVING REALITY.

His eternal purpose is to develop for Himself a glorious community of holiness and spiritual beauty, cleansed from all the unloveliness of the flesh; a community wholly, joyously and unitedly dedicated to "good works"; a community with no other interest in life than the worship and service of God, and the love of the brethren; a community that have put away everything that is of the benighted, perishing world, and who—*not of themselves but by the operation of the mighty power of the Spirit*—can stand exultantly before God HOLY AND BLAMELESS IN LOVE.

Do we, individually and collectively, correspond to this Divine image of the beautiful, sanctified Bride of Christ?

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"That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 2:19).

What does it mean? Surely a more comprehensive and sublime statement could not be made! Consider the magnitude of the thought! "*Filled with all the fulness of God*"!

How all our smallnesses and pettinesses and impatience and foolishness and selfishness and thoughtlessness stand naked and ashamed before it! How mean and sordid does every fleshly thought seem under the brilliant light of its transcendent glory!

What would it do to our characters and our course, of life from moment to moment if we could but keep this glorious conception constantly in the forefront of our minds? We *must* keep these things before our minds. It is only those rare few who make these things their constant meditation who are the subjects of this marvellous Spirit transformation.

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"According to the power that **worketh in us**" (Eph. 3:20).

IS that power working in us? ARE we being (as the Spirit through Paul says we must be) gradually changed into the image of Christ, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord? Do we find ourselves—by this Divine power (for if it is happening it is certainly not of our own natural, evil selves)—gradually becoming gentler, kinder, more patient, more zealous in the service of God, of deeper spiritual understanding, sensing more fully the overpowering beauty and loveliness of the Divine Word, bonded more and more closely to those who are undergoing the same glorious, exciting transformation, freer from the empty foolishness of the natural mind and passing things, more able to detect and overcome the deceptive motions of sin within us, more keenly hungering and thirsting for the spiritual food of the Word of God, more anxious to put away all that is of the world?

If not, *the fault lies with ourselves*. If this Divine power of the Holy Spirit is not working these things in us from day to day, then it is the most important and urgent thing in the world to find out why we are being left out of this great Divine operation, for the time will soon come when the Bride will be assembled in all her beauty of holiness, and if God has not been working in us by His Spirit, *we shall not be there*. James says—

"Draw nigh unto God, and He WILL draw nigh unto you."

It is a definite promise, an absolute guarantee. It is entirely up to us. We draw near to God by conscious, mental effort, by turning the mind and attention and affections toward Him, by constant prayer, by consistent, persevering study of His Word which He has glorified above all His Name, by endeavouring to serve and please Him in all we do, by striving to realize and comprehend the height and depth of His great purpose in Christ.

This latter aspect—the key to the whole—is why it is so *indescribably sad* when some concede defeat and failure before they really begin at all, by saying that parts of God's glorious message to His children are "too deep" for them to *try* to understand.

In all these things we must clearly realize that *natural ability and natural education mean nothing*, that none of our own efforts mean anything—except that it is such efforts that draw God to work within us by the mighty power of His Holy Spirit.

Our feeble and puny efforts to seek Him merely establish the contact. It is the limitless power that flows freely from Him that accomplishes the transforming marvels within us—that all the glory and accomplishment may be clearly of God alone.

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"He gave himself for us that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14).

"Zealous of good works." Are we joyously eager and anxious to be about our Father's business, in season and out of season, or do we find that other things draw our desires? Are the opportunities of assembling to strength one another, and to enjoy one another's companionship in the Truth, and to proclaim the way of the Lord—are they looked forward to with thanksgiving and anticipation? Do we avail ourselves of, and enjoy, daily feasts on the Daily Readings? Are the ecclesial activities the centre of our lives and of all our planning and arrangements? *Such only* are God's jewels. Such only are the ones in whom this glorious power is working to bring forth spiritual fruit unto life eternal.

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"That ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual understanding . . . fruitful in every good work . . . increasing in the knowledge of God . . . strengthened with all

might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering **with joyfulness**" (Col. 1:9-11).

This is a description of the only proper and acceptable condition of the true saints of God. It rests entirely with us whether or not we set ourselves to comply with it. We note particularly the word "*with joyfulness*." Without that the rest is meaningless and dead. These spiritual characteristics of patience and longsuffering are, in the true Bride, always manifested—not in cold resignation—but, as this passage tells us, in warm, enlightened joyfulness and thanksgiving, based on the consciousness of being the blessed subjects of the operation of the Holy Spirit.

In the true Body of Christ, "patience and longsuffering *with joyfulness*" are primary characteristics, for all members are filled with a fervent mutual love, each conscious of his own natural

weakness, and each helpful and forbearing toward the weaknesses of others—but still each keenly realizing and confessing that *there must be a real and progressive "overcoming"* of these things. The promise of life is only "to him that overcometh" by drawing on the great power of God.

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"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

To the natural mind, this may appear to be a contradiction, but actually it is the beautiful expression of a great Divine mystery. Just how this merger of our efforts and God's power is accomplished we cannot know, but the Scriptures teach us that in some strange and glorious way we are privileged to be "*workers together with God*"—working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, and yet all the while recognizing that the accomplishment of that salvation is wholly God willing and working in us.

What could be more beautiful and inspiring than this triumphant, loving partnership of the pitifully weak and the infinitely strong!

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"The God of peace make you **perfect in every good work** to do His will, **WORKING IN YOU** that which is well-pleasing in His sight" (Heb. 13:20).

Are we justified in seeking, with childlike simplicity, the marvellous comfort and consolation that a full, literal acceptance of this verse affords—*and never resting till we find it*?

Or must we reinterpret it to fit the dictates of what the many may consider "reason" and "common-sense"? — sadly but realistically reinterpret it to fit the actual conditions we find among those claiming to be the children of God?

Is it unreasonable to have faith in the declared purpose and power of God to make His elect "*perfect in every good work to do His will*"? Is not rather a thoughtless contentment with anything less but a dreadful, slumbering delusion?

If there *is* such a power of God at work among men today as these verses say there is—(though wholly unsuspected by the world and apparently even by many who claim to have come out from the world to become the children of God)—then do not we want, *above everything else*, to be among the hidden few who come under this great Divine operation?

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"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

"By the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." To what extent are we entitled—to what extent are we *expected* and *required*—to appropriate that promise to ourselves, and to adjust ourselves to the staggering magnitude of that promise?

Is the apostle just speaking of the miraculous Spirit-powers of the first century—the especial and specific external Spirit-gifts of miracles, prophecy, tongues, etc., which ceased with that generation—or is he speaking of *something far deeper and more marvellous and of vital concern to us individually today?*

A careful consideration of the whole verse, and its spirit and context, and similar verses of similar revolutionary import elsewhere, will make manifest that the *latter* is unquestionably the glorious and overwhelming meaning, for Paul is clearly speaking here of the *general inward experience* of all believers in their vital relation to God their Father—not just of some incidental, outward, bestowed power on the part of just *some* of the believers, as the possession of an external Spirit-gift.

The whole sense of his reasoning requires—to give it any meaning—that what he says should be an *essential part* of every believer's experience—

"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us."

Is this love of God that is shed into the hearts to be restricted just to those who happened to be given the Spirit-gifts for the development and edifying of the early church? Is not the love of God shed into the hearts of all true believers? Surely: and it is done, says the apostle, "*by the Holy Spirit which is given us.*"

The miraculous gifts of the Spirit did not affect the heart or character of the possessor, nor did they have any direct bearing on his salvation or his relation to God. It is apparent that Judas, in common with other apostles, was given these powers when sent forth to preach (Mark 3:14-15). The Galatians had received the gifts of the Spirit but were astray from the Faith (Gal. 3:5). The Corinthians had to be instructed to use the Spirit-gifts for edifying and not for vainglory and confusion (1 Cor. 14).

But *here is a completely different aspect* of the operation of the Spirit. Here is an operation that relates to the *heart and character*, and that is spoken of in terms that require us to apply it to every true believer as an essential element of the development and preparation of the purified Bride. To the Corinthians Paul said:

"He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit **in our hearts.**"

"*In our hearts*"—there is the key. It is an essential operation of God upon the hearts of His elect. This becomes even more manifest in the apostle's words to the Galatians (4:6)—

"That we might receive the adoption of sons. And **because ye are sons**, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant but a son."

Here the Spirit sent by God into the heart is related to, and resultant upon, the sonship of the believer. The Spirit-operation is the result, evidence and intensification of the sonship. It creates that sense of unity with God that finds expression in the heartfelt ecstasy of the cry: "*Abba, Father!*"

But the thought is even clearer still in Rom. 8, There, in several verses, this indwelling of the Holy Spirit is described as the *deciding factor* as to whether the individual is in the way of life or death, as in vs. 8-9—

"They that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit—**IF so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.**"

V. 11—"IF the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies **by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.**"

This cannot just mean "spirit" as disposition and frame of mind; there is manifestly more to it than that for it is the *power by which God shall "quicken your mortal bodies."*

Nor can it possibly relate to the special Spirit-gifts of the first century that passed away, because it is spoken of as something that *has to happen in and to every accepted believer*—something their salvation depends on. It is the very means by which they are transformed and saved.

Vs. 15-16 contain the same thought concerning the inseparable relationship of the Spirit-indwelling to the sonship as we have noted in Galatians—

"Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father! The **Spirit itself** beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

How does the Spirit of God bear witness with our spirit that we are God's children? John answers that when he says—

"He that **keepeth His commandments** dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us—**by the Spirit which He hath given us**" (1 John 3:24).

Note that it is related to the keeping of the commandments, and it is the evidence of the God-abiding which is promised in John 14:23 to "him that keepeth my commandments" (v. 21).

In this passage again the whole tenor of the words show that they necessarily relate to all God's children, not just to those who had Spirit-gifts. John further says, in the next chapter (4:12-13)—

"If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Hereby **know** we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, **because He hath given us of His Spirit.**"

The essential connection between this Spirit-operation and the believer's redemption and transformation is further revealed in Rom. 15:13. There Paul prays—

"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, **through the power of the Holy Spirit.**"

We cannot escape the clear teaching of this passage—it is God Himself that fills His elect with the joy and peace of belief, *through the power of the Holy Spirit,*

This intimate inter-abiding of God and the believer by the Holy Spirit, dependent upon the eager obedience of love, is the glorious theme throughout the entire New Testament. And it is described in terms, and connected with conditions, quite different from the first century Spirit-gifts.

Perhaps the distinction between the two aspects of the Spirit's working is most obvious in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In Ch. 12 he speaks of the Spirit-gifts. (In his later remarks—Ch. 14—it becomes clear that they were not using these gifts in an orderly way or to general edification). He concludes Ch. 12—

"Covet earnestly the best gifts; yet show I unto you a more (Diag. 'much more') excellent way."

—and then in Ch. 13 he speaks of Faith, Hope and Love as this "much more excellent way" (the Spirit-gifts being merely external instruments for general instruction and edification).

Now this is the point:—the references to the indwelling of the Spirit of God *in the heart* (which we have just been considering) we find to be inseparably connected with—yea, the *very life and motive power* of—this more excellent way of Faith, Hope and Love. That is, this operation of the Spirit is the evidence of the indwelling of God, which in turn—as we have just read from John—depends upon the mutual relationship of pure love.

To Titus Paul said (3:5)—

us, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to **His** mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit **which He shed on us abundantly through Christ** (RV: the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us richly)."

The saving, says Paul, is by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon us—no pouring out, no saving. To the Corinthians he uses this marvellous truth of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in strong words of exhortation and warning—

"Know ye not that ye are the Temple of the living God, and that **the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?**" (1 Cor. 3:16).

Let us particularly note that the way in which he applies this argument to emphasize and illustrate the great responsibility of the children of God shows that he regarded this indwelling of the Spirit as a universal privilege and characteristic of *all* elect believers generally—not just something (like Spirit-gifts) that just applied incidentally to *some* of them. Was it just the possessors of the Spirit-gifts who were the Temple of God, and to whom this argument of holiness applies? Later in the same letter he repeats the question with even stronger emphasis (6:19)—

"What? Know ye not that your body is the Temple of **the Holy Spirit which is in you**, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

Your bodies, he says, are holy, sanctified vessels to irradiate Divine, spiritual light to the world. Was it just those with Spirit-gifts who were "the Temple of the Holy Spirit" and "not their own"? No, that applies to *all in Christ*.

We must strive, by constant meditation upon these things, to reach a point where they are a fixed, continuous part of our character and consciousness—a point where these exalted conceptions set the pattern of all our acts and thoughts: "*Ye are the Temple of God—by His Holy Spirit He is dwelling and working in you, creating something for His eternal use.*"

How essential, then, is the awed and reverent reaction of Peter—

"What manner of people ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!"

"*What manner of people ought we to be!*" We recall the words of Jude with which we began—

"Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you **faultless** before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

Let us let our minds dwell for a moment on this beautiful thought of faultlessness. It is a human and almost irresistible tendency of the natural mind to cut everything down to fit the puny

limits of its own conceptions. That is why the revolutionary and transforming power of these teachings are so universally missed.

But let *us* not make that sad mistake. Let *us* humbly and reverently set ourselves to try to lift *our* minds to this Divine level, rather than pulling *it* down to ours. These words of Jude do not stand alone. They but express a glorious Divine principle that is common to all the apostolic writings: —

"We should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4);
"To present you holy, unblameable and unreprouable in His sight" (Col. 1:22);
"A glorious ecclesia, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27);
"The God of peace make you perfect" (Heb. 13:20);
"That He may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness" (1 Th. 3:13);
"The God of all grace, Who hath called you to His glory, make you perfect" (1 Pet. 5:10);
"That ye may be blameless" (1 Cor. 1:8);
"That your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless" (1 Th. 5:13).
"That ye may be blameless . . . the sons of God, without blemish" (Ph. 2:15).
"That ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14);

A continual, eager, affectionate exposure of the mind to these Divine conceptions is the key to the process of which Paul speaks:

"We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Let those who will decry this as an impossible fantasy. Let them struggle and wrestle with words and definitions in an effort to explain away all the transforming power of these deep things of the Spirit of God. Wisdom and love will not fight against these things but will rather revel in the glorious immensity of the prospect, and will struggle to elevate themselves to the exalted level of the revealed Divine Will. Would the eternal Creator of heaven and earth use half-measures in working His glorious plan?

The final thought to which we are led is the most marvellous:

"We are **His** workmanship" (Eph. 3:10);
"The power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20);
"It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do" (Phil. 2:13);

After 3 fervent appeals for relief from the constant distress of his "thorn in the flesh," the Lord said to Paul—

"My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Surely this is the most beautiful and satisfying explanation of tribulation in all Scripture! And how beautifully Paul in turn expresses the proper answer and attitude—

"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, **that the power of Christ may rest upon me**. THEREFORE, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, THEN am I strong!"

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Continuing our review of the passages that speak of the marvellous mystery of the direct working of God in us—

"The God of peace make you perfect" (Heb. 13:20);
"He that hath wrought us is God. Who hath also given us the earnest of the Spirit"

(2 Cor. 5:5);

"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom. 15:17);

"The God of all grace make you perfect" (1 Pet. 5:10);

"The God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1 Thess. 5:23);

"FILLED WITH ALL THE FULNESS OF GOD!" (Eph. 3:19).

What can we take from these teachings but that the great, all wise Creator is taking out for His eternal glory a few from the passing multitude of the children of men, and is presently shaping their minds and characters to the heavenly pattern of the beauty of holiness; and that, in His incomprehensible mercy, the call has come to us to give up everything else and surrender ourselves completely to the operation of this Divine workmanship—to accept the incalculable grace and privilege of being "*filled with all the fulness of God!*"

Let us then try to constantly maintain, as the background of all our thoughts and actions, the broad and vast perspective to which Paul refers (Rom. 8:32)—

"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**?"

"*All things are yours—the world, life, death, things present, things to come—all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's!*"—1 Corinthians 3:23.

—G. V. G. Taken from November 1955 Berean
