

24 - Our Strong Consolation

The Present Truth : December 30, 1897

When we began the study of the book of Hebrews, we said that we should take up the first four or five chapters. With this number we close the sixth chapter, and since this is even more than we contemplated doing or promised to do when we began, we shall discontinue the study for a few months, to resume it later. In the meantime other portions of the Bible will be studied, no less interesting and profitable than the book of Hebrews; and as every part of the Bible is a help to the study of every other part, we shall derive the more profit from Hebrews when we proceed with it.

It will be remembered that the portion of the epistle comprising the latter part of the fifth chapter and the first half of the sixth, is a personal appeal. Those to whom it is addressed are charged with being dull and slow to apprehend the deep truths of the Gospel, and are exhorted to go on unto perfection; they are warned of the danger of receiving the grace of God in vain, but are at the same time encouraged by a recognition of the fact that they had already shown love to the Lord in ministering to the saints. Then the exhortation, and the encouragement, which we find in our present

Scripture Lesson

“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.” And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Hebrews 6.11-20

Some Peculiar Idioms.—The words; “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you,” are a literal translation of the Hebrew words of the promise, in Genesis 22.17. But everybody who has given any study to language knows that an idiom, that is, a characteristic expression, in one language, does not make good sense if translated word for word into another language. A word for word translation is not an exact rendering. In the Hebrew language, repetition of a sentence; phrase; word; or even of a single letter in a word, indicates emphasis,

positiveness. For example, in Genesis 2.16 we have the statement, “Thou may freely eat,” which is as plain as anything can be; but the word for word rendering of the equally plain expression in the Hebrew, is given in the margin, “eating thou shalt eat,” which in English means nothing. So also in the next verse, where we read, “Thou shalt surely die,” we have in the margin, “dying thou shalt die.” This latter expression, although meaningless, is the word for word rendering of the Hebrew words conveying the positive assurance, “I will certainly bless thee, and I will surely multiply thee.”

Not Slothful, but Faithful and Patient.—Be not slothful, but followers [or, imitators] of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Faith and patience! Trust and endure. We see that faith means activity, since it is contrasted with slothfulness. Faith works. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, and “the Word of God is living and active.” The “wicked and slothful servant” is the servant who does not have faith in the Master.

The Promise to Abraham.— When God made the promise to Abraham, scripture says, “And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Genesis 15.6. So, the promise is therefore that by which righteousness is obtained.

There is probably no other subject in the Bible, concerning which so great a web of speculative nonsense has been spun, as that of the promise to Israel, which is none other than to Abraham. All this confusion would be avoided, if men would but hold to the plain words of the Bible, letting them stand for just what they say.

Note this:—

“For all the promises of God in Him [Christ] are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.” 2 Corinthians 1.20

God makes no promise, except in Christ; the promise to Abraham, as already seen, was confirmed in Christ (Galatians 3.17); therefore no promise of God is fulfilled except to Christians. God keeps faith with all and His promises are such that whoever accepts them thereby becomes a Christian. Any talk about promises to be fulfilled to Jews, as distinct from Christians, comes from ignorance or rejection of the everlasting Gospel, which is the same in every age and to all people.

“He Obtained the Promise.”—In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews it is said of Abraham and all his posterity, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises” (verse 13), and still later, “These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.” Verse 39. Yet in Hebrews 6.15, it is said of Abraham, “And so, after he had patiently endured, he received the promise.” How is this?—It is easily reconciled, when we consider that, “in Isaac shall thy seed be called.” Isaac was the child of promise, born of the Spirit. His birth was life from the dead. See Romans 4.19. So when Abraham was tried he offered up Isaac; “and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise

him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” Hebrews 11.17-19. Christ is the Seed, and He could come only through Isaac’s line; yet so firmly did Abraham’s faith grasp Christ as the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come” that he calmly proceeded to offer up Isaac, assured that the Christ who was to come from him was already alive from the dead, with power to raise Isaac from the dead so that the promise that He should be born of his line might be fulfilled. Truly Abraham had the promise, even as he who for a surety knows the promise of God that he shall be “heir of the world,” already has tasted “the power of the world to come.”

“Two Immutable Things.”—What these two immutable things are, by which we have “a strong consolation,” is plainly stated in the text. They are the promise and the oath of God. God’s promise is unchangeable; “the Word of the Lord endures for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.” 1 Peter 1.25. The Word needs nothing added to it to strengthen it. Let men remember this, when they presume to uphold God’s Word by assertions of their own. Any attempt of man to strengthen the Word of God, is but a reproach to it, a disparagement of it. The Lord receives not the testimony of man, and His cause is never strengthened by quotations from eminent men of the world in favor of the Bible. Abraham did not need anything more than the Word of God, for, let it be noted, the oath was not added for his sake, but for ours. Read Genesis 22.1-18 and James 2.21-24. There we see that the oath was not given until after Abraham’s faith in the promises had been shown to be perfect.

“Interposed Himself by an Oath.”—Thus we have it in the margin of verse 17. God swore by Himself. Now when one swears by any object, that object is put up as a forfeit. If the thing sworn is not fulfilled, the object is forfeited, God set Himself apart as a forfeit, or, interposed Himself between those to whom the promise was made and the possibility of failure. The promise is as sure as the life of God. If the promise should fail of fulfillment, in a single particular, then God would cease to exist. So sure is it. But if God should cease to exist, then would the universe be annihilated, for He is its support. Now God has created all things in Jesus Christ, and in Him all things consist (Ephesians 3.9; Colossians 1.16, 17), so that it is literally true that in Christ we have all things. Romans 8.32. All the promises of God are in Christ, so that the oath of God is in Christ; Christ is set forth as the very being and presence of God. Thus it is that the existence and stability of the whole universe depends on the fulfillment of God’s promise to us. And what is the promise?—Righteousness; the forgiveness of sins. “Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins.” Acts 13.38. Forgiveness of sins comprises cleansing from all unrighteousness (1 John 1.9) and complete redemption. Ephesians 1.7. That God will do this, that He is faithful to His promise, and that not a sinner can apply in vain to Him for pardon and cleansing, we have the assurance in every blade of grass, in the sun, moon, and stars, that still pursue their courses. The snow and vapors and stormy wind fulfill His Word. Psalm 148.8. “For I have said, “Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.” Psalm 89.2

For Our Sakes.—Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness. "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Romans 4.23-25. So the oath was sworn to Abraham, "that we might have a strong consolation." You and I have an interest in that oath to Abraham, and therefore in the promise to him. Every soul who comes to God comes to Him by virtue of that which God promised to Abraham.

Christians Children of Abraham.—"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, "In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Galatians 3.7-9. The oath of God to Abraham gives strong consolation to those who flee to Christ for refuge. On this is based the hymn beginning,

**"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word;
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
Who unto the Saviour for refuge have fled?"**

But it is sinners that flee for refuge to Christ, and it is sinners that have a firm foundation for their faith in fleeing to Him for refuge. It was for the benefit of us sinners that the oath was given, for God would not leave the shadow of a chance for a reasonable doubt in the mind of any sinner. To be sure the same consolation remains for those who have been made saints; "for if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Romans 5.10. Let every soul come to the Lord with this assurance of pardon and acceptance, that God has more at stake than man has, even as God's life is worth more than any man's. Thus, if God should refuse to hear my prayer, and should not forgive my sins, I should be lost, but God would also be lost, and His loss would be greater than mine. If we believe God, and hold to His Word, our cases are as sure as His. Surely this is a strong consolation.

Christ the Forerunner.—This hope is as an anchor sure and steadfast, which enters into that which is within the veil, that is in the secret dwelling-place of God, into which place Jesus the Forerunner is entered for us. A forerunner implies others following after. We have already seen that Christ is forever identified with mankind as Brother. He is one with us. He is the Son of man, "the Man Christ Jesus." Well, now, there is one Man—the representative Man—already in the presence of God in person. He is already seated "on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens," a King on the Father's throne. But it is one of us, who has gone there; One who is made in all things like unto His brethren. He is indeed "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8.29), but we are joint-heirs with Him. Verse 17. Therefore if we believe in Him, if we have "put on Christ" in baptism, and are become Abraham's

seed, and children of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3.26-29) we have the same right to enter heaven and sit upon the throne that He has. He has simply gone before us to show us the way, and to prepare a place for us. John 14.1-3

A Kingly Priest.—“Made an High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.” Who was Melchizedek?—He was “king of Salem” and “priest of the Most High God.” Hebrews 7.1. So Christ is both King and Priest. “Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the Man whose name is The BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” Zechariah 6.12, 13. What is Christ’s work as Priest?—“To make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” How much power has He to do this?—All His power as King; all the power of the throne of grace on which He sits. What more could be said to give confidence to a trembling soul? He is King of righteousness, and also King of peace. Let Him reign in your heart, “and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” “Blessed be His glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen and Amen.”