

Food for Thinking Christians

“. . . If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him.”—Revelation 3:20

The following are excerpts from “The Divine Plan of the Ages,” a 350 page book, which is volume one of the series entitled “Studies in the Scriptures.” Circulation of over eight million has made this one of the most widely used helping hands for Bible study ever printed.

EARTH’S NIGHT OF SIN TO TERMINATE IN A MORNING OF JOY

No work is more noble and ennobling than the reverent study of the revealed purposes of God, “which things the angels desire to look into.” (1 Pet. 1:12) The fact that God’s wisdom provided prophecies of the future, as well as statements regarding the present and the past, is of itself a reproof by Jehovah of the foolishness of

some of his children, who have excused their ignorance and neglect of the study of his Word by saying: "There is enough in the fifth chapter of Matthew to save any man." No system of theology should be presented, or accepted, which overlooks or omits the most prominent features of Scripture teaching.

Believing that the Scriptures reveal a consistent and harmonious plan, which, when seen, must commend itself to every sanctified conscience, this work is published in the hope of assisting students of the Word of God, by suggesting lines of thought which harmonize with each other and with the inspired Word.

The period in which sin is permitted has been a dark night to humanity, never to be forgotten; but the glorious day of righteousness and divine favor, to be ushered in by Messiah, who, as the Sun of Righteousness, shall arise and shine fully and clearly into and upon all, bringing healing and blessing, will more than counterbalance the dreadful night of weeping, sighing, pain, sickness, and death, in which the groaning creation has been so long. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—Ps. 30:5

THE EXISTENCE OF A SUPREME INTELLIGENT CREATOR ESTABLISHED

He who can look into the sky with a telescope, or even with his natural eye alone, and see there the immensity of creation, its symmetry, beauty, order, harmony and diversity, and yet doubt that the Creator of these is vastly his superior both in wisdom and power, or who can suppose for a moment that such order came by chance, without a Creator, has so far lost or ignored that faculty of reason as to be properly considered what the Bible terms him, a fool (one who ignores or lacks reason): "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." However it happened, at least that much of the Bible is true, as every reasonable mind must conclude; for it is a self-evident truth that effects must be produced by competent causes. Every plant and every flower, even, speaks volumes of testimony on this subject. Intricate in construction, exquisitely beautiful in form and texture, each speaks of a wisdom and skill above the human.

How short-sighted the absurdity which boasts of human skill and ingenuity, and attributes to mere chance the regularity, uniformity, and harmony of nature; which acknowledges the laws of nature, while

denying that nature has an intelligent lawgiver.

Let human reason do her best to trace known facts to known and competent causes, giving due credit to nature's laws in every case; but back of all the intricate machinery of nature is the hand of its great author, the intelligent, omnipotent God.

We claim, then, that the existence of an intelligent Creator is a clearly demonstrated truth, the proof of which lies all around us; yea, and within us; for we are his workmanship, whose every power of mind and body speaks of a marvelous skill beyond our comprehension. And he is also the designer and Creator of what we term nature. We claim that he ordered and established the laws of nature, the beauty and harmony of whose operation we see and admire. This one whose wisdom planned and whose power upholds and guides the universe, whose wisdom and power so immeasurably transcend our own, we instinctively worship and adore.

THE BIBLE AS A DIVINE REVELATION VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF REASON

The Bible is the torch of civilization and liberty. Its influence for good in society has been recognized by the greatest statesmen, even though they, for the most part, have

looked at it through the various glasses of conflicting creeds, which, while upholding the Bible, grievously misrepresent its teachings.

The Bible is the oldest book in existence; it has outlived the storms of thirty centuries. Men have endeavored by every means possible to banish it from the face of the earth: they have hidden it, burned it, made the possession of it a crime punishable with death, and waged the most bitter and relentless persecutions against those who had faith in it; but still the book lives. Today, while many of its foes slumber in death, and hundreds of volumes written to discredit it and overthrow its influence, are long since forgotten, the Bible has found its way into every nation and language of the earth, over two hundred different translations of it having been made. The fact that this book has survived so many centuries, notwithstanding such unparalleled efforts to banish and destroy it, is at least strong circumstantial evidence that the great being whom it claims as its author has also been its preserver.

Though written by many pens, at various times, under different circumstances, the Bible is not merely a collection of moral precepts, wise maxims, and words of comfort. It is more: it is a reasonable, philosophical

and harmonious statement of the causes of present evil in the world, their only remedy and the final result as seen by divine wisdom, which saw the end of the plan from before its beginning, marking as well the pathway of God's people, and upholding and strengthening them with exceeding great and precious promises to be realized in due time.

THE EPOCHS AND DISPENSATIONS MARKED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIVINE PLAN

As some ignorantly misjudge the skill and wisdom of a great architect and builder by his unfinished work, so also many in their ignorance now misjudge God by his unfinished work; but by and by, when the rough scaffolding of evil, which has been permitted for man's discipline, and which shall finally be overruled for his good, has been removed, and the rubbish cleared away, God's finished work will universally declare his infinite wisdom and power; and his plans will be seen to be in harmony with his glorious character.

While the mass of mankind, groping in the darkness of ignorance, must await the actual developments of God's plan before they can realize the glorious character of the divine architect, it is the privilege of

the child of God to see by faith and the light of his lamp the foretold glories of the future, and thereby to appreciate the otherwise mysterious dealings of the past and the present. Therefore, as interested sons of God and heirs of a promised inheritance, we apply to our Father's Word, that we may understand his purposes from the plans and specifications therein given. There we learn that the plan of God, with reference to man, spans three great periods of time, beginning with man's creation and reaching into the illimitable future. Peter and Paul designate these periods "three worlds," which we represent in the following diagram.

GREAT EPOCHS CALLED "WORLDS"



THE THREE WORLDS

These three great epochs represent three distinct manifestations of divine providence. The first, from creation to the flood, was under the ministration of angels, and is called by Peter "the world that was." —2 Pet. 3:6

The second great epoch, from the flood to the establishment of the kingdom of God, is under the limited control of Satan,

“the prince of this world,” and is therefore called “this present evil world.”—Gal. 1:4; 2 Pet. 3:7

The third is to be a “world without end” (Isa. 45:17) under divine administration, the kingdom of God, and is called “the world to come,” “wherein dwelleth righteousness.”—Heb. 2:5; 2 Pet. 3:13

We have here only glanced at the mere outline of this plan of the ages. The more we examine it, the more we will find in it perfect harmony, beauty, and order. Each age has its part to accomplish, necessary to the complete development of God’s plan as a whole. The plan is a progressive one, gradually unfolding from age to age, upward and onward to the grand consummation of the original design of the divine architect, “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” (Eph. 1:11) Not one of these great periods is an hour too long or too short for the accomplishment of its object. God is a wise economist of both time and means, though his resources are infinite; and no power, however malicious, for a moment retards or thwarts his purposes. All things, evil as well as good, under divine supervision and overruling, are working together for the accomplishment of his will.

THE MYSTERY HID FROM AGES AND FROM GENERATIONS, BUT NOW MADE MANIFEST TO HIS SAINTS.”—COL. 1:26

Paul declares that this mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, now made manifest to his saints, is “*CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY.*”—Col. 1:27

This is the great mystery of God which has been hidden from all previous ages, and is still hidden from all except a special class—the saints, or consecrated believers. But what is meant by “Christ in you”? We have learned that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38), and thus we recognize him to be the Christ—the anointed—for the word Christ signifies anointed. And the Apostle John says that the anointing which we (consecrated believers) have received abideth in us. (1 John 2:27) Thus the saints of this Gospel age are an anointed company—anointed to be kings and priests unto God (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 Peter 2:9); and together with Jesus, their chief and Lord, they constitute Jehovah’s Anointed—the Christ.

In harmony with this teaching of John, that we also are anointed, Paul assures us that this mystery which has been kept secret in ages past, but which is now made

known to the saints, is that the Christ (the Anointed) is “not one member, but many,” just as the human body is one, and has many members; but as all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Anointed—the Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12-28) Jesus is anointed to be the Head or Lord over the Church which is his body (or his bride, as expressed in another figure—Eph. 5:25-32), and unitedly they constitute the promised “Seed”—the Great Deliverer: “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—Gal. 3:29

God’s plan will not always be shrouded in mystery: the dawn of the Millennial Day brings the fuller light of God to men, and soon “the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth.” The Sun of Righteousness, which shall arise with healing in his wings, dispelling the darkness of ignorance, is the Christ in Millennial glory—not the Head alone, but also the members of his body; for it is written that if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together.—Rom. 8:17

In the age to come, when God shall “pour out his spirit upon all flesh,” as during the present age he pours it upon his “servants and handmaids,” then, indeed, all will understand and appreciate the promises now being grasped by the “little

flock”; and they will rejoice in the obedience and exaltation of the Church, saying, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” (Rev. 19:7) They will rejoice in the glorification of the Church, through which blessings will then be flowing to them.

It is this for which the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now, waiting for the completion of this mystery—for the manifestation of the Sons of God, the promised “Seed,” in whom they shall all be blessed.—Rom. 8:19,21,22

OUR LORD’S RETURN—ITS OBJECT, THE RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS

That our Lord intended his disciples to understand that for some purpose, in some manner, and at some time, he would come again, is, we presume, admitted and believed by all familiar with the Scriptures.

“And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

The Scriptures thus teach that the object of our Lord’s second advent is the restitution of all things.

As death came by the first Adam, so life comes by Christ, the second Adam. Everything that mankind lost through being in the first Adam is to be restored to those who believe in the second Adam. When awakened with the advantage of experience with evil, which Adam lacked, those who thankfully accept the redemption as God's gift may continue to live everlastingly on the original condition of obedience. Perfect obedience will be required, and perfect ability to obey will be given, under the righteous reign of the Prince of Peace. Here is the salvation offered to the world.

We see, then, that the general salvation, which will come to every individual, consists of light, from the true light, and an opportunity to choose life. As the great majority of the race is in the tomb, it will be necessary to bring them forth from the grave in order to testify to them the good tidings of a Savior. The special salvation which believers now enjoy in hope (Rom. 8:24), the reality of which will, in the Millennial age be revealed, also, to those who "believe in that day," is a full release from the thralldom of sin, and the corruption of death, into the glorious liberty of children of God. But attainment to all these blessings will depend upon hearty compliance with the laws of Christ's kingdom—

the rapidity of the attainment to perfection indicating the degree of love for the King and for his law of love.

Seeing, then, that so many of the great and glorious features of God's plan for human salvation from sin and death lie in the future, and that the second advent of our Lord Jesus is the designed first step in the accomplishment of those long promised and long expected blessings, shall we not even more earnestly long for the time of his second advent than the less informed Jew looked and longed for his first advent? Seeing that the time of evil, injustice, and death is to be brought to an end by the dominion of power which he will then exercise, and that righteousness, truth and peace are to be universal, who should not rejoice to see his day?

Surely all in sympathy with his mission of blessing and his spirit of love will hail every evidence of his coming as the approach of the "great joy which shall be to all people."

THE PERMISSION OF EVIL AND ITS RELATION TO GOD'S PLAN

No difficulty, perhaps, more frequently presents itself to the inquiring mind than the questions: Why did God permit the present reign of evil? Why did he permit

Satan to present the temptation to our first parents, after having created them perfect and upright? Or why did he allow the forbidden tree to have a place among the good? Despite all attempts to turn it aside, the question will obtrude itself—Could not God have prevented all possibility of man's fall?

The difficulty undoubtedly arises from a failure to comprehend the plan of God. God could have prevented the entrance of sin, but the fact that he did not should be sufficient proof to us that its present permission is designed ultimately to work out some greater good. God's plans, seen in their completeness, will prove the wisdom of the course pursued.

God designed to permit evil, because, having the remedy provided for man's release from its consequences, he saw that the result would be to lead mankind, through experience, to a full appreciation of "the exceeding sinfulness of sin" and of the matchless brilliancy of virtue in contrast with it—thus teaching him the more to love and honor his Creator, who is the source and fountain of all goodness, and forever to shun that which brought so much woe and misery. So the final result will be greater love for God, and greater hatred of all that is opposed to his will, and

consequently the firm establishment in everlasting righteousness of all such as shall profit by the lessons God is now teaching through the permission of sin and its correlative evils.

The injury we received through Adam's fall (we suffered no injustice) is, by God's favor, to be more than offset with favor through Christ; and all will sooner or later (in God's "due time") have a full opportunity to be restored to the same standing that Adam enjoyed before he sinned. Those who do not receive a full knowledge and, by faith, an enjoyment of this favor of God in the present time (and such are the great majority, including children and heathen) will assuredly have these privileges in the next age, or "world to come," the dispensation or age to follow the present. To this end, "all that are in their graves . . . shall come forth." As each one (whether in this age or the next) becomes fully aware of the ransom-price given by our Lord Jesus, and of his subsequent privileges, he is considered as on trial, as Adam was; and obedience brings lasting life, and disobedience lasting death—the "second death."

In view of the great plan of redemption, and the consequent "restitution of all things," through Christ, we can see that blessings result through the permission of

evil which, probably, could not otherwise have been so fully realized.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

God has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world. How can this be? Has God changed his mind? Has he concluded that his decision in the trial of the first man and the general sentence was unjust, too severe, that he now concludes to judge the world individually? No; were such the case, we should have no better guarantee of a just decision in the future trial than in the past. It is not that God considers his decision in the first judgment unjust, but that he has provided a redemption from the penalty of the first judgment, in order that he may grant another judgment (trial) under more favorable conditions to the entire race—all having then had experience with sin and its results.

All mankind are to be recovered from the sentence of that first trial by the one sacrifice for all, which the great Redeemer provided. All are to be rescued from the grave and from the sentence of death—destruction—which in view of this redemption is no longer to be considered death in the full, everlasting sense of the word, but rather a temporary sleep; because in the Millennial morning all

will be awakened by the Life-giver who redeemed all.

In John 5:28,29 a precious promise for the world of a coming judgment-trial for life everlasting is, by a mistranslation, turned into a fearful curse. According to the Greek, they that have done evil—that have failed of divine approval—will come forth unto a resurrection [raising up to perfection] by judgments, disciplines.—See the Revised Version.

The conclusion of the world's coming judgment is clearly shown in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46), in Rev. 20:15; 21:8 and in 1 Cor. 15:25. These and other scriptures show that at its close the two classes will have been completely separated—the obedient and the disobedient; those in harmony with the letter and the spirit of God's law, and those out of harmony with it. The first enter into everlasting life, and the others are remanded to death, extinction ("second death"); the same sentence as in the first judgment, from which they had been reckonedly released by Christ who secured the right to release them by the giving of their ransom—by his death. This will be their second death. No ransom will be given for them, and there will be no release or resurrection for them, their sin

being a wilful, individual sin against full light and opportunity, under a most favorable, individual trial.

RANSOM AND RESTITUTION

Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord [ruler, controller] of both the dead and the living. That is to say, the object of our Lord's death and resurrection was not merely to bless and rule over and restore the living of mankind, but to give him authority over, or full control of, the dead as well as the living, insuring the benefits of his ransom as much to the one as to the other. He "gave himself a ransom [a corresponding price] for all," in order that he might bless all, and give to every man an individual trial for life. To claim that he gave a "ransom for all" and yet to claim that only a mere handful of the ransomed ones will ever receive any benefit from it, is absurd; for it would imply either that God accepted the ransom-price and then unjustly refused to grant the release of the redeemed, or else that the Lord, after redeeming all, was either unable or unwilling to carry out the original benevolent design.

The "ransom for all" given by "the man Christ Jesus" does not give or guarantee everlasting life or blessing to any man; but

it does guarantee to every man another opportunity or trial for life everlasting.

The Bible account of man's creation is that God created him perfect and upright, an earthly image of himself; that man sought out various inventions and defiled himself (Gen. 1:27; Rom. 5:12; Eccl.7:29); that, all being sinners, the race was unable to help itself, and none could by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him (Ps. 49:7,15); that God in compassion and love had made provision for this; that, accordingly, the Son of God became a man, and gave man's ransom-price; that, as a reward for this sacrifice, and in order for the completion of the great work of atonement, he was highly exalted, even to the divine nature; and that in due time he will bring to pass a restitution of the race to its original perfection and to every blessing then possessed.

SPIRITUAL AND HUMAN NATURES SEPARATE AND DISTINCT

The human race are God's children by creation—the work of his hands—and his plan with reference to them is clearly revealed in his Word. Paul says that the first man (who was a sample of what the race will be when perfect) was of the earth, earthy; and his posterity, with the exception

of the Gospel Church, will in the resurrection still be earthy, human, adapted to the earth. (1 Cor. 15:38,44) David declares that man was made only a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory, honor, dominion, etc. (Ps. 8:4-8) And Peter, our Lord, and all the prophets since the world began, declare that the human race is to be restored to that glorious perfection, and is again to have dominion over earth, as its representative, Adam, had.—Acts 3:20,21

It is this portion that God has elected to give to the human race. And what a glorious portion! Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow that yet prevail on account of sin, and picture before your mental vision the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society; not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word; love, welling up from every heart, meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more; not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay—not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and

mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's society be; and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears all wiped away, when thus they realize the resurrection work complete.—Rev. 21:4

The human nature is a perfect earthly image of the spiritual nature, having the same faculties, but confined to the earthly sphere, and with ability and disposition to discern only so much beyond it as God sees fit to reveal for man's benefit and happiness. The divine is the highest order of the spiritual nature.

The conditions on which the Church may be exalted with her Lord to the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) are precisely the same as the conditions on which he received it; even by following in his footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21), presenting herself a living sacrifice, as he did, and then faithfully carrying out that consecration vow until the sacrifice terminates in death. This change of nature from human to divine is given as a reward to those who, within the Gospel age, sacrifice the human nature, as did our Lord, with all its interests, hopes, and aims, present and future—even unto death. In the resurrection such will awake, not to share with the rest of mankind in the blessed restitution to human perfection

and all its accompanying blessings, but to share the likeness and glory and joy of the Lord, as partakers with him of the divine nature.—Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim.2:12

Life for those restored as human beings and immortality, the prize for which the body of Christ is running, have both been brought to light during this age. (2 Tim. 1:10) Both the human and spiritual natures will be glorious in their perfection, yet distinct and separate. No insignificant feature of the glory of God's finished work will be the beautiful variety, yet wonderful harmony, of all things, animate and inanimate—harmony with each other and harmony with God.

THREE WAYS—THE BROAD WAY, THE NARROW WAY, THE HIGHWAY

Thus we have found a "Broad Road," on which at present the masses of mankind travel, deluded by the "prince of this world," and led by perverted tastes. We have found that it was opened up and that our race was started in its headlong course upon it by "one man's disobedience." We have found that the "Highway of Holiness" is to be opened up by our Lord, who gave himself a ransom for all and redeems all from the destruction to which the "Broad Road" leads, and that it will, in due time,

be accessible and easy for all the redeemed ones whom he bought with his own precious blood.

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain” (kingdom) saith the Lord. (Isa. 11:9) Though there will be difficulties to labor against in overcoming propensities to evil, etc., yet in comparison with the narrow way of this age, that will be an easy way. The stones of stumbling shall all be gathered out, and the standard of truth shall be lifted up for the people. (Isa. 62:10; Mal. 3:15,18) By wholesome chastisements, fitting encouragements and plain instructions, as returned prodigals, mankind will be trained and disciplined up to the grand perfection from which father Adam fell. Thus “the ransomed of the Lord shall return [from destruction, by the grand highway of holiness] . . . with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:10

We have found, furthermore, that the present “Narrow Way,” opened up by the merit of the same precious blood, is a special way leading to a special prize, and is made specially narrow and difficult as a test and discipline for those now being selected to be made partakers of the divine nature and joint-heirs with our Lord Jesus

in the Kingdom of glory soon to be revealed for the blessing of all. Such as have this hope—who see this prize—may count all other hopes as but loss and dross in comparison.—Phil. 3:8-15

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

When fully set up, the kingdom of God will be of two parts, a spiritual or heavenly phase and an earthly or human phase. The spiritual will always be invisible to men, as those composing it will be of the divine, spiritual nature, which no man hath seen nor can see.—1 Tim. 6:16; John 1:18

Those who will constitute the spiritual phase of the kingdom are the overcoming saints of the Gospel age—the Christ, head and body—glorified. Their resurrection and exaltation to power precedes that of all others, because through this class all others are to be blessed. (Heb. 11:39,40) Theirs is the first resurrection. (Rev. 20:6) The great work awaiting this glorious anointed company—the Christ—necessitates their exaltation to the divine nature; no other than divine power could accomplish it. Theirs is a work pertaining not only to this world, but to all things in heaven and in earth—among spiritual as well as among human beings.—Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:20; Eph.1:10; Phil 2:10; 1 Cor. 6:3