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HE SENT HIS WORD

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He Sent His Word

Devotions for Each Day of the Year

JANUARY

Spring Valley, 1992

HE SENT HIS WORD is a translation of *Er sandte Sein Wort* (ed. Anneliese Böhringer, Freimund-Verlag, Neuendettelsau, 1974), a collection of daily devotions (many with supplementary texts) written at Bad Boll in the mid-1860s by Johann Christoph Blumhardt.

This English edition is a compilation of partial translations done by several brothers and sisters at various Bruderhofs between 1974 and 1991. Francis and Sylvia Beels completed the translation, which has also been checked for readability, though *not* "2-man checked" against the original German.

The daily Bible texts preceding the devotions were translated freely except where otherwise indicated.

Spring Valley, December 1992

January 1

See, you had reason to be angry when we sinned and remained in sin for a long time; but in spite of it we still received help. (Isaiah 64:4,5)

It is a great comfort when we are reminded that God helped, even when there was guilt, yes, great guilt. Certainly, we have reason to become afraid and almost lose courage when we feel in our affliction that God's wrath is upon us and that he therefore punishes us severely and we well know why he is angry. But we have experienced God's help in such situations, if we earnestly turned to him, and that is a wonderful comfort in every distress. Yes, it is said that even in distress we found comfort and this word "even" is wonderful. We must feel that it is true: God helps, even when the guilt is great. That is why David says: "He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:9,10 RSV).

Therefore we should never give up courage to look for God's grace. People often say the worst part of their distress is that they are to blame for it. That tends to drive them to despair. One can well understand that misfortune weighs heavily on men, especially because they would like so much to be innocent and able to tell our dear God, "Why do you chastise me, I am so good!" Let us not forget that we are children of grace and that we must know that we are children of grace.

Therefore God often makes it very obvious what we are, so that we may learn to cry out for grace. When he punishes our sin we must not give up hope because of our guilt. If we feel God's wrath, and that he has good reason for it, we must not think that he will be angry forever and will not forgive. We still can hold fast to his grace.

We know we receive help in spite of our own guilt. That is sure. Anyhow, what we call God's "wrath" is often just pure love. In the end God's mercy will be revealed, even though slowly at

first, then more and more. At last what remains in our heart in only praise and thankfulness.

January 1 (Supplement)
Help--in spite of everything

The prophet uses these words in a special connection. He transfers himself into a future time, when, for the people of God, heaven would be as though closed, and God would have concealed himself without regard to the prayers and entreaties of his children. We are reminded how directly the Lord had once manifested himself to his people! How the prophet sighs, (Isa. 64:1) "Oh, that you would rend the heaven and come down and let the mountains dissolve before you!" With that he remonstrates with the Lord that in earlier times, even when he had been angry, yet he had relented and given help. "Why" he asks "will you now be so hard and keep silent and bring us down so low? (64:12) Before that he said (63:17) "Why, Lord, do you let us go astray from your ways and harden our hearts so that we do not fear you?" In this way the prophet sighs and prays, thinking of a future time that will come.

However, we know how Isaiah speaks continually of the Messianic times, and not only of their beginning, but also of their ending which brings the fulfillment with it. Our words refer to both of these. Before Christ came, it really was as though God had gone far away, and all the entreaties of those who were waiting for the kingdom of God, were in vain. But at last heaven opened and the Lord revealed himself in his promised glory--in Christ.

However, once again in our times it has come about that the Lord appears to be in the far distance, as if he had forgotten the completion of what he had begun or had given it up. We see decay and weakness on all sides and overpowering darkness to a high degree both within and without; and that personal manifestation and help of God appears to have almost ceased. Here again we have cause to pray, as Isaiah prompts us at such a time: "Why, oh Lord, do you let us go astray on our own ways and harden our hearts that

we do not seek you?" Even in this the wrath of God lies hidden that he does not send us the spirit of repentance and awe; that at the same time he withholds the power for the renewal of our hearts which is so necessary for us. It is God's wrath because the true earnestness and longing for him and his revelation is lacking in us, whereby the entire guilt of Christianity, of the people of God, has become so great.

But shall we then give up all further hope? No, we take the sighing of the prophet as a sign, that in a similar way we should sigh and pray, for that is the way to something better. Like him we hold to the historical facts that God "has nevertheless helped his people, though they have sinned and remained long in sin." However much he may have cause, the Lord cannot keep his anger for ever or give up what he has promised and all that follows. We can pray for him to come to us again, like the prophet who at last received an answer. (Isa. 65:1 ff) Finally he will take things in hand and will open up and allow his grace and the gifts of grace to come in streams over his forsaken, stricken and widely erring people--directed toward the day of the final Revelation.

January 2

You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (Eph. 2:20,21 RSV)

Our Lord Jesus Christ is called the cornerstone on which all believers, united in the Spirit through the teaching of the apostles and prophets, are gathered in a holy temple of the Lord. This includes not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, who up to now have been only "guests and strangers." But now they have become "citizens together with the redeemed in God's family." The believers from both groups are like the stones which fit into one building.

This comparison expresses how closely all are united and how indispensable each is for the fulfillment of God's Kingdom. In a house or temple building one stone supports another; and each one contributes to support, strengthen, and build up the whole. Everyone is needed. If one stone should drop out, it would at least leave a gap, or even could bring the whole building into danger.

Everything, however, is supported by Christ, the cornerstone. When the building is completed, that means when all who are called are gathered and made ready for the Kingdom of God, it will become apparent how important each soul is for the whole, each soul who allows himself to be saved.

How much should each Christian strive to gain a place in the building! He should do that for the sake of the whole which would remain incomplete even if only one soul is missing, one soul who has been called and on whom we therefore count. It should be our concern, so to speak, to gather the stones. That means to share in working for men to accept the Spirit of Christ, so that they can by faith be incorporated, and so that the whole building may more quickly be completed.

When the whole is completed the perfect glory of God will be manifest in it (Rev. 21:3). That is why this building is called a "holy temple of God." Each one of the members is already here as a "living stone," (1 Pet. 2:5), a "dwelling of God in the Spirit;" and each person is therefore already "a temple of the Holy Spirit."

May we be more flexible and obedient, more watchful of the teaching of the apostles and prophets who laid the foundation, so that we in good time become "witnesses of his wonderful grace."

January 2 (Supplement)

Building stones that have fallen away

It certainly seems that when someone in defiance remains stubborn, his position can also be transferred to another. That appears to be indicated where it is said that the one who had buried his pound [or talent] should give it over to him who had ten pounds [or talents] (Matt.25:28); further, when the Lord says so emphatically to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia (Rev.3:11) "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown"; further, it is even said of Judas, the betrayer, that "another will take over his charge"--otherwise he would have had his seat "to judge the twelve tribes of Israel" together with the other apostles (Matt.19:28).

It is possible for the whole structure to be completed even when the faithfulness of one individual is lacking. There is also the serious word in Revelation to be aware of: "Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; but let him who is good continue to be good; and let him who is holy continue to be holy" (Rev. 22:11). With those words it appears that there comes a time when the negligent and unfaithful will no longer be waited for; those who do not go forward with their repentance, but whom the Lord shuts out--as it may be now with those who have been waited for, considering the attitude of their hearts.

On the other hand we can also think that nevertheless God waits patiently until, so to speak, the building can be completed. This is explained by the word of Peter, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Dear Christian, how important is your faithfulness! On the one hand it is for you yourself, so that you are not done out of what is destined for you; on the other hand it is for the sake of the whole, whose fulfillment can be hindered through you. We may dare to think so, considering the great worth of every single soul!

January 3

Seek the Lord and you shall live. (Amos 5:6)

The prophet Amos' concern is with the Kingdom of Israel. It had separated itself from the Kingdom of Judah where the temple stood. Instead of serving God, the Israelites followed a so-called worshiping of calves, worshiping all kinds of idols and turning away from the Lord and his commandments. Because of such idolatry more and more misfortune hit this Kingdom, and also, because other sins and horrors became customary, Israel's complete destruction drew near.

The prophets of the Lord including Amos foretold this destruction. They said that everything would turn out well if the Israelites in their affliction would look to the Lord and not to idols, and serve him alone. However for a long time they had become used to running only to the altars of idols and to those serving them who, in the service of darkness, led the Israelites to believe in all kinds of superstitions. Therefore Amos says: "Do not seek Bethel and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba (Amos 5:5 RSV) because these were places where the idols had their altars. And he added: "Seek the Lord and you shall live," which means that they will live and not perish. But they did not listen and did not obey. Again and again they sought council in idol worship. A hundred years later the Kingdom was broken up by terrible events. Those who did not die by the sword were led into captivity in Assyria.

This has been recorded as an example to us. The words of the prophets should still today ring in our ears when we see in our time what even Christendom is doing. How many have stopped seeking God in their misery and ceased to call on him in their need and to serve him! It seems as if even Christians run after and serve other gods again. We do not call what is done among us idolatry, but that is what it actually is.

Let us consider the great part that superstition, pagan superstition plays among all classes in our time. How many people

cling to the so-called miraculous and other kinds of trickery, to certain men and women who pretend to know or achieve very much, or to clairvoyants. They imagine they hear voices of the spirits and believe in horoscopes. They want to have connection and communication with uncanny beings by table-turning, table-tapping and other innumerable kinds of esoteric magic! Is that not the same as running to Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba as the Israelites did? Does it help if we, like the Israelites, wish at the same time to hold on to Christ and the true God? How many among us no longer care about God! Will such ways help people to live or to save their lives? Does it not happen that often such dark superstitions are the cause of much misery in many families today, even where people do not reject all faith? "Leave it and turn back from such ways" so might the prophets cry out to us today "or it will lead you into complete destruction. Only he who seeks the Lord will live!"

January 4

Peace be with you all that are in Jesus Christ.

(1 Pet. 5:14, AV)

The word peace expresses everything our heart desires for body and soul, for time and eternity. It signifies a situation in which we have above all found inward peace and calm. When we have found peace we feel we have come to a safe harbor where we can be carefree and fearless, even when storms roar and seas rage. Such peace comes to us through faith in Christ Jesus who sacrificed himself for us and gave his all for us in order that we as children have access to God's fatherly heart. Peace is often missing outwardly; it cannot be any different in a world that is in bondage. The heart, however, can still find peace in the certainty that everything will turn out right and that we find eternal peace with God.

Only those who are through faith really united with Christ and are really in Christ can have peace. That is why Peter wishes peace to those who are in Christ. We are in Christ Jesus if we know how to accept what he has won for our sakes. We have also to be of the same mind as he so that we stay free of passionate involvements which are the concern of those who love what is of this world, instead of keeping his commandments. Then peace cannot vanish completely; then we shall always know how to gain it again through God's grace.

Even if we have peace in Jesus, we need always to have it renewed. It is seldom completely in us because we hardly ever surrender everything to Christ. Let us therefore always seek peace in fuller measure. Peace will always be attacked, especially by outer events. We will be tossed about by fears and worries because of the happenings in our lives. We often feel as if we had lost peace. That happens because we still make many mistakes and fall sometimes, without being aware of it, into folly and sin. First then our peace of soul suffers. Often darkness attacks us and clouds the peace of our souls or even takes it away. That is why:

"peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus," is the Apostle's deep longing for the Churches, even though we would expect them to have peace. This longing makes us aware how necessary it is to be awake and to pray lest our peace suffers. We are always tossed about and it is always a question of holding on to peace, because of the danger of being robbed of it.

Let us help one another with comfort, encouragement and intercession, so that peace remains with us. May peace, even when it is far away, return to us again! Then we shall be able to depart in peace from this vale of tears as men who are in Christ and are forever sheltered in him.

January 5

We do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy.
(Dan. 9:18 RSV)

Daniel prays for the return of captives from Babylon. It had been foretold that it would happen at a certain time. Through Jeremiah God had pointed out to the people that the captivity would last 70 years (Jer. 25:11). But Daniel who "perceived the number of years" (Dan. 9:2) knew only too well that such promises are given only conditionally and can fail if conviction and faith are lacking in those for whom they are meant. It can well be that God means: You will be allowed to return home in 70 years. However, if none of you captives care or are concerned that this really happens and do not pray for it, then it can still go amiss, however definitely I have foretold it. God does not feel obliged to stick to numbers. We always have to take it as if he said: I have it in mind and thought of doing it in 70 years. Act accordingly, so that it can happen.

We have to ask for each gift of grace afresh, even if it has been promised to us. That is why Daniel found it necessary to pray earnestly to the Lord in the name of the people that he would fulfill the given promise. A man like Daniel was able to represent all the people because of the earnestness with which he was standing constantly before God. It often depends on a single person, as happens several times in the Old Testament, and this person must not be unconcerned. The Lord looks at this person above all to see if it is his real longing. So much is not always required of others, because they do not have so much the task of carrying the whole on their hearts. But Daniel tried at least to do his duty.

In his prayer Daniel must not rely upon anything he or his people have done that is good, nor rely on righteousness or any kind of goodness or merit they have above other people. Daniel cannot and does not want to claim any such thing. He therefore

presents himself and his people as sinners. He has to say and confess aloud how much the people have departed from God, and that it has served them right that they have fallen into the great misery that has come upon them. That is why he says: "We do not present our supplications before thee because of our righteousness, but because of thy great mercy."

We can trust in God's mercy even when we are so unworthy of it. We have to recognize that it is only out of his pure mercy that God pays attention to our prayers. If we claim with deep humility his mercy and his mercy alone, it will be granted to us. If we pray, we have first of all to surrender our own righteousness, let it go completely, so that we can pray solely on the ground of God's mercy. Then there is hope for us. However, if we want to add something of our own to God's mercy, all that we ask for and expect remains uncertain.

May the Lord, when we call upon him, grant us, above all, humility and clear recognition of our unworthiness and sin.

January 5 (First Supplement)

The non-fulfillment of the prophesy

It is especially the story of Jonah that shows how numbers can fail or do not prove correct, although certainly they were predicted, when there is a change in the attitude of those concerned. Jonah had to announce to the Ninevites that in forty days their city would be destroyed. The Ninevites repented. So God "relented concerning the calamity which he had declared he would bring about, and he did not do it" (Jonah 3:10)--which, as is well known, made Jonah angry, since he was more concerned with his own honor and infallibility than with the well-being of those who were threatened. However the fall of Nineveh came later.

As God felt regret in this case over the evil, so also he can regret the good he thought of doing, if the people concerned show they are not worthy of it. This is especially important in considering the question, why it is that the promised speedy return

of the Lord Christ is so long delayed, which causes great difficulty for many. We can simply answer: "The Lord has regretted allowing the shortening of the time for the fulfillment of the promise. For the church on earth did not act as it should; above all, the spreading of the Gospel to all people--which the Lord had commanded in his last words--simply did not happen. Those who stay in the simplicity of faith think that the promise of the Lord's future is, as it always was, a conditional matter, and they do not let themselves be disturbed, but still wait for the Lord. His ultimate coming (or return) nevertheless remains certain; and the delay will make it so much more wonderful!

January 5 (Second Supplement)
Curtailement of the affliction.

Daniel's prayer was even more important, for after all it was uncertain from which date the 70 years of captivity were to be reckoned. At that time, as he prayed and took note of the "number of the years" it was 536 B.C.; but as Jerusalem was destroyed in 588 B.C. [52 years earlier], and it was then that the people who remained alive were led away into captivity, so that 18 years seemed to be lacking from the 70 years. [70-18 = 52 years] However, Daniel ventured to reckon from the first abduction of some Israelites, which happened in the year 606 BC. Humanly speaking, the Lord had the freedom to delay the fulfillment of the promise until the year 518 BC. It could be said that a prayer such as Daniel's prevented the delay; or that the Lord shortened the time and acted more graciously than perhaps many had thought, and allowed Daniel's calculation to hold good.

So also one day in the extremity of woe the time of affliction will be shortened for the sake of the elect (Matt 24,22); ie. it will come more quickly to an end than was originally the plan. "The chosen ones" as they are called in Luke 18, 7ff. "who cry out to him day and night, he will save in a short time." Likewise the Lord should remain three days and three nights in the bowels of the

earth, just as Jonah did in the belly of the whale (Matt. 12:40). But the time of waiting was shortened for the faithful and praying disciples, although they did not really know what to pray for; it was not three full days; but a little of the first day, which already closed at sundown after the burial, and half of the third day--from the evening to the morning--was reckoned as the whole time.

In the same way we cannot know how much we can at least shorten the time of any affliction with prayers and entreaties to the Lord, even though we cannot pray for it to be taken away, whereas others, who do not humbly pray, must drink the cup of suffering down to the dregs. There can be wonderful experiences in cases of sickness!

January 6

We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

(Eph. 5:30 AV)

The Apostle expresses our solidarity with Jesus powerfully and forcefully here, when he says that we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Our Lord Jesus has become one with us to such an extent that he has also corporeality in common with us. He not only *became* in body as we are but through his human origin *became* kin to us. Therefore Paul says in another place (Gal. 4:4): "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman." With this Paul wants to express that the Lord has complete kinship with us.

But first only those can partake in the working of this "kinship" who are willing to depend upon him, accept him as a brother and are open to his blessings; those who also grow through faith close to him so that they become one mind and spirit with him as branches of him, the Vine. If we are like that then it serves us as a special support in faith that he is also through human origin our brother. Then we are allowed to ask him as one brother to another: then through him everything can turn out for the best. His love can have the power to redeem us.

Let us think of our Father in heaven: He cannot refuse the Son when he desires that his human brothers who look up to him are held in the same esteem. We can show this by a picture. Pharaoh was quite ready to accept Joseph's brothers with his father and all the members of his household. We read in the story (Gen. 45:16 RSV): "When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, 'Joseph's brothers have come', it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well." When the father and the whole family arrived, Joseph was allowed to "give them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land" (Gen. 47:11). And he was allowed to: "provide his father, his brothers, and all his father's household according to the number of their dependents" (Gen. 47:12). That is how it was with

Joseph who had been raised to the throne and found favor with King Pharaoh.

Even men who are evil act kindly, much more so does our merciful compassionate heavenly Father! How much will he rejoice when brothers of his beloved Son come! Through his Son he will give those who have erred but turned to love again the best a brother's heart can give. To separate his brothers would feel to our Lord like tearing a limb from his body. How heartwarming it is to hear that we are "members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones." In childlike faith we want to draw near to our great heavenly Brother. Through humble repentance and sincere love we want to grow close to his heart. Through his brotherly love he knows how to lead us safely from sorrow and distress to everlasting joy and bliss.

His loving strength is great, it brings us close to him so that his heart feels all our pain and suffering. We are not left alone: "We are of his flesh and bones."

January 6 (Supplement)

Christ our Brother

We should remember that the *whole of the human race*--we human beings--are akin to Jesus because of his human birth. We too belong to God as Jesus does, but not in the same way. We are akin to him because God created us men in his image and breathed his spirit into us.

This gives us important things for consideration. First of all we recognize that he shows his perfect goodness and righteousness in childlike and complete love for those who are akin to him. Finally he longs to bring his brothers--if that is possible--close to his heart. We feel his pain when men who are his brothers reject him with hard and stubborn hearts. His love called him to take upon himself the agony of death on the cross. In the same way now--when he is exalted to the right hand of God--it is his heart's desire to win further souls among nations of the

earth. He wants to honor them as brothers and let them have a share in his glory. We can imagine that it is with deepest anguish that he sees those who are against him fall prey to everlasting death. How can we think that he does not feel that pain?

Let us consider this: As he is our brother we can ask a great deal of him, and we want and can do that because we long to be saved through him. How can we then allow our brotherly feelings to be extinguished, to hate, envy, torment, ill-treat, despise, disparage, strangle, murder one another? Or pass by without feeling and hardheartedly, as the priest and Levite passed by the man who had fallen among robbers? Nothing will be more seriously condemned than to allow brotherly feelings toward one another to die. Therefore it is very significant that we are reminded: "Little children, love one another." And we are seriously reproached: "I have against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first" (Rev. 2:4 RSV). Because we are members of his body, of his flesh and bone, Jesus judges us seriously with these condemning words: "As you did it not to one of the least of these you did it not to me" (Matt. 25:40).

January 7

I have the Lord constantly before my eyes; for he is at my right hand and therefore everything will go well with me.
(Ps. 16:8)

Yes, he stands at my right hand, so I will remain firm. This is what David says in this passage, (taken from Ps. 16) in such a way that our Lord was able to apply it to himself in the time when he was among us in the flesh. One also could hear Jesus say: "I always do what is pleasing to him" (Jn. 8:29 RSV). In him it is completely fulfilled that the Lord, his Father, was at his right hand and that it went well with him through all the dark times of his life on this earth until he was glorified by his Father.

David, however, speaks in this Psalm as if he would apply these words to himself. That means he dared to say that he had the Lord constantly before his eyes, that he felt the Lord to be at his right hand, and that he hoped that with God's help all would go well with him.

There were times, however, when David was not able to say: "I have the Lord constantly before my eyes," though for the rest, he remained of faithful mind. After having seriously fallen, he learned by his own failures, became steadier, and regained and maintained confidence that everything would go well with him.

We who stand to the New Testament are first of all asked to have the Lord constantly before our eyes--constantly, at least to the point of not looking sideways with glances which displease him, deny him, and slight him. That is easier for us now because looking to God, the Lord, now means looking to Jesus, our highly exalted Brother, whose example we have before us. We feel drawn to him, "on whom faith depends from start to finish" (Heb. 12:2 NEB) because we are accepted through him by grace and through him have received peace. We also know that he, when we look to him, will be at our right hand, and all our hope will come from him in time and eternity. Who will not rejoice in having Jesus constantly before his eyes?

But where are those who do what is demanded, who abstain from casting glances at the rottenness of this world and do not allow themselves to be lured into all kinds of sins and transgressions of his divine command? Remember that the promise of everything going well with us, to which David is faithful, is fulfilled only if we have the Lord before our eyes or at least do not look away from him. Glancing sideways and thus abandoning the Lord brings danger or punishment. The punishment will be all the more severe, the more it has been expected of us not to cast such evil glances anymore. It will not go well with those who still keep an eye on the world with its carnal pleasures. Sooner or later they will find out how much harm it has brought or is bringing them.

Let the Lord therefore be our only possession, treasure, honor, joy and guide! Oh, how well will it go with us then not only now, but also in eternity!

January 7 (Supplement)

The eternal well-being of Christ, and his constancy

When we think of this saying in the mouth of the Savior, it can awaken all manner of thoughts in us.

Already when he says: "I have the Lord constantly before my eyes" we are reminded of the situation he was in, as one who had also come into the flesh and was faced with all manner of temptations, as Satan made every effort to lay snares for him everywhere. If he exults then that God is at his right hand, there is an indication of the many afflictions that came upon him and constantly seemed to crush him, and of how he spent his life in continual struggle and striving with God for help--more than we know. Ultimately, how important it is that all his hope, especially for us for whose sake he sacrificed himself, depended on his remaining firm to the end. For on that hung our salvation, because all the children born of man were sold into the power and bondage of Satan. It was especially important that in his most difficult hour, when he was hanging on the cross, he could cry out:

"He is by my side, therefore all will be well"-- he must have added in his thoughts."even though I die." However, he was so certain of this that he could invite one of the criminals into Paradise, which he saw before him, and could promise him eternal well-being. For this reason he could continue in the words of the psalm 16:9ff: "My body will rest securely, and you will not leave my soul in death, nor let your Holy One see decay."--words which the apostle expressly says refer to the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:25ff; 13:35ff). But for us, how very much depended on his remaining firm and well! He led the struggles to victory and out of the afflictions of this world he rose to the eternal well-being with the Father and to his original glory. With this our well-being is made certain.

How good it will be one day with him, our highly exalted Savior, in his glory and peace.

January 8

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be confirmed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. (Rom. 8:29 RSV)

In this text the Apostle wants to say, as in the previous verse, "with those who love God everything works for good." He wants to say that it should come to the point of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Their love consists in having entered into God's love through faith and dedication to God's grace through Christ. Through the love of God they have been brought to love and therefore are loved as God's children.

Such souls God "has chosen before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4) That means God has known them from the beginning and has therefore taken them into his care, appointed them to be in the likeness of his Son, who came in the flesh. Those who love God, and therewith prove their true childlike faith, need not wonder anxiously whether God knows and accepts them. That is certain from the beginning. The Apostle considers that we have to do with the eternal God who has always had a destiny in mind for us. God does not change, therefore the Apostle cannot imagine it as something which comes quite new in our time. Because he cannot imagine that there could be any change and anything new in God, he is compelled to think back into eternity, incomprehensible as it may be for the human mind.

Those who love God have to take anything obnoxious and any temptations in faith, knowing that they are made to bear the same as Jesus.

It is wrong to be overcome by doubt, despondency, mistrust, murmuring, or even by despair.

If we think of Christ's image we have to think of the Son when he was humiliated and raised up. Those who love him are also deemed worthy to suffer like him, to be scorned and badly treated in this world, to undergo Satan's temptations, persecution, abuse,

and the slanders of God's enemies, to be disowned as he was, offered up--even, if it must be--to suffer death as he did. But they will also, like him, see the resurrection, exaltation and glory. They--like him--will have the same right as children of the Father.

"That they may be one even as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one" (Jn. 17:22,23 RSV).

That gives us a great deal to think about! It is an encouragement to persevere in patience in all situations, and to remain faithful unto death.

January 8 (First Supplement)

Christ, the firstborn

When the Lord in our quotation is named the firstborn among his brothers, it is a reference to his resurrection. He is the first one who after going into death like other men, his brothers, and was born anew into heavenly life with his father on high. He is now called the firstborn among his brothers. For he should be the first, whom the second, the third, the fourth, the thousandth, the millions upon millions follow as brothers, and like him, rise again from the dead and become newly born into that life of eternal glory.

We want to remain true to him, our great brother, so that he can raise us up to himself, as God willed it from the beginning! This will become reality in that we will always have him lovingly before our eyes. Then we will not only remain strong and well, but will resemble the image of the son in the great rebirth. (Mt.19:28)

January 8 (Second Supplement)

Concerning election to grace

In connection with the preceding verse in our text, this is also used to substantiate the so-called "election to grace" or

"predestination". It means that God of his own free will has called one person to blessedness, but not the other.

However, a closer examination of the passage shows no evidence for this. In the previous verse, those who love God will be named as the people who are called according to his plan. However, the word "plan" cannot be understood as the arbitrary election to faith and love, which that dogma implies, but only the eternal plan of salvation, now fulfilled in this time, the order of grace appointed from eternity, the preconceived will of God under which conditions he would give a share in the kingdom of God. That is to say, it is not a reward for good works done, but out of grace, from the One who calls us through faith (Rom. 9:11-32). To be called according to the plan means nothing else than to allow yourself to be called as God will have it according to his plan: to seek salvation through faith and not through works, accepting the gospel in faith.

It continues: those who love God--love is here synonymous with faith--God already has chosen and known, in as much as he perceived from eternity, first, that they would have a disposition to faith and love, as nothing about human beings is unknown to him, even before they are born. (Ps. 139:16). Second, he has "recognized" them, in so far that he is mindful of them, and has concern for them, that they receive what is consistent with their heart and longing. Therefore the word "recognition" is frequently found in the Scriptures. In consequence, he has already previously appointed them for blessedness with him through Christ, and further, those he has called he has also justified and glorified (Rom.8: 30).

It does not mean that God has recognized or loved them in advance; that he gave them the disposition to faith and love, which he did not give to others, according to this dogma [of predestination]; but because they had the disposition to faith and love, as God knew in advance and as we see in them, they believed and loved when it was required of them; so God has already cared for them and is now carrying out his plan for them.

From where, however, this disposition to faith arises, which many of our generation yearn for like a captive in hiding, and why the one has it and not the other--about this subject, the Scriptures say nothing. They assume it is there where true faith is accepted as God-given. Such a nature, which will either accept or not accept the gift of faith--on which the Scriptures make everything ultimately depend--may correspond with the most personal self and self-awareness of the man.

Here remains a mystery that the Scriptures do not reveal, as after all it remains a mystery in what way the free will of man can be reconciled with the omnipotence and omniscience of God.

But, in the Christian way of thinking, all brooding over it should be avoided. We must take it in a childlike way according to the Scripture; on the one hand we are what we are from God; on the other we have to be responsible for what we believe or do not believe, and whether we are faithful or not faithful. Only in this way will we move forward in a healthy manner on the path of life.

January 9

To every man of his people now among you..., the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up. (2 Chr. 36:23 NEB)

Cyrus, the Persian king, had just conquered Babylon. With these words he allows the Israelites who dwelt as captives in his country to return home again.

Rather than speaking to all the Israelites, he addresses those who "belong to the Lord, their God." It is as if he knew that not all who are called Israelites belong to God's people, or care much about God, to whom they should belong and whom they should serve. He knew that not all would want to return, for they now felt at home among the heathen.

Cyrus was right. Not all of them did return. Ever so many Israelites stayed in the country in places where they had settled. It is likely that most of them did not have the God of their fathers in their hearts. If an Israelite at this time liked it away from his homeland, he was only half-heartedly for his God. The others had to leave behind what they had gained in the foreign country, had to take on and bear all kinds of privations and hardship on their long and difficult journey. In much distress and difficulty they had to start anew in a devastated country. For all this the ones who stayed behind had not enough love to their God.

But how is it with us Christians? They want to bear the name of the Lord their Savior, but how many are dedicated to him? How many are willing to join in sacrifices for him? For instance, we can see how few show an interest in the heathen who are also meant to come to the Savior, that means, how few can be induced to share in the conversion of the heathen. The same applies to other endeavors for the advantage of all. There is always only a little flock who stand up for the Savior. But also among the many we can find some--though scattered--to whom we can call with good courage: "Up to Jerusalem."

Those who hear this call dare everything, cost what it may! They can enjoy the Lord's grace and protection, as those who

returned from Babylon were allowed to find. Of them Cyrus said, "The Lord your God will be with you!" Those who returned succeeded, though the task was difficult and troublesome. In the same way all those will succeed who travel to the heavenly Jerusalem with true self-denial and dedication. Their merciful Lord is with them and leads them through all the difficulties till they find what their heart longs for. The Lord cannot help those who are slothful and negligent, who stay behind and are tied to trifles and the vanity of the world. They are at fault, finally, completely at fault!

Oh, may the time soon come, the promised time, when a new call to seek the Lord can ring out. Then many who are still sleeping will awake and--though the struggle may be hard--will prepare for the day of revelation and glory of the children of God.

January 10

Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. (Rom. 6:13 RSV)

We should not yield our members to sin, but to God. Sin and God are set against each other, because sin is against God and his rule. Injustice is the root of sin.

The man who sins thinks only of himself and has absolutely no regard for God and men. He acts as he pleases and as suits him, not caring what his fellow creatures say. Therefore it is said in 1 John 3:4, "Whoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law" (AV). Injustice is against God, justice is in harmony with God and his rule.

Sin is committed through men's members--mouth, eyes, ears, hands, feet, and so on. These members serve as tools for injustice. Thus from God himself, who has created the members, the weapons are given into the hands of injustice. Injustice would not be capable of doing anything if men had no members, if they had no bodily or mental equipment. Therefore God deprives some people of this or that weapon in making them blind, dumb, lame, or permitting suffering, so that they cease sinning. Peter speaks about this in 1 Pet. 4:1, and in Mt. 18:8-9, the Lord tells us in symbolic language, "If your hand, foot, or eye is a hindrance, throw it away," so that you do not become a child of damnation because you are using your own members against God. This means, "Do not allow your members to rule over you. Act as if you had lost them, as if you did not have them anymore" (Mt. 5:29a).

The believing Christian is "bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20 AV). All the members should serve God.

But how is it if the members and man with all his gifts are misused in serving sin, if man still does not devote himself to the service of God through righteousness? Oh, how much we need Paul's

admonition! Christian circles have got used to their members yielding to sin without a qualm. To this day even so-called Christians use the members of their body and their other gifts for things which are completely opposed to God. It is as if they use their members against God as weapons of unrighteousness. Is it possible to behave more or less rebelliously against God--often a whole life long--perhaps using the hand God has given to mock him? How can you then still have hope in Christ? Paul says further: "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death" (Rom. 6:21 AV).

January 10 (Supplement)

But if we have with our hearts come to believe in Christ, we are--so the text says--as if made alive from the dead. We serve the unrighteousness no more which led to death, but we serve God and the righteousness which leads to life. The members should sin no more, should no more be used as weapons in the hand of unrighteousness, but as "a ... sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1 RSV).

January 10 (Second Supplement)

The weapons of sin

It is the nature of all men that, through sin, they transform everything which they are given into weapons against God because they are in the service of injustice and selfishness. Not only do they misuse the members of their bodies in the sinful service of injustice, but they also know how to use sinfully their intelligence, skill, mental faculties, everything they have; they even know how to make use of their higher gifts and powers and nobility of mind for injustice and selfishness. For this reason the Lord is apprehensive of the "wise and learned" if they should feel moved to attach themselves to him (Matt. 11:25). We also know

that people who have been educated in good Christian institutions and are unsuccessful, can become much more artful scoundrels and cunning opponents of Christ than those who have learned less and whose minds are less educated. Yes, the higher education, which actually the Gospel gives to people, will frequently be used more in the service of the world than in the service of God, and often leads to sheer unbelief and to denial of all revelations. For we have had enough of the so-called "enlightenment" for which again, Christendom alone has to be thanked. So it is that even the highest gifts which God has given are made into weapons against God. And so for example, also the Protestant world, can misuse its highest enlightenment against God.

How can we wonder that God's anger lies upon the human race? We also understand how Paul in aroused zeal could say (Phil. 3:7-9): "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." For everything he was proud of in his former piety, had become weapons against Christ.

However, as our quotation says, whoever comes to faith in Christ in his heart, will be like one "brought from death to life". He has stepped out of the service of unrighteousness, which led to death, into the service of righteousness and the service of God, which lead to life. Now obviously the members should no longer give themselves to sin--as though they were still weapons in the hand of unrighteousness--but should be offered "as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God". (Rom. 12:1)

January 11

My God, help thou thy servant who trusts in thee. (Ps. 86:2)

"My God, do thou help!" David cries out when he is in great need. This is the only help that we know of in thousands of instances. Matters often become so hopelessly entangled that man in his own strength would have to give up. Everything then depends upon having a faith that trusts God to do what seems to be impossible and that turns to God in this faith.

How easily do we fall into thinking that even God no longer knows how to help; that means that everything is lost. Then one does not want and cannot pray anymore. That's how it is with those who fall into despair. They who despair of God can no longer say: "My God, do thou help!" because they, as has been said, have given up as if even God could no longer help!

Of course, many are not at all accustomed to think of God and know nothing about calling to God in need. Unfortunately people often consider themselves too clever and wise and think: "Why should God listen to the prayer of men or be moved to do something because of their pleas, or change something from the way he was doing it?" These people do not believe in God and are badly off when complicated situations arise. Indeed, people are badly off who have not learned to sigh: "My God, do thou help!"

Often, however, people do learn to pray when they are in need, though they have not been able to call on him before.

David was often in painful and desperate situations. But, because he calls himself "Servant of the Lord," he is able to say: "I trust in thee!" He means he is anyhow only a servant who stands in the service of a Lord, whose cause it is and who is the one to do it. Since David is a servant it is not up to him to do everything and he may not do it. As a servant he can and must go to the Lord and say: "I do not know what to do, I am at my wit's end. O Lord, do thou take care of it!"

We rarely do it that way. We want to be our own masters, who do and manage everything by ourselves. If it does not go anymore

we even get cross because we do not succeed. And then, because we are annoyed, we do not want to turn to God. However, acting like this, and not being able to surrender everything to God, to his mercy and strength, means to turn matters upside down and it brings us into ruin. We would rather run our heads against a wall instead of standing still, waiting, and humbly praying: "O my God, do thou help!"

David, the king, depends upon his God. He trusts God to accomplish it where he, the servant David, has got stuck. He trusts that God will get the wagon, which has gone off the track, out of the mud.

Indeed, for God everything is possible. He listens to our prayers and cares about them. To that we want to hold firm in faith! Well for him who can do it! He will receive help. This David has experienced and can therefore say: "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Ps. 2:12 AV).

January 12

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. 12:11 AV)

If we are driven into a corner and suffer because of it, it is mostly a chastisement for not having been wakeful enough, not having looked enough to the Lord, not having his cause clearly before our eyes. We have served our own advantage more than that of the Lord, we have been guilty of heavy sins. We get entangled, are up against a wall and do not know how to surmount it. That causes pain, sorrow, distress and all kinds of suffering. It is chastisement for having fallen into unfaithfulness. There is much sadness because we feel that we cannot carry on. It also happens that God comes with one lash after another. Then we are neither happy nor joyful.

Now everything depends upon how we take such chastisements. First of all we have to take it as a chastisement from a father to his son. One must not say, as many do, that we are no longer children of our Father. Then we would behave like step-children who, when punished because of being naughty, frequently complain and say: Now we can see that these are not our real parents, but only stepmother and stepfather. It is they who feel that they are not their children. Let us not act or think that God means to drive us away through chastisement. Let us rather become true children saying: "I thank you for chastising me!"

If we take all adversity as chastisements, and also keep on trusting in God, we will improve through it, will gain more understanding and become more upright. That will bear a fruit which is called peaceable, because it serves peace, finally eternal peace.

It is also called a fruit of righteousness insofar as we become empty and cleansed before God. The more we endure chastening and learn through it, the more upright we shall become.

The exercising, however, happens on the one hand through chastisement from our dear God--then why do you want to be beaten only a little bit knowing that without it you do not learn to become watchful. The training happens on the other hand that through it our faith and trust in God increases. Even if we have to blame ourselves for unfaithfulness, let us always trust in the Lord anew, let us always be sure of his grace and goodness. Let us always when distressed consider and take to heart that our Savior has endured bitter death on the cross for our sakes, so that we can find help out of all our misery. That disciplines and makes us ready for all good works in this present time and for a blessed entry into eternal peace.

Let us then accept all affliction as chastisement from God as children of the dear Father. Let us also carry the most difficult burden in hope that it may bear fruit which will bring eternal joy.

January 13

My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.
(Prov. 23:26 RSV)

What does the Lord want? Your heart! To behave a bit honorably here and there, to be proud of your virtues, and to stroll along in good repute--is still not pleasing to our Lord. He wants your heart, yourself, you real self. Your love and pleasure should rest alone in our Lord and God. All your being, in all your doings big or small, in inner or outer concerns, should be a witness to your love to God. It should be felt that you love your God who is merciful, that you want to give him your heart.

There are people who know how to appear virtuous and devout, yet they are not completely dedicated to God. Their manners are somehow rigid and legalistic and show that there is something not quite genuine about them. It makes us feel uncomfortable. Such people easily fall out of their roles when difficulties arise or if things go against the grain.

It is completely different if your heart--that strives for the good--looks to God. You are made happy by the grace God shows and gives to a heart that seeks him. Relief comes to you; you become more friendly and more loving, because you feel liberated from legalistic bonds. You can be joyful, can freely give or withhold as is demanded by the spirit. Everything need not be up to the mark. You do not fail so easily because love to God, to whom you belong, makes you take a stand. Your heart always beats for what is pleasing to God, and is hurt by what is done against him. How happy and secure you feel if you have given your heart to God!

In the New Covenant it is made easy for us to surrender our hearts, because there everything is aimed at winning our hearts by looking at Christ, God's Son and our brother, whose pure heart reaches out to us.

God says, "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways." If we have not surrendered our heart to God we are easily puzzled about the ways he asks us to take and he himself

takes. We are even puzzled about the way he wants to lead us to salvation. We can--if things go wrong--fall into murmuring, anger, and annoyance. If we look at things as they are naturally and not with the eyes of the spirit, we fall into doubt, mistrust, and disbelief. What good is such behavior? A childlike heart, however, rejoices in God's leading and accepts it humbly and gratefully, lets itself be guided by God and his Word, and knows how to submit to what God sends because it has no separate and self-willed desires. Only in relationship with the Lord does such a person look for salvation and peace, even if he has to go through self-denial, thorny hedges, through need and the Cross. That is how the Lord wants it for our good.

May we learn to give our love and hearts anew to him each day, so that his ways--even when they are rough--may not appear to us strange and unpleasing.

January 14

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20 AV)

Christ has been crucified for our sins. That is the great reality; a true Christian should always keep it before his eyes. For him it is like being crucified with Christ, having the power of the natural man broken. That is why Christ died.

How important it is to stand so firm in faith that the thought of Christ's death on the cross can kill and take the power away from all the natural, sinful impulses which want to rule us. That can only happen if we recognize and feel how great our sin is. There are no special results if we accept only drowsily, without remorse, that Christ died for mankind. Then--as a rule--our own nature keeps its hold upon us. Christ's agony has to penetrate our hearts much more deeply, so that we can say and feel that we have been crucified with Christ.

Paul says, "It is no longer I who live."

As Christ has not remained in death, so we, who have been crucified with him, also live. But it is no more our own life--it is the life of Christ in us. The only thing that matters to us is his witness, teaching, warning, and his consolation in our hearts. Everything besides what comes from Christ is dead, has no power or significance. That is the meaning of the words "...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Oh, how few there are who have come to such a life in Christ!

But we still live "in the flesh", have not yet overcome the weaknesses of a mortal life in the flesh; therefore we still have much to suffer as Christ had to suffer in the flesh. Paul, however, says "...and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God."

Through this faith the Apostle holds fast two things which transform his life in the flesh. He says about the Son of God,

first, "who loved me", and secondly, "who gave himself for me." Our life in faith should bring us on the one hand to Jesus' love, and on the other hand to his surrender; and that not only to strengthen and enliven us, but to renew and transform our life in the flesh. The same that the believer perceives and cherishes in his Savior should also be imprinted in the believer's heart. If Jesus has loved us, how can it be difficult for us to love him? He has surrendered his life for us. How can we refuse to make sacrifices for him or to be true in self-denial? Christ lives in us if both his love and his surrender become reality in us.

Our so-called life of faith, however, often remains only a life in the flesh--as if there were no faith. That is because we do not love and do not practice self-denial.

January 15

I know, O my God, that thou dost test the heart and that plain honesty pleases thee. (1 Chr. 29:17 NEB)

God tests the heart and keeps watch that it is honest. When, however, is a man not honest before God? It is when he does not recognize his weakness. Then, before God and himself, he hides and overlooks what he does wrong and how wrong he is. He is not honest if he does not recognize and does not take seriously his bad behavior, ungodliness, estrangement from God, and his leaning towards what does not come from God. The more so if he does not consider, is not struck by, his real wickedness and sin. Then because he does not look at his wickedness, he thinks highly of himself. Even in prayer he pretends to be devout and correct, and wants to look like this before men. Such a man is not honest before God.

Some people--although they have a bad conscience and sometimes want to ask forgiveness of their sins in prayer--still pass over them too lightly. They set their mind at rest because they quickly want to forget their sins. These people are also not honest before God.

As God tests the heart, he also sees into it. Therefore he is against those who are dishonest, hypocritical, sanctimonious, and deceivers of themselves. Such people can even become defiant of God like Cain, or get angry with him because things are not going the way they wish. They have to go through much chastisement if God perchance thinks that he can do something with them, so that they may be purified. However, if he perceives that he cannot do anything with them because of their self-importance and hardness of heart, he lets them go, ready for judgement. And there will be nothing so unfortunate as dishonesty.

Honesty is pleasing to God. When is a man honest before God? When he reveals himself before God as he is, as he really is, and if he does not hide or cover up anything. He is honest if he allows the pain of a bad conscience to penetrate into him, the pain

from which unbelievers shrink back. He is honest if he does not act the hypocrite before men, does not pretend to be better than he really is, and is willing to humble himself and be humbled as truth demands. That is pleasing to God.

God gladly comes to such people with comfort and healing of the wounded heart and troubled mind, and with great kindness. In them the entire power of the Gospel holds good. They not only find it easy to come to complete peace in forgiveness of sins, but also their whole being becomes clearer before God. They are not deceitful and false towards their fellowmen; they do not flare up if they are reproached. It is easy to come close to them, one can feel their heart and knows what to expect of them. That is why they are pleasing to men, and people wish them well. Let us take all this to heart and become honest!

January 15 (Supplement)

Sincerity in Giving

The saying, which was taken according to its general meaning in the previous explanation, has in its context a special application. That is to say it is taken from a prayer spoken by David in joy that the people had made the greatest sacrifice freewillingly and with joy, for the temple tax, which he had levied on them for his son and successor, Solomon, and it had turned out to be so abundant. David could have been proud about it; the whole enterprise could have served his vanity, his self-seeking, and ostentation. However, he was so far from this, that he believed he could declare it before God in prayer--since he knew that sincerity is pleasing to God--that he had acted out of an upright heart to the glory of God, and had no other intention or secret thoughts about it; he could also rejoice that all his people were like-minded about the matter.

These words of David show us how we have to be on our guard when gathering gifts for God's kingdom, that in doing this, we

serve only our dear God, and not ourselves--in which case we would be insincere toward God.

A lack of sincerity can occur both in collecting and in giving. In the first case they can boast as though they were something by serving God in this way with much activity and enthusiasm, whereas perhaps they are very much lacking in a Christian attitude! They can love to have it turn out splendidly and creditably; they can be glad to acquire a name, to have more joy in the gifts than a true interest in God's cause--all that without being true Christians! However the givers can lack sincerity in so far as they wish to be praised and commended, or only give with reluctance, not wishing to be frowned upon for not giving. Although they appear to have an interest in the cause, they really have none; and although they appear to be willing to sacrifice, they are not. They continue in an ungodly frame of mind.

It is remarkable that, generally with us in contrast to the times of David, the readiness to make sacrifices is in nothing else so petty as it is for the Lord. For David, it was a matter of building the temple; we think twice before saying much about a mission; for us it would be much easier to get the money together for a theater, or a similar project, however costly, than it would be for building a church.

January 16

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

(1 Th. 5:24 AV)

If God calls, he does it for a definite purpose. He has something definite in mind. He wants and he is able to carry out his plans. God cannot call half-heartedly; but when he calls, he calls from his whole heart. He wants to possess the man he calls to him. He wants to give everything and accomplish through him everything that he has planned and to which he is calling. God does not plan something today and drop it tomorrow. He remains firm; that is the meaning of the verse: "Faithful is he."

It seems, however, that many people imagine God to be inconsistent, to act differently today from tomorrow, to bless today and condemn tomorrow. Let us learn to trust in his faithfulness! Let us stop doubting when he calls, as if our dear God does not mean it seriously when he calls, or that he will change his mind. Everything will be given and assured for us, if we listen to his call. We can take it as if already granted us as soon as we answer when he calls our name. If he calls us, he will "do it." It is, however, often that he longs for it; but he needs you too. You also have to long sincerely for him. You must obey and come when he calls. You must be wholeheartedly surrendered to him. You must not interfere and want to insist on your own way. You must not come half-heartedly. You must not, so to speak, believe him to be the one who says yes today and no tomorrow, and always wavers between yes and no.

If we are true, God will surely lead us to the goal. If we are inconsistent, dishonest, and deceitful, we leave our dear Lord in the lurch when he wants to help us and accomplish something through us. However, as long as our hearts are sincere, he can help us. We will not suffer need, for he is faithful.

You must not regard your own feelings. That is what many do who say they do not feel any inner peace or certainty of forgiveness of sins and salvation. Your feelings may lead you

hither and thither. However, he has called you, he is faithful and he will help, if only your heart holds to him.

The greatest uncertainty can come to us through failings, foolish actions and sins we get into through ignorance, or unfortunately often knowingly. By this we surely make it more difficult for our dear God to work in us. But it will not hinder him so long as we, on our part, have a heart that acknowledges our guilt, is open, sincere, honest, and ready to start again. There are also weaknesses we cannot master; we will have to fight them throughout our whole lives and we will keep failing; but that must not cause us to doubt. Our Lord will not look at what we cannot do, he knows us, but he will look at our will, our troubles, sorrow, eagerness, seriousness, and honesty. It is our fault if we fail; and the reason for it usually is that we do not have faith and do not give the whole of our heart to him.

Let us believe what the Apostle says: He who has called us is faithful and helps us in spite of our weaknesses! If we fail, do not put the blame on him!

January 16 (Supplement)
Doubt in God's faithfulness

Many people are made fearful when they happen to take a look at a Judas, who was also called--and yet was lost! They ask why the Lord could not succeed with this Judas so that he might have kept his position (bishopric). And then they think further, if it went wrong with him, how easily it could also go wrong with them!

But if only Judas had thought once in a similar way to these people, and had said that he was fearful whether he would come through, he would certainly not have been lost. For if a person is fearful and anxious about his salvation it is an expression of his honesty.

However, even our dear God is unable to win over anyone with evil inclinations and actual unfaithfulness, such as Judas indulged in as bearer of the purse, or anyone who remains confident,

impelled by pride, self-love and touchiness. It might go so far with anyone who becomes annoyed and angry at friendly warnings and admonitions, as though it were doing him a wrong or did not honor him enough; with anyone who having such a stubborn mind and outwardly pious appearance never shows signs of humbling himself and wanting to change.

The Lord can pray effectively for one like Peter, and for the other disciples, that their faith might not fail when Satan wanted to sift them; for they themselves experienced anxiety and fear, and sincerely and frankly recognized their own weakness. When they asked, "Lord, is it I?" they clearly showed how little they trusted themselves and how they had not overcome the fear that they could even become betrayers, for they seemed to have fought with the incitement of Satan. Such souls the Lord can help.

But the self-seeking, spiritually superior people, the arrogant, haughty, covetously minded, secretive Christians--whom one meets again and again--certainly make it difficult for God to bring them to salvation. It was the Lord's firm intention to do it for them although he can only invite and call, but he forces no one. Whoever earnestly wishes that God will save him, God will surely do it for him!

Moreover, with certain people there is rather a bad habit; it is as though they want to reproach the Savior by saying, "Certainly wrong was done by Judas and others--and I could also err, so you could give me up in a similar manner!" That looks like a contradiction as though they would say, "We cannot trust your word completely!"

Whoever thinks in this way is in a dangerous situation, putting it all on to the Savior and laying the blame on him when, as he himself says, he is no better. Guard yourself from such an unchildlike person, certainly a very unpleasant being to Him! You, however, rouse yourself, trust and believe! "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling", that you do not become a thief like Judas, or a deceiver like Ananias and Saphira, a worldly person like Demas, or a glutton, drunkard and abuser of your domestic servants and others like that servant whom the Lord will

condemn on his day, or in general an evil-doer whom the Lord "never knew!" Only such people can fail.

If however you have the fear of God in you that you will not be like that, then the Lord will keep his word. He will not leave you in the lurch--if only you do not desert him through mistrust, evasion or running away!

January 17

Praised be he, who comes in the name of the Lord.

(Ps. 118:26)

These words were often sung in front of the temple when great festivals were celebrated in Israel. They express in a living way trust in the Lord who, after we have waited for a long time, comes to us with his help and his almighty power. They mean more than the plea, "Come, Lord, and help!"

These words place the help which is to come already in the present, indicating that we can see the first traces like the rays of a rising sun.

The words of the Psalm also point to the coming of the Savior of the world. His coming was already felt by those who were filled with faith. That is why when Jesus was entering Jerusalem, the people--in order to confess that they saw in Jesus the promised one--sang, "Praised be he, who comes in the name of the Lord," meaning that the strength of the Highest has been bestowed on him. This shows that he was to bring about salvation and peace. Remembering him, we sing, "Praised be he who comes in the name of the Lord. He is the Comforter of the world who will end all misery."

In the meantime Jesus has ascended to his Father. However, much misery remains with us, comfort is also offered through him. We again are longing for his coming and wish the day might break in when we can call, "Praised be he who comes in the name of the Lord, in the strength and glory of his Father."

Yet we believe that he is ever again on the point of coming, especially when we call on him. He himself told his disciples, "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you" (Jn. 14:18 AV). Through all that takes place in his kingdom we can believe in his coming and his help. Believing has to suffice for the time being. We can often get to know and sense this through the blowing of his Spirit, when our hearts are on fire as with the disciples on their way to Emmaus. Often, when we receive unexpected help in all sorts

of difficulties, we feel compelled to call out, "Praised be he who comes and brings us help from heaven." But we still wait for his real coming. Then all our heart's longing will be fulfilled. We can do nothing but cry out, "Come, Lord Jesus!" and at last, in a time when everything is in a great turmoil and all seems to be lost, the call will be heard, "He comes! He comes!" Then those who belong to him will lift up their heads when they see him coming from heaven! In great rejoicing they will call out, "Praised be he who comes in the name and power of the Lord!"

Our beloved Savior Jesus Christ and his coming mean everything, yes, everything, to us!

January 18

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love. (Eph. 4:1,2 RSV)

Our calling is to become members of the kingdom of heaven, through faith. That is a wonderful calling. We on earth cannot treasure it too highly. It includes our need to come into close and deep relationship with God. With God, who out of his great mercy, little as we have deserved it, wants to grant us a dwelling place close to him.

Our whole life and being should befit such a calling. What are the characteristics that show we are called to the kingdom of heaven? Oh, how often the Apostle tells us, and even the Lord himself! They are humility and meekness, patience, and bearing one another in love. That is what should grow in us who are evil by nature. Then we fulfill and adorn our calling. If these adornments are lacking, we do not live up to our calling.

Bearing one another in love is especially important. That is the essence of everything. When there are differences of opinions and views, those who are called to the kingdom of God have to be careful not to lack in bearing one another in love. If one has to do with less advanced Christians, one has to consider that one cannot ask as much of them. The main thing is to persevere in love. To flare up if one thinks he is right or if one sees that others are blinded and erring, causes discord, quarreling, and enmity, and is therefore a disturbance to bearing one another in love. This behavior hurts love, and does not befit our calling. Let us therefore learn to be quiet, gentle, and peaceable, and thus not to hinder love! Let us learn to yield whenever possible! Let us wait for an appropriate time when one can speak and be understood in love! In this way let us bear one another in love and walk in accordance with our calling.

But how important are also the three other jewels of the children of the kingdom: humility, meekness, and patience.

Bearing one another in love is based on these and they are its bulwark. If one is found to act the opposite way, if one is proud, harsh, impatient, one confuses everything, and that violates one's calling. How few there are who consider that, and how few take to heart to be humble, meek, and patient! They very often let themselves go and do not fight against their own nature. Then, even if much seems to be given, the right thing is missing.

Let us guard against lacking the best thing, and let us learn to walk in accordance with our calling! That is what we have been told!

January 19

Trust, be a man, and wait for your God's protection so that you may walk in his ways and observe his ordinances, commandments, and orders. (1 Kgs. 2:2,3)

These parting words David speaks to Solomon who followed him on the throne. First of all David calls him to trust and to be a man, that means to act with joyful courage and to be strong and firm. Because Solomon is called to pursue God's cause, it would be treachery to be fainthearted, unmanly, and uncertain. Otherwise it would look as if he did not really trust in God's cause and was uncertain what the results of his endeavors would be.

If an important task is given, we are asked to perform it with confidence. If we are timid and fainthearted we already show that we are not firmly grounded that we dishonor God and assist the Evil One. A true servant of the Lord is firm and confident, joyful and assiduous in his work, and never loses courage in meeting opponents. He knows he is serving a Master who gives strength and who can accomplish everything that he has put into his servant's hands. The hands of the servant are weak unless God helps!

David asks his son "to wait for God's protection"; that means faithfully to observe the service of God in the temple, to keep the commandments and ordinances given by God and not to neglect them. If those responsible do not observe the set orders, everything becomes lax and almost falls apart. Then slackness, lack of restraint, and disrespect for the divine get the upper hand.

Furthermore David asks his son to walk in the ways of the Lord, to observe his ordinances, commandments, and orders. Such warnings to a young king were very important. It easily could happen that his position would make him headstrong, high-handed, and domineering. In doing so he follows his own desires and moods more than the God-given commandments and orders.

If these commandments are given as a duty for a king, then how much more do they apply to us! It can easily happen for somebody to be authoritative and despotic, disregarding the commandments and

not allowing God's Spirit to guide, not heeding to word that should be a guiding star!

Let us remember these words are the parting words spoken to a son! Many people only speak up in their last hour. They would, if they could, in flaming letters burn into the hearts of those who remain what they only now see clearly in full significance. But how many children forget only too quickly such heart-moving warnings!

Even Solomon, the wise man, forgot it in later years.

Let us be wiser than Solomon!

January 20

Be ready to follow the gospel of peace. (Eph. 6:15)

The words of the text are: "Let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace" (NEB).

The apostle describes the Christian as a warrior, and interprets the warrior's armor symbolically. The armor for the leg reminds the apostle of the clothing which is worn by the messengers of peace. This is a picture of the eagerness to proclaim peace--in the same way that a warrior goes to war, in order to bring peace into unpeace.

The warrior usually takes off his armor when he comes back from the battlefield. The Christian, however, should never take off his "armor." He should wear it always, prepared to fight against unpeace and work for peace.

A Christian is never allowed to become slack or lean back unconcerned in order not to suffer defeat and losses. Most of all he has to give heed to maintaining peace in himself, and keeping peace with others. The foe likes nothing better than trying to disturb peace among Christians as well as others. Therefore the Christian has to be armed against this foe.

The text says two things. First of all we should be ready to work for the gospel of peace, to spread it and to bring it to others who do not yet know it. The Ephesians are told that it is their duty to speak about and proclaim the message of peace which has meant so much to them. All who have found peace should become messengers of peace who proclaim the Word. It should become second nature to them to speak and witness about what has brought peace to their heart.

The text also says that we should not only speak about peace, but show it in deed. We should witness with our lives and in our contact with others that the Gospel brings peace of heart. If we ourselves do not seek peace, that is if we cannot deny ourselves, if we act stubbornly and come to the point of wrangling and quarreling, we do not work for the gospel of peace, however much we

want to. Then we only do it outwardly and have not the right spirit of the Gospel; no wind of the spirit of peace blows from us. If we know and proclaim Christ, we have really to be bearers of peace. We have to have peace with all men and try to maintain peace amongst men. Making "unpeace" is something the world knows well.

Peace, however, should be the nature of the Christian. We must not shrink from any hardship or sacrifice for peace, but stand equipped for the fight as workers for peace.

How often do we work ourselves into unpeace! May God have mercy on us! How loving are the words of the Lord in Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (AV). Those who are not peacemakers--have they the same right to be children of God?

January 21

Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears,
and my feet from sliding. (Ps. 116:8)

These are words spoken when David had experienced deliverance out of great distress. He had been in deadly peril, almost doomed to death. He did not see any help against the foes who pursued him, and severe illness had brought him close to death. But now God has helped him, and his soul praises God.

One of God's methods of educating is to let us come in various ways near to death, in order to remind us that--after all--we are nothing but children of death. In any case we do not give in till we come to the utmost limit. Many evildoers only humble themselves and confess their guilt when they see the flash of the executioner's sword. Little difficulties which God put in our way do not seem to have much effect on us. No wonder that he has to bring us near death, no wonder that he has to inflict the worst possible upon us. Many of us have to keep walking as if on the edge of a steep abyss, in danger of falling into it at any time. That will change only when we begin to humble ourselves. David no longer needed to shed tears. If we are confronted with the utmost suffering, then tears flow abundantly.

It depends upon what kind of tears we shed. Are they shed in mere pain, pride, self-love, despair, or even in anger and wrath? Or if they are tears because of humbling ourselves before God, of looking to the Lord, and heaving a sigh for his mercy, then we have made a beginning, and help can be found. Tears shed in turning to the Lord and not away from him have great power. Even the godless Ahab benefitted from bowing low with tears and supplication before God (1 Kgs. 21, 27ff). David too cried to the Lord and that brought him deliverance.

David praises the Lord for preventing him from sliding. If we--in need and distress--do not see a way out, it is likely that our foot will begin to slide. Then we lose firmness of heart and faith; we are tempted to fall into despondency, despair, and

murmuring against God, even going so far that our heart gives up believing in God and his faithfulness and promise. We may even fall into false, sinful ways of taking things into our own hands, and then our foot can begin to slide. That is very dangerous for us men, because then we come to the brink of eternal death if we do not hold out when our faith is tested.

The Lord is kind to us if we are sincere, take heart, and stand firm. We are not tempted beyond our strength. In good time--before we really start to slide--he brings about a change in our suffering. David experienced this, as our text expresses.

God snatched the devout David out of every danger. We too can have similar experiences. After we have been distressed, the Lord gives us again and again times of rejoicing and peace with signs of help. Then we--like David--can give praise and thanks.

To be sure, temptations and struggles will come again. But we will never lack help and comfort from our faithful God.

The time, however, will come at last when we have gained certainty, when the tears are wiped away from our eyes and there will be no thought of our foot sliding.

What praise and glorifying will then be ours!

Oh, that we were there!

January 22

Behold, we count them happy which endure. (Jas. 5:11 AV)

James bids us "take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience" (Jas. 5:10 AV). The prophets--in order to remain true to their testimony--have endured much suffering, also disgrace and persecution, even the cruel pains of death. James also reminds us of Job's patience, and points us to the ending of Jesus' life. That should show us that glory arises from affliction.

"Those who have endured" means those who endured without denying the Lord. Certainly "we count them happy." We can see this clearly in the Lord Jesus himself, who, because of his patient obedience, "has been highly exalted by God, and given a name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). They, like him, are well off who fought courageously on his side and remained faithful unto death. Is there anyone who does not believe this who does not count them happy?

We also see that James wants to tell us that we can only enter the kingdom of God through affliction. Therefore we must not wish to have a good life on earth on account of our faith, or wish to remain without tribulation. It should not surprise us if we have a hard time.

In our time faith is not made very difficult for us. But other times will come, which make themselves felt already. In the last fierce time, however, nothing can help us so much as looking at those who have endured and whom we therefore count blest. In a special way we can be upheld by looking to Jesus "on whom faith depends from start to finish" (Heb. 12:2 NEB).

In the meantime, till these most difficult times come, we must have other difficult times instead. So many things happen to us that we are likely to think we are worse off than any martyr. For we live in a time when misery and distress through sickness, poverty, anguish of mind, family difficulties, torments and pains unto death seem to increase in a frightful way. Then many people

believe that they, as God's children, should fare better, and are at the point of losing heart. Instead of enduring and patiently waiting, some are troubled thinking that, because they have such a hard time in the world, they are not in God's favor.

They want to be rid of everything painful. Impatiently and sorry for themselves, they cry to the Lord day and night, and do not rest content, even when there is good reason.

Others, not finding help, think they are done for, eternally as well, because God does not listen to them. The only advice for all those whose wishes God does not respond to, are James's words, "Behold we count them happy who endure."

Mark my words--we do not count as happy those who have a good life on earth, but those who endure. We also do not count as happy those who lack patience and endurance. Listen well, we do count happy those who endure. Remember, you too will be called blessed if you have endured, patiently endured. Then you are really blessed.

Let us therefore hold out courageously. That will be best for you, you weak, weary, suffering pilgrims!

In any case you need not carry it all alone.

January 23

Shall mortal man be more righteous than God? Shall a man be purer than his Maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his messengers he charged with folly.
(Job 4:17,18)

These words are not said by a man who always says the right thing, but by one of Job's unpleasant comforters, namely Eliphaz. He accuses Job, a man crushed by misfortune, of being a great sinner, as otherwise God would not have brought him so low. Eliphaz had kept silent for a long time. But he became indignant in the end, thinking that Job, with his strong complaining, was wanting to be better and purer than God. Among other things he said, "Shall mortal man be more righteous than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?"

Eliphaz's words are hard because he gives Job to understand that he no longer thinks much of Job's devoutness.

We should never speak like this to people who are unfortunate, reminding them of their sins as if they, because of their misfortune, were greater sinners than we are. Much more, we should be terrified when we see all the wretched, thinking how we would fare if God's punishment came upon us. Often we do not know anything about those who suffer, and then we have good reason to show compassion and sympathy. That is more humbling than behaving like a disciplinarian. If we do know anything we must nevertheless go gently because we usually feel guilty of the same sin. It is obvious that basically Job had no special sin. How painful it is when we show any suspicion!

After all, Eliphaz says a word we can take to heart. A person who suffers often does not want to think of his sins, though he surely ought to. Certainly we could avoid much distress and do better if we would not forget God in days when it goes well with us, if we now and then would not easily permit, in word and deed, something that is sinful. Many people who do not stand as well as Job complain that God acts unjustly toward them, the innocent. It

is obvious that they make themselves out to be better and purer than God. In doing that they commit a sin and cause God not to hear their prayers, and they can often be badly off.

If affliction befalls us, let us be more humble, repentant, and broken in spirit. Even if we have not so many great and crying sins on our consciences, we can always bear in mind that we are not righteous, pure people, and not blameless servants, that we also have much foolishness in us. God remains holy and righteous in all his doings.

But the time will come when our eyes will be opened to everything as also happened to Job; afterwards a light was shed over the guidance he had received.

Let us remain patient and humble, reverent and worshipping the Lord. He acts wisely and aims only at the good with everything he does.

January 23 (Supplement)

Job's Suffering

Of Job we know that he came into great temptation and challenge. At first all his herds were driven away by bands of robbers and all his children struck dead; then he was afflicted with leprosy.

Both these happened with God's permission through the instigation and action of Satan, who had come before the Lord with the accusation that it was easy for Job to be righteous, since everything went well with him, and that he, Satan, was not allowed to touch him. This was forbidden to Satan, as the context shows, because Job constantly sacrificed to God, whenever he suspected himself or his house of having sinned; in the meantime he made amends for his sins according to divine promise (Job 42:8), so that Satan's accusations were nullified. There was no basis for an earthly affliction. We must say, at that time a sincere sacrifice meant repentance and faith. Every person who made his sacrifice with repentance and faith, and so to a certain extent judged and

punished himself, was spared by God from temporal judgment. And, as we see, also Satan--the Accuser, as he is called--had to comply with this forbearance of God, consistent with God's justice.

Now however the Lord remonstrates with Satan, about Job's devotedness, as if he would question him--this is how it is presented--whether, when he passed through the land, he had anything to find fault with in Job. This aroused Satan's jealousy. He acted as if Job were an unworthy or untested person to enjoy such favor before others, that Satan was not allowed to hurt him. So Satan dared to contradict the Lord. But everything must go according to what is right and just with God--also the judgment which one day will be passed on Satan. Therefore first he shall be punished for his own lies and convicted of untruthfulness, in that now freedom would be given him to deal with Job as he pleased. With that it should be shown who was right, and whether Job would not stand the test. Only Job's life should be protected, for if this were forcibly cut off, no further testing of his life could take place. Should Job, despairing of God and everything else, take his own life--as his wife advised when she was overcome by the greatness of his distress--then Satan would have gained his point.

But Job's adherence to God remained undefeated. Far from dismissing God, he could say at one time, "The name of the Lord be praised!" and at another time, "We have received good things from God; shall we not also accept the evil?" Later it is true that under the pain of great suffering he uttered hard words, but he never murmured against God or defied him or abandoned him; they appeared to be more an expression of his anguish and indicated how unbelievable to him was the affliction from God, but he never stood against God. Manifestation of the pain, when not accompanied by any desperate deed, could in no way confirm Satan's accusation. So Job became the victor and Satan was defeated.

It is easy to perceive, already in the Old Testament, how meaningful were such unusual temptations, and how important for the whole history of salvation, in fact already a preparation for this. This is already shown in the remarkable comparison of Job with the Lord Christ, as James writes in his epistle (5:11): "You have heard

of the patience of Job, and have seen how the Lord finally treated him."

It was Job's task to believe:

- 1) in God's solicitude--even when it appeared that God had no concern for people;
- 2) in his justice--even when it was as though God did not ask about the devoutness of people;
- 3) in his grace--even if it appeared, as if God unrelentingly rejects people who have once been caught in a sinful situation;
- 4) in his truth--when all his promises like the ones befitting those who offer sacrifices, appeared to be null and void. How joyfully, after the time of testing, Job could call out, just as Eliezer had done (Gen 24:27): "Praise be to the Lord, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness"--which previously had appeared to be the case!

Also in our day it may happen that individuals have to prove themselves in similar temptations. Satan accuses them before God, or accusations that could be raised against their belief in Christ have to be corrected; by this faith the adoption as children of God will be earned. Then they must prove that they continually hold firmly to their faith in Christ--even if on account of their inner and outer circumstances, it seems as if they might not be deemed worthy of forgiveness of sins, of filiation with God, of an answer in their affliction, of kindness from their Savior, of power against the darkness, and of protection against the evil enemies of the visible and invisible world. All people may be led more or less deeply into such nights and darkness. Yet this will come in full measure to only a few. We can be comforted by Job's sufferings. Now we can perceive from his story, better than he could himself, how we have to stand the test face to face with a hostile accuser who, as long as possible, seeks to bring up objections against men being lifted up to God.

Testings of this kind may, however, have a great influence on the advance of the kingdom of God: on the eventual liberation from the attacks and charges of the devil and the final complete defeat

of Satan, who should be trodden down under our feet (Rom 16:20) and on the expected victorious return of our Lord.

How important it is that, whatever may happen, we come to a depth of faith to say with Paul (Rom 8:31ff): "If God is with us, who can be against us? Who will accuse us? Who will condemn us? Who will separate us from the love of God? Shall affliction or fear or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger of the sword take away from us the certainty of the love of God, if any of these things should happen to us?--No! In all this we shall prevail for the sake of him who loved us. Neither death nor life, neither angel nor principality, nor power, either present or future, either high or low, nor any other creature may separate us--detach us--from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."

All this is said to us, in case we should think that this love, and our holding to it, is of no consequence.

January 24

Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him neither known him. (1 Jn. 3:6)

It is a very serious word that John speaks to us here. When he says, "sinneth not" he means to say do not use force, do not act wrongly, do not steal or cheat. Honor father and mother, keep away from fornication and adultery. Do not lie or backbite (do not spread evil gossip), be not quarrelsome, hard, and unjust, unforgiving and revengeful. A person who does not sin keeps away from misusing the name of God in weird superstition or profaning holy days and so forth. All that means to sin.

If we intentionally commit sin, we act against what our good conscience tells us. There is a difference between one sin and another. If we go on sinning and do not know nor want to know anything about repentance and sorrow for our sin, then, as John says, we have not seen or known him. That means he has not touched or come close to our hearts, so that we can see and recognize him as true disciples can. However hard we may then pretend to have seen and recognized him as true believers do, it will only be lying and deception. That is what John wants to convey to us.

This is a very serious word which is spoken to us, and should frighten people who are sure of their holiness. Today there are only too many of this kind. Many present-day people can pretend to know a lot, and speak about the things of God's kingdom. They, however, cannot keep away from sinning. But, as long as sinning remains, we have really not experienced the Lord's grace in our hearts, even if we have lots of recognition and insight into the Word of God.

If we had real insight into the Word of God, then we would cease sinning, or at least we would stop playing with sin. Let us give up thinking that in the New Covenant through grace we can easily get rid of sin! We are very wrong if we want to believe that we can just drift along, come what may, be it right or wrong, good or bad, pleasing or unpleasing to God. Such easygoing ways

have to stop for those who abide in Jesus, the Redeemer of our sins, because henceforth we know that he has accepted us through grace and the shedding of his blood. If we feel that to be true, we will be careful and watchful, even shrink back from the thought of saddening our Savior in transgressing God's commandments, for it is as if we through faith have recognized and seen the Lord. To feel God's love through Christ crushes the old Adam in us; and as love grows, sinning has to yield.

Help us, O Lord, that only Christ dwells in us, so that hateful sinning comes to an end!

January 24 (Supplement)
Seeing and knowing the Lord

The text: "Whoever remains in him, does not sin, and whoever sins has neither seen or known him," is truly fitting to open our eyes concerning the state of Christianity in our day.

We will not speak about those who call themselves Christians, but judging by their deeds, conduct themselves as heathens inasmuch as they do not avoid any sin and know nothing of either God or a Savior. But how is it with the so-called believers, the converted, who want to be separate from the world? With many, conversion only means being godly and putting on the appearance of godliness, avoiding and refraining from the coarse, more obvious sins. That is only too often all they show of their better Christianity. For many, it appears as if all Christianity consists of is upbraiding the world and unbelievers or in having disputes with those of a different confession. Nevertheless, in secret, how much creeps in! How little sensitivity of the conscience there is when it is a matter of mine and thine; or if a denial of evil desires is demanded, everyone is aware of his own weakness; to his dismay a man can see that he is almost tormented with temptation. Are there still Christians who have fully and purely experienced God's grace themselves without deception, so that it can be called "seeing and knowing" the Lord? We may not and do not want to be hard and

judging, but misgivings are aroused when we compare the word of the apostles with the state of Christianity today.

To be sure we can repeat, that in our time the Lord has withdrawn because of the low standard which is to be found in Christianity. Therefore many with the best will and effort do not feel they could say they had seen and known him as it was in the time of the Apostles. We are left in our poverty and are directed rather towards having a longing for the Lord. But it should be that we possess him! It does seem that a new time of grace is needed, in which we have him again closer and more fully, and may "see and know" him so to speak. We see many people groaning and in tears, struggling for repentance of heart, certainly not always recognizing their actual sinful deeds--but accusing themselves before the Lord of the situation they are in. To be sure the Lord never lets them go away empty-handed; yet they feel poor in spirit, hungry and thirsty, without being able to rejoice fully in the Lord.

To see and know the Lord, understood spiritually, would indeed be great, I will repeat it! To read such a word from the Apostle can only give the impression how completely different it could be, just as it was in the beginning; for the Lord cannot come so close to degenerate Christians who are only half devoted to him. Therefore it has become more difficult in our time to see him and know him and to have him really in the spirit.

If that is truly so, then we have to ask the Lord in our poverty for his mercy that--to stick to the word--he might make himself seen and known. He could do that through a new outpouring of his Holy Spirit, that we might become freer from sinning, after being accepted and renewed by such grace; at present we perceive it in a very inconstant manner, more in an intuitive than a spiritual way. Then if it is true that our iniquities have driven him far away, the reverse is also true--and our text says so when it speaks of "remaining in Jesus"--that it is harder for us to become free from our iniquities, because he is a stranger to us, and so to speak does not let himself be seen by us.

Recognizing the misery, let us learn from this to pray for his drawing near to us! And let us believe it is necessary that he draws near to us again. Let us believe without disregarding it or being indifferent, that things are different now from former times!

If many of you earnestly strive to deny all worldly desires and cravings and, "raising up holy hands" to him, begin beseeching like the widow with the unjust judge, the Lord cannot refuse you! Even if "he does not want to" help for a long time, he will not refuse if these many people do not give up until he takes pity on us, takes us again by the hand, fills us with his Holy Spirit, makes his presence felt again and in this way helps us to overcome.

And so it will be until the time of his reappearance!

January 25

The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.
(Isa. 32:4 AV)

The prophet speaks of a time of salvation when much that men lacked in former times will be given to them. Since the coming of the Savior we stand in such a time of salvation. How much could be given to us if we would strive for it!

It is said, "The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge." A time will come when all that is foolish, wrong-headed, blind, and careless will disappear and men will come to the right understanding. Of course that only means that the promised new strength will be given to those who strive to gain it. But there are still many rash people among us, even among earnest Christians, because they do not strive for better things. Unspeakable damage comes from the hearts of the rash! Many people run about as if there was nothing to fear in a world full of evil. They grope--and before long they are soiled, poisoned, or--snap!--they are like a little mouse in a trap. Like a little mouse which is attracted and enticed by the smell. It patters around till there is a snap. That is a picture of how many people who are careless come into dreadful danger, even danger of death, the eternal death.

We have good reason to become wise, as it is obvious that the enemy puts traps everywhere. We should be aware that he puts traps wherever we stand or go. The enemy counts chiefly on our being foolish and careless, as happened at the fall of man. He does that especially with those whose souls might come to the Lord, the Lord who has overcome Satan. How much misery does carelessness bring, especially to young people!

However, the time is still here when the hearts of the rash can learn wisdom and guard against all that glistens and shines on the surface, but is rotten at the core! We can learn wisdom that comes from God if we turn our hearts to the Lord Christ through

repentance and faith. We learn more the more fully we turn to God with our whole being. Above all we can learn to refrain from the many sins committed by our tongue, which shows especially how careless we men are. But we have the promise that "the heart of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly."

Of course we need to be watchful and constantly look up with a sigh and plead: "Lord, keep me, protect me, guide me! Give me a hint at the right moment, for I am too stupid to notice this or that by myself. Direct my mind so that I may not be deluded. Above all, teach me to control my tongue, so that it does not bring me to harm!" If we go this way in prayer, we have the promise of succeeding. If we, however, trust ourselves, if we do not pay any attention, rejecting warnings and advice, then we often suddenly come to grief. That is especially so if our various desires are not completely mortified.

Oh, may the Lord help us to be watchful and careful, and so bring us to victory!

January 25 (Supplement)

The stammering tongue

"Stammering" is a peculiar expression. Taken spiritually, this is how people are, particularly when they come to spiritual matters. With many people speech pours straight out. If however they turn a little toward what is spiritual, or take a stand for the truth, or if they speak only from their conscience, what is right and what is not right, then they stammer and nothing comes out, or it comes out the wrong way, and in no time they are pushed on one side.

Instead of that we should learn to speak in a "finished" manner; "finished" in the sense of knowing how to state what is right, what is a help to others and serves the good, when we continually have new thoughts and the right words for them and above all know the answer and don't get stuck. Such must be given,

and for that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth is promised to us.

However, what is to be given must also be asked for. If we are to be responsible, or if we have to stand up to an overwise person, or in any way associate with others, we must learn to speak with our eyes turned to the Lord. How "finished" we could become for giving consolation, edification, counsel, instruction, warning, also punishment. And if we would put ourselves more in the presence of the Lord, how would it all serve for our preservation!

But our talk should be clean and distinct: no bitterness, no adverse feeling; no lovelessness, abruptness, or harshness; nothing repulsive should be in what we say. The experience of the love of Christ should purify our talk if only we would respect it! And how important that would be! Many a one is "finished" and knows how to hand out [words] right and left so that he wins the day; but with his "finished" talk, he injures, offends, grieves, angers, indeed kills others; and how disagreeable that is!

The "Stammering tongue" should learn to speak distinctly, aptly and wisely, gently in an uplifting and comforting way; and free of all deceit and all lovelessness. As disciples of Jesus we can do this with a good heart when we wish, through the Holy Spirit!

January 26

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

(Heb. 4:9 AV)

The Apostle says, "There remaineth," that means it has not happened yet, but it lies in the future. To keep hoping gives you peace. Words from a psalm caused the Apostle to express this as a promise from God. He says that this is a different kind of rest than the people found formerly in the Promised Land. In the same way as the Israelites when they traveled through the desert towards their rest, so, as the Letter to the Hebrews says, "we who have believed, enter that rest" (Heb. 4:3 RSV); that means we here on earth are on the way to God's peace. During their wanderings the Israelites found no rest, no permanent place, and had to fight against much discomfort, such as the desert gave them, until they came to the Promised Land. Our passage through earthly life, as through a desert, is full of unrest and privations; it is exposed to constant changes and calamities, till we reach the peace God has promised. In the same way as the Israelites were wonderfully protected and given food and drink during their wanderings, so the Lord watches over us who have faith. We stand under his protection and are nourished by his Word and by the working of the Holy Spirit and the grace offered us. If we persevere in patience and faith, nothing can happen to us and we will reach our goal safely. The grumbling, unbelieving Israelites, however, came to grief and lost their lives in the desert without reaching the promised peace in the land of Canaan. In the same way we too have to watch out during our pilgrimage on earth, so that we do not fall into disbelief like the Israelites and thereby miss the promise to enter his rest, --and so remain behind (Heb. 4:1-11)

This peace, which is still available, comes to all who passed away in Christ. But it will be fulfilled only when all struggle is ended, when heaven and earth are new, and the time has come that God is all in all. Then, in his rest, we will have reached the highest that a human being can hope for and expect. "God shall

wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4 AV). That will be "the rest that remaineth to the people of God."

How good that will be!

January 26 (Supplement)
The rest or peace promised by God

In order to transfer ourselves rightly into the standpoint of the epistle to the Hebrews and its interpretation, let us visualize how it was formerly with the people of Israel.

To start with they were in Egypt; and there the promise which they inherited from Abraham pointed to a time, when free from all pressure, they would receive their independence in Canaan. For the time being they had to wait for a leader whom the Lord would send; then came Moses who began to carry out this work. The exodus took place and their wanderings began. On this journey, a life full of restlessness, that sometimes seemed more oppressive than the life in Egypt, the land of slavery, they consoled themselves with the hope of soon arriving in the land of rest and peace. Certainly they had the leader whom they could trust, and the Lord gave them signs of himself a thousand times.

However, in the wilderness on the way to the land of rest, they had to undergo many hardships, and the Israelites took it badly. On one occasion they sinned so badly that God punished the older generation, in that they should all die in the wilderness without coming to the goal; only the younger generation should come into the land of rest. They finally conquered the land under Joshua's leadership. And now it is recorded that God had given them rest and peace. This was peace insofar that they had dwellings again and were an independent people under the direct protection of God. For this reason, this peace could be called a "peace of God." (Jos. 21:44 and Jos. 23:1)

But the true peace which God intended with the choice of Israel, was not yet reached. Truly Israel was now free from Egypt; but the yoke of sin and darkness still pressed hard on them, as it did on the whole world. It lay in God's plan to release them from this yoke. The people had to get accustomed gradually to thinking of this: the hope of seeing a time come, where complete freedom has come about and God himself would dwell in their hearts and their peace would be a true peace of God.

In order to bring about this actual rest, new promises were given which indeed already lay in the all-embracing promise to Abraham that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through him" (Gen. 12:3), and a new leader like Moses would arise, to whose voice it would be important to listen. The first Moses already spoke of this leader, when he said: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me whom you should obey; and it was already said then that the Lord would challenge those who would not listen to his Servant (Deut.18:15ff).

From this developed the hope for a Messiah (God's envoy), who would liberate Israel and subsequently the whole of mankind from inner bondage and so lead to the complete peace of God. In order for this hope to become living in them, the people who had already been led to deeper desires through the prophets, must once again feel themselves as it were in Egypt, in a land of slavery, from which they were to be liberated, although outwardly they were already at peace. And just as Israel had once sighed for deliverance, so once again they should yearn for complete freedom, which the whole nature of mankind longs for. Hence comes the noteworthy utterance of David (Ps.14:7 and Ps.53:7), "Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion and the Lord liberate his captive people! So will Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!" Here Israel is called a captive people--apparently meant spiritually--without their actually being imprisoned or oppressed by a foreign nation.

With reference to Israel's further hope, David says in the 95th Psalm: "Today, if you hear his voice"--that means: as you must think of the explanation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when one

day the Lord, the promised one appears and his voice will be heard calling for release from all servitude--"then do not harden your hearts as you previously did!" Otherwise it will be as with the first Moses in the wilderness and, taking it from the epistle to the Hebrews, you will perish and miss the new promise of God's rest. You still perish again in the "wilderness" even after being taken "out of Egypt", so to speak, through faith in Christ. Chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews elaborate this in more detail.

The same chapters speak to the Jews who have come to believe in the Lord Jesus, "the Apostle", just as Moses was. (Heb 3:1). They, like all the faithful, have "wandered out of Egypt" and found themselves on the way through "the wilderness" towards the peace of God. Many of these Jews--pressed by all kinds of afflictions and persecutions brought about by their confession of faith--murmured on the way, as Israel did, when they were lacking in all sorts of ways; and they yearned especially for the religious ceremonies of Judaism, in order to become free from their privations and afflictions. They showed signs of turning back as Israel had once done, and began causing trouble for the Lord with undevout conduct.

Here the Apostle gives a warning: he reproaches all those who have caused the Lord so much trouble, as the Psalm expresses it, "through going astray and all kinds of sin", with the threat made known in the Psalm. He warns them with the remark that they could all fail through disbelief, in spite of the grace they had previously experienced, just as those had failed in spite of their exodus from Egypt, and their bodies died in the wilderness, without ever reaching the land of rest! Like them, those who have fallen away are threatened with the loss of God's promised peace, which here means the loss of eternal blessedness! He admonishes them to hold out in faith in the "wilderness"--that means through all storms, persecutions, and privation--for only so are they certain of the coming peace of God.

Let us then reflect, that we here on earth find ourselves on the way through the "wilderness," exposed to fear and attack and without a permanent abode. That helps us not to be disturbed when it often appears that the children of the world who have not moved

"out of Egypt", and sit comfortably at their "fleshpots" are better off than the children of God! Towards the end it must be hard for the latter to become aware that they are on a pilgrimage through a "wilderness!"

For those who endure to the end, God's rest is there in the heavenly fatherland. It is a secure hope!

January 27

Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of steadfast love, break up your fallow ground for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain salvation upon you.
(Hos. 10:12 RSV)

May the Lord come! -that was Israel's hope. The God of Abraham manifested himself to his people in many ways. The prophets, however, promised that the Lord will come in a more tangible way to put right all that is wrong in men. His coming was represented as connected with a judgment--for it was not possible that God could, without further ado, unite with men as they are. That is why John the Baptist said of the coming of the Lord that all those who were not ready would be rejected by him.

The Lord, who appeared in Jesus, has first of all not come as a judge, but as the one who wants to snatch them from judgment. But his coming in judgment will not fail to appear. Who does not feel frightened, faced with his return? The preaching about the future coming of the Lord remains serious. It was so for the Israelites to whom it should have served as an encouragement to mend their ways. Much more so for us who know certainly that, when the time comes, the century-old prophecies will be fulfilled in all their seriousness.

It is "the time to seek the Lord till he comes" (Hos. 10:12 KJV). This is already said by Hosea. He has to make this time soon because he does not know the actual hour. We too have always to take Christ's future as near!

In our present time we can certainly say: "The time has come to seek the Lord." How quickly, how quickly, the last time can take us by surprise! Those who hear, who listen with their hearts, and feel that delay is dangerous, follow Hosea's advice: "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of steadfast love, break up your fallow ground." Hosea seeks to express by "break up your fallow ground" that we have to be willing for a fundamental change and conversion of our hard, unbroken hearts. Let this speak to us

and let us take up now sowing righteousness, so that at the Lord's return we can hope for love and grace. We already sow righteousness in finding repentance and a childlike faith in being made righteous through grace, and then we, as those ready for justice, become just in every respect toward the present generation. Oh, in how many ways do we still act in hate, pride, envy, greed, and self-will--even when we know Christ! All these are the fruits of unrighteousness and through them we will reap hate, severe judgment, even possible damnation.

Let us listen to: "Break up your fallow ground and sow for yourselves righteousness" with love, meekness, and purity. Then the fruits will be love, nothing but love from the Savior who will come. For he will "let righteousness rule" over all men. May it be for their salvation, so that they all, as the righteous ones, can enter into the joy of the Lord. Or else, they are judged and as the accursed go to hell's fire.

May all who hear, be guided! The Lord is near!

January 28

And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Th. 4:17,18 KJV)

These words of Paul make us see that he speaks about Christ's returning. Then those who died in Christ will be the first to rise and come with the Lord. The living who belong to him on earth will be transformed and lifted up "to meet the Lord in the air." The Lord will take with him both the dead in Christ and the living who belong to him on earth, so that they shall ever be with him. Therefore the Apostle says: "We shall ever be with the Lord."

"Being with the Lord" will only be completely fulfilled when the Lord appears. But those who died in Christ will already be comforted. They no longer need consolation. They, like Lazarus, find comfort in Abraham's bosom. We, however, need the comfort in the hard struggles and temptations we have to go through in this world. In this way--so Paul thinks--we should comfort one another.

The Thessalonians needed above all to be comforted about those who had passed away, for they thought that the dead will come off badly at the Lord's return because they died before Christ's future coming. This made them all the sadder because they had the idea they would have to suffer in the same way if they had to die before the coming of the Lord! That is why Paul speaks a word of comfort concerning the dead as well as the living. The Lord will care for both without any difference so that they can be forever with him.

But in the meantime the future of the Lord has been delayed. If we know that those who have gone from us have died in the Lord, we no longer are concerned in this way about them. But we still need a lot of comforting. Paul tells us in a way that is still valid how we should be comforted.

Paul's words bring to expression that we should encourage each other in what we hope for. We should represent to one another the great things which will happen at the final redemption of all creation. We should, though we have sorrows in this life, place ourselves in the joyful time when we need weep no more, when we

forever and uninterruptedly will be with the Lord. It is not enough to have only a general picture of the blessedness in heaven without picturing how this will finally take place. We will find much more comfort if we can clearly say: Our Lord Jesus Christ will return from heaven and he will first of all fetch from the graves those who have died in Christ. Then he will also call us--if we are still living--and keep us always at his side.

May we learn to comfort one another like this! How encouraging this would be for us to ask for the coming of the Lord, that is so vital for fulfilling all that is promised. That would strengthen us to persevere in patience and faith, especially when the crucial time is approaching.

January 29

At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all you do."
(Gen. 21:22 RSV)

The text reminds us of this story, which teaches that the blessings of those who love God are recognized even by people who are not so close to God. Everybody has to marvel that God knows how to bless in a wonderful way those who trust him and have a living relationship to him. It may happen that people say about this or that person: "There is something special about him, indeed, it is surprising how well he gets on, how he succeeds in everything he does." "Of course," so they continue, "he deserves it too--he trusts in God."

The Lord knows how to bless his children who serve him faithfully and honestly, so that everybody can see it. Even those who are not close to God feel the desire to have a friendly contact with such blessed people. It is as if they also want to share in the blessing they can see there. King Abimelech with his commander came to Abraham because he wanted to make a covenant with him. Of course Abimelech felt a certain weakness before Abraham who was so much blessed by God. He therefore feared that Abraham and his people would one day grow more powerful than he.

Let us think of Abraham's situation at that time. Because God had called him, he had come into a completely foreign land from far away. He had come with many servants and with herds, which were the most important possessions at this time. At first he might have thought that God called him into a rather uninhabited country, and that he, with little trouble, could spread out on all sides. But he found the country populated by different peoples. How that could have frightened him, as he had to keep moving with his flocks! How easily could these barbarous people have had the desire to rob and kill in order to get his possessions! But he was able to stay unharmed in the country in the same way as Isaac and Jacob did later on. That already proved that God was with them.

Praise is given to this in the psalms where it says, "He allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account" (Ps. 105:14 RSV), like the king of Egypt and also at one time, Abimelech. It was as if heralds surrounded these patriarchs calling out: "Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!" The inhabitants of this country were astonished how Abraham's wealth increased. That, as well as other things, proved to Abimelech that God was with Abraham.

Through the blessings Abraham received he became "a light amongst the heathen." The Lord knows how to provide honor for his name, so that whoever wanted could also wish to put himself under the protection of this God. That is what Abimelech does.

How much can one profit in an inner and outer way if one is devout and keeps the fear of God before one's eyes! One has to stand more or less aloof from the ways the world goes. One has to do what these patriarchs did: to follow peacefully their way, without getting involved in the general trend of the world.

January 29 (First Supplement)
Abimelech's request for agreement

Let us summarize in a few words what is worth taking to heart in Abimelech's visit to Abraham. Then we realize:

1) After what has been said previously, how good we have it when, through faith and obedience, we have become the favorites of God! He can deal with us in all manner of ways, though not exactly clearly seen, yet constantly, so that others praise God because of us.

2) How we should, like Abimelech, approach those who are blessed, since we can only benefit from their company and their love. God is not pleased if we are cold and heartless, or distance ourselves from them in envy.

3) How we should welcome with outgoing love those who want to come near to us in love, as Abimelech did to Abraham, and not be indifferent or stiff, or even loveless and repellent. We should not

let ourselves be held back, even when they leave much to be desired, just as at first Abraham had to reprove Abimelech. We should not be averse to forming a friendship with them, as long as from our side we do not compromise God's cause. For in this way we can often reach out to souls who seem far from us, to the honor of God and the furtherance of his kingdom.

January 29 (Second Supplement)

The use of texts

In the above text, used by the *Brüdergemeine* [the Moravian Brethren], are only the words "God is with you in everything you do," without any indication who said these words or how they are to be understood in that context.

But great care is necessary in reading such texts, because they are a temptation to those who like to make use of them to learn the will of God in some matter they have on hand. The reason for this warning is that they can be tempted to take it as the word of God to prove infallibly that they are right in what they plan to do, although the text above was only spoken by a heathen king. They take it as a directive in what they were undecided about till then, or even to take it as a sign in a matter they have scruples about. Without further consideration they grasp it with enthusiasm, as though they must now be obedient to the sign and directive from God. How much they can be deceived, if they so easily and quickly and almost superstitiously are captivated by the letter!

The words of the texts can become especially dangerous if they are deliberately drawn by lot, as if to ask God for counsel. Because in such tests, to become assured of the will of God, a false attitude always underlies the matter, since there is nothing in the Word of God to authorize such questioning, so that the silent God is, as it were, obliged to speak. It can happen that the enemy mixes into this and lays a trap even through a word from the Bible; for such people are a sure catch for him. For they are

absolutely obedient to him, in the conviction of its being against God [to disobey]. In the same way he tried to lead the Savior into error by temptation through Bible words. There are examples enough of how, through the misuse of Bible sayings, people have ruined their whole lives. However pleasing it may be, if at any time a Bible text which you have found proves to be apt--does not give a decisive yes or no, but only a desired consolation or strengthening--for what you plan to do--then you must be on guard about practicing with the Word of God a kind of fortune-telling, which in any form is a horror to God.

Also we must be on guard not to discern God's judgment about ourselves or others in texts that have been turned up or been obtained by lot. On the one hand we may be misled into confidence and complaisance--as one could be by the quotation in our heading--or we are shocked into despair and despondency, as though God had pronounced his rejection of us.

Nevertheless, a saying may fit and, strictly speaking, any text is bound to fit, whatever it says, if we understand how to interpret it. For anyone can always use every word, also the most serious! But it is wrong and remains so, to find God's personal opinion in a text, as if God himself wished to indicate either a personal approval or disapproval or a special decision in life through that saying.

May we always remain sober and not let ourselves be drawn away from simplicity.

January 30

As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hope on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous.

(1 Tim. 6:17,18 RSV)

At that time there were a few rich people in the church, but they were not the core of it. Their riches did not make them more influential, even if perchance they wanted to be. That was not allowed to happen. Earthly possessions are of no value when compared with the wealth of the Gospel. On principle, Bishops and Elders were not allowed to be privileged because of their possessions. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:26: "Consider your call" (RSV)--that means what kind of people you are whom God has called to the church--"not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (KJV). It was a remarkable time when the poor and lowly formed and could form the core of the church.

But because that was the case, the more could one "charge" the rich as Paul says, "Dear brother, listen and let me say to you: be careful; you are rich--be not proud!"

It was then possible to forbid the rich to be proud. They should not--on account of their riches--be proud and superior or look down upon others. In the same way Timothy forbids them to set their hopes upon uncertain riches. We have learned how overnight the richest can become the poorest. That shows riches are of no value, only passing, like foam. But one should hope in the living God, because only what comes from him is certain and enduring; it is everlasting like God himself. It is only God who gives us in abundance all kinds of things to enjoy, be we rich or poor. And as he gives, he can also take away!

The rich will enjoy their wealth most in doing what Paul commands: to do good, to be rich in doing good works, generous and helpful, especially in things which serve to build up the church.

Whoever understands this can rightly enjoy what he possesses. He is only a steward over God's gifts. He is not a steward if he does not know how to serve with what he possesses. Doing that will be a joy for him, for "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35 RSV). Rich people have a certain advantage in that they can more easily become rich in good works. They can be helpful to many hearts through many thoughtful little acts that will be remembered on the Day of Judgment. But one has to be self-denying in order to use one's riches for helping others. There are many people who don't do it. Rich people should remember that they will be held responsible if nobody stands at their side on the Day of Judgment. That means they will be alone in the same way as they stand often apart in this world. They with their riches are at a disadvantage in comparison with the poor, because they carry more responsibility. On this earth the poor look to the rich for help, and there the rich should be able to look to the poor for what they need. They will be judged according to their behavior towards the poor.

Everybody, even if he has only a little to share, should remember: Every one can in many ways bring joy, help, and show love to the poor. That does not depend entirely upon money. You can comfort, you can be kind, can give advice and help. You can look after one another, even if you have no money. Every one, even the poorest, can "be rich in good deeds." The poorer you are, the more it will be valued by God.

January 31

I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.

(Gen. 17:7,8 AV)

That is what God tells Abraham at a time when circumcision was introduced in his household. It is heartening and comforting that the covenant "God wants to establish with Abraham is valid in the same way for his descendants. They, like Abraham, may glorify God as their God.

This we are entitled to consider significant for us and our children, namely, that God includes our children in the covenant we have entered into with him, through faith in Christ. Abraham is only a man, a man of faith. If we stand faithful like him, in community with God through faith, God can make no less a covenant with us than he did with an Abraham. We think little of our covenant if we do not consider it a covenant God made at the same time with us, and our children and descendants.

Who would dare to say that the covenant should not mean as much for us as it did for Abraham? Or that through it our children have been brought no nearer to God? Or that they are as far from him as if we did not have this covenant? Let us see how clearly the Lord speaks to us in this text: The covenant is made, God the Lord stands on one side, and on the other side Abraham "and his seed after him in their generation." At the same time it should be an everlasting covenant according to what God says in the Ten Commandments, "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments" (Exod. 20:6 KJV). And God adds, so that it cannot be misunderstood: "to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee."

This promise was also fulfilled insofar as all members of Abraham's household, including his servants, were there upon circumcised, without much question as to their merits. Should we not take this as a comfort for our children and our children's

children? Should we hesitate to give our children "the sign of the covenant" through holy baptism as soon as they are born? Oh, how much kindlier God is than we are often tempted to believe!

Let us take it as a comfort that God thinks of us, in speaking also of our children and descendants! Of course it is not so that God does not notice sins and shortcomings; he does not let sinners go unpunished. We have sufficient evidence of this through Israel's history. Parents too, if they become disloyal, forfeit the grace of the covenant. But, as they will not be completely excluded from the covenant or not cared for by God even when sinning, so also their children from their birth on will not be excluded from the covenant. In the same way as God looks after the parents, he also looks after the children. God shows the same grace and care to the children and makes them faithful to the covenant as he does to the parents when they have been accepted. The children often have to be the ones to save the parents!

We can firmly believe that if we are concerned about our children, God--I would say--is no less concerned about their salvation, especially when he sees how much the parents carry that on their hearts. As God has never forgotten his people, and also now does not forget them, so our children and children's children too will not be forgotten by him. It is still true that "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29 RSV). Parents who sigh now will in the end get to see great miracles, such as Abraham saw. Of his generation it is said, "so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26 RSV). Through this unspeakably powerful word one can see how God in the first covenant already purposed eternal salvation. Thus circumcision gains a higher significance.