

Cornerstone

A Voice To The End-time Church

The Apple of God's Eye

by Jim Rector

LIKE SO MANY THINGS, AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE TEND TO TAKE EVEN THE LOVE OF GOD FOR GRANTED. OH, WE SURELY WOULDN'T WANT TO ADMIT IT, BUT WE REALLY KNOW THAT IT'S TRUE. GOD'S LOVE GOES FAR BEYOND MERE PHYSICAL BLESSINGS. YOU NEED TO GRASP THE VERY SPECIAL DEPTH OF HIS LOVE - THE UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE GOD HAS TOWARD HIS PEOPLE - JUST HOW HE REALLY FEELS ABOUT YOU. ALL OF US NEED TO UNDERSTAND, APPRECIATE, BASK IN AND DWELL UPON THAT LOVE.

We speak so easily, perhaps even smugly, about the love of God. Most, if not all of us, certainly believe in that love and surely we experience many aspects of God's care and concern for us. We read about the love of God in the Scriptures, and through Christ we are both witnesses and even participants in the Father's greatest gift of love.

I wonder, however, if at times something is not missing, a barrier that many of us find difficult to scale when it comes to the love of God in our own personal lives. It is clearly one thing to simply be confronted with examples of Godly love or with various passages in the Bible concerning that love, to even believe in that love; yet quite another to fully **ACCEPT GOD'S LOVE!** - to allow ourselves the privilege of basking in that love, to permit ourselves to be a part of that love, to go beyond mere recognition of God's love to understanding and truly reveling in the unique status that we have been mercifully granted as begotten children of our God and Father. I firmly believe, through experience with many of God's people, that a lot of us deny ourselves the richness of deep joy and peace that really should be ours, simply because we either will not or cannot come to terms with the very special relationship that should exist between a true child of God and God Himself. It is always much easier and simpler to merely bury the deeper things, refuse to confront them and just let our involvement with other people or church groups take the place of searching our souls, coming to grips with ourselves, with who we really are, where we really stand and what our status with God really is.

God's people need to be more than just knowledgeable. Learning the Scriptures is wonderful and should be a part of every Christian's spiritual life. Serving others is commendable, because it is the very expression of Christ in and through us. Staying in close contact with God and having great faith and patience and kindness are all marvelous qualities and should be diligently pursued and desired by us all. What I want to discuss with you, however, is something a little different, a little more personal, a little more special. I want to talk about allowing God to love us, basking in His love, becoming brimful and running over with confidence and trust and assurance and profound joy and peace - a peace and joy that truly **PASSES UNDERSTANDING!** I want to talk about God's love for you, not your love for Him or His work or His truth or His people.

LOOKING BACK TO ISRAEL

One of the great blessings of Scripture is the fact that God has designed it in such a fashion that His spiritual children can come to terms with New Testament concepts by studying the various types of the Old Testament, especially as they relate to ancient Israel. As you well know, the nation of Israel is a type of the Church of God. Stephen, in his magnificent apology before the Sanhedrin, said as much, calling the old Kingdom "**The Church in the wilderness**" (Acts 7:38). It is therefore incumbent upon us all to become serious students of Old Testament Israel, because its history, replete as it is with all sorts of trials, sins, punishments and other unique events, stands as a type, a pattern and a lesson for the Church today. Indeed, it is often the case that when God speaks of Israel in the Old Testament, He is really intending to convey a veiled message either to or about the New Testament Church. That is why those who reject or de-emphasize the Old Testament are completely missing out on one of the most dynamic and important dimensions of God's Word. Don't forget that the same God inspired both great sections of the Bible; and remember Paul's advice to Timothy:

"The Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto SALVATION ...are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:15-16).

Paul, as you know, was obviously not referring here to New Testament Scripture. Those books were even then in the process of either being written and/or canonized. There was no official New Testament at this early date. Paul was clearly talking to Timothy about the Old Testament, the Holy Scriptures that he had known and studied as a boy. Paul always held them in the highest regard, even stating that they alone were able to make us wise unto spiritual salvation.

It is also remarkable how Paul, with such relative ease, weaves the spiritual lessons of the Old Testament into his own creative letters. He, in fact, told the Corinthians that the events of ancient Israel's history should serve as **EXAMPLES** or **PATTERNS** for the Church, and especially the end-time Church - **"those upon whom the ends of the world are come"** (I Cor. 10:11).

With this principle in mind, let's look into what the Old Testament reveals concerning the very special loving relationship God, the **YAHWEH** of that day, had with the physical nation of Israel. Beginning with the account of Deuteronomy 32, we start to see a marvelous description of the closeness and the uniqueness of that relationship - and it truly has profound spiritual implications for us today:

"Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask your father and he will show you: your elders and they will tell you. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance ...He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land...He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as THE APPLE OF HIS EYE. As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him...Rejoice, O you nations...For he will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries, and He will be merciful unto His land, and to His people" (Deut. 32:7-14, 43).

What a beautiful portion of Scripture! It so aptly reflects the very special quality of God's love and concern and the relationship He desired with the nation of Israel. Notice once again how intimate He was with the people as we read in Ezekiel 16 the following passage:

"And as for your nativity, in the day you were born your navel was not cut, neither were you washed in water to supple you; you were not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things unto you, to have compassion upon you; but you were cast out in the open field to the loathing of your person, in the day that you were born. And when I passed by and saw you polluted in your own blood, I said unto you...Live. I have cause you to multiply as the bud of the field, and you have increased and waxen great, and you are come to excellent ornaments; your breasts are fashioned, and your hair is grown, whereas you were naked and bare. Now when I passed by you and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over you and covered your nakedness; yea, I swore unto you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I washed you with water, yea, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with brodered work, and shod you with badgers' skins, and I girded you about with fine linen, and I covered you with silk. I decked you also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon your hands, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel on your forehead, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. Thus were you decked with gold and silver;

and your raiment was of fine linen and silk...you did eat of fine flour, and honey and oil; and you were exceedingly beautiful and you did prosper into a kingdom. And your renown went forth among the heathen for your beauty; for it was perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon you, says the Lord: (Ezek. 16:4-14).

Now God did more, much more in fact, than just give Israel physical blessings. He entertained such deep feelings for His people and was moved and touched by their suffering, their trials, their pain - so much so that in Isaiah 63, the prophet was inspired to say:

"I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all the Lord (Yahweh) has bestowed upon us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed upon them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, Surely they are My people, children that will not lie; so He was their Saviour. In all their affliction, HE WAS AFFLICTED and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity, He redeemed them; and He bare them and carried them all the days of old" (Isa. 63:7-9).

Yes, it is a fact that the great God of the Old Testament, whom many have thought was a harsh, brusque, unfair Judge, Jury and Executioner, actually loved the Israelites so much that He hurt when they hurt and suffered Himself when they were in trouble! Like the precious Saviour of later years, He was "touched with the feelings of their infirmities" (Heb. 4:15).

Ancient Israel occupied such an uncommon position and enjoyed such a distinctive personal bond with the Creator. God specifically selected these people. He got involved with them. They became His children. They belonged to Him and Him alone! He was jealous over them. Naturally this close association with God conferred upon them a status utterly unique among all the nations of the earth. They had a special calling. They had a special relationship. They had a special place in God's own heart.

In the beginning, when He was leading them out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai, where He would appear to them and indeed marry them, He told the people precisely where they stood with Him, provided that they continued in all the laws and ways He had commanded them. Just before Moses ascended the Mount, God said:

"You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a PECULIAR TREASURE unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be unto me a KINGDOM OF PRIESTS and an HOLY NATION" (Ex. 19:4-6).

Pay close attention to God's choice of words in the preceding passage. He calls Israel a *peculiar treasure*, a *kingdom of priests* and a *holy nation*. These phrases clearly indicate not only the close connection the nation had with Yahweh, but also these very terms are later used in the New Testament in relationship to the Church. Before we look into that association, notice what David once said about Israel's special affiliation with God:

"Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; Sing praises unto His name ...for the Lord has chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His PECULIAR TREASURE" (Psa. 135:4).

Imagine, if you can, what it would be like to be the treasured personal possession of the God of heaven and earth - not just loved by Him, that is simply too general a concept, but His pride and joy, His prized object of desire, His priceless treasure! That was the kind of special status enjoyed by ancient Israel. References to it are found in several choice passages. Notice the following:

"For you are an holy people unto the Lord your God...God has chosen you to a SPECIAL PEOPLE UNTO HIMSELF, above all the people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you and by the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, has the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh of Egypt" (Deut. 7:6-8).

A few chapters later in this same book, God revealed unto Moses more concerning Israel's special relationship with Him by saying:

"For you are a holy people unto the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations upon the earth" (Deut. 14:2).

And finally in Deuteronomy 26, we read yet another beautiful passage describing once again the unique standing of ancient Israel with the God of the Old Testament:

"You have avouched the Lord this day to be your God, and to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes and His commandments and His judgments, and to hearken unto His voice: and the Lord has avouch you this day to be His PECULIAR PEOPLE, as He has promised you, and that you should keep His commandments; and to make you high above all nations which He has made, in praise and in name and in honor; and that may be an holy people unto the Lord your God, as He has spoken" (Deut. 26:17-19).

It is so evident how much God loved the people of Israel. We can see clearly through the special relationship that existed between the nation and their Creator, a type and pattern of the even more special and distinctive love and concern He has for His spiritual people. Speaking of both physical Israel and the spiritual Church, God declares:

"Deliver yourself, O Zion (type of the Church), that dwell with the daughter of Babylon. For thus says the Lord of hosts: After the glory has He sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that touches you touches the APPLE OF HIS EYE...Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion (end-time Church); for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be My people: and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me unto you" (Zech. 2:7-11).

The **APPLE OF GOD'S EYE** - What a statement!! What a distinction! Both ancient Israel and the true New Testament Church of God are considered in this same light, this same unique status. Do you really believe that you personally are the *apple* of God's eye? Be honest with yourself. Beyond that, do you actually **FEEL** it? Do you enjoy that very special feeling of being loved, of being close to and highly prized by God Himself. Do you truly feel like family - not through your local church, but connected directly to the Father Himself? Or is the love of God more of a theory, a concept, an abstract notion to you?

David went beyond mere intellectual belief or acceptance. He lived in the aura of God's love. He bathed himself in it. It covered him and altered his perceptions, his outlook, his attitude. He reveled in it, or, if you will pardon the expression, he **WALLOWED** in it - so real, so close, so tangible was that love to him! He, in fact, used the very same phrase to describe Himself that God had used to designate Israel:

"Keep me," he prayed, "as the APPLE OF THE EYE, hide me under the shadow of your wings" (Psa. 17:8).

GOD'S SPIRITUAL TREASURE

Let's face the facts. Ancient Israel knew the truth of God. They had the knowledge. They had seen with their own eyes the miracles. Why Moses and the elders had actually seen Yahweh Himself! But the Israelites were never truly able to comprehend the love of God and could never really see the special and peculiar treasure they actually were to God. As a result, they went into spiritual and eventually national decline. **"Where there is no vision,"** the Proverbs state, **"the people perish" (Prov. 29:18)**. Israel is the prime example of this basic truth.

We Christians, on the other hand, must not fail in this matter as did they. We must first genuinely grasp the depth and profound reality of God's love for us, and come to see the rare uniqueness of ourselves in God's sight. But we must do something else as well - something that for many of us may perhaps be the most difficult thing of all. We absolutely must come to **ALLOW** ourselves to fully **ACCEPT** God's love for us. We must be willing to receive it. We must permit ourselves to become a part of it. We must become lost in it - we must bask in it - we must revel in it! It is only when we can truly accept God's love for us, accept the fact that you and I, as individuals, are so very precious, so very meaningful, so very special, so very desired by God, that we can ever really have the deep **PEACE AND JOY** of the Spirit, for this is the source of it all!

Perhaps the first and most significant aspect of God's love is best expressed by the apostle Paul in his magnificent letter to the Romans. Beginning in chapter 5:1, we read:

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God ...Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly...God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:1-10).

What is this passage really saying to you and me? Is it not that Almighty God and His Son, Jesus Christ, the great Yahshua ha Meshiach, loved the likes of us so much that they were willing to give up everything, put it all on the line, take the unthinkable, ultimate risk - for us - and do it while we were yet dirty, rotten **SINNERS** - even outright **ENEMIES** of the truth!! Again, Paul says:

"For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His

Holy Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how WIDE AND LONG AND HIGH AND DEEP IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST, and to know this love that SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:14-19).

I think that it is most interesting and instructive that Paul saw fit in this passage to contrast love with knowledge. Paul saw something that so many people just simply cannot seem to fathom. He said the love of God surpasses knowledge. In I Corinthians 8:1, he put it a little differently by saying: "Knowledge PUFFS UP, but love BUILDS UP." It is so unfortunate that to the natural human mind, knowledge almost always takes a higher seat than love. People want knowledge. Knowledge is power. It unlocks doors. It strokes the ego and brings recognition. But love, true Godly love, often takes a back seat. It is unpretentious and doesn't usually attract much attention. It is many times done in secret. It is always giving, serving, working, sharing, helping, encouraging.

God places special emphasis on love above knowledge, even knowledge of the Scriptures. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 13 that unless the gifts of the Spirit, including the power to perform miracles, the ability to prophesy, the faith to move mountains, the zeal of a fanatic, the understanding of all mysteries, even ALL KNOWLEDGE - exist and operate in the medium of Godly love, then they are ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!! God's love is not some ethereal concept, some theoretical notion, something that just sounds *religious*, a mere platitude, something to which we only pay lip service. Remember that Godly love has a height, a depth, a breadth. In other words, it has profound dimensions that we all need to grasp, to understand and fully appreciate, to believe in and accept, to have our very being in!!

Referring back to the book of Romans once again, we read Paul's marvelous description of the love that God has for we little human beings, we who have been called according to His divine purposes. This particular passage is surely one of the most lofty, inspired, sublime pieces of Scripture in all the Bible. As you read it, feel the weight of it by putting yourself directly in the middle of what Paul is saying:

"Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed...What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us ALL THINGS? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...NO, in all these things we are MORE THAN CONQUERORS through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Yahshua) our Lord" (Rom. 8).

Where, I ask you, would you go to find a more inspiring, more moving, more encouraging passage of Scripture? Paul makes here one of the most potent points in all the Bible when he states that because God has already given up His only Son, we can rest assured that He will therefore hold nothing else back from us, but will give us all things! In other words, since God the Father has already, in His matchless love, given up the very best He ever had, then it is an absolute, a certainty, a given, it only follows, that He will withhold nothing from us. When God made that momentous decision to relinquish His only Son, from that point on it became inevitable, unequivocal, beyond the shadow of any possible doubt, that all that was left in the vastness of the universe, all creation whether in Heaven or on earth, would indeed become the inheritance of the saints. When one pays the highest possible price for an object of desire, then it only stands to reason that he will lavish everything he has on that object. Such is the case with you and me and all who are so specially loved and chosen by the Father.

Just as ancient Israel occupied that very special position in God's sight, so now we, as His spiritual children today, are His prized possession. Paul told the Corinthians that we Christians are actually God's building, Christ being the chief cornerstone. The building blocks are gold, silver and precious stones. This building is perfect and unique - spiritual in nature - highly treasured and filled with valuable, indeed priceless commodities.

Remember the language of the Old Testament in its description of Israel as God's special people? Those statements served only as types, however, of the far greater status conferred upon His spiritual people. Notice how similar the New Testament wording on this very subject is:

"For the grace of God that brings forth salvation to all men has appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and Godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus, who gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a PECULIAR PEOPLE, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:11-14).

Peter also wrote concerning this special relationship that Christians have with the Father through Christ - this unique way in which God views His chosen people. He says in his first epistle:

"Wherefore laying aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby; if so be that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, You also as LIVELY STONES, are built up a SPIRITUAL HOUSE, an HOLY PRIESTHOOD...You are a CHOSEN GENERATION, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, a PECULIAR PEOPLE, that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:1-9).

Just how special are you to the Father? True, we are all to become lively stones, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people, God's prized treasure - but Paul goes even further in showing us the very reason for this remarkable status. Notice what he told the Ephesians:

"For through Him (Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom you

also are builded together for an HABITATION OF GOD through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:18-22).

Imagine that! This unique relationship, this special esteem in which we are held by God is for a reason - a magnificent purpose that transcends the mundane of this world - for we are specifically chosen, singled out in this world to be built into the perfect **RESIDENCE FOR ALMIGHTY GOD HIMSELF!!!** We are to be the very dwelling place of God. He is preparing us, cleansing us, building us up spiritually to become His own proper and worthy habitation - where He can live, where He can have His very being in and through us! What a grandiose plan for you and me. We are created, called and chosen to bear the image of the man from heaven. We are here for the express purpose of showing forth Christ to the world. Again I ask, just how special are we?

Even though we so often fall short of the glory of God, even though sin so easily besets us, even though we are weak and inadequate - in spite of it all, God has a special place in His heart for us. God desires us. He wants us. He craves us! He sees through all the problems, through all the maze and haze of this world, this life. So greatly does He long for us that He gave up His only Son to purchase us. So dear are we to Him that He is willing to endure everything for us - to put up with and suffer long the sins of a Noah, a David, a Hezekiah, a Peter and a Paul! Perhaps the apostle John, Christ's closest companion, said it best:

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the SONS OF GOD...Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure" (I John 3:1-3).

The principle of God is that kind begets kind. When He stated in Genesis 1:26, "**Let us make man in OUR IMAGE, AFTER OUR LIKENESS,**" we can rest assured that He knew what He was talking about. Our great God is **REPRODUCING HIMSELF!!** There is nothing to compare with this fact. It is utterly unique and it is taking place right here, right now, on this minuscule speck of a planet in a remote corner of the endless universe! The purpose of God is so grand, so exalted, so extraordinary, that it literally defies all language, all description, all expression. When God says that we are His children, that is not to be taken in some figurative sense, the way the world's churches have interpreted it. We are to become a part of the Divine Family of Yahweh - the God of heaven and earth! We are destined, because of His eternal love, to enjoy the priceless privilege of being directly related to Him, just as close a relationship as a child has to its own loving parents - but even much more so! We will be like Him and will be raised to His divine level. We will have His mind, His state of perfection, His kind of power and we will share with Christ in possessing the entirety of the Creation, whether known or unknown, visible or invisible, spiritual or physical!! In this regard, notice how the *Phillips* translation of I John 2:24 reads:

"I beg you to stick to the original teaching. If you do, you will be living in fellowship with both the Father and the Son, and that means SHARING HIS OWN LIFE FOREVER, as He has promised."

The passage, however, that really expresses the profound reality of God's love as revealed in His plans for your life and mine is found in I Peter 1:23. Once again, the *Phillips* translation catches the meaning perfectly:

"For you are to be SONS OF GOD - the live, permanent Word of the Living God has given you HIS OWN INDESTRUCTIBLE HEREDITY."

Brethren, we are begotten of God Almighty, Yahweh Himself - just as surely as a little physical child is begotten in this life. **WE HAVE GOD'S OWN GENES!!** We are in the process of

being metamorphosed, transformed from mere human flesh and carnal-mindedness to divine, eternal Spirit. When the Messiah returns to this earth, we will be changed into His own kind - His own composition - His own likeness. We will be exactly like Him, in the same way that a younger brother is like His older brother. As Paul said:

"If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body...The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so are also those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we BEAR THE LIKENESS OF THE MAN FROM HEAVEN" (I Cor. 15:44, 47-49).

Paul, in another place, shows our exceptional relationship with God and how we must become pure in this calling:

"What agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For you are the Temple of the Living God; as God has said: I will be their God and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my SONS AND DAUGHTERS, says the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:16-18).

It isn't enough that we have been given life, the blessings promised to the fathers and the chance to be a servant of our God - No, the Father goes on to tell us that we have been chosen to transcend the mere flesh into another realm, another relationship - to go from a class of servants to that of His own divine children and the inheritors of everything He possesses!!

IS GOD INTIMATE WITH YOU?

Many of us are parents. We understand the relationship we have with our children. We know that kids are so very special - the most valued and highly prized of all that belongs to us. We can grasp how involved a parent must be with his or her children, how close they can and should be, how intimate they become in their dealings with each other, how much pleasure and pure joy, even ecstasy, they bring to us. If we understand such realities in the flesh, can it possibly be any less with our Heavenly Father?

Just how intimate, therefore, is God with you, His begotten little child? King David, himself a father many times over and a type of Christ, once wrote:

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us after our sins (AMEN!); nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Like a FATHER PITIES HIS CHILDREN, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust...But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting" (Psa. 103:8-18).

How strong is our God's love for us? How truly close is He to us? Does He deal with you as a Father pitying His little child? Do you really sense the extraordinary relationship you should have with Him? If not, you need to seek Him more directly and more often. With great fervency you must **DESIRE** this closer relationship, this special status, this deeper, more profound association. It is available. It is, in fact, there for the taking, for those who are called according to His purpose.

Paul reminds us in Hebrews 12 that God treats us as His children when He sees us doing wrong. He corrects us and chastens us and brings forth *the peaceable fruit of righteousness* from us. In chapter 4 of this same book, Paul reminds us of what we read in the Old Testament, speaking of Christ as being "**touched with the feelings of our infirmities**" (Heb. 4:15). Just like the physical head of a human body registers the pain that is located in all other parts of the anatomy, so Christ as head of the Church, is touched and moved by the affliction of every member of that spiritual Body. When we hurt, no matter what the cause, He suffers with us. And just as with ancient Israel, when we are afflicted, He too shares the pain. What an intimate, close, personal relationship! We must believe this truth and come to **ACCEPT** it into our minds and lives. It should wash over us and cover us and imbue us at all times.

Is God's love for you, His involvement in your life, so real, so special, so truly overwhelming that you cannot help but shout for joy? Does the unique relationship that you enjoy with God bring tears to your eyes, genuine contentment to your life, real peace and overflowing joy to you, no matter what your physical circumstances might happen to be at any given moment? Time after time, David admonishes us to rejoice, to show forth our joy, letting it burst out like a dam breaking, like a river flooding its banks. In Psalms 5, we read:

"Let all those that put their trust in You rejoice; Let them SHOUT FOR JOY, because You defend them; let them also that love your name be joyful in You. For you, O Lord (Yahweh), will bless the righteous; with favor you will compass him as with a shield" (Psa. 5:11-12).

On still another occasion, David said:

"Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous; and SHOUT FOR JOY, all you that are upright in heart...O clap your hands, all you people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph...If your children will keep My covenant and My testimony that I shall teach them, their children also shall sit upon your throne forevermore. For the Lord has chosen Zion (spiritually, the Church!); He has DESIRED IT FOR HIS HABITATION. This is My rest forever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it...I will also clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall SHOUT ALOUD FOR JOY" (Psa. 32:11; 47:1; 132:12-16).

What a fantastic description of God's undying love and His deep desire for the Church. This applies directly to you and me, if indeed we are a part of that genuine calling. And if we are, then we must ask ourselves to what extent these words are applicable in the practical sense to each of us personally. Are you truly happy in the Lord? Is He your true source of real joy and peace or does it, quite honestly, come to a great extent from the world, from the environment and circumstances you find yourself in in this life? Does your heart really **SHOUT FOR JOY**? David even said that the saints would "**SHOUT ALOUD**," so great, so real, so overwhelming would be their joy!!

THE APPLE OF HIS EYE

When God speaks of Zion in the Old Testament, there is always an excellent chance that He is referring in a dual manner - to Jerusalem or to the spiritual Church. Zion is, in fact, a symbol or type of the New Testament Church. With this in mind, notice the eloquent statement of Isaiah:

"For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burns. And the Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of Yahweh shall name. You shall be a CROWN OF GLORY in the hand of the Lord, and a ROYAL DIADEM in the hand of your God...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you...you that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and GIVE HIM NO REST till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth...Go through the gates; prepare you the way of the people...Say you to the daughter of Zion (end-time Church!), Behold your salvation comes; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. And they shall call them, THE HOLY PEOPLE, THE REDEEMED OF THE LORD; and you shall be called a city not forsaken" (Isa. 62).

God tells us to see and appreciate and accept His love so completely that we cannot help but shout for joy. Then He Himself tells us that He will ultimately rejoice over us! He commands us to **"GIVE HIM NO REST"!!** Brethren, I strongly second that powerful statement! Indeed, let us resolve here and now to re-dedicate ourselves, to re-apply ourselves to fervent, prevailing prayer each day, praying for the Kingdom of God, praying for the work of God, praying for the will of God to be done, both in the Church and in the world. In other words, we must make it a point ;to give our God **NO REST**. Do not keep silent before Him. He wants to hear our pleas. He wants to hear our heartfelt cries, tears and supplications. Pour them out - Persevere, hang in there, keep it up, put on the pressure, keep coming back again and again and again just like the importunate widow. Become a *nuisance*, keep pestering God time after time, beseeching Him for the many needs of the Church and the world. Give Him no rest until He has established His Kingdom upon this earth and His great Son is ruling from Jerusalem!

Isaiah described you and me as a crown of glory in the hand of God and a royal diadem. The prophet Malachi elaborated on this theme by saying:

"Then they that feared Yahweh (the Lord) spoke often one to another; and the Lord harkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be MY JEWELS; and I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him" (Mal. 3:16-17).

And in the same vein, Zechariah writes:

"And the Lord their God shall save them (saints) in that day, as the flock of His people, for they shall be as STONES OF A CROWN - lifted up as an ensign upon His land" (Zech. 9:16).

The love of God is so pure, so strong, so special that it ought to well up in us and spring forth like a geyser! Our appreciation, our realization, our reaction ought to be one of shouting for

joy, of singing the praises of our God, of extolling Him, so much so that even in the face of persecution and death, we should "LEAP FOR JOY" (Luke 6:22-23)!! Is this your constant state of mind, your true attitude, or is that still a goal you have yet to reach? Be honest with yourself and with God in this matter. You must come to really know and understand your relationship with God and be able to accurately judge the quality of that relationship at all times. In fact, forthrightly coming to grips with this issue could prove to be the most significant and necessary aspect of your spiritual life. Take the matter directly to God. Confront Him on it. Get down on your knees and don't get up until you have poured out your heart to Him fully. If you will persist in this sort of effort, seeking him in this way, He will unequivocally begin to answer you. He will not leave you in the dark for long.

How much does God love you and me? How close is He to His chosen people? There is a passage in the Scriptures that is so sublime that it ranks at the very top - one of the most eloquent statements in all the Bible. In Zephaniah 3, we read the following words. Please realize that they are written about you and me:

"Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy; the King of Israel, even Yahweh, is in the midst of you; you shall not see evil anymore...The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty; He will save, He will REJOICE OVER YOU with joy; He will rest in His love, He will JOY OVER YOU WITH SINGING...at that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you; for I will make you a name and a praise among all the people of the earth" (Zeph. 3:14-20).

Can you even begin to imagine the kind of pure joy that God the Father Himself has over His own children? How greatly does He anticipate the day when His divine Family will actually be born? How precious are we to Him? He has already paid the highest possible price for us. Now He anxiously awaits our full birth. In His righteous zeal He will stir Himself up, He will powerfully perform whatever is necessary to bring the day of our salvation to pass. And when that time comes, He will rejoice over us. When Christ comes breaking through the clouds in the power and glory of His Second Advent, Almighty God in Heaven will **SING FOR JOY** over His children!!! Can you picture God singing over you? Quite a staggering thought, isn't it?!!

The message is astonishingly clear. When we are put into the Body of Christ, it is the image of God with which we must be imbued - not merely proving ourselves, but by relinquishing our dependence upon our own self-image in favor of allowing God to project Himself through us. This is what is meant when we say that one should **YIELD** to the Spirit. Therefore, we should be able to let go of worries and anxieties. Health, appearance, abilities - all of these things are rapidly slipping away. Dependence upon our own self-image, our will, must then submit to a freeing, joyful and complete leaning upon God's own image.

Yes, it is true that we do perhaps lose a certain amount of autonomy and ego, but the rewards are so much greater than anything we give up in this great cause. We are to be swallowed up by Christ's Body. John says that we must *abide* in Christ. He is our home and we are to be built up into a perfect dwellingplace for Him. We are the *sweet savor* or *aroma* of Christ to God, Paul tells us in II Corinthians 2:15. We shine like stars of the universe (Phil. 2:15). We are considered as "**holy and blameless in His sight**" (Eph. 1:14).

We, you and I, are **GOD'S DELIGHT! - HIS PRIDE AND JOY!** We are the restoration and reproduction of His own perfect spiritual image here on earth. When He sees us, He sees **HIS OWN PERFECT SON!** We, you and I, have been granted the priceless privilege to be judged in this calling, not so much for what we are, for we ourselves are truly nothing, but for what Christ is and can and will be through us. Paul summed it all up by saying:

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:18).

Brethren, love your God, focusing upon and dwelling upon that profound, unspeakable love. But at the same time, I say to you, **LET GOD LOVE YOU!!** Don't permit your own self, your own sin and shortcoming, your own particular set of circumstances, to cause you to not accept the love of God that is so richly poured out on your behalf. Don't allow the things of your past or present condition, no matter how they may currently appear to you, to rob you of your joy and peace that comes from passing across that barrier and letting God love you, accepting His love, recognizing and admitting your own special relationship with Him, your own unique standing with the Creator Himself. Believe it, desire it, cherish it, receive it, bask in it, revel in it, let it move you and please you beyond all expression. You are a child of the Living God! Your calling is the highest possible for any human being on the face of the earth! Your place in the first resurrection will ensure your exalted position forever in the eternal family of our God. Rejoice in it, praise God for it, thank Him every day for it, sing about it, leap for joy, shouting all the way!!!

The remaining days, months and years are going to be hard ones for this world and that includes the Church as well. The full assurance of knowing who you really are, of allowing God's pure love to cover your life, to permeate your inner being, to fill you with inspiration and revelation, will be the chief source of sustaining peace and joy as times get increasingly more difficult for God's people.

In your most trying hour of sorrow or suffering, of persecution or affliction, remember this one thing: You are **THE APPLE OF GOD'S EYE!!!!** You are the one, no matter what your personal circumstances might be, over whom Almighty God Himself will sing and rejoice! Therefore, live your life as that peculiar treasure of the Lord, as the chosen generation, as the royal priesthood. To God, you are inexpressibly close and precious. You are His chosen one, bought and paid for by the blood of Christ Himself. He surely will exalt you and glorify you as His divine child forever. **ALL THINGS ARE YOURS** - through the unsurpassing love of your Heavenly Father!