Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting **every man** *perfect in Christ Jesus.* Colossians 1:28

Volume XIV
Issue 349

The Deity of God

Part 3 of 4

Faith in the Deity of God

by — John H. Essex (1907-1991)

Believe God. Believe Him in times of blessing. Believe Him in times of adversity. Believe Him and trust Him.

By putting our trust in God, we affirm our faith in His Deity. We acknowledge Him to be the Supreme, Who is operating all according to the counsel of His will, and Who is working all together for the good of those who are loving Him.

We acknowledge His right to bring afflictions on us, and to give us the strength and courage to rise above them when they cannot be pushed on one side. None of them are allowed to separate us from His love in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Rather, in them we are more than conquering through Him Who loves us.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Job is the name that stands out as an example of endurance in affliction. It is noteworthy that the term *"the One Who suffices"* (*"The Almighty"* in the *King James Version*), first used in connection with Abram in Genesis 17:1, occurs no less than thirty-one times in the book of Job – nearly twice as often as in the rest of the books put together. Through his afflictions Job grew in the realization of the Deity of God, so much so that, when they were over, he was able to say of God,

> *I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee* (Job 42:5).

Afflictions are beneficial from an educational aspect, and we may glory in them as such, realizing that they produce endurance, and endurance testedness, and testedness expectation (Romans 5:3-4). Let us not grieve because of them, but rejoice.

Qualified to God

How it behooves us to stand by the Word of God in its truth, purity and accuracy – by doing so we glorify Him Who has given it to us. Let us not be engaging in controversy for nothing useful, to the upsetting of those who are hearing and reading, but rather let us be continually endeavoring to present ourselves qualified to God, unashamed workers, correctly cutting the Word of Truth. We should stand aloof from profane prattlings, for they will only lead on to more irreverence, especially in an era like the present, when men will not tolerate sound teaching, but their hearing being tickled, will heap up for themselves teachers in accord with their own desires, and indeed will turn away their hearing from the truth and will be turned aside to myths. (see II Timothy 2:14-16; 4:2-4).

To Paul was committed an evangel based on the Word of the cross. It was God's power for salvation, and Paul was in no way ashamed of it. As his ministry approached its end, he committed it to Timothy with an injunction to guard it through the holy spirit which is making its home in us (II Timothy 1:13-14). Timothy, in turn, was to commit it to faithful men who would be competent to teach others also. It was an evangel in which works of flesh have no part whatever – in which, on the contrary, *"All is of God."* Let us not adulterate the Word of God, but by manifestation of the truth concerning the evangel, commend ourselves to every man's conscience in God's sight (II Corinthians 4:2).

(see ***Deity,*** *page 3155)*

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the *"preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began"* (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
  - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
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  - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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Strictly Personal

Kenneth F. Joyce

1938-2012

It is with great sadness that we report the death of our dear co-laborer, Kenneth Joyce, on May 17th. Ken served with us as a faithful and enthusiastic editor of the *Bible Student's Notebook*. He was a constant loving encourager to me, and a steadfast supporter of our work. He will be greatly missed.

Never one for taking matters of belief at face value, Ken, who was from Victoria, Australia, frequently found himself at odds with others by asking unpopular questions. He frequently found rejection by family and "friends" as God led him through a maze of teachings from such as the Exclusive Brethren and Herbert W. Armstrong.

Not until he reached age sixty did the puzzle pieces fall in place when he came across a major work by Adlai Loudy titled *God's Eonian Purpose*. God used this book as a launching pad, rocketing Ken into a late-life understanding of the truth. During his retirement, his main activity was the further study of God's Word with a longing to share it with others as God made it possible.

Having been so profoundly moved by Loudy's book, Ken was thrilled to the challenge of re-writing excerpts from it in the hope that, with an easier narrative, others will enjoy its journey in *God's Plan for Man*.

Concerning Ken's book, *God's Plan for Man,* Andrew Maclarty of Grace & Truth wrote,

> This book will delight you as you read of God's purpose of all mankind. Written in clear and simple language, it traces the purpose of God from earliest revelation to its fulfillment in the reconciliation of all to God in righteousness.

In *BSN #305* we also carried an article by Ken entitled "Beneath the Surface."

Ken was a loving husband to Joan, a devoted father to Jacqueline, Philip, Janine, Nicole and Shane, and a much loved "Gramps" to 8 grandchildren.

Those desiring to send a note or card letting his family know how much he was appreciated, and how heartfelt our sympathies for them are, can address them to:

> Joan Joyce
> 2 Cassan Way
> Caroline Springs, Victoria 3023
> Australia

In confident expectation of resurrection, because of Him,

Clyde

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

***Deity** (continued from front page)*

The Tie of Maturity

Finally, another way in which we can give glory to God is in the manner of our treatment of each other. A hasty criticism, an unkind word, a thoughtless action, may give pain to someone with whom we associate. In his Colossian letter, Paul tells us to

> *Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, pitiful compassions, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another and dealing graciously among yourselves, if anyone should be having a complaint against any.*

The pattern for this gracious dealing is to be the Lord Himself.

> *According as the Lord also deals graciously with you, thus also you. Now over all these put on love, which is the tie of maturity* (Colossians 3:12-14).

In short, we are to be *"mutually disposed"* towards one another. Paul uses this expression several times. In II Corinthians 13:11-12 he says,

> *Furthermore, brethren, rejoice, adjust, be entreated, be mutually disposed, be at peace, and the God of love and of peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

A holy kiss is not just putting your lips against someone else. This is common practice in the world. A holy kiss is when you can greet another, knowing full well that what emanates from your mouth is truth and always in ▶

love and in the interests of the one you are greeting. A mouth that will never speak evil of a brother can give that brother a holy kiss.

In Philippians 2:1-4, Paul says again,

> *If, then, there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any communion of spirit, if any compassion and pity, fill my joy full, that you may be mutually disposed, having mutual love, joined in soul, being disposed to one thing – nothing according with faction, nor yet according with vainglory – but with humility, deeming one another superior to one's self, not each noting that which is his own, but each that of the others also.*

Once more the pattern is to be our Lord Himself, "*for,*" continues Paul,

> *Let this disposition be in you which is in Christ Jesus also, Who being inherently in the form of God … nevertheless empties Himself, taking the form of a slave* (Philippians 2:5-7).

Christ pleased not Himself, Paul told the Romans before continuing,

> *Now may the God of endurance and consolation grant you to be mutually disposed to one another, according to Christ Jesus, that, with one accord, with one mouth, you may be glorifying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore be taking one another to yourselves according as Christ also took you to Himself, for the glory of God* (Romans 15:3, 5-7).

Yes, we may truly glorify God by walking in love, one with another, by striving earnestly to observe the terms of that hymn we delight to sing:

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love.
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Blest are the sons of peace
Whose hearts and hopes are one,
Whose kind designs to serve and please
Through *all* their actions run.

Truly, the standard is a high one, but then, we are claiming to be sons of God!

To sum up, we have tried to show various ways in which we may exercise our privilege of glorifying God. This can be done by our subjecting ourselves to Him, by acknowledging Him in all things and thanking Him, by accepting evil (when it comes) as necessary in the outworking of His designs, by believing Him and trusting Him in all circumstances, by accepting infirmities and afflictions and living above them through holding fast to our glorious expectation, by developing the fruit of the spirit within ourselves, by standing by the unadulterated Word of God, and by walking in love with one another, dealing graciously with each other at all times.

This we are praying,

> *That your love may be superabounding still more and more in realization and all sensibility, for you to be testing what things are of consequence, that you may be sincere and no stumbling block for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that is through Jesus Christ for the glory and laud of God* (Philippians 1:9-11).

> *And to Him be glory in the ecclesia, and in Christ Jesus, for all the generations of the eon of the eons! Amen!* (Ephesians 3:21).

The Relative and the Absolute

One of our great difficulties in understanding Scripture comes about through our unwillingness or inability to distinguish between the relative and the absolute.[1] Because of this, we come up against seeming contradictions, and the general tendency is to accept the relative rather than the absolute. Both are true, but in different circumstances, and it is necessary that we should take these differing circumstances into account.

For example, let us note that the Scriptures speak of Abel, Lot, Zechariah, Joseph (husband of Mary) and Joseph of Arimathea (and others) as being *just* or *righteous* – the word is the same in the Greek – yet Paul is emphatic in declaring that,

> *Not one is just, not even one; for all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God* (Romans 3:10, 23).

How can both of these conditions be true? The answer is that the first is relative while the second is absolute.

1. The dictionary defines *absolute* as "unconditional and unlimited" and *relative* as "having relation to something else." For the purposes of this study, we may regard *absolute* as that which is in accord with, or depends solely on, the Deity, and in which no other factors may intrude. Thus the Deity of God will be stressed in every mention of the absolute.

The righteousness of each of the men we have mentioned is being judged against a particular set of circumstances operative at the time he lived. The righteousness of Abel, for instance, is in connection with the oblation which he made to God, and is in contrast to the unrighteousness of Cain in respect to his offering. Lot was righteous in respect to his witness to God in Sodom, and to his keeping aloof from the general wickedness prevailing in the city. Zechariah was without blame in the manner in which he conducted his priestly office, as distinct from the generally corrupt priesthood of his day, of which Ananias and Caiaphas were later examples. None of these righteous men was completely without sin in his life, for when Paul contemplates the whole of humanity against the background of the absolute righteousness of God, he makes no exceptions, but finds them all wanting:

> *Not one is just, not even one; for all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God.*

The Word of the Cross

It is the apostle Paul who consistently proclaims the absolute; the other writers of Scripture generally confine themselves to the relative. This is because it is Paul alone who speaks of the *Word of the cross* (I Corinthians 1:18), and until this truth is proclaimed, the absolute cannot even be revealed, let alone understood. Indeed, it is not until after his preaching of the cross that Paul can even mention the purpose of God, which has a culmination that is gloriously absolute, for the end of God's purpose is that He may be *"All in all."*

It is generally accepted that the Corinthian letters, and also Galatians, were written before Romans. In Corinthians *the Word of the cross* is declared to be, to us who are being saved, *"the power of God,"* and this links up with Romans 1:16, where Paul proclaims an evangel which is *"God's power for salvation."* In this evangel, the *"righteousness of God is being revealed"* (:17), and this righteousness is so absolute that it makes all humanity unrighteous.

> *All sinned and are wanting of the glory of God.*

From this, it follows immediately that no one can justify or save himself. In Paul's evangel, the righteousness to which all believers attain is not acquired through works, but by faith alone. It is,

> *The righteousness of God through Jesus Christ's faith, for all, and on all who are believing* (:22).

It is bestowed on them *"gratuitously"* (that is, without any cause in themselves that would enable them to lay claim to it). Works are completely excluded, for Paul reckons

> *A man to be justified by faith apart from works of law* (:28).

Indeed, he declares that,

> *By works of law, no flesh at all shall be justified in His* [God's] *sight, for through law is the recognition of sin* (Romans 3:19-28).

In the writings of James, on the contrary, justification is by works. In the relative context of the Kingdom evangel this is perfectly true. James writes to those who are still under the law (and have, therefore, not yet come to the cross of Christ), for he says,

> *For anyone who should be keeping the whole law, yet should be tripping in one thing, has become liable for all* (James 2:10).

Yet Paul writes to those who are *"free from the law"* (Galatians 3:21-25).

It is the very liability of humanity to trip that makes it impossible for a law to be given which can vivify, and which can produce that absolute righteousness which satisfies God. The fault is not in the law, for,

> *The law, indeed, is holy, and the precept holy and just and good* (Romans 7:12).

The fault is in the inability of humanity to keep it; therefore, the promise has to be *"out of Jesus Christ's faith,"* for He alone could keep the law. Now God is able to manifest, "apart from law," a righteousness of His Own through Jesus Christ's faith, and to bestow it freely on all who believe.

The law can only produce a relative righteousness, for no one can keep the law to perfection. Those who strive to do so may be described as *"just,"* in contrast to their fellows who do not endeavor to keep it. They may even be described as *"becoming blameless,"* as Paul so pictured himself in Philippians 3:6, yet elsewhere he designates himself as *"a calumniator and a persecutor and an outrager"* and *"the foremost of sinners"* (I Timothy 1:13-15). The righteousness which is in law is actually one of the things which he deems to be forfeit because of Christ. This is the distinction between the relative and the absolute.

We may perhaps illustrate this by reference to sunspots. These are really masses of brilliant flame, but against the absolute brilliance of the sun itself, they appear as ▶

dark spots on the sun's surface – hence the name that is given to them. Against any other background, they would appear as luminaries, not spots. And so it is when the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is in Paul's evangel. Much that appeared before to be righteous now assumes a different complexion when seen against the glory of God's Own righteousness.

The Will and Purpose of God

In the letters of Paul the absolute is consistently being proclaimed, for in them we are introduced to a God Who is seen to be,

> *Operating all in accord with the counsel of His will* (Ephesians 1:11).

Can *anything* be more absolute than this? Though in other parts of Scripture, men may *appear* to have a free choice,[2] here in this Scripture it is made clear that *every* choice that men may appear to have is, in reality, subservient to the absolute will of God. It is in this context that God can speak of a *"purpose of the eons"* – that is, a purpose which spans the whole of the eons – for such a purpose, to be effective, presupposes the absoluteness of the will of God. *Nothing* is ever allowed to thwart Him, even for an instant. This makes God's purpose itself absolute, and so Paul is able to refer to it with the definite article, *"the purpose of the eons,"*

> *The purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will.*

Let us, then, briefly see how Paul presses home the absolute. In the matter of salvation, for example, whereas the teaching in other parts of Scripture is that *"He that shall endure to the consummation, the same shall be saved"* (Matthew 24:13), with Paul the teaching is, *"God wills that **all mankind** be saved, and come into a realization of the truth"* and *"We rely on the living God, Who is the Savior of **all mankind**"* (I Timothy 2:4; 4:10).

James makes works a requisite of salvation (James 2:14-26), yet Paul speaks of salvation as being entirely *"in grace"* and not out of us at all, *"not of works lest anyone should be boasting."* In Paul's evangel, we contribute nothing to our salvation, but find ourselves to be entirely God's achievement (Ephesians 2:8-10).

In other matters, Paul is equally emphatic. If we want an absolute expression of subjection, we find it in I Corinthians 15:20-28, where Paul goes to some pains to point out that, in the final analysis, only God Himself may be excluded from those who are to be made subject to His Son. This of necessity includes the Adversary, who in other parts of Scripture is given some measure of control and influence. It also far exceeds the relative dominion given to man in Genesis 1:28-31 and Psalm 8:4-8. Even when this is enlarged in Hebrews 2:5-8, we still do not see all subject to Him.

Again, if we want an absolute expression of vivification, we find it in I Corinthians 15:22.

> *For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified.*

In other parts of Scripture, vivification is relative.

> *For even as the Father is rousing the dead and vivifying, thus the Son also is vivifying whom He will* (John 5:21).

In Revelation 20:6 it is only those who have part in the former resurrection, and whose names, consequently, are written in the scroll of life, on whom the second death has no jurisdiction.

The Deity and the "All"

The tendency, mentioned earlier, to accept the relative rather than the absolute, often means that we fail to give full value to the absolute when we come up against it. Nowhere has this been more frequently demonstrated than in the text quoted in the last paragraph (I Corinthians 15:22).

The words of Scripture have been twisted in the minds of many sincere believers to read, *"For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also shall **all in Christ** be vivified."* This would limit vivification to the believers of today. No, the *"all"* in the second half of the comparison is just as comprehensive as the *"all"* in the first part. In Adam ALL are dying; in Christ ALL will be vivified. Unless this is the true meaning, Christ's sacrifice becomes, in part, unavailing.

Others, while accepting the all-embracing nature of the word *"all,"* have questioned the true meaning of the word *"vivify"* (*"make alive"* in the *King James Version*). They have qualified it to mean *"rouse from the dead,"* with the possibility of dying again, as Lazarus was roused. However, in the context of the whole passage from :20-28, which begins with the rousing of Christ from the dead and ends with God being *"All in all,"* and includes within it the final destruction of death itself, such a restriction of meaning of the word *"vivify"* is not admissible. The basis

2. For example, Joshua is recorded as saying, *"Choose you this day whom you will serve … as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* Joshua 24:15)

of comparison is Christ's Own rousing from the dead. We know that He dies no more, hence neither do those who are vivified in Him.

A similar reluctance to give full value to the absolute is seen in the common interpretation of the passage in I Timothy 2:4,

> *God wills that all mankind be saved.*

In the minds of many, the overriding will of God is reduced to a wish or a desire, in part dependent on the wills of mankind, the thought being that "God will have all men to be saved, if they will only let Him." How far short is this from the truth of Scripture, and how detracting from the concept of the Deity of God, Whom Paul declares to be,

> *The Savior of all mankind,* ***especially*** *of those who believe!* (I Timothy 4:10).

Many would make Him the Savior *only* of those who believe.

People who think this way would also, of necessity, put a restriction on the absolute expression of reconciliation as found in Colossians 1:20, where no being in the whole universe is excluded. God is making peace with all, both in heaven and earth, through the blood of Christ's cross.

The whole passage of Colossians 1:15-20 is full of expressions that are absolute, both in the field of creation and in the field of reconciliation. Notice how frequently the word *"all"* occurs, and how, in three cases, it is expanded to make it quite clear that nothing is to be left out. In our quotation of the Scripture, we have put the word *"all"* in capitals, to bring it out, and have shown the three expansions in italics.

> *Who is the Image of the invisible God, Firstborn of every creature, for in Him is* ALL *created,* ***that in the heavens and that on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or sovereignties, or authorities,*** ALL *is Created through Him and for Him, and He is before* ALL, *and* ALL *has its cohesion in Him.*
>
> *He is the Head of the body, the ecclesia, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in* ALL *He may be becoming first,* ***for in Him the entire complement delights to dwell,*** *and through Him to reconcile* ALL *to Him (making peace through the blood of His cross), through Him,* ***whether those on the earth or those in the heavens.***

A parallel Scripture, but with a vital difference, is Romans 11:36,

> *Seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is* ALL: *to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen!*

The vital difference between this passage and the one in Colossians lies in the phrase *"out of Him."* The Scripture in Romans refers to God Himself; the one in Colossians refers to the Son of His love. All is out of God, and through Him and for Him; all is through Christ and for Him. Such is the oneness between God and His Son that the *"through"* and the *"for"* can be attributed to both; but by the nature of the case, the *"out of"* must refer to the Father only.

In this passage in Romans, the word *"all"* is used only once, but it is an absolute expression. Whatever is out of God is *"for Him"* at the ultimate, and is *"through Him"* during the intervening period. Nothing gets lost on the way, but is safely brought through all of the disruptive factors of the eons until it finds its place in that most absolute of all scriptural expressions, *"That God may be* ALL *in* ALL."

Dare we here limit the completeness of the first ALL? Can we limit the comprehensiveness of the second ALL? If we seek to limit either, we cast doubts on the other.

The Word of God Completed

Wherever we turn in Paul's writings, we find them full of absolutes. That is because he was the one appointed to complete the Word of God (Colossians 1:25). We note a few more:

> ***Nothing,*** *consequently, is now condemnation to those in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1).
>
> *Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who blesses us with* ***every*** *spiritual blessing among the celestials, in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3).
>
> *… and subjects* ***all*** *under His feet, and gives heavens and that on the earth* (Ephesians l:22).
>
> *… and subjects* ***all*** *under His feet, and gives Him, as Head over* ***all,*** *to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement by which* ***all*** *in* ***all*** *is being completed* (Ephesians 1:22-23).
>
> *Wherefore, also, God highly exalts Him, and graces Him with the name that is above* ***every*** *name, that in the name of Jesus* ***every*** *knee should be bowing,* ▶

*celestial and terrestrial and subterranean, and **every** tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God, the Father* (Philippians 2:9-11).

Let us conclude by looking again at Romans 8:28.

Now we are aware that God is working ALL together for the good of those who are loving God.

"Who" are here defined as those who are called according to His purpose. Actually, their calling is the middle stage of their spiritual experience, as outlined in these verses. Before they were called, they were foreknown and predesignated, and after their calling they are justified and glorified. Where, in any of these stages, do any fall away? Where is there any room for failure when God is working ALL together for their good? Any suggestion of this kind immediately casts doubt on the foreknowledge of God, and on His ability to carry through to the end what He has designated beforehand in accord with His purpose.

How shall He not, together with Him, also be graciously granting us ALL? (Romans 8:32).

*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor messengers, nor sovereignties, nor the present, nor what is impending, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, **nor any other creation,** will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord* (Romans 8:38-39).

What a glorious absolute this is! When asking the question in :35, "*What shall be separating us from the love of God in Christ Jesus?*" Paul lists seven things which are grievous in themselves, but are the common lot of many in humanity. He deals with them quickly by saying that "*in ALL these we are more than conquering through Him Who loves us*" (:37). They are all the outcome of man's own inhumanity to man, and we are granted the strength to deal with these through our faith in God, Who gives us so many evidences of His love for us.

Then Paul goes on to list a series of nine other things which are outside of humanity's control, and then, just in case anything in the wide universe has been omitted, he adds a tenth, "nor any other creation," and gives us an assurance that not one of these, nor all combined, *"will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord."*

Paul can say this only because the power of the Deity is absolute, and because God is ever true to Himself. Let our appreciation of the Deity of God enhance this assurance in our hearts.

(To be continued.)

<u>*Note from the executive editor:*</u> The page numbers for BSN issues #330-348 are incorrect. BSN #330 should begin with page 2989, etc. The page numbers have been corrected for these issues, and will be reflected in the electronic versions when they are placed online. We are sorry for any confusion/inconvenience. Yours in patient plodding, one of Father's broken vessels,

André Sneidar

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