

Foundation of Faith

“THE FUTURE LIES DARK BEFORE US” – OR DOES IT?

AT THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW YEAR

WITHOUT ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING!

THE CALL TO UNITY

Face the **FUTURE** *with*
ASSURANCE

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Editorial

On the threshold of the new year, we look back on the past and concur:

*He was present through the waters,
Through the rivers raging He led.
And even through the flaming fires,
He Himself walked on ahead.*

Yes, the year 2017 brought many storms, floods, earthquakes, and natural catastrophes. Then there were also wars, famine, and a growing anti-Christian sentiment in politics and society. . . .

Now, dear reader, what will happen this year? What did the Son of God prophesy to His disciples?

Matthew 24:7-9: "For nation will rise against nation . . ."

Luke 21:25-26: "And there will be signs . . . men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth . . ."

Do we see and recognize the signs of the times? So many people are fearful and at their end. Uncertainty and anxiety push them to despair. We too, may be tempted to despair, but we know that Jesus has promised us: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Years ago, I took refuge in my Savior. Through His great love, He paid for my guilt and iniquities. By grace, I became a child of God and know that my name is written in the Book of Life. In all the storms and difficulties, I experienced God's help and counsel. Jesus Christ is my Redeemer, and in His love, He stands ready at our side to help us in this new year. Therefore, trust in the Lord!

*He helped us through! So we want to venture
To walk with Him through dark nights unknown.
He will hold us, we are His beloved treasure,
'Til with our Father we're safely at home!*

H. D. Nimz

God's *Wonderful* Leading

The reformer of Württemberg, Johann Brenz, was to be captured, as commanded by Emperor Charles V. A Spanish cavalry was already on its way to Stuttgart when Duke Ulrich heard about it from a relative. Late at night, he called Brenz and told him what his enemies wanted to do. The Duke also told Brenz: "I do not desire guilt for your blood; rescue yourself however you can. I cannot hide you myself, for I have to state under oath that I do not know where you are. Go in God's name! May He save your life!"

Despite the shock of this news, Brenz quickly took courage in faith, bowed, and left silently. The Duke called after him, deeply moved: "If God finds favor with you, He will watch over your life."

When he arrived at home, Brenz threw himself onto his knees and called out to God in earnest prayer. When he stood up, it seemed as if someone was speaking to him: "Take one loaf of bread and go to the upper city, and where you find an open house door, go in and hide yourself in the attic."

Brenz accepted this as an instruction from God and left. He found all house doors locked except for the last one. Here he went inside, and without being noticed by anyone, he went up to the attic, where he crawled on hands and knees between stacks of wood and hid himself.

The next day, the emperor's colonel arrived in the city and occupied all of the city gates and exits and demanded of the Duke, the surrender of Brenz. When he testified under oath that he did not know where Brenz was, the colonel ordered a thorough search of every house, which took 14 full days.

From his hiding place, Brenz could overhear the people on the street conversing about the searches' progress. Eventually, on the last day, his enemies came into the house where he was hidden. On his knees, praying silently, he heard the weapons clanging and listened to the persecutors moving slowly from room to room and from stairway to stairway until they finally came near to his hiding place. Several times, they jabbed the woodpile with their weapons, and once he even had to dodge the thrust of a sword.

It is hard to imagine how he must have felt during those anxious moments. Finally, to his joy, he heard the command: "Let's go!—He is not here either!"

Soon after, the colonel reported the result of his search to his superior and added that he did not believe that Brenz was in Stuttgart. On the next day, the command came for the cavalry to depart.

But how had Brenz survived 14 days with only one loaf of bread?

God, the Almighty Helper and Defender who had sustained the life of the prophet Elijah by providing food for him at the Cherith brook by ravens and afterward from a widow in Zarephath, had arranged for a hen to care for Brenz. On the first day, she snuck in between the stacks of wood and the roof, laid an egg close to his feet, and then, contrary to the nature of hens, left quietly again. Brenz took the egg, sliced off a piece of bread, and thanked God sincerely for this meal.

The next day, the hen came again and throughout the next 14 days, always at the same time, so that Brenz could

enjoy a good meal every day. It is odd that on the fifteenth day the hen did not return, as Brenz heard the people on the street say: “Now they are gone!”

For safety’s sake, he remained there until the evening and spent the rest of the day giving thanks and praising God. When it had turned dark, he crawled out, left the house unnoticed and hurried immediately to Duke Ulrich, who could hardly believe his eyes. “How did you fare, dear Brenz?” he addressed him.

“Good!” answered Brenz.

“Who sustained you throughout this long time?”

Brenz replied: “God!” and told him about the incident with the hen.

“And how did you make it past the Spaniards?”

“Also well, for God covered me!”

“This time I had given up hope for you!”

“Me too!”

The Duke led Brenz to the window and together they praised God for this visible deliverance from the hand of the enemy.

Who is Your Guide?

One evening many years ago, a farmer in Canada was returning home from the city. He lost his way on the snow covered prairie and searched unsuccessfully for the right path. Night fell and he lost all hope of finding his way. Suddenly he noticed that the horses pulling his sleigh were following the tracks of another sleigh.

“Now,” the farmer told himself, “I have the help I need!”—He heard the bells of another sleigh in the distance. He drove faster and the more he hurried, the more he noticed how well trod the path was and the other sleigh’s bells became more distinct. “I am likely on a very busy path,” he thought, “I should be home before midnight.”

Even though he pressed his tired horses on and drove mile after mile, he did not see any light indicating a house. The dark and bleak fields re-

mained spread out before him. In his fear and uncertainty, he drove even faster and finally caught up to the man he was following.

“Where are you headed?” he asked. “I’m following you!” was the answer. The two travelers had lost their way and followed each other round and round in a circle.

After discussing their situation, they thought of looking up to the heavens. The star Polaris which points north shone brightly. North was exactly the direction in which the men wanted to go.—“How foolish!” they said. “Why didn’t we think to look to the heavens sooner?”

So they continued on, accompanied by the heavenly light, and soon reached their homes safe and sound.

How many lost sinners in “Christianity” follow one another, repeating the same religious practices and the same ceremonies that the others

do. Or they follow religious leaders who sadly are often blind leading the blind. How pitiable are these people, whether leaders or followers, who in vain believe they are on the right path. Sooner or later they discover that they have deceived themselves. It is well that they make this discovery before it is too late, before they are lost eternally.

Dear friend, it is not yet too late to stop and examine the well trod path you are on. If you feel that you are not drawing nearer to God in spite of your religious activity, then get off the religious merry-go-round. Turn your eyes away from man and towards the Savior, from the world towards heaven, from works and rituals to Jesus, the only star of security. Then you will know that in Him you have found the only guide to heaven. Commit yourself to Him, and follow Him alone!

Enter the New Year with Courage

Jesus once said to His disciples: “And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:32-33).

A new year has begun. It is only a few days old. At this time, many might ask: “What will this new year bring?” Of course, we cannot answer this question. It wouldn’t even be good for us to know the answer to that question. No one can answer the questions of the future without generalizations. What does it even mean to ask, “What does the new year hold for me?”

Now this is a human question. It contains a certain desire for a good answer. We long for someone to say: “Do not fear! It will all be okay. You will remain healthy. You will receive your income. You can be content.” Every person would like to hear a positive forecast for the new year. Unfortunately, no one can give us this guarantee. Not even God’s Word does so. Jesus soberly makes the statement: “In the world you will have tribulation.”

Perhaps we do not agree with this statement. Cowards are afraid, and we do not want to be cowards. Some might say, “We just need to be brave. In this life we need to be courageous. Then it will work out.”

But it says, “In the world you will have tribulation.” This is what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples before His farewell. “You” refers to His disciples, children of God. Are they a particularly fearful people, a group of weak people who are unable to cope with life? Absolutely not! Perhaps they only fear to be honest with themselves and do not wish to deceive themselves.

On the other hand, a deep fear could be hiding behind the façade of strength. We sometimes wonder why many people are so hurried and busy, how quickly they can become upset and irritable, how forcibly cheerful they are. Often, the whole reason behind it is repressed fear, a numbing fear of death.

But in this case, the Lord isn’t speaking of the sinners’ fearfulness. These disciples had forgiveness of their sins and needed not to fear the wrath of God. They had peace with God, but in the world they had fear. It comes with the task that the Lord gave: “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matthew 10:16). Does it not often seem as if the believer is helpless against attacks and is handed over to the mockery and whims of the world? The apostle Paul writes about this as well: “we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Romans 8:36). If the believer looks to his own strength, then he will be afraid in such a situation.

There is a second reason for fear: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). The believer will not be brought to a place of false security; rather, the Word of God will clearly and soberly show him the dangers.

Thirdly, there is the fear of not achieving the eternal goal. The apostle warns: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We also do not wish to commit ourselves to a false sense of security. These perils will await us this coming year as well. They will threaten to frighten us, and we will need help.

In spite of all of the dangers in our lives, Jesus says: “Be of good cheer!” These are not meaningless words of comfort for the new year, as if we might be spared from suffering, difficulties, despair, and temptations. We may and we should pray that these things do not gain power over us. Jesus does not thoughtlessly try to mislead us

about the reality. Some people's words of comfort often do. They are empty and simply don't help. When Jesus says: "Be courageous, fear not!" He gives us a new sense of reality contrary to the fear in our lives. He does not want to dull our sight to dangers but wants to guide our sight to something far bigger and stronger: to Himself and His victory over evil.

Jesus validates His assurance: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!" Because Christ has overcome the world, we can take heart. The world and all that we fear no longer have the last word, but God does. "I have overcome the world!" said Jesus, the One who knows our situation. He travelled this earth, and even as the Son of God, did not escape the world and its fears. He felt joy and pain, honor and shame, disappointment and loneliness. Even as a child, there was no room for Him in this world. As a man, he was ridiculed, tortured, and executed. Think of the time when Jesus began to sorrow and be distressed as He said to the disciples: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38).

This same Jesus says here: "I have overcome the world." Therefore, He can say with great conviction: "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." He knew that the Father would sustain Him even in the darkest hour. Because the Father was with Him, victory was certain. He does not say: "I will overcome the world"; rather, "I have overcome the world." The world of evil encountered ultimate defeat.

"In Me you may have peace." That is the reason Jesus can say to us: "Be of good cheer." We can courageously begin the new year. What He overcame also applies to His disciples. The Father is also with us. Anything that may threaten us must submit to the Word: "I have overcome the world." Christ says: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace." Because of this, we can take heart; we can live by it in this year.

F. H. Friedrich



God's Promises for the New Year

Surrounded by many forces that threaten to destroy us and against which we are completely helpless—in the midst of thousands of dangers, from which there appears to be no escape—these and other things may cause many hearts to be anxious at the approach of a new year. If the past year has brought loss, sorrow and tribulation, the prospect may seem darker yet if our eyes only see the unrest in the world rather than looking to God.

It would be terrible to walk towards a dark future if we had to believe, as some seem to, that we are tossed around by blind and merciless fate on the sea of life. Only the true Christian confidently approaches the new year, for he knows it is not blind coincidence but an almighty and loving Father who stands at the helm of his life. He will lead us through all waves, rocks, and reefs, and safely bring us to the haven of rest and joy.

This loving Father has given His children precious promises, all verified by Jesus Christ, in His word. There is no situation in the life of a Christian for which the Holy Scriptures do not have a promise. Let us take a look at a few of these precious gems to comfort, encourage and strengthen our faith for the beginning of the new year.

One of the first of these precious promises is the comforting, “Do not be afraid,” which we often read in God’s Word.

When Abraham, a stranger among the Canaanite tribes, had returned from the slaughter with the kings,

he was likely somewhat disheartened. He may also have been afraid the conquered kings would return with renewed strength and annihilate him who was without any allies. Then the Lord appeared to him and said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

When the Philistines harassed Isaac and he had to move from place to place, the Lord said to him, “Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you” (Gn 26:24).

The Lord gives us another wonderful promise through the prophet Isaiah. He says, “But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you’” (Isaiah 43:1–2). We can insert our own name and trust the Lord to help us in every situation.

In the New Testament, we also find the Lord saying, “Do not be afraid.” When Jairus came to Jesus with the plea to heal his deathly ill daughter, the Lord said to him, “Do not be afraid: only believe, and she will be made well” (Luke 8:50). We hear the same words directed to His group of disciples, “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

“Do not be afraid,” should also be our motto for the new year. Even though our foes may be numerous and mighty, and may be shooting their arrows at us, the Lord is our shield. All hostile arrows will ricochet off Him without hurting us.

When Moses, God’s servant, was in distress due to the disobedience of the Israelites, God assured him that, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” That is a wonderful word of encouragement at the beginning of a new year!

Our work may be difficult and our road may be rough, but we can be confident. If our feet walk the way of the Lord and we remember Him in all we do, He will guide us true.

Before His departure, Jesus gave His disciples the command to, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The disciples could have shied away from such a command. However the resurrected Conqueror gave them this assurance along with the command, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). He was with them and gave them victory.

The same Jesus who was given all authority in heaven and on earth, is also with us. With Him we can overcome the largest obstacles and solve the most difficult issues. With Him we can also confidently go into the new year and with Paul triumphantly cry, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Almighty God Will Be With Us

*A new year’s standing at the door now,
Through which the old year disappeared.
In every place, on every shore, how
It beckons us, the path is clear.
No one has gone the way we’re going,
And though the road seem treacherous,
We will not fear the future, knowing
Almighty God will be with us.*

*God gives us courage, strength, and faith;
Our hearts are happy just to know
He lavishes abundant grace,
And watches o’er the way we go.
We don’t know what the new year’s bringing,
Sorrow or such things which bless us,
But deep inside our hearts are singing:
Almighty God will be with us.*

*In every place and situation,
What should we fear and why despair?
For Christ the Lord is our salvation;
Our God is near, we know He cares!
We trust in God, rejoicing greatly;
We need not fear at all because
We know in Christ we travel safely.
Almighty God, He is with us.*

*If skies are grey and storm clouds threaten,
And winds are blowing cold and bleak;
If armies face us with their weapons,
In God our refuge we will seek.
We will not fear though mountains crumble;
Though others should despair and fuss,
We know the Lord cares for the humble;
Our mighty God, He is with us.*

*The new year’s standing at the door now,
It beckons you and beckons me.
We have God’s promises beyond doubt;
We need not go reluctantly.
We’re traveling homeward, on to glory,
Through time this path winds full and free;
Throughout the new year, as we journey,
Almighty God with us will be.*

Without Me You Can Do Nothing

We find it hard to let go of the rudder and to accept guidance from someone else. But we will notice that it is a lot easier if we don't trust in ourselves, but fully trust in the Lord.

Some time ago, I met a young father who had his little daughter with him on his bicycle. The ride was visibly creating much joy for the child, but she also wanted to contribute something. With all seriousness the little one said: "Daddy, you can pedal, but I want to steer myself." As she said it, her little hands grabbed for the handlebars.

At these words, I involuntarily had to think of how often I too want to steer my own life. Right after finishing school, I had my wishes, plans and goals. Not that I wanted to manage my life on my own. I knew that I needed the Father in heaven, that without Him I couldn't make it to the goal. But my wishes and goals remained. While

I recognized God as my companion and guide and loved Him in a childlike fashion, I still questioned whether my way on the journey of life was also His will. I treated God like this child did her father. I pleaded with Him to escort me through life. I asked Him to straighten that and remove this, and protect me from difficulties, allow me to succeed in everything and bring me safely to the goal. He could pedal, so to speak, but I wanted to steer.

Over the years, I came to understand where one ends up when doing it oneself. It was by His love and grace that God guided my lifeboat to His will and not to my desires and simply took the controls from my hand before it

went astray. With time I learned to place my wishes into the will of God and could pray: “Your will be done!” My heart rejoiced when God’s will agreed with mine, when He did not halt my often shortsighted desires, when my wishes and hopes were not disturbed. But many times, His guidance was so different than I had imagined, and then my joy in life’s journey was over.

My heart became heavy and with innumerable sighs I stood before the enigmatic ways of God. I could not comprehend why the way had to be so difficult for me. But I learned that self-denial, disappointment and sorrows of all types are the best school of life that takes us on the shortest way to our heavenly Father, of Whom we know, that everything that He allows is out of love. And that precisely the darkest and most difficult ways are the most blessed.

Step by step, I came to the point where placing myself into His will and remaining in Him gave my life a new direction and a new goal and I began to understand the words: “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). I surrendered my own plans and sought to understand the ways of God and learned to be thankful, even for sorrows, because I recognized the blessings therein. Despite all sorts of adversity, hardships and pain in my life, a time

of great grace followed, in which I matured. God filled my soul with everything that I needed for quiet service in His work.

Always and everywhere God gives opportunities to work in blessing. And in this service, it becomes clear that without Him one can do nothing. So many things will succeed better if we do not forget to ask God’s guidance in all things. It protects against many failures. One often wants to do great things for the Lord and forgets that remaining in Him is much more important.

The hunger in my soul and my thirst for knowledge often made me wish to understand the whole Bible. And I was happy to know a suitable verse at every opportunity. But I have also often had to experience how long the way has been, until I have comprehended even one word in all its depth.

It is my prayer that I never intervene, with inept hands, in a work that God has not intended for me. I cannot do anything without Him, but everything is possible with Him. He, the wise leader and great helper, in His hands I want to confidently and with childlike faith put my path and goal. I can do this joyfully, because He has guided me this far with great patience, love and faithfulness at many a crossroad.

I Lift Up My Eyes

“I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help?” (Psalm 121:1).

When our forefathers wrote a chronicle, they set the words “Anno Domini” before the date. Translated, it means: “in the year of the Lord.” They called their years “divine years.”

A new year with God is beginning. Let us make sure that it really becomes a year with God. We are personally responsible for making it so. The Lord will hold us accountable for how we look after our household in 2018.

The Psalm speaks about our eyes. Where will our eyes be directed at the beginning of this new year?

The worldly man looks anxiously or defiantly into the darkness that hides his path. There are eyes that look down, desperately seeking fleeting treasures. Then there are eyes that look to the past. They search through their

memories and come up lonely and empty. Other eyes look into space and despair.

What do your eyes do? “I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help?” Do this as well, my dear reader.

Christians look up to the eternal heights. They direct their gaze to the One who brought them salvation. He wants to guide us with His eyes. He does not want to leave us nor forsake us. We are safe with Him.

In this Psalm, everything is said that needs to be said about the new year. We read the word “help.” We will definitely need help this year. We will go through times of fear, affliction, challenges, distress, and temptations.

It is important that we raise up our eyes to the Lord. And when we do, the new year can be a blessed one with God.

The Right Leader for the New Year

We want to focus on the Scripture passage Exodus 33:1-18.

We see the man of God, Moses, with a heavy, fearful heart. Israel has sinned. In response, God told him: “I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Verse 3). What should Moses do? Here he is in the desert and completely dependent on God. If God turns away from him and the children of Israel, then they are lost. Moses says to himself: That can’t happen! He was certain that the gracious God, our Father, must continue to go with them! For that reason he relied on his pleas. He brought three things before God.

1. “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people.’ But You have not let me know whom You will send with me” (Verse 12). The assignment was clear and certain and needed to be fulfilled. But, could Moses proceed into uncertainty? He knew for certain that if God did not go with him, all would be lost. For this reason he stood before God full of concern, and waited for Him to allow Himself to be moved and go with him. Out of his great sense of responsibility he spoke before the Lord.

We must wonder if the spiritual leaders of today also stand earnestly before the Lord and put themselves in the gap out of concern for the ones who have been entrusted to them. Oh, what a great responsibility they have! But, not only those in leadership, rather every individual should be concerned about going without the Lord.

2. “Show me now Your way” (Verse 13). How important was this petition! Which is the right way? There are many ways, but on which one can we be sure to reach the goal? Man chooses his own way and usually goes further from God. He gets lost in his many ways. He hopes to still make it, but without God’s leading, he gets lost and doesn’t know where he will end up. Moses knew this and therefore he said: “Show me now Your way.” It is of great importance that we don’t rush ahead without knowing the way. Only those who go after having received di-

rection from the Lord will be protected from setbacks, hardships and worry. This is why it is good to wait on the Lord.

3. “And consider that this nation is Your people” (Verse 13). There was too much at stake to simply leave it. He remembered his godly responsibility and His covenant with the people. Indirectly Moses said “You aren’t allowed to pull away, for we are dependent on you! And if we should succeed in reaching the borders of the promised land, how should we take over the land without Your leading? The enemies are many and they will fight unto death. If you, Lord, don’t go with us as our Leader, then all will be lost in the end.”

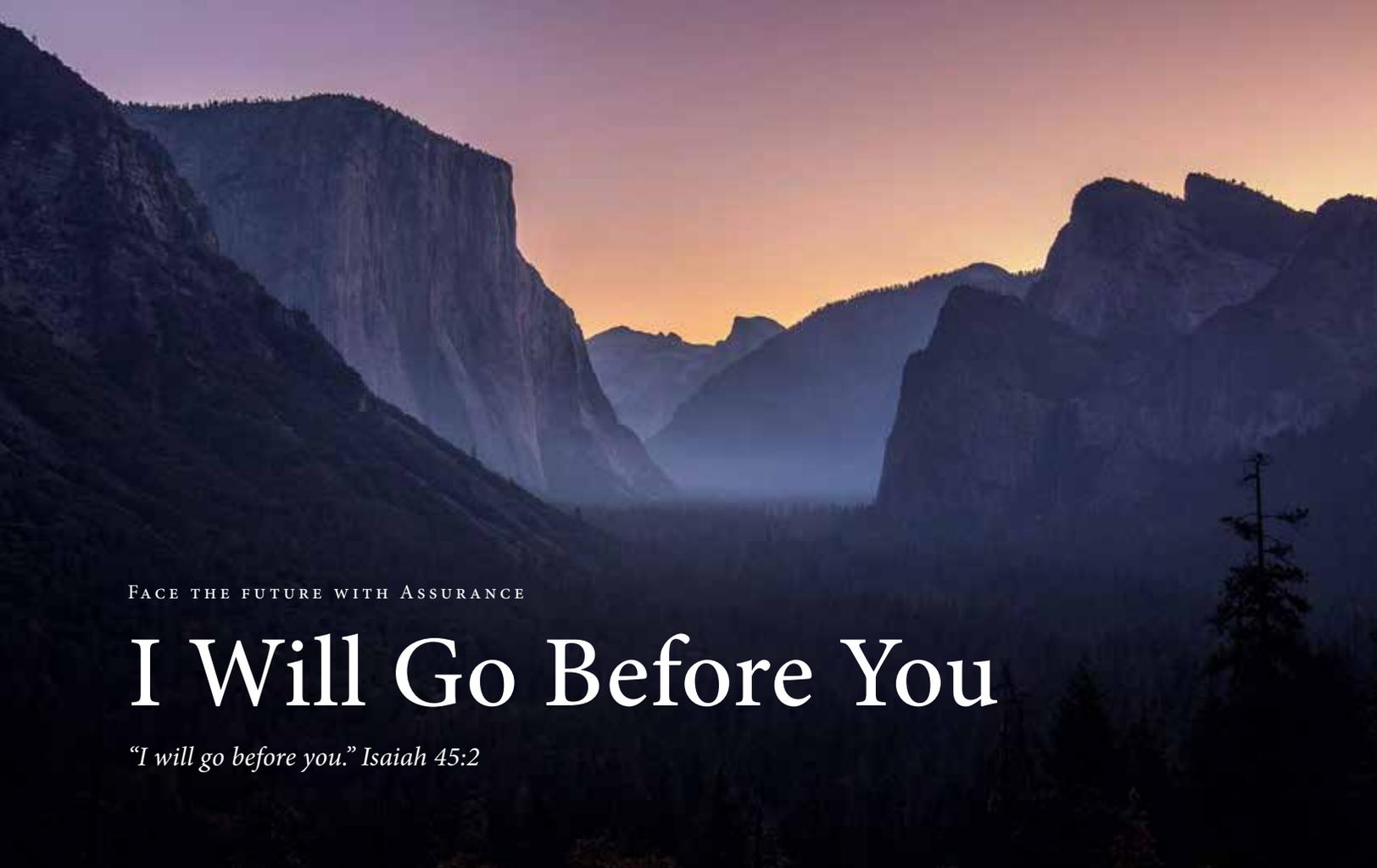
In response, Moses received the answer: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (verse 14). In faith he grabbed the Word, clung to it tightly and said: “If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here” (verse 15). Now he was certain. God had received His people again. Overcome by His grace and compassion, he gained courage and petitioned: “Please, show me Your glory.”

We find ourselves at the beginning of a new year. Like Moses, we also need assurance that God will go with us. We will encounter some things that can cause us to fear. But the assurance of God’s presence on the journey will keep us safe. Even when the enemy of our souls stands up and goes against us, we will gain the victory with God. For: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31b).

Only if we remain connected to the Lord as our Leader will we win the victory and will the forces of darkness be driven away. The Lord wants to help us to become overcomers and to receive the crown of life one day. Therefore, let us proceed in the name of the Lord, for Christ, our Mediator and Intercessor wants to stand with us. The Lord said: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye” (Psalm 32:8).

G. Sonnenberg

I will instruct you
and teach you in
the way you should
go; I will guide you
with My eye.
Psalm 32:8



FACE THE FUTURE WITH ASSURANCE

I Will Go Before You

“I will go before you.” Isaiah 45:2

This promise will accompany us in the New Year. When He, the Light of the World, goes before us, then we will have the same experiences as the children of Israel, whom God led by a cloud of fire in the night. He is a light on our path; what a wonderful comfort this is!

There are two pictures of our Lord which I admire very much. The one shows us how Jesus the Good Shepherd rescues the lost lamb from the thorny bushes. It is the picture of a searching shepherd. The second shows Him walking ahead of the herd of sheep and carrying the small lamb on His shoulders. It is noticeable how the sheep press forward to be close to their master. He, the Shepherd, is leading them. This is the Shepherd illustrated in John 10, the Shepherd who leads His sheep to find good pasture. The Shepherd, as described in Psalm 23, leads through dark valleys but also on clear mountain peaks. He is the Shepherd who promises His sheep, “I will go before you.” This promise is only for those who allow themselves to be found by the Shepherd. The master must first search and call us before He is able to lead us.

When we read the entire chapter of Isaiah 45, we will realize how this scripture was directed to Cyrus. He was

to be God’s instrument to free the children of Israel from captivity. God’s will was that He would go before him and give him the strength to do that what God wanted him to do.

Let us look at our Savior, how He was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13) when he falsely quoted Psalm 91:11-12. If Jesus had thrown Himself from the temple’s pinnacle without the Father’s command, He could not have claimed the Father’s protection. God’s angels will keep those who remain obedient and on His path.

God will go before us and protect us from harm only if we remain on the path of obedience. Naturally, Jesus had to die on the cross even if angels were surrounding Him. Even though God is protecting us, it does not mean that we will be spared difficulties. However, we must be aware that these difficulties are not hurting, but helping us.

If our Lord goes before us, we have a leader, protector, and comforter. We know we are safe. He is there and overcomes our trials first. All we need to do is walk on the path He has prepared for us and follow Him. The Lord

will show us how we can conquer trials. We can be assured that he knows them. He is our high priest, who was tempted in all things just as we are. That is why He can have pity on us. In times when our friends disappoint us or when we feel lonely, we can look up to Jesus and know that He was also disappointed by His friends and experienced loneliness. “Could you not watch with Me one hour?” (Matthew 26:40). From these words, we can sense the disappointment and loneliness. When I read these words, I am no longer lonely, for I know that even He, my Master, felt this sorrow. He understands me and thus can also help me.

Jesus was tired when He sat down by Jacob’s well. However, when the opportunity to serve arose, He forgot about His tiredness and contended with the woman in regard to her soul. Sometimes we are given a particular duty. Even though we may be tired, we should not complain but rather go the path of our Master. And just as the Father strengthened His Son so that He was able to fulfill God’s will, our Master will strengthen us when we approach our duties, even when weary.

The hardest thing we may need to endure is if our good intentions are taken badly. There are times when we want to help but are not understood, or even face anger. How quickly we become discouraged and lose our patience! Didn’t our Master experience this as well? “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” He sadly said, “but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37)

How patient was our Savior with Judas Iscariot! What love He showed to his soul, and even then Judas crushed this love with his feet! Jesus did not approach this betrayer with fierce anger, but instead, with a sad voice, He asked: “My friend, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” There are many other examples that we could mention. Our Master experienced every stage of human life. Every pain that we innocently endure, He had as well. He has gone before us and will go before us again in this year. Even in this New Year, there will never be a path which our Master will not tread as well. All we need to do is walk in His footsteps, keep our eyes on Him, and follow!

G. D.

The Call to Unity

Before Jesus left this world, He prayed earnestly for the unity of God’s people. Unity is a sign of true discipleship. Jesus prayed “that they all may be one, as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). “That they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me” (John 17:23).

A third scripture showing the sign of true discipleship is John 13:34-35. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In these scriptures, we see that unity and love are the true signs of genuine discipleship. If the love of God is in our hearts, then unity among us will not be lacking (Romans 5:5). The love of God will always compel us to pursue peace with all people (Hebrews 12:14).

Since the Word of God commands us to love our enemies, and since through the grace of God, even this is possible, how much more should it be possible to be in unity with our brothers and sisters, unless of course, we have lost our first love (see Revelation 2:4).

Today, we see an increasing trend of disunity within the Church of God. Each group claims to be the Church of God and to have the truth. And they all pray for unity. Prayer alone is not enough. We need to put into practice our prayer for unity and do what is needed so that unity will once more be a reality.

One writer states: “We must build bridges. Every split within the Church of God is a cause of disobedience against God’s command. In the Old Testament, God was often compelled to severely punish the people of God due to their disobedience (1. Samuel 15:22-29). When the Is-



raelites confessed their disobedience and humbled themselves before God, the Lord showed compassion and helped them. What the Lord expected of the Old Testament people of God, He expects of us today, namely: ‘Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother [sister]. . . . Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.’ (Zechariah 7:9-10). These are the things you shall do: ‘Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor’ (Zechariah 8:16-17).”

In the New Testament, we find scriptures along the same lines. These scriptures demand us to genuinely examine ourselves but also to act. We show mercy and goodwill to others if we forgive their errors instead of judging and condemning them, knowing that we, too, are still in the flesh (2 Corinthians 10:3; Philippians 1:24). Every child of God must strive not to let evil thoughts enter in. Then we will not have the temptation to share them with others. We need to keep our mouths from speaking hastily and sharing gossip (James 1:26). Much harm will be circumvented if we do this. In Psalm 141:3, David prays: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

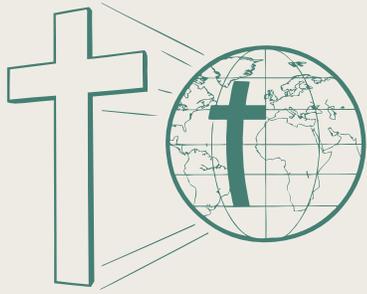
We want to keep our feet from following our impulse and from hastily sharing with anyone whatever we have

heard. Instead, we want to make haste and clear away those stones that are obstacles to unity. And even if those obstacles are great, we want to do all we can to eliminate them. The Word of God tells us: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). (See also Colossians 3:12-17.)

How is the world to see where the truth is and where the Church of God is to be found? Only if love and unity are found there! If we have these characteristics, it will also be visible to outsiders. The way the two witnesses, the Word of God and the Spirit of God, are at work in our hearts internally, so love and unity will be actively at work externally.

Brothers and sisters, we bring guilt upon ourselves, with respect to those lost souls who are seeking the truth, if they cannot see love and unity among us. Therefore, we want to get to work, humble ourselves, and take the necessary steps to restore unity, so that at this time, which is close to midnight, the characteristics of the true Church are once again visible. The Lord will show us what we need to do. And He will help us. We need to heed the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Waldemar Rogalsky,
Bödingen, DE



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs, Kitchener (ON)

At the Threshold of a New Year

The transition into a new year is always a very touching moment. Often the heart is filled with good intentions, hope and plans for the future. For some, the heart might be filled with anxiety of what will happen. The Lord wants to help you and wants to tell you something very important today.

The first day of the year is the gateway into a new year. Many stand reverently before this significant gateway. Countless anxious questions arise in many hearts.

This day, which launches us into the uncertainty of the next fifty-two weeks, gives us pause for quiet reflection. While some stop to quietly reflect, most rush past each other and call out the typical “Happy New Year.” These and other similar words are passed on to one another. Other than that, not much thought is given to the future.

What does a happy new year mean for us? What joys does the human heart seek and need? Can there still be a “happy year” in the face of disappointments, suffering, and tears? One accepts this greeting and passes it on, but really does not expect more from this new year than what one knows from the past years.

This brings us to a very important point: the past. Now the questions become serious: How did I live through the past years? What did I do with the precious moments of my life? What values did I place on the years of my existence? For what did I use my strengths, my gifts, and my health which God has so graciously given me? Did I exclusively live for my selfish interests without once asking about God’s will? Did I ever care about someone for whom I could consciously lighten the burdens in his life? In retrospect, can I look back on my past with a satisfied heart and a good conscience, and be happy?

He who only spends his years in self-indulgence and pleasure will find them very empty, and empty years do not make one happy. We can only have “happy new years” when we ourselves have become “new and joyful.” Becoming new and joyful requires us to turn to God and experience a personal relationship with Him. That is why this blessed “today” is given to us.

Redeem “the time” (Colossians 4:5) is the divine appeal from God’s eternal Word! Does this word of warning not speak to our hearts as we stand at the beginning of a new year? The days that lay before us in 2018 do not belong to us. We only own today. Not a single person has the guarantee that he will see tomorrow. Therefore, start living today as you would wish to have lived at the end of your life.

Each one of us needs to be very clear on how we want to analyze and evaluate our time. Paul could say: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Every person’s life can be blessed with these heavenly blessings. And whoever seeks these blessings, lives according to them, and allows them to work has correctly evaluated his life.

In Proverbs 3:1-3, we read: “My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of



days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you.” Are we willing to respond to this? This is the real purpose for our life. He who spends his life living for God and leading others to Him has used his time wisely. Seek to spread light and truth! Seek to bind wounds and dry tears! Pray, work, and make sure your work is a blessing. Nothing has a higher purpose than this. Someone once said: “Live your life today as if it were your last day on earth.” This will bring years of peace and grace and lay the foundation for a fruitful future.

The present is followed by the future, and the future not only represents the coming future but also approaching eternity. “Future” does not simply mean a gift of additional years, but meeting God and having a relationship with Him!

One day, we will all stand before God. This fact is included in our future. “Prepare to meet your God” (Amos 4:12) is the divine appeal in reference to our future. We need to consider and decide what this encounter will be like. What blooms tomorrow needs to be planted today. And how one wants to stand before God needs to be considered today. Time is precious as it gives us ongoing opportunities and healing grace to always begin with God. Time flies by, and this transience is tied in with the new year. What will you do with it? Will it be an empty, lost year or a truly profitable and very blessed one for you?

Consider: As your years, so will your life be in the end: empty—or filled with the grace of God. Receive a new, happy heart, and you will have a happy new year. It will bring you life, peace, and grace, and faithfulness will not leave you!

The Rabbit On the Rocks

It was one of the most unusual things I have ever seen. We were finishing our walk early one morning and we came upon a rabbit that was sitting on the rocks. The rabbit had just left the lush green lawn, and was there on the rocks. I went a bit closer to watch this amazing scene unfold before my eyes. Soon the rabbit moved a bit further, but remained on the rocks. I left the rabbit there on the rocks as I finished my walk, but my thoughts stayed with the rabbit. What was it about the rabbit that would make it leave the lush green grass and sit on the rocks? What was it looking for in the rocks? And what would happen if it stayed on the rocks?

Another question came to my mind, as I thought about the rabbit on the rocks. How many Christians leave the lush green pastures behind and sit on the rocks and are deprived of nourishment? David writes in Psalm 23:2: “He makes me to lie down in green pastures.” Is it possible for a Christian to walk by the green pastures of spiritual nourishment, and then lie on the rocks? There are Christians who complain about being undernourished, and I sometimes wonder if they, too, are spiritually on the rocks of malnourishment.

Where do we find spiritual nourishment? Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:2: “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” When a person finds the way to the cross, and becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, this person, because of the new spiritual nature, longs for the pure milk of the Word. If we notice what Peter has written, we will notice that this desire for the pure milk of the Word never diminishes. In fact, the longing for spiritual nourishment grows, as the disciple of Jesus Christ matures. Spurgeon wrote the following: “As you ask a blessing over your meat before you eat it, so it would be a good rule for you to ask a blessing on the Word before you partake of its heavenly

food. . . . Scripture reading is our spiritual meal-time” (1975, p.89). Remember, when we open the Word of God, we have God’s buffet before us, and God is waiting to give us spiritual nourishment, again and again and again. The Prophet Jeremiah, who lived during a very difficult time, needed words from God to nourish him, and to give him guidance and strength. He writes: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name” (Jeremiah 15:16). One of the greatest gifts we have ever received as humanity is the gift of the “Word of God,” the Bible. It is this book that serves as our daily nourishment for the soul, and gives strength for the journey ahead.

One last question. Are you like the rabbit on the rocks? Are you close to being nourished but not being nourished? If so, what will it take for you to get back on the lush green place of nourishment for your soul? It is the experience of many malnourished people, that they began reading the Bible and found nourishment for their souls.

Can I make an agreement with you? Since the new year is starting, can we decide to read the Bible daily for a year and see what difference that will make in our lives? Perhaps we can follow a Bible reading plan, as there are many online plans that we can download and follow. There are many followers of Jesus who have been reading their Bibles daily, and through their reading of this wonderful book, they have been challenged and they have grown into mature followers of Jesus.

Spurgeon, C.H. (reprinted, 1975) *Counsel for Christian Workers*. Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Book House

Holman Christian Standard Bible. *The Apologetics Study Bible*, Nashville, TN. Holman Bible Publishers

Observed

In 2013, British and American researchers performed an experiment in a hospital in Florida. Anyone who came near the intensive care unit of the hospital was observed by a stern, penetrating set of eyes. The pair of eyes that were fastened on the wall near the hand sanitizer dispenser proved to be a successful precautionary measure. Anyone, whether visitor or clinical personnel, who planned to enter the station was required to thoroughly clean their hands. The “observer” on the wall was there to ensure that this happened.

And indeed, the monitoring worked. If the doctors, caregivers and visitors were eyed, they took more care than usual with their hygiene practices. They rubbed their hands thoroughly before entering the station. The number of people that cleansed according to the prescribed protocol rose up to 33%. The interesting thing was that just the feeling of being watched was enough for people—at least most of them—to change their behavior.

The result was quite amazing, and was supported through other similar experiments. After the researchers fastened an enormous poster of stern, piercing eyes on the wall of a university campus above some bicycle racks, the number of bike thefts decreased. In another study done by psychologists in Ulm and Bremen, a set of eyes that peered at readers was printed on a dining hall menu. Those customers with this menu were more likely to order vegetarian sandwiches rather than fatty burgers. A similar principle was applied to garbage disposal and proved to be successful here as well. Certainly there are many more examples that could be mentioned.

What would happen if we were truly cognizant of the fact that God looks over our shoulder every single second of our life? For that is exactly what God does. In Psalm 11:4 we read, “The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.” Would we perhaps deal with situations differently in the upcoming year if we would be mindful of this fact at the start of each and every day?

Could a pair of eyes on the bulletin board of our room be a reminder for us? What if we had a pair of eyes on the dashboard of our car? Or on the monitor of our computer? In the office? On the inside of our closet? Maybe even on the inside flap of your schoolbag? You alone can determine best where it should go. Allow yourself to be led to a better life with God through His testing eyes. He will help you with this. We, the team of the youth page, wish you God’s blessing for the new year.

VERSE OF THE MONTH

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.”

(Psalm 32:8)

What an encouraging promise for the start of a new year! Be convinced that God will lead and guide every one of your steps in this new year, regardless how big or small they will be.

Are you anticipating new challenges, such as exams, career (training or studies), or a new job? Perhaps you have to make decisions about further important steps in life. He wants to guide you and be near to you. But especially in your spiritual life, He wants to draw you nearer to Himself and guide you closer to the goal in the year 2018. Will you allow Him to lead you?

Do You Know Jesus?

The young lady was very sick with typhoid fever. She had lost consciousness and was unable to recognize her relatives. Her husband, to whom she was married for only two years, was unsuccessful in trying to talk to her. In his grief, he said: “Certainly you know me, my dear Helene. I am Karl, your husband. Do you recognize me?” “No,” she answered weakly, opening her eyes, “no, I do not know you. My husband?—I don’t have a husband.”

“But you know Jesus, right?” her friend asked, as she sat on the bed crying. This question awakened her tired heart. As her face lit up, she answered: “Jesus? O yes, I know Jesus. He has been my friend for a long time! He is my Savior, and at this moment He is right beside me!”—A few days later, she was called home to be with Jesus.

Another lady was suffering for some time from intense pain. She often told her crying relatives, who gave her the best care: “I am certainly surrounded by a lot of benefits. But the greatest and most delightful for me is the presence of my Savior, Jesus Christ. Oh, He is so good! He is everything to me!”

The evening prior to her death, she grasped her brother’s hand as she suffered the violent pain and said with a joyful, glowing expression: “Dear brother, the fiery trials are burning hot. But the arms of grace are carrying me. Christ alone is my salvation, my only desire, and my one and only.”—Not even a small cloud darkened her eye of faith as she died with Jesus, leaving behind a good testimony.

Who wouldn’t want to experience such hope of eternal life? Who wouldn’t want to have a safe and secure anchor for their soul?

“I have acquired victory!” the elderly saint called out from his death bed. “I have acquired victory, and Christ my Lord is reaching out His arms to carry me!”

Dear reader, do you know Jesus? Wouldn’t you like to rejoice in the same manner over death and the grave?—This question is very serious, and the answer is very im-

portant! It is so terrifying to be lying on your death bed unprepared! Perhaps you are still healthy and hope to live a long and happy life. But tell me: are you certain that your health will remain for a week or even for just a few days? Are you certain that if you see the sun set tonight, you will see it rise again in the morning? It could easily happen that you might be attacked by a serious illness or be in a deadly accident, and you would have no time to get to know Jesus. What will happen then?

Or perhaps you are older and nearing the end of your life. Just think how frail an elderly person is, and especially if one becomes sick on top of it. You may not be in the condition to call to God even once and ask for grace.

Oh, how many young people, and old as well, have passed unprepared into eternity? How many pass out of this life without leaving a ray of hope regarding their salvation, for those left behind. One can only say: “They passed away!”

Dear reader, whether you are young or old, wouldn’t you like to die righteous and leave a joyful testimony on your lips as you pass into eternity? Oh, then I ask you in the name of Jesus, give Him your heart today! His love is stronger than death. And He can redeem those souls who come to God through Him. Jesus said: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Who can describe the blessings of those who obey this invitation? Leaning on the arm of Jesus, they are able to overcome sin, worldliness, and Satan.

Dear soul, give your heart and life to Jesus. You will never be disappointed. He has promised never to leave you or forsake you (see Hebrews 13:5). And He will guide you with His counsel and afterward receive you to glory (see Psalm 73:24). All is well if you are able to say in the hour of your death: “I know Jesus. He is my best, my truest friend; He is my Savior!” May He therefore be your choice for your entire life, your comfort in death, and your portion in eternity!



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Starting Right

One day, Lena said to her mother, “Oh, it’s so hard to always do the right thing. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to do it.”

“Have you really tried?”

“Oh yes, Mama. I try every day. When I wake up, I say to myself, before I get up: ‘I want to be obedient, gentle and good all day; obey my parents and teachers. I won’t argue with my siblings and always tell the truth.’—I don’t know how it happens, but I always forget what I resolved. And then I tell myself: ‘It doesn’t help to even try.’ I’ve been disobedient over and over again and I haven’t always told you the whole truth, dear Mama.”—At these words, tears came into Lena’s eyes.

Her Mother drew her near and said: “I believe it happens because you don’t begin right. The first thing

is that you must have a new heart. Have you prayed for that?”—“No, Mama.”

“Then start with that, Lena. You know very well that good fruit can only grow out of a good tree. If your heart isn’t good and clean, like it should be, then all good resolutions don’t help any. It all stays the way it was until God changes it. But God doesn’t lie. He promised to answer if we pray in the name of Jesus. So, ask Him to give you a clean heart. And then you will see it won’t be impossible to do the right thing, if you pray and are watchful.”

Lena followed the advice of her mother. She asked the Lord Jesus to forgive all her sins and give her a new heart. And now when she awoke in the mornings, she prayed to be obedient and good. And she was watchful and soon became a happy child and the joy of her home.

Seniors' Page

“The future lies dark before us” – Or does it?

The future lies dark before us—or?

Unbelievably, but true, we are once again standing on the threshold of a new year. Changing from one year to the next brings sentimental thoughts with it. It is not only about how fast the time goes, which we are all aware of, but also about questions that concern the future, the “unknown” future. What we have experienced in the past we know—what we possess we know—but the future is unknown to us, and we are unable to change any of that. We are helpless to do anything about that which lies in the future. We are striding towards it, but we are unaware what to expect. No wonder we are somewhat hesitant as we again stand on the threshold of the New Year.

Justifiably, New Year’s speeches often begin with the words: “The future lies dark before us.” I have heard these words from politicians, heard them in the news, read them in the newspapers, and even now and again, these words were at the beginning of a sermon. Pessimists, particularly, are often plagued by these words. Concerning the future, they see things as “black.”

The fact is that our present situation is not exactly “rosy.” If one assesses the political, economic, financial, and moral circumstances, negative feelings may arise. The longer one occupies oneself with these feelings and discusses them with others as to what the future may bring, the more fear naturally results. This fear then becomes our constant companion on life’s pathway. How easy it is to let this fear take hold throughout our life. In the morning, we arise with it, and at night,

we go to bed with it. This fear becomes one of life’s realities.

Are we aware that such situations existed throughout all times? Fear is nothing new. Fear made the lives of people that lived before us difficult. May I point out to you a few situations from the Bible in which fear assuredly played a major role?

- Joshua sent out 12 spies to assess Canaan (Numbers 13), the land that lay before them. Ten of the men said that, compared to the giants in that land, they themselves were like grasshoppers. Not only did they have these fears, the total Israeli population became affected by this fear.

- As the Philistines prepared for war against Israel, and Goliath, a giant, stepped forward and mocked God’s people and challenged them to a duel, we read “they were dismayed and greatly afraid” (1 Samuel 17:11).

- When the Apostle Paul was on a boat journey to Rome, they encountered what appeared to be a hopeless storm. Luke describes the situation as follows: “Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up” (Acts 27:20).

One could continue to list people and situations from the Bible, but important to us are our own fears. We do not invite them in, and we do not want to be burdened by them, but they are present and make our lives difficult.

Fears of the future—those words define everything. Present political situations appear tentative. Memories of past wars arise. Are the politicians contemplating another war? Have past wars not brought enough suffering? Then arises the question of assimilating refugees in Europe and North America. Will these actions bring positive results? One hopes—even though many questions exist—that the politicians know what they are doing. And on and on, more questions could be asked.

Of course, personal fears are more oppressive. The question arises: “How will I personally survive in the future?” Surely you are aware of these questions which everyone asks, including: “As I age, I become more dependent on outside help. Will this lead to me having to give up my home, my garden, and eventually my car? And where will I find help and a place to spend the last years of my life?” Here again, the list of questions may become endless. Eventually, one reaches the point at which one hears oneself say: “The future before us is dark!” Then the worsening fears begin to arise.

On one occasion, when I saw the future before me as “dark,” I saw a book that became a great help to me. It touched me, even though I had not read even one page in it and did not know the thoughts of the author, nor his ideas. It was the title of the book—only five simple words—“Regardless, God is still there.” I stood there as if struck by lightning. Naturally, if one does not include God in one’s calculations of the future, the future becomes “dark” before us. However, as I read those five words, “Regardless, God is still there,” my situation suddenly changed. These five words changed my outlook and gave me new courage.

“Regardless, God is still there” is a calming thought. The darkness of the situation loses its power and strength. The great, strong, omniscient, all-knowing, and far-seeing God still holds the world (and us) in His hands. Nothing happens to us that first does not pass by Him. God does not always change every situation, but He is there. God tolerates some things and lets other things happen, but He is always there. Sometimes God is silent, but He is present! A few instances from the Bible that support these thoughts are:

- Joseph was thrown into jail even though he was not guilty, but God was there!

- Israel feared Goliath, but God was there (with David)!

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were thrown into a fiery furnace, but God was there!

- Paul and Silas were thrown into jail in Philippi, but God was there!

- John was banished to the Island of Patmos, but God was there!

- Stephen was stoned, but God was there!

- _____ (your situation), but God is there!

Brother and Sister, God did not promise us sunshine every day, but His grace. God did not promise to take away all our burdens, but He did promise to help us carry them. God is there.

Hebrews 13:5 states: “For He Himself has said ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” In the original Greek, there is a five-layered negative and, if translated word for word, states: “I will not leave you in a lurch! Never! No! Never and in no case would I forsake you.” No wonder that the next verse (6) states: “So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”

On the threshold of the New Year, we can confidently join in and say: “The Lord is my helper,” and there is no need for me to fear. Even in the greatest darkness, in the most complicated situation, yes, in all situations, we can depend on His presence.

I never did buy the aforementioned book, but I did remember its title. I have typed and printed this title and have fastened it to my desk. When my heart threatens to become heavy, I turn around, and my eyes see the piece of paper with the words: “Regardless, God is still there!” Remembering this then changes my focus. Maybe you can do this as well.

I wish you a blessed and bright new year. Do not fear, God is there.

Harry Semenjuk

The Lord's Prayer

By Gerhard Mielke – Part 9: Forgive Us

After the words: “Give us this day our daily bread” the Lord’s prayer continues with “And forgive us.” Are there any prerequisites for being forgiven?

Prerequisites for forgiveness.

In 1 John 1:9 we read: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Proverbs 28:13 states: “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” So we see that the first step in being forgiven is to confess our sins, and not to deny that we have sinned. If we confess, we have God’s assurance that He will forgive us and cleanse us.

Secondly, Jesus says: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14-15). So our willingness to forgive others plays a role as to whether or not God will forgive us. These are the conditions we must meet. The conditions we are not able to meet God has already met for us.

What are the means of forgiveness?

What are the means of forgiveness? The reason we can freely be forgiven is because Jesus died for us on Calvary. We know that “according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). Because there is no remission of sins without blood, that is why Jesus paid the ultimate price for us and shed His own blood on the cross of Calvary, so that “whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Ephesians 1:7 verifies this: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” And Peter states: “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:10). We are saved because of God’s grace through faith, by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who can forgive?

Who is able to forgive? Only the person who has been offended or sinned against can offer forgiveness. J. S. Candlish describes three types of moral evil. He says moral evil against another human is a crime. Moral evil against oneself is vice. And moral evil against God is sin. However, all moral evil, even against oneself, is at the same time an offense against God. Since every sin is an offense against God, if we sin, we need to seek God’s forgiveness.

What word is used in Greek?

Matthew 6:14 reads: forgive us our debts. The Greek word used here for debts is *ὀφειλήματα*. The understanding here is that we have such a great debt before God, that we cannot pay it. The only hope we have of clearing the debt is to be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Our only hope is for God to annul it, to forgive it, to cancel it. That is exactly why Jesus paid it all, so that we can be free from this debt. The parable in Matthew 18:23-35 makes this teaching of Jesus clear.



**“In this manner, therefore, pray:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. Amen.”**

Matthew 6:9-13 (NKJV)

In Luke 11:4 we have another version of the Lord's prayer. Here it reads: Forgive us our sins. The Greek word used here is ἀμαρτίας. It is plural and therefore includes multiple sins. Hamartia is often defined as missing the mark. In Romans 3:23 we read that all have sinned or missed the mark. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24).

God has a standard for us, a law, a mark, and ignoring or disobeying that law is sin. Another definition for sin given in the Bible is ἀμαρτίαν (1 John 3:4), which is lawlessness. If instead of heeding God's law—do not lie, do not murder, love the Lord with all your heart, love your neighbor—we ignore it or say we do not need it, then we practice ἀμαρτίαν, which literally means without law, or lawlessness.

After “forgive us our debts,” the Lord's prayer continues: “as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Jesus explains what he means by this in Matthew 6:14: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” Here he talks about trespasses. If we disobey God, we trespass. So whether we miss the mark, act contrary to God's law, sin, or trespass God's commandment, all are a debt or an offense against God, which only God can forgive or release us from. He wants to do this. It is yours for the asking.

Praying for others

Interestingly enough, Jesus does not teach His disciples to pray: forgive me my sins, but forgive us our sins. How often have we prayed that God forgive the sins of others? We know that Job sacrificed for his children in

case they offended God (Job 1:5). Also, Daniel, although he was righteous, placed himself under the sins of the people of Israel and made confession for them. We read: “So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: ‘Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from Your commands and laws’” (Daniel 9:3-5). “We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, LORD, because we have sinned against You” (Daniel 9:8).

So Daniel places himself in the position of the people and pleads on their behalf. What can we learn from this? Is there a place for intercessory prayer on behalf of others in a similar way? What did Jesus do? He placed Himself in our place and bore our sins. I know that we cannot bear the sins of others like Jesus did, but we can learn from Jesus, from Daniel, and from this prayer: “Forgive us our sins.”

Transformation

When God forgives our sins, He does not just overlook what we have done, He also changes us (1 John 1:9). When we come to God and genuinely ask for forgiveness, we are born again (1 Peter 1:18-23). A transformation takes place. We are changed. After forgiving us Jesus says: “Neither do I condemn you,” but then He adds the words: “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11). May God help each one of us to have victory over sin by asking God for His help to overcome whatever temptation may come our way.

At The Border

There are national borders that separate one country from another. Most people live spread out all over the country. However, part of the population lives in the border region. Some of these people commute to the neighboring country, which they like, because it benefits them.

Let us apply this example to the spiritual realm.

There is a border between Christianity and the World.

This border is not man-made. It was not determined through human reasoning, as was the case with national borders in Europe after World War II, for example. This invisible border, drawn by God, is described for us in the Holy Scriptures:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1) or “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16).

This tells us to avoid literature, video games, friends, and other things that tarnish our Christian ideals.

In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul gives us the following words of warning: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). He is warning the children of God not to cross the border. He wants to keep them from leaving the Kingdom of Light and returning to the Kingdom of Darkness.

Solomon warns us not to move the border of our fathers (Proverbs 22:28). Should people or preachers move the border, that which was previously unthinkable will become tolerated. I personally would never have thought that certain things from which I fled as a young man some 40 years ago would make their way into our congregations.

This is caused by those crossing the border who like bringing things into the congregation from the other side. My dearly beloved in the Lord: That will have consequences!

In some large churches, border crossers have managed to take it so far, that sins which are clearly condemned by the Word of God, are tolerated. Did that happen overnight? No! The borders were gradually moved, over decades. One finds oneself in the Kingdom of Darkness despite still calling oneself Christian. We say: But we must love all people. That is true. We love the people, but the sins must be punished.

In this context, the same question came to me again and again: Has the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit changed? No, the working of the Holy Spirit has not changed.

Someone wrote the following: “All knowledge imparted to us by the Holy Spirit in the past will never contradict what the Holy Spirit tells us now or will tell us in the future.”

The drastic changes that have been taking place among self-professing Christians in recent times can find their cause in these words from the Lord: “The people no longer want to be disciplined by my Spirit.” That alone is the cause of the shifting borders in the spiritual realm.

What Defines Cross-Border Christians?

1. They spend time too close to the border.

Brother S. Weissburger was asked: “Why are Christians deserting the faith?” He answered: “They are living too close to the border.”

Let us take residents of a border region between two countries as an example. They are familiar with the currency, traditions, and customs of the neighboring country. They know its language to some degree and are familiar with the country’s advantages and disadvantages in comparison to their own.

This is a good metaphor for the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness. Somebody living too near the border knows what is happening on the other side. Border crossers look at the things going on on the other side of the border, including language, behavior, fashion, pride, vanity, love of money, music, and other things of the world.

They are often only one step away from crossing the border entirely and living in the Kingdom of Darkness. We read in 2 Timothy 4:10: “For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed to Thessalonica.” Demas had been one of Paul’s colleagues. At some point, however, he deserted the brothers and fell in love with the world. He took that one step that effected this great change.

2. Cross-border Christians ask: What can I do and still be a Christian? Can I go to the movies? How deep can my neckline be? How short can my dress be? How much can I dress up? (Hint: Note how makeup is stored in “vanity” cases—and vanity is closely associated with pride.)

God’s Word clearly and categorically forbids joining in the vanity of the heathens: “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind” (Ephesians 4:17).

What about the borders of the forefathers who taught simplicity, humbleness, and plain living? Are you still observing them? In Jeremiah 6:16, we read: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.’”

3. Border crossers do not ask: How can I grow closer to the Lord? They do not have a deep longing to deepen

their knowledge of and relationship with God. It does not interest them enough. On the other hand, those living far from the border and near to the Lord have a thirst for a deeper spiritual life. They long for sanctification, seek it, find it, and live it out. Advancing the Kingdom of God is very important to them. What a difference there is between a border crosser and the child of God who loves the Lord more than anything!

Serving God Within His Borders is Wonderful!

We read in Malachi 1:5: “Your eyes shall see, and you shall say, ‘The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.’” Has that been your experience as well?

The glory of God fades in the borderlands of the Kingdom of Darkness. The core of an energy source, e.g. an open fire, is its warmest part. The greater the distance from the core or center, the colder it gets. By this reasoning, it follows that: the love of God threatens to cool off in border crossers, but burns bright in those that walk at the side of the Lord. The effects on their lives are obvious: righteousness, holiness, pure and lovely speech (language of Zion), modest conduct between men and women, and much more.

As long as the people of Israel stayed within God’s borders, things went well for them. When they spent more and more time with the heathens, adopted their customs, and married them, they fell from grace and became a tribe like all others. This is the danger facing all cross-border Christians!

God does not want border crossers. He calls to them: Come nearer to me, my child, come nearer! Jesus wants to draw you to His breast like John. Border crossers do not (or no longer) know how wonderful it is to be in the center of God’s burning love and how this love pleases the heart. The border crossers cost the Holy Spirit and pastors much effort. The more border crossers a congregation has, the worse its overall spiritual condition.

What does God expect from a congregation and from every individual, both young and old?

1. Observe God’s borders.

2. Draw nearer to God and leave the borderlands behind.

H. Kowalski
Hamm (DE)

Abide With Me!

*Lord, in my heart impress Your image,
Abide with me.*

*In joy or pain, love knows no limits,
Abide with me.*

*In days of joy, keep me from folly,
Abide with me.*

*In days of want or melancholy,
Abide with me.*

*Like the refreshing dew of summer,
Lord, strengthen me.
Help me to watch and pray, not slumber,
Abide with me.*

*You are my strength, my shield and comfort,
Sunshine to me!
Remind me that my days are numbered;
Abide with me.*

Emanuel Geibel