

QUESTIONS OF GENERAL INTEREST

CHRIST THE FIRST FRUITS.

Question. – Does the word "first fruit" in 1 Cor. 15:20-23 refer to our Lord Jesus only or to *the Christ*, Head and body?

Answer – Our Lord Jesus, as represented in verse 20, was certainly the *first fruit of all*. If we were speaking of summer fruit and would say that strawberries are the first fruit of the season, we could also pick up the first ripe strawberry and say, *This* is the first fruit. So it is true of our Lord Jesus, the [R3132 : page 14] first fruit, and also true of the Lord and the Church together, that they are the "first-fruit unto God of his creatures." – Jas. 1:18.

Verse 23 refers to the entire Church (the Christ, head and body) as the first fruit, because the discussion is with reference to "every man in his own order," and not with reference to our Lord Jesus personally. The Lord Jesus and the Church, which is his body, united in glory will constitute the first fruit, the first resurrection (the overcomers being partakers of his resurrection. Phil. 3:10; Rev. 20:4. Compare 2 Pet. 1:4.) "Afterward they that are [who shall become] Christ's at [during] his presence;" that is, after the close of the Gospel age and the glorification of the Christ will come the second order or class of those to be "made alive." – Vs. 22.

Verse 22 takes in all who shall be "made alive;" that is, all who shall ever come to perfection of life, eternal life. It declares that these shall attain this life by virtue of being "in Christ," even as all men who were in Adam lost life.

These verses ignore entirely all who, when brought to a knowledge of the truth, reject it and wilfully choose sin; and they are

in harmony with other Scriptures which declare that "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." – 1 John 5:12.

The description of verse 23 relates, therefore, entirely to the Millennial age, which will begin with the glorification of those who have become Christ's during the Gospel age and including the perfecting of the remainder of those who shall during the Millennial age accept Christ and the life which is in him. Verse 23 reaches, therefore, down to and beyond the final trial at the end of the Millennial age, represented in Rev. 20:7-10; and verse 24 represents the everlasting condition after the world shall have been blessed with the knowledge of the truth, and the opportunity of coming into Christ as the "City of Refuge," and after all who would corrupt the earth (all not in full accord with the divine spirit of truth and righteousness – Satan and his servants) shall have been destroyed in the Second Death. Then the mediatorial reign of Christ will terminate, and he will deliver up the Kingdom to the Father.

Notice that, in harmony with the context, verse 22 should read, "As *all in Adam* die, even so *all in Christ* shall be made alive." This passage is very frequently misused to prove the everlasting salvation of all men irrespective of their acceptance of Christ as their Redeemer and King. But, thus translated, this passage is in perfect accord with the remainder of the Bible, which everywhere declares that, "He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." – 1 John 5:12; John 3:36. The Greek text also supports this rendering, and no other view of verse 22 could be reconciled with the context, verses 23,24.

The difficulty with many, however, is that they have never noticed the full sense of the words *life* and *made alive* in the Scriptures. The whole world is reckoned as already dead – because under sentence of death through Adam; and unless they eat (assimilate and appropriate by faith) the flesh (sacrificed humanity) of the Son of

Man, they have *no life* and can have *no life*. (John 6:53.) And those who do so "eat" are said to pass from *death* unto *life* now, reckonedly, but the *actual making alive* of such, as stated in our text, will be in the Resurrection morning. And so it will be with the world in general during the Millennium: they will be *awakened* by the great Redeemer in order that each may have the offer of everlasting life, on condition of becoming Christ's, accepting his gracious work for them in the past and his regulations for their future. Thus they may "eat" his flesh – appropriating his merit and receiving thereby his strength and life. They will be accounted or reckoned as beginning to live from the time that they begin to "eat," but they will not be fully *alive*, perfect, until the close of the Millennial age of trial or testing.

THE BEGINNING OF OUR RESURRECTION.

Question. – In regard to the resurrection of the Church, is it proper for us to consider this in any sense of the word beginning at the time of our consecration, and as progressing during the period of our sojourn in these mortal bodies, and as being complete when we awake in the Lord's likeness? or should we apply the word resurrection as concerns the Church merely to that great change which will consummate our perfection in glory, honor and immortality?

Answer. – The Scriptures frequently refer to the Church as not only having died to the world and the flesh, but as having already been quickened together with Christ, as already risen with him to walk in newness of life. (Col. 3:1; Rom. 6:11.) This might, of [R3132 : page 15] course, be considered by many a figurative start to the resurrection life, but if we are reckoned as new creatures in Christ it implies that the old creature, the old nature, is dead, and, hence, that a new will, or nature, has been started, begotten – that the new creature which God proposes to raise up has started in its upward course. This in no sense of the word applies to a fleshly resurrection, but merely a rising of the spirit of the mind above earthly things to a relationship with the

heavenly and spiritual, in which it is declared to be at rest and associated with Christ in heavenly conditions, merely waiting for the new spiritual body, which God has promised shall complete the new creation with such as are faithful to their obligations as new creatures in walking, not after the flesh, but after the spirit, to the extent of their ability.

It is not the flesh, either in the present or the future, that is to be raised, but the new creature, whose resurrection life is already started, and to which God will in due time give a body as it hath pleased him.

WHAT CONSTITUTES CHASTISEMENT?

Question. – I must ask you to set some of us right on the subject of chastisement as recorded in the 12th chapter of Hebrews. Your writings on the subject have been read, yet there are some here who cannot altogether harmonize the matter. It is contended on the one hand that the chastening of the Lord which we as sons must experience, according to your teaching, consists in the tribulation difficulties, the spoiling of our goods, our names, the breaking of ties of friendship which we have enjoyed, the willingness to be called fools for Christ's sake, – in short, the enduring of all things which Christ endured, and also some sickness and pain in the flesh.

It is contended on the other hand that that cannot be construed as the chastening of the Lord, since the word chastening means to correct, to set aright when we have erred; it is contended that all these things come to us because we have taken the right way, and that the closer we try to remain at the side of the Lord, and the more we cut loose from the world, the severer will be the persecutions, the more contempt will the world heap upon us, and the more will it scorn us, even as it scorned him. It is furthermore contended, that the chastening which, as sons of God, we must experience is directly of God, since the Scriptures (Heb. 12) declare so, and that the things mentioned

before do not come to us at the hand of God, but are heaped upon us by Satan and the world; that these things must be expected and must be borne with patience, that thus we are polished, and are building character, and are being prepared for the place that we shall some day, by the grace of God, occupy in his glorious temple.

Now, all of this, it is contended, is as far from the chastening of the Lord as day is from night, since the one is from God and the other from Satan. Now, the chastening of the Lord is explained thus: the Apostle in his writing to the Hebrews (12th chap.) compares the spiritual with the fleshly, saying: – "Should we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?" It is contended, therefore, that the chastening which the sons of God must experience is a chastening of the new spiritual being, which is as yet only in its embryo, or begotten condition, and is yet to be developed. Being weak, it is sometimes overcome, but when it regains its position from the error or sin into which it had been lured, it is grieved, and as the Word declares, it is indeed chastened or corrected, causing it sorrow and pain; but which afterwards yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Having come to the Father with grief and tears, and finding grace, it returns once more to its journey, rejoicing. Having learned the lesson and being rightly exercised by its experience it is more watchful and prayerful, and in the future yields more of the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

The question is asked: Was the stoning to death of Stephen a chastening of the Lord?

Answer. – Using the word *chastisement* in its broad sense of trial, or trying experience, we should say, Yes. Using the word chastisement in its narrower sense of penalty or correction for wrong-doing, our answer is, No. To my understanding the chastisements of the Lord include both of the kinds you specify – not only correction when we have erred from the way – the Lord's rod and staff disciplining us, – but, also the experiences which we receive along life's pathway when

we are not straying, but seeking diligently to learn the lessons necessary to our preparation for the Kingdom. The word "chastisements" and the word "corrections" amongst mankind generally carry with them the thought of previous transgressions, for which these are punishments; but this is not necessarily the limitation of thought contained in these words. As new creatures we are begotten to a new nature, which is far higher every way than our present nature; so that even if we were free from all human imperfections (and we are free to the extent that we are covered by the merit of Christ's righteousness) we would still need correction, that is, to be made right, to be made fit, to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light – the divine nature. These chastisements or corrections are in the nature of instructions and tests necessary for our development for the higher plane of life to which we have been called. Our Lord Jesus, for instance, was a son [R3133 : page 16] of God, and, if a son, then, as the Apostle says, he was chastened, "for what son is he that the Father chasteneth not? If ye be without chastisement,...then are ye bastards and not sons." (Heb. 12:7,8.) Our Lord Jesus was a true son, and hence had his share of chastisements. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." (Isa. 53:5.) While these chastisements and stripes were necessary for our redemption, they were necessary also to our Lord's preparation for the high station of glory, honor and immortality to which he was called. Thus we read that "he learned obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb. 5:8.) The sufferings or chastisements or corrections were necessary to his glorification. And so it is with us, his brethren: our sins are graciously covered through the merit of his sacrifice; by faith we are accepted as every whit whole, and by faith our sacrifices are accepted, "holy, acceptable unto God." (Rom. 12:1.) Our chastisements, therefore, are not in the nature of penalties for the weaknesses and imperfections of the flesh, which Jesus has graciously covered for us; but our standing as new creatures is on the perfect plane, and the majority, at least, of our chastisements, like those of the Master, our elder Brother, are disciplinary, and to the intent that we may be

ultimately complete in him, meet for the "inheritance of the saints in light."

