

[R4432 : page 213]

"MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE"

– ACTS 19:23; 20:1. – AUGUST 22 –

Golden Text: – "And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

– 2 Cor. 12:9.

FOR two years and three months St. Paul had actively engaged in the service of the Truth at Ephesus, the Gateway or Eye of Asia Minor. He was about ready to leave and had already sent word to the Churches enroute, which he had established, informing them of his journey and of the fact that a famine had recently prevailed in Palestine and that he purposed taking to the Christians at Jerusalem a present of money from their fellow-believers in the Gospel and fellow-members in the Body of Christ in Gentile lands. However, the Lord was pleased to permit the great Adversary to stir up persecution and riot against the Truth and especially against the Apostle just on the eve of his departure. As the Apostle declares, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to the called ones according to his purpose;" hence, we may be sure that God saw some good that could be accomplished by permitting this panic of persecution and that otherwise he would not have permitted it.

"FAITH MAY FIRMLY TRUST HIM, COME WHAT MAY"

Ephesus was one of the greatest cities of that time. This may be judged from the fact that just at the entrance of the harbor stood one of the "seven wonders of the world," an immense statue of "Diana of the Ephesians" – the deity of Ephesus and indeed of Asia Minor. To her shrine thousands of people came, as opportunity offered, believing that they received a special

blessing from her, which affected favorably the prosperity of their homes. Her blessing was supposed to greatly increase the flocks and herds and the birth of children. Unlike the other (virgin) Diana, this one was represented to be the mother of all things living, fecundity being her special blessing. Of course, the fame of this great idol attracted general attention, and those who could not go to Ephesus to worship at the shrine of this image were pleased to purchase from merchants certain charms or amulets, which consisted of small copies of her shrine wrought in silver. The business of making these shrines grew as the people of that region learned to desire her blessing and to offer her worship. In the Apostle's day the business of making these shrines of various sizes out of silver was immense, employing hundreds, perhaps thousands.

A man named Demetrius was the representative or head of a silversmith's guild or union. He, becoming incensed against the propaganda of the Apostle and the early Church at Ephesus, aroused his fellow-craftsmen by a stirring speech, in which he pointed out the great prosperity of their city through this idol, and how they themselves had prospered by the making of her shrine. Then he painted a black picture of how the prosperity would shortly die, as a result of the preaching of this man Paul. He called attention to the fact that it was not merely at Ephesus that this new religion, opposed to the worship of Diana, was spreading, but that it prevailed throughout all Asia Minor amongst people who might be expected to place orders with them for shrines. With a wonderful cunning, he combined with this thought of the duty of supporting their city religion that of the duty also of looking out for their pocketbooks. Who can think of stronger grounds of argument with people in general? That he was successful in arousing the prejudices and creating a riot causes us no wonder. The whole city was in an uproar in the very tenderest spots, religion and worldly prosperity.

The Adversary, no doubt, helped on the matter, with the result that the people were shortly in a frenzy of despair, as though they feared collapse for their religion and their prosperity were already upon them. The home of Paul was known; so thither the mob rushed, seeking the chief factor in the impending troubles. In the Lord's providence St. Paul was absent. Aquilla and Priscilla, who kept the home, were there and, although not arrested, evidently were loyal to the Apostle and to the cause to the very last degree. Thus the Apostle, subsequently writing respecting them, remarked that they endangered their necks for the sake of the Truth. As working people and home-keepers they were not molested; but two assistants of St. Paul found in the home were taken by the mob. They hurried them to the theatre, or place of public entertainment, whose capacity, we are told, was 56,000 persons, indicating that Ephesus must have been an immense city. St. Paul, learning of the commotion, would have courageously entered into the thick of the trouble in defense of his friends and, above all, in defense of his Master and his message. But wiser counsels prevailed and St. Paul remained away. The brethren suffered him not, believing that his presence would have accomplished nothing with people in so unreasonable a state of mind and St. Paul agreed with them, because no other course would have been the wise or proper one.

The Lord, however, did not neglect the two brethren who were arrested, Gaius and Aristarchus. The town clerk came to their assistance and with words of wisdom dispersed the mob. This official was not interested in the Gospel of Christ and its service, but he was interested in the doing of his duty as an officer of the city. He pointed out to the mob that they had become unduly excited; that they and everybody knew the greatness of Diana, and that one Jew or many Jews could not injure her great fame. And then he concluded, Seeing that these things cannot be **[R4432 : page 214]** gainsaid, ye ought to be quiet and to do nothing rash, for ye brought hither these men,

which are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. If, therefore, Demetrius or his companion have any matter against these men, the law courts are open. Let them accuse one another. In other words, let us mind our own business and not allow ourselves to be unduly excited over a matter of no moment. Besides, he pointed out to them that, while there were lawful assemblies provided for them, the present one was an unlawful one, which if it were reported to the Government at Rome, might bring disrespect to the city and perhaps cause it to lose some measure of its eminence. With this he dismissed the assembly.

PRINCIPLE AND LACK OF PRINCIPLE

Notice the contrast between the chief actors in the account of this lesson and those mentioned in the preceding one. In that case many people, realizing that they had been working in conjunction with the powers of evil – of demons – brought their books of magic, etc., and burned them, as a result of the influence of the Gospel message upon their hearts. They not only stopped the practice of the black art; they not only refused to use the books of magic; but they refused to sell them to others, lest they should do injury to them. They were willing, glad, to suffer financial loss and be thought foolish by their neighbors, rather than to do injury to others, after they had come to a true realization of the situation. On the contrary, the chief actors in this lesson were moved to a frenzy and to riotous conduct by their love of money – their fear lest they should suffer loss. Evidently it was not their respect for religion, but their love for filthy lucre which prompted their actions. Moreover, the religion of this goddess was a demoralizing one. Hence we see the stronger contrast between those who raised a riot in order to perpetuate idolatry and sensuality and to bring money to their own purses and those, on the contrary, who are ready to sacrifice their earthly interests rather than do harm, and in order that they

may do the more good. Verily there is a power, a wonderful power, in the religion of Jesus, our Redeemer.

It is to be noted that the Apostle and his co-laborers were not guilty of the charge of which they were accused – blaspheming the goddess of Ephesus. Here we have a point of importance and a valuable lesson. St. Paul elsewhere said, "Let none of you suffer as an evil-doer nor as a busy-body in other men's matters." It was not necessary for the Apostle to say one unkind word in reference to the goddess Diana. His commission was to preach the good tidings of great joy – not to quarrel with false gods, or their worship. The persecution was therefore for right-doing. There is a lesson here for us, too. It is not necessary [R4433 : page 214] for us to do or say a single unkind word or act towards our friends in Babylon. It is not necessary for us to tirade against their systems or doctrines. We have plenty to do in setting forth the Gospel message. Of course, the Apostle did not fail to call attention to the fact that Diana was merely the work of men's hands and not, as claimed, a divinity. So we may properly enough set forth to our friends that there is but the one true Church, which was organized by our Lord, established at Pentecost, and that all other churches, therefore, are merely human systems. But it is not our privilege to tirade against these churches, as we learn some of the dear friends are inclined to do. The command, "Speak evil of no man," may properly be applied also to religious systems. Particularly those who recognize the foundation of Christianity in the redeeming merit of the death of Christ, and that favor and teach morality, if nothing more, should be let alone by us. In Divine providence the appointed hour will come, the Scriptures assure us, when everything which can be shaken will be shaken and overthrown in the great "time of trouble." Against that evil day we warn men that they repent and develop meekness and righteousness; "it may be that they shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." Undoubtedly the Lord has permitted sectarianism for some wise purpose, even as he has

permitted the Gentile governments to hold sway until the end of the times of the Gentiles. Let us not interfere with the fulfillment of the Divine purposes. Let us be content to fulfil our mission of assisting the brethren, building them up in the most holy faith and telling the good tidings to the meek and such as manifest an ear to hear.

THE LESSON OF OUR GOLDEN TEXT

This is a wonderful text. Our Lord's words therein expressed applied, we may be sure, not only to St. Paul, but to all of us who are of the one Body and energized by its one spirit. Doubtless St. Paul's experiences in connection with his thorn in the flesh were given to him and recounted in the Scriptures largely for the benefit of ourselves and of all who, from his day until now, have been suffering under peculiar experiences, trials, whose necessity and value were not clearly discerned.

When St. Paul, blinded by the great light which accompanied his conversion, finally received the Lord's forgiveness and the restoration of his sight in considerable measure, he doubtless bore patiently with the continued weakness of his eyes, considering it a proper chastisement for his wrong course as an opponent of the Anointed One and an injurious person in respect to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. The measure of his afflictions which remained helped the Apostle, doubtless, to appreciate very distinctly how close is the relationship between the Church and her Lord, as members of the one sacrifice, as explained in the Lord's Words, "Why persecutest thou me?"

However, as weeks and months and years passed, and the Apostle found his defect of vision a great burden, he doubtless wondered why the Lord should permit any measure of the ailment to continue. Well did he know that it would be as easy for Divine power to give him perfect sight as not. Indeed, he had

evidence along this line continually – the power of God in healing the sick – so that handkerchiefs and napkins which he had blessed were sent for from far and near, and carried with them Divine blessing and healing. Evidently the Apostle reasoned that after he had suffered awhile in this affliction it would be removed. He may even have surmised that God wished to bring him to the point of humbly asking for its removal.

St. Paul explains to us that he did request healing – the removal of this grievous affliction or "thorn." He tells us that he did this three times. There is a point in connection with the matter which apparently up to that time he had not discerned clearly, namely, that the healing of his eyes would be so much of *restitution* blessing. But St. Paul, like the others of us, had been called of the Lord not to restitution, but to *sacrifice*; as he himself explained the matter to others, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1.) Knowing that the blessings of God were passing through him to others, he wondered that some might not have been for himself. He had yet to learn that the gifts conferred to him were for the worldly and not for the saints, who had consecrated to sacrifice. He had yet to learn that, if permitted of the Lord to take back his consecration to sacrifice, it would mean his letting go proportionately of the spiritual blessings and favors which God bestows upon us when we sacrifice earthly things.

TWO WAYS OF ASSISTING US

It would not have been right for St. Paul to have been encouraged in a wrong course, in harmony with his prayers for healing. Hence, those prayers were refused. True, the Lord has granted similar requests from many who knew no better than to ask such favors. But with the great Apostle the matter was

different. Like his Lord he was an example to the flock and hence it was not appropriate to grant his petition. However, what God did do not only furnished a lesson to St. Paul, but a blessed lesson to us, his brethren, throughout the Gospel Age.

While it was not proper to remove the burden from the Apostle in answer to his prayer; while God saw a special way in which this thorn in the flesh would be specially [R4433 : page 215] helpful to him in the development of the holy Spirit, nevertheless his prayer could receive an answer still more effective, still more blessed, in a different way. Instead of removing the difficulty, the Lord promised the more grace, the more strength, the more endurance to meet the difficulty, to overcome it, to compensate for it. This was really much better for St. Paul in every way than if his prayer had been answered. We do not know, neither did he know, how necessary to the preservation of his humility and usefulness in the service was that "thorn in the flesh." We may know assuredly, however, that the giving to him of *more grace* was the greater blessing; because the grace of the Lord is helpful in all things, in all of life's interests, while the taking away of the thorn would have been merely a relief in the one line. No wonder the Apostle, when he understood the situation, cried out, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." – 2 Cor. 12:9.

There have been blessed lessons for all of the Lord's dear people throughout the Gospel Age in these experiences of St. Paul. We have various thorns in the flesh, various difficulties, various trials; some of them mental; some physical; some well understood by others; others unknown except by ourselves. What a comfort it has been to many to have the Lord's assurance that what trials and difficulties he does not remove from us, he permits for wise and loving purposes. These, he assures us, will

all work together for our good. Of these he declares, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Taking this, the Apostle's viewpoint, dear fellow-servants of the cross, let us take all of our experiences in good faith, realizing the truth of these words, that our weaknesses, our imperfections, our frailties, so far from working injury to us, will, under the Lord's supervising care, enable him to supplement the more our willing endeavors with his strength.

[R4438 : page 215]

HEROISM

It takes great strength to train
To modern service your ancestral brain;
To lift the weight of the unnumbered years
Of dead men's habits, methods, and ideas;
To hold that back with one hand, and support
With the other the weak steps of new resolve!
It takes great strength to bring your life up square
With your accepted thought, and hold it there,
Resisting the inertia that drags back
From new attempts to the old habit's track.
It is so easy to drift back – to sink –
So hard to live abreast of what you think!

It takes great strength to live where you belong
When other people think that you are wrong;
People you love, and who love you, and whose
Approval is a pleasure you would choose.
To bear this pressure, and succeed at length
In living your belief – well, it takes strength –
Courage, too. But what does courage mean

Save strength to help you face a pain foreseen;
Courage to undertake this life-long strain
Of setting yourself against your grandsire's brain;
Dangerous risk of walking alone and free,
Out of the easy paths that used to be;
And the fierce pain of hurting those we love
When love meets truth, and truth must ride above.
But the best courage man has ever shown,
Is daring to cut loose, and think alone.
Dark are the unlit chambers of clear space
Where light shines back from no reflecting face.
Our sun's wide glare, our heaven's shining blue,
We owe to fog and dust they fumble through;
And our rich wisdom that we treasure so,
Shines from a thousand things that we don't know.
But to think new – it takes a courage grim
As led Columbus over the world's rim.
To think – it costs some courage – and to go –
Try it – it taxes every power you know.

It takes great love to stir a human heart
To live beyond the others, and apart;
A love that is not shallow, is not small;
Is not for one or two, but for them all.
Love that can wound love for its higher need;
Love that can leave love though the heart may bleed;
Love that can lose love, family and friend,
Yet steadfastly live, loving to the end.
A love that asks no answer, that can live
Moved by one burning, deathless force – to give!
Love, strength and courage; courage, strength and love –
The heroes of all time are built thereof.

– C. P. S. Gilman.
