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IMMANUEL -- "GOD WITH US"

Christmas is the time that we remember Jesus Christ and His birth. His supernatural coming to earth as a new born child reminds us of our own supernatural spiritual birth – our salvation by grace through faith in Him and His substitutionary sacrifice in payment for our sin.

However, the angel's statement to Mary, "THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means,



"GOD WITH US" often escapes our contemplation.

"GOD WITH US" includes His indwelling of each believer as one's daily life. W.H. Strombeck, calls Christ's indwelling life "**God's Keeping Grace**" as he comments on the Good Shepherd in John 10:1-29.

The following is from a chapter from his book *Grace and Truth*, pp.84-98.

God's Keeping Grace

That **grace** is essential for **regeneration** and also for **glorification** is granted by some to whom it is not evident that it is equally essential to the **keeping of the believer during his earthly life.**

In His ministry of grace and truth Jesus does not fail to lay particular emphasis upon this fact.

The parable of the Good Shepherd is a beautiful presentation of **God's keeping grace.** Here it is pictured as a shepherd's care for his sheep and the believer's dependence upon God as the dependence of the sheep upon the shepherd. This is a true picture of the relationship of God and man under grace.

Sheep are known for their defenselessness and helplessness. They are prone to stray from the flock. They are a symbol of weakness. Of all creatures they are in need of protection, guidance and sustenance. Their very existence is one of dependence at all times and in all things upon the watchfulness and **keeping care** of the shepherd. This dependence of sheep upon the shepherd is a perfect picture of the believer's complete dependence upon God's grace. The sheep hear the Shepherd's voice (v.3) and they follow him (v.4). It is to this state of weakness, defenselessness and helplessness that grace addresses itself and so in the Good Shepherd is found all that is needed by the sheep.

There is a tender relationship between the Shepherd and the sheep. In the first place there is ownership. The sheep are "his own" (v.3). He calls them "My sheep" (v. 27). They are therefore not their own, and consequently they do not have a will to do as they please. They are not free to go away from Him. He calls them by name (v.3); not collectively but individually. Each one is personally known and valued by Him. He leads them out; he puts them forth

and goes before them (vs. 3,4). What a picture of love, devotion and care! He knows His sheep (v.14). He knows their temptations, their failures, their needs. He knows all about them. And knowing, He who is omnipotent cannot fail to provide the right thing at the right time.

The outpouring of this loving provision to care for the sheep is all in the purpose of His coming into the world. "*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*" (v.10). Not only life, but abundant life is the purpose of grace. Though the law promised life to those who did that which it commanded (Lev. 18:5, Gal. 3:12), no one was able to fulfill its demands and therefore, the commandment which was unto life, was found to be unto death (Rom. 7:10). Therefore, life for mankind is impossible apart from grace. Consequently the law knows nothing of the intimate relationship between God and man that is illustrated by the Shepherd's care for His own. The one under law is not kept by the power of God, nor can be, for under law man depends upon his own strength.

There is one great fundamental fact out of which springs this **keeping care** by the Shepherd, and guarantees that it shall never fail. "*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*" (v.11). This giving of His life does not mean that He gave out His earthly life in a sympathetic and sacrificial service for His fellowmen. It is something vastly more than that. It means that He actually died in order that His sheep might have life and have it more abundantly. That there may be no

excuse for misunderstanding the meaning of giving His life, He said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (v. 17). He could not take back His works of compassion. He did take His life when He arose from the grave. **It is this resurrection life of the Good Shepherd by which the sheep are kept.** "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10).

The words "I lay down my life" are enlarged upon in the following verses, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (v. 18). No one else has ever been able to say these words. He only could so speak and that was because of His sinlessness. He was not by the law guilty before God. When He gave His life, it was to satisfy for others the demands of the law, so that those who believe on Him might become the objects of grace that they might become His sheep and partakers of the abundant life provided by Him as the Good Shepherd. His death and God's provision in grace for those who become His sheep are inseparable. The latter is conditioned upon the former. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). These "all things" must necessarily include all that is needed for the **safe keeping** of the sheep.

When Jesus spoke of laying down His life for the sheep there was a division among the Jews. Many of them said, "He hath a devil, and is mad" (v. 20). To the legalistic Jewish mind, depending upon self-righteousness and human merit (Rom. 10:3), the death of the Shepherd as a condition for life for the sheep was madness. To the Jews the cross is a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23). Life because of the death of another cannot be grasped by that mind which is saturated with the thought that life is a reward for doing that which is good and righteous under the law.

In verses 27-29 inclusive is found one of the most illuminating

statements, showing dependence on the part of believers and provision on the part of God, to be found in the entire gospel. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." When He calls they listen to Him and as He calls they follow. What is the meaning of following Him? To many it means obeying Christ's commands, to follow His example of His teachings. Such interpretations do violence to the figurative language here used. The figure here is a *sheep following a shepherd*. Why do sheep follow a shepherd? Is it to do something for the shepherd? Hardly. There is but one reason. They follow to be fed and cared for. Following is an expression of complete dependence upon the shepherd. There is nothing meritorious on the part of sheep to follow. To inject a demand for that which is in the slightest meritorious as an element of following the Good Shepherd is adding law to grace.

When soldiers follow a general into war it is quite a different matter. They do so to fight for him and to give their lives, if need be, for him. But not so with sheep. By following they commit [entrust] themselves to the shepherd's care and protection. This is a perfect picture of the believer's position under grace. As it is in the nature of sheep to follow their shepherd, so it is also in the new nature of the sheep of the Good Shepherd to follow Him.

To this attitude of dependence the Shepherd responds by giving them eternal life and declaring that they *shall never perish*. No clearer statement could be made than this. Its simplicity excludes interpretation. It can only be accepted or rejected. To reject it is to deny grace. The power of the Shepherd to hold them in His own hand is the guarantee that they shall never perish. But that is not all. "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (v. 29). The omnipotence of the Father then is called upon as a further guarantee. He is greater than all. Yes, He is even greater than the will of man. In these words Jesus

sums up God's loving provision for the preservation of His sheep.

IMMANUEL -- "GOD WITH US" is God's keeping grace!

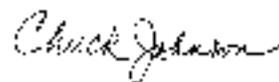
Dear Friends
of CUPbearers/Gracestoration

Through the years, the ministries of CUPbearers and Gracestoration have been supported faithfully by those who have been blessed by God's good news and by those who want to see this message extended to others. Over the past year, we are grateful to say that, through these faithful friends, the donations contributed have allowed all expenses to be covered. God has provided what has been needed to ensure that the ministry efforts could continue to be given without consideration of receiving any financial payment for the services that have gone forth.

As a board member, I have been so impressed by the consistent confidence in the Lord that Bob and Dottie have shown. One of my favorite "Bob statements" is, "We trust God because He is so trustworthy," and God's faithfulness has been shown again and again throughout this year as contributions have been received. On behalf of the board, we are sending this letter to say a hearty "Thank you" both to God and to those whom He has touched to contribute.

We would appreciate your ongoing financial support in the upcoming year as God presents continuing ministry opportunities and as CUPbearers and Gracestoration seek to speak boldly into the lives who need the message of grace.

Sincerely in Christ's service,



Chuck Johnson
Board Member
CUPbearers and Gracestoration