

WAY OF REST

Way of Rest - 1

Dearly beloved, Greetings in the Name of our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ, who has given us a hope and a future. On behalf of The Witness Ministries, I send you this message, believing that the Lord will use it to accomplish His purposes in your life and in the lives of your loved ones. This is the first in a series of such messages. You are at liberty to forward them to as many as you believe will be blessed by them. In addition, you may print them out, make copies of them and distribute to as many as you believe will profit by them.

The world in which we live is ordinarily no place for rest. Men are preoccupied with "running from pillar to post" to "keep body and soul together". One would think that for the privileged few, who have risen above the so called poverty line, that in itself would eliminate stress. Instead the struggle to maintain the ground already gained (and possibly gain more) turns out to be as fierce as the first. Even when men attain a level of relative prosperity, the prevailing spirit of competition is bound to make them 'restless'.

As a result, men know little or nothing about rest. In the midst of the frustrations, worries and struggles of this world, we readily forget this counsel of Scripture: "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so He giveth His beloved sleep" (Psa. 127:2). Yet we must know that there is more to rest than a good night's sleep. We will explore the possibilities, one step at a time.

The Way of Peace

There is a relationship between the "rest" we are dealing with and the peace that God gives. A man cannot be at rest if he is not at peace. The Bible, in painting a picture of the state of the unbelieving world, is emphatic: "And the way of peace they have not known (Rom. 3:17, Isa. 59:8). This peace can be experienced at three levels: with God (Rom.5:1), with fellow men (Rom. 12:18) and within the individual (Col 3:15). If we must be at rest, we must experience peace at these levels, and maintain it. Even then, there is more.

Kinds of Rest

The goal of this classification is to differentiate, and then identify our area of emphasis. We will consider three major forms of rest: spiritual, physical and material rest.

Spiritual Rest - this involves rest in the spirit and the soul of man. In the divine order of things, the soul cannot be perfected without the spirit, and vice versa. As a result, we

have grouped "rest" at both levels under one head. "Rest in the spirit" is attained through the salvation experience and maintained through fellowship and obedience (Rom. 5:1, Gal. 5:22, Ac. 3:19). Once we are genuinely converted, its manifestation is automatic. This is guaranteed because we are assured of forgiveness of sins, removal of guilt, purging of the conscience, the joy of salvation and peace with God. However, the extent to which this is consolidated will depend on the measure of rest in the soul.

"Rest in the soul" is progressively attained. It comes through the right kind of understanding, a renewal of the mind and the kind of choices we make. Since the soul (or mind) is the arena for the great battles that rage within a man, this level of rest is very crucial. (See Rom. 7:14-24, 8:5-7, 2 Cor. 7:5, Gal 5:17). This explains why we cannot talk about spiritual rest without focusing on the spirit and the soul.

Physical Rest - this category of rest involves relaxation, recreation and sleep. This is the most basic level of rest, and we do not need to emphasise it. A wise man will not need to be told to strike a good balance between work and rest.

Material Rest - this level of rest is linked to material prosperity. In this restricted sense, the Israelites entered into rest, seeing that they inherited the Promised Land (see Josh. 1:13-15, 23:1). But they fell short of entering the spiritual rest prepared for them (Heb.4:4-8). Another example of material rest can be seen in the experience of Issachar. The Children of Issachar submitted themselves to hard labour because they saw that "rest was good" and that the land "was pleasant" (Gen. 49:15).

Way of Rest - 2

Beloved of God, Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus, who paid the ultimate price for the salvation of man and has turned us from darkness to light. In the first part of our focus on The Way of Rest, we dealt with introductory matters. We sought to understand rest, explore the different kinds of rest and identify our area of interest.

As we continue with our exploration, we enjoin you to request for the first part of the message, just in case you did not get it. You are also at liberty to forward these messages to others. We will now focus on spiritual rest. To start with, we will consider two levels of spiritual rest.

Active and Passive - due to the upbeat motions of the society in which we live, and the prevailing spirit of competition, many tend to associate rest with laziness. It is important to note that the rest of God can be revealed both in active and passive forms.

On the one hand, "rest" is capable of restraining the individual. On the other hand, it is capable of propelling the individual unto action.

When rest is revealed in the heart, it teaches self control, acting as a restraining influence even in the midst of pressure (see Psa. 46:1-3,10). Yet when, in addition to being revealed in the heart, rest is revealed in your walk, it teaches you obedience, acting as a catalyst even in the midst of complacency.

It becomes a walk or work in rest (see 1 Sam. 30:1-18, Jn. 5:1).

While acknowledging the fact that both forms are important, we must warn that unless the passive phase of God's dealings is fully worked out in a man, he cannot move on to the active phase. This leads us to consider the pattern of rest established in the beginning.

In the Beginning - before the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed rest at all levels. Concerning spiritual rest, they had an intimate relationship with God; they had no reason for anxiety or fear; they had neither unpleasant memories nor corrupted imagination. In addition, their placement in a garden planted by the LORD guaranteed material and physical rest (see Gen. 1:27-29, 2:7-25). When they fell from grace, they forfeited this glorious heritage. In declaring to them the frightful consequences of their transgression, the LORD did not mince words (see Gen. 3:14-19):

*The serpent would bruise the heel of man.

*Sorrow would be an unpleasant factor in pregnancy and delivery.

*The man would rule over (or dominate) the woman; while the woman's desire would be her husband (thereby manifesting a husband-focused mentality).

*The ground (or soil) would be cursed for their sake.

Way of Rest - 3

Beloved of God, Greetings to you (and yours) in the Name of our Lord Jesus. We thank God for the grace He has given and the opportunity to be ushered into a new year. We are pleased to continue our focus on "The Way of Rest".

So far, we have explored the peace that God gives, categories of rest, levels of rest, the pattern of rest established at the beginning, the 'loss' of rest and the God given

opportunity to recover. The main thrust of our present focus is the exchange programme that God has ordained for our rest.

Take My Yoke - we often fail to see (or appreciate) the conditions Jesus attached to His offer of rest: "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29). What Jesus expects is an exchange of yokes and burdens. When He says, "take My yoke", the implication is that you have dropped yours, especially when we consider His promise to relieve you of that which makes you "weary and burdened" (see 1 Pet. 5:7). If you believe His words ("My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" – Matt. 11:30) you should consider their implication: your own yoke is difficult and your burden heavy.

To understand this 'exchange programme', we need to consider the meaning of the words "yoke" and "burden".

Generally, yokes are a symbol of service, responsibility, working partnership, bonding or bondage (see 1 Tim. 6:1, Ac. 15:10, Deut. 22:10, 2Cor. 6:14, Phil. 4:3, Isa. 10:27, Gal. 5:1). On the other hand, burdens are weights arising from the cares, worries and fears of this life (see Matt. 6:25,27, 34; Mk 4:18 & 19, Lk. 21:34, 1 Pet. 5:7). The implication of this exchange is that the LORD changes your approach to work and service, exercises Lordship even in the area of your lawful responsibilities and bears your burdens for you, all in return for your absolute and unconditional commitment to His will. By taking charge of our yokes and burdens, He nullifies every potential excuse for not doing His will. In practical terms, this involves laying down everything at His feet and starting a new life with a continual emphasis on His will. (see Matt. 6:33, 2 Cor. 5:14 & 15, Gal. 2:20). Apart from doing everything "as to the Lord, and not to men", it involves giving up your will for His will. After all, when a man is yoked to the Lord, he is free ONLY to do the will of God.

On this note, we will consider the relationship between the rest of God and the old testament Sabbath of rest.

The Sabbath Rest - the Scriptures reveal that, after the six-day creation period, God rested on the 7th day, and that He sanctified that day and blessed it (Gen. 2:2 & 3). This turned out to be the basis for the weekly Sabbaths of rest observed in Israel. Interestingly, it is also the basis for the rest that God gives His children.

*In the course of time (and in physical terms, they would both die. Spiritual and physical death had become frightful realities.

The above pronouncements were followed by the expulsion of Adam and Eve (and by implication the unborn generations of men) from the Garden of Eden, their earthly paradise and their symbol of wholesome rest. But even then, there was a ray of hope in the horizon. Based on the promise of God, the Seed of the woman (Jesus) would someday bruise the head of the serpent (Satan).

Come Unto Me - eventually, Jesus came to fulfil that which was declared. During one of His discourses, He gave this historic invitation: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt.11:28). We need to examine closely the terms of this invitation. In the first place, the invitation is extended to those "that labour and are heavy laden" (or "who are weary and burdened" – NIV). The implication of Jesus' words (which capture the state of all men) is that His invitation is extended to all.

The benefit of accepting this offer is the rest that God gives. But the question arises: Multitudes have come to Jesus; how come this rest has eluded so many?

Way of Rest - 4

Fellow partakers of God's grace, Greetings to you in the wonderful Name of our Lord Jesus. We thank God for the opportunity He has given us to reach you. We also appreciate the feedback we have received from some of you. We intend to circulate some of such at the appropriate time, for the benefit of everyone. This we are likely to do during the interval between the end of this series and the beginning of another one. We are still open to receive your questions, comments, burdens and suggestions. We believe in participatory fellowship, and this we practice, not only in fellowship meetings hosted by us, but also in places where we minister, so long as we have the permission of our hosts to do so. However, we intend to handle your mails with utmost discretion.

To this end, we will not circulate private information (except otherwise stated) or anything that is potentially injurious to you or others. We trust God for wisdom.

Dearly beloved, We thank God for yet another opportunity to reach you. Some of you we have met. Others we have not met, and may never meet. All the same, our desire is to remain relevant to all, but only in the context of God's will. So, pray for us, again and again, for guidance.

We continue our exploration on "The Way of Rest". So far, we have considered the way of peace, kinds of rest, the pattern of rest established in the beginning and Jesus' historic offer of rest. In our last write up, we started to explore the Sabbath-rest of

Hebrews 4. To ensure an unbroken flow of understanding, we will repeat the introductory aspects. After that, we will focus on the storms of life.

The Sabbath Rest - the Scriptures reveal that, after the six-day creation period, God rested on the 7th day, and that He sanctified that day and blessed it (Gen. 2:2 & 3). This turned out to be the basis for the weekly Sabbaths of rest observed in Israel. Interestingly, it is also the basis for the rest that God gives His children.

Hebrews 4 teaches that:

*The promise of rest for the people of God still stands .

*The works of God were finished from the foundation of the world. The implication is that we are called to partake of the manifestation of works that are already finished or completed (see also Jn. 5:19 & 20, Eph.2:10).

*The Israelites entered the promised land (an earthly inheritance) but did not receive rest for their souls (see vs. 6-9). The same thing is currently happening in many lives (Rev. 3:15-19).

*Entry into rest marks the end of man's labour and the beginning of the manifestation of God's finished work (Psa. 46:10, Jn. 15:5, 1 Thes.5:24).

*The labour God appreciates is that which leads us into His rest. Afterwards, though we labour, it is "according to His working which worketh...mightily" in us (see Col. 1:29). May it truly be so. Amen.

Understanding Storms - Psalm 107 gives us examples of 'storms' in the lives of men. We will highlight the four storms described therein and make brief comments. In all, we will confirm that God's Word is beautiful for all situations.

*"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. O that men would praise the LORD for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (vs.4-8)

The Israelites went through a storm characterised by hunger, thirst and lack of shelter.

In response to their cry, the LORD made a way where there was no way and provided something out of nothing.

*"Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of The Most High: Therefore He brought down their heart with labour; they fell down and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the LORD...For He hath broken the gates of brass and cut the bars of iron in sunder" (vs. 10-16).

This storm is characterised by affliction and pain. We learn that the consequences of disobedience are grave. Yet there is forgiveness and deliverance for the penitent.

*"Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat: and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and He saveth them out of their distresses. He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh that men would praise the LORD..." (vs. 17-21).

Again, this storm is characterized by affliction. The Lord chastens and corrects His children. Repentance attracts forgiveness.

*"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind...their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses...Oh that men would praise the LORD" (vs. 23-31).

Unlike the preceding two, this storm does not seem to have any purpose to accomplish. However, it is as useful as the others. The higher the stakes, the greater the challenges. Again, the more the challenges, the greater the testimony. This leads us to a classification of storms.

Classifying Storms - a study of the Scriptures will reveal different kinds of storms. For now, we have been able to identify four:

Storms as natural phenomena (or storms that come in the natural course of things). Paul had a few of such (Ac. 27:14-44, 2 Cor.11:25-26).

Storms as a response to man's disobedience (Psa.107:10-21, Jon. 1:1-4).

Storms as a test of obedience (Mk.4:17,35-41,Matt.7:24-27).

Storms that are related to men's aspirations and pursuits (Psa. 107: 23-31, Eccl. 10:8-9).

Way of Rest - 5

Dearly beloved, Greetings to you in the Name of our Lord Jesus. As we continue with our series on The Way of Rest, we wish to remind you that your questions and comments are welcome. In fact, at some point, we are likely to circulate the feedback we receive, for the overall benefit of all. Whenever we do this, you can be sure we will handle it with utmost discretion. As for those who have already mailed us, God bless you.

When you send mail, you are free to indicate whether or not you want your mail (or any part thereof) circulated. God bless you all. Amen

God Our Refuge - the Bible describes God as our refuge (Psa. 46:1,48:3, Isa. 25:4). This implies that the world is a place of storms, danger and trouble. Since "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble", we need not fear, not even when the earth is removed from under our feet; not even when the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea. The implication is that, no matter how intense the storms of life may be, we need not fear. The Lord says: "Be still and know that I am God" (see Psa. 46:1-10).

A study of Mark 4:35-41 will reveal some helpful insights: "And the same day, when the even was come, He saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took Him even as He was in the ship. And there was also with Him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake Him and say unto Him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And He said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?"

The implications of this passage are as follows:

*Storms are not an indication that God has left you. Jesus was in the boat, but that did not stop the storm from coming.

*Storms are NOT ALWAYS an indication that you are out of God's will. The disciples were in that boat in obedience to a specific instruction of their Master:

"Let us pass over unto the other side".

*Anytime your faith is low, fear will overwhelm you.

*The storm within a man is usually more deadly than the storm without. In much the same way, the enemy within is more deadly than the enemy without. The disciples were incapacitated, not by the storm without, but by the storm (of fear) within them. As a result, they lost control and became ineffective.

The ideal attitude of a believer in Christ to the storms of life is well captured in Isaiah 8:11-13: "For the LORD spake to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." Let us examine the implications of this passage:

*When you walk in the way of "this people" (the way of the heathen or unbelievers, which was being adopted by God's people), you will necessarily fear what they fear.

*Unbelievers, along with compromising believers, have their fear. In the same way, we (committed Christians) have our fear, namely the fear of the LORD.

*Their fear consists of worries about provision, protection, the future, and so on. Our fear revolves around the LORD and how we may please Him. This does not make us irresponsible. The difference is that we have learnt how to cast our cares upon Him.

*In practical terms, we do not get there in one day. The level of rest we enjoy is equal to the level of understanding we attain in God. This leads to consider the instruments by which a man may lay hold on the rest of God.

Way of Rest - 6

Entering into Rest

At this point, we will consider certain ingredients of God's Word that will help a man to enter into rest.

They are - (1) Fellowship (2) Understanding (3) Obedience, (4) Death, (5) Hope (6) Belief (7) Commitment (8) Contentment.

We are not talking of ready-made formulas by which men accomplish their goals. We are talking of a life that must be lived and ingredients that will help us to be on the way. For the avoidance of doubt, we enter into rest when we come into an encounter with God. However, there are certain things that God has put in place by which we can have such an encounter and enter into His rest.

(1) Fellowship - we need to consider, on a daily basis, the place of fellowship in our overall response to God. Fellowship is like respiration. In much the same way as the process of breathing in and out sustains 'the life of the flesh' that we have, so does fellowship sustain 'the life of the spirit' in us. When we are out of fellowship, we grow weak and, eventually, the life of the spirit is choked out of us. Spiritual death becomes the end product of our carelessness.

We need to view fellowship as God views it, as a means to an end, which end is an intimate rapport with Him. When we are truly in His presence, fear, anxiety and worry disappear, and we are continually transformed (see Isa. 99:11-13, 2 Cor. 3:18). We will discover that the end of worship, prayer and Bible study is a glorious encounter with the Lord. So will the doors of rest be open to us.

However, we need to consider another aspect of fellowship, namely fellowship with the brethren. The Bible tells us that "if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7). He that walks in the light must, of necessity, fellowship with the brethren; and it is only then that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin. Being out of fellowship with the brethren is as grievous as being out of fellowship with the Lord (Heb. 10:25, 1 Jn. 4:20, 21).

As already stated, the peace of God is an integral part of the rest that God gives; and this manifests as peace with God, peace with our fellow man and peace within us. We cannot walk in the peace within us when we do not cultivate peace with God and peace with our fellow man.

Way of Rest - 7

Beloved of God, Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus. We continue with our focus on The Way of Rest. We urge you to keep forwarding the mails and to get back to us as often as the need arises. Soon enough, we will have opportunity to circulate some of your responses. Keep focused.

In our last write-up, we started a sub-series on Entering into Rest, in which we began to consider the ingredients by which a man may enter into rest. We then considered the place of fellowship. In continuation of this focus, we are considering the place of understanding and obedience.

(2) Understanding - from the Scriptures, we learn that "understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it" (Prov.16:22a). Yet we know that "understanding" does not operate in isolation. It works with knowledge and wisdom. For instance, the Bible teaches us that "wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times". Yet without understanding, a man cannot move from knowledge to wisdom. Knowledge deals with information, the raw material for growth.

Understanding supplies the meaning and the purpose of the information received, thereby revealing to man the ways of God, the will of God and the Person of God. Wisdom supplies the help by which that which is known and understood may be practised. No wonder, the Bible teaches: "Through wisdom is an house builded and by understanding it is established: and by knowledge shall all the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches" (Prov.24:3-4). By implication, stability comes through knowledge, understanding and wisdom. We must not trust in the letter of God's Word, for "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor.3:6). The pathway of understanding is the pathway of life and rest.

(3) Obedience - no doubt, certain things will spring up in the place of fellowship. An understanding of the will of God will come, and obedience should follow. We must never expect to be at rest when we are outside God's will. What then is God's will? It is the mind of God, the heartbeat of God. For this reason, it takes a man after God's heart to fulfil it (Ac.13:22). Many have settled for the more general definition that portrays the will of God as the Word of God, and they are not wrong. Yet when we understand that God's will does not need to be expressed in order for it to be His will, we will automatically become seekers (Heb.11:6a, Matt.7:7).

Naturally, obedience flows from a knowledge of God's will. Yet we cannot always conclude that disobedience flows from an ignorance of God's will.

This leads us to consider some of the many faces of disobedience. When a man says "no" to God, he has disobeyed (Jon.1:1-3). When a man falls short of doing all that the Lord has commanded, he has disobeyed (1Sam.15:10-24).

When a man goes beyond what the Lord has instructed him to do, he has disobeyed (Num.20:7-12). When a man yields to any counsel that contradicts the instructions of the Lord, he has disobeyed (1 Kin. 13:7-24). Again when a man, under pressure (as a result of situations and circumstances) does something different from that which God has revealed, he has disobeyed (1 Sam.13:5-14). These are but samples. Areas of disobedience abound, and so do the Scripture references. One thing is certain: Each act of obedience is a step into rest, while each act of disobedience is a step away from it.

Way of Rest - 8

Fellow seekers of God, Greetings to you in the Name of our Lord. It gives us great pleasure to reach out to you with the waters of grace. In addition, we derive great fulfillment from knowing that we are fulfilling the purpose of God. We want to thank those of you that have mailed us, especially in recent times. On that note, we return to our focus on The Way of Rest.

In recent times, we have been considering the ingredients by which a man may enter into rest. Having considered fellowship, understanding and obedience, we want to focus our attention on 'death' and hope.

(4) Death - the nature of the death in question is certainly not physical. The Scriptures do teach death to sin, self, the flesh, the law (or the principle of works) and the world. Along with Paul, we need to consider the fact "that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2Cor.5:14). If this death is not a manifest experience in your life, you will not know rest. When a man is physically dead, he does not respond to any stimulus.

You may prick him with a pin, cut him with an axe or shoot him with a gun, he remains unmoved. Even so, relative to sin, self, the flesh, the law and the world, God expects that we are dead, so that we can have the liberty to be alive to Him and to His will.

It takes a crucified life to walk in the rest of God (Gal. 2:20, 5:24, 2 Cor.5:14-18).

In relation to sin, the question arises: "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:2). As touching self, Jesus teaches: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himSELF, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matt.6:24).

Likewise, Paul teaches that "if One died for all, then were all DEAD" and that "they which live should not henceforth live unto themSELVES, but unto Him which died for them." (2 Cor.5:14-15). In relation to the flesh, the Bible teaches: "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the BODY, ye shall live" (Rom.8:13).

Likewise, we are taught that "they that are Christ's have crucified the FLESH with the affections and lusts" (Gal.5:24). Concerning the law, Paul teaches:

"Ye also are become dead to the LAW by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring fruit unto God" (Rom.7:4). Finally, we are expected to die to the world: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the WORLD is crucified unto Me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14).

(5) Hope - the Bible teaches that hope is "an anchor of the soul" (Heb.6:19). The implication is that, in the midst of the changing fortunes of life, our hope in God's Word plays the kind of role that an anchor plays in relation to a ship at sea. Basically, there are three kinds of hope:

The dead hope, which originates in the devil and is founded on a lie. If there is a living hope, there must be a dead one (1Pet.1:3).

All occult groups, for instance, are founded on a dead hope. The mortal hope, which originates in man and is based on the senses. It may or may not be realised, but many have found themselves echoing these words:

"As long as there is life, there is hope." When this kind of hope failed Abraham, he leaned on a higher one (Rom. 4:18).

The living hope, which originates in God and is founded on truth (Heb. 6:18-19). This hope is based on two unchanging things: The promise of God and His oath (a symbol of the covenant we share with Him) and it is strengthened by practical experience in God (Heb.6:13-18, Rom. 5:3-5).

Way of Rest - 9

Beloved of God, Greetings to you and yours in the Name of our Lord Jesus. We are gradually coming to the end of our series on The Way of Rest. By now, we should be in a position to know whether the journey, so far, has been worthwhile. Once again, we thank those of you that have written back to us, at one point or the other.

During the interval between the conclusion of the current message and the beginning of another one, we will circulate some of such mails, along with comments, where necessary. We encourage you to seek God and love Him. Nothing can be more rewarding. We continue with our sub-series on Entering into Rest. While focusing on the ingredients by which a man may enter into rest, we have considered fellowship, understanding, obedience, 'death' and hope. We now move on to consider belief and commitment.

(6) Belief - in the Scriptures, we see a link between belief and rest: "For we which have believed do enter into rest" (Heb. 4:3). Not only must we hope in God through His Word, we must believe in Him and in His Word. Remember, unbelief hindered the Children of Israel from entering the promised land: "And to whom sware He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief....Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb.3:18-19, 4:11).

When Jesus was asked about the steps men should take in order to "work the works of God," His answer was simple: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (Jn. 6:28-29). By this we understand that, relative to the things of God, belief is the foundational response of a yielded soul. What we believe will eventually influence our confessions, actions and lifestyle. If only we will believe the Word of God, we will know rest.

(7) Commitment - commitment takes us to a level beyond belief and faith. In fact, without commitment, faith cannot be perfected. We must remember that belief is an ingredient of faith. When, for instance, God tried Abraham's faith, his commitment was also at stake (Gen. 22:1-18). What if the LORD chose not to prevent him from killing his son? Was he committed enough to go all the way? He certainly was. If he did not see that possibility, there would have been no basis for "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19).

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were faced with the threat of death in a "fiery furnace," they made a statement of faith, as well as a statement of commitment. True,

the LORD was able to deliver, but what if He did not? Whichever way, they were not going to worship the golden image (see Dan. 3:1-18, Rev. 12:11).

There are times when men need to echo the words of Esther: "If I perish, I perish" (see Est. 4:10-16). To some of us, that may sound like Old Testament thinking; yet the early Church upheld the same standard of commitment (see Ac.20:16-24, Heb. 11:35-37, 1 Pet. 4:1-2, 12-14, Rev.12:10-11).

Thank God for "positive confession" and faith, but what do we do if the unexpected happens? Will the heart not be unsettled?

What we need is a wholesome commitment that will help us to go through water and fire, through the mountains and valleys of life without being moved. This is a sure way of experiencing the rest that God gives. In so doing, our hearts are prepared for all things. In any case, the peace that God gives is one that transcends understanding, peace in spite of trouble or peace in the midst of trouble.

Way of Rest - the conclusion

Beloved partakers of God's Grace, Greetings to you all in the Name of our Lord Jesus.

Once again, we are sending out messages. As we round up the series on rest, we want to remind you of our availability to attend to your comments, questions and suggestions. During the break between the conclusion of this series and the beginning of another one, we intend to feature your responses to these mails, which should provide a platform for more responses, first from us (where necessary) and then from you.

God bless you.

In continuation of our sub-series, "Entering into Rest", we are focusing on contentment. You may refer to other ingredients (previously explored) by which we can enter into God's rest, namely: fellowship, understanding, obedience, 'death', hope, belief and commitment.

(8) Contentment - a man that seeks contentment must first deal with covetousness (Heb. 13:5-6). Basically, covetousness manifests in two ways: (a) the love of money or material things and (b) a craving for that which belongs to another (Exo. 20:17, Ac. 20:33). Whichever way, it is a manifestation of idolatry (Matt. 6:24, Col. 3:5).

The solution to covetousness is contentment. In addition, the basis for contentment is "such things as ye have" (Heb. 13:5) and not "such things as ye desire to have."

Based on the standard of God's Word, the bottom-line is having food to eat and clothes to wear (1 Tim.6:8). While not denying the fact that God desires to prosper His people, we must also remember that "godliness with contentment is GREAT GAIN" (1 Tim.6:6). If we walk by these standards, we will know rest.

As we conclude our explorations, we want you to know that we have not exhausted everything. In addition to some areas and details we may have left out, it is possible to explore the subject from a completely different angle. If the Lord wills, we will revisit it. For now, we believe the basic understanding has been communicated.

A man that is at rest is profitable to God, to himself and to others; for he positions himself in such a way as to tap into the finished works of God. He has access to the limitless grace of the Almighty God. That could be you.

May God continue to grant us understanding.

Amen.

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT ENTERED INTO A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST. YOU CAN ASK JESUS TO COME INTO YOUR LIFE, TO BE YOUR LORD AND SAVIOUR. YOU WILL RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, A REMOVAL OF GUILT AND A PURGING OF THE CONSCIENCE (Rom.10:9-10).

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST, AND HAVE NOT BEEN TRUE TO HIM. IF YOU WILL BE SORRY FOR YOUR SINS, CONFESS THEM AND FORSAKE THEM, YOU WILL BE RESTORED (1 Jn. 1:9, Jam. 4: 4-10).

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Daniel Okeme & Pius Ohue