

Be Doers—Not Hearers Only

*“Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”
—James 1:22*

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES of God’s law never change. Details of his will may vary as his plan progresses from age to age, but they are always in harmony

with the basic standards of his just and righteous laws. The principles of the Law given to natural Israel were summed up by Jesus to be supreme love for God and love for our neighbors equal to that which we have for ourselves. These are as binding upon the followers of Jesus as they were upon those to whom the Ten Commandments were given through Moses.

There are two important facts governing God’s dealings with his people. One is that he does not hold accountable those who are ignorant of his will, unless that ignorance is willful. The other is that when he reveals his law, his will, he expects those who are thus enlightened to be obedient to it. This also has been true throughout all the ages during which the Heavenly Father’s plan has been developing.

The Apostle James, writing to spiritual Israelites of this age, said in the verses which follow our opening scripture, “If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [a mirror]: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty [in which we see the perfect image of Christ], and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”—James 1:23-25

There is no other legitimate object in the study of God’s Word than that of learning the divine will in order that we may do it. Jesus said, concerning himself, “My meat [that which I hunger for] is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” (John 4:34; 6:38) If doing God’s will was the “meat” which sustained his relationship with the Father, no less can be expected of us as we strive to put on the “mind of Christ.” He was a “doer” of God’s Word, and we must be likewise.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) Rightly dividing God’s Word is not the ultimate objective of Christian Bible study, but rather a means to the goal that we may work for the Lord—the chief work being that of doing his will. We endeavor to rightly divide the Word of truth so that we may gain understanding as to how to be “approved unto God” and counted

as “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.” It is doubtful that those who study the Scriptures from any other motivation than this will be permitted by God to continue in the light of truth. It is as true today as it was in Moses’ day that the things which God reveals are disclosed to his people so that they may be governed accordingly, and his will be done in and through them.

REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE

To natural Israel God offered a very high position in his plan, but the promise was conditional upon obedience to his law. He told them that they would be to him “a peculiar treasure unto me above all people,” also that he would make of them “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” This great prize of glory in the divine arrangement, however, was to be theirs only, God said, “if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant.”—Exod. 19:5,6

Although Israel pledged to do God’s will, they did not keep their covenant with him. God was longsuffering with them, chastising them for their backslidings, and forgiving them when they repented. However, intermittent and halfhearted loyalty did not produce in the nation the growth in righteousness and degree of faithfulness which were necessary so that they might pass the test to which they were subjected when Jesus presented himself to them as their Messiah. The law which was given to them as a “schoolmaster” to bring them to Christ did not accomplish this intended purpose because they were not obedient to it, even in spirit. (Gal. 3:24,25) Hence, when Jesus came to

them, his own Jewish brethren, “his own received him not.” (John 1:11) God had revealed his will to the nation—to accept their promised Messiah—but they did not heed it. Therefore as a nation they did not enter into the promised inheritance of joint heirship in the Messianic kingdom. Instead, Jesus said to them, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”—Matt. 21:43

This was a tragic loss, all because they were not “doers” of the divine will which had been revealed to them. Jesus had come to them as “the chief corner stone” in God’s spiritual temple which was to be the eventual means of blessing for the world, but they had stumbled over him. (Eph. 2:20) As the prophet had foretold, they rejected the one that God designed to be the “head stone of the corner.” (Ps. 118:22) Jesus told the Jews about this prophecy, and how it was being fulfilled by their failure to recognize and accept him as their Messiah. Then he added, “Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”—Matt. 21:42,44

Even after Jesus came to Israel and was rejected, God’s mercy and forbearance continued through the Master’s efforts to enlighten and convert them. “How often,” he said, “would I have gathered thy children together, . . . and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:37,38) Here, as the Master had warned, the “stone” fell upon the unbelievers of Israel, and their hope of sharing the glory of the Messiah in the promised “kingdom of priests” was broken forever—ground to powder.

BRANCHES BROKEN OFF

Jeremiah 11:16 describes Israel as a “green olive tree.” The root from which this tree was nourished was God’s oath-bound covenant with Abraham. That covenant provided for the development of a spiritual seed. (Gen. 22:17,18) It was to the spiritual seed of Abraham that the royal promises of the kingdom belonged. The Apostle Paul explains that a greater portion of these Israelites, as the natural branches in this olive tree of promise, were broken off because of unbelief.—Rom. 11:17,20

However, this did not change God’s plan. His promise to Abraham and his seed remained, and the individuals in Israel who accepted Jesus were transferred from the typical house to the spiritual: “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” (John 1:12) Paul speaks of those who received Jesus as “a remnant according to the election of grace.” (Rom. 11:5) These were not arbitrarily made a part of the elect class, but occupied this high position by virtue of God’s grace because of their heart obedience. The Apostle Peter explains the condition upon which anyone may thus be of the elect, saying that it is “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:2

This remnant of Israel was far too few to make up the total number of those whom God had fore-ordained to be joint-heirs with the Messiah. It is this that gave Gentiles the opportunity of becoming the fellow heirs with the Jews. Paul refers to these as “wild” branches which, “contrary to nature,” are

grafted into the “Israelitish” olive tree. (Rom. 11:24) This grafting of Gentiles is contrary to nature because nature’s laws have decreed that any branch grafted into a tree retains its own characteristics, and not those of the tree into which it is grafted. How different it is, however, with the Gentile branches that are grafted into the symbolic olive tree. They no longer are Gentiles, but become “Israelites indeed.” (John 1:47) Thus, the foreordained number of the little flock of spiritual Israelites who are to live and reign with Christ a thousand years will include those who were, by nature, both Jews and Gentiles.

THE HOLY NATION

What a wonderful lesson this is to emphasize the unchangeableness of God’s plan and the necessity of obedience on our part if we are to have the privilege and honor of cooperating with God. Jesus said that the kingdom was taken from natural Israel and given to a nation bringing forth its fruits. Peter identifies this nation when, in writing his first epistle, he says, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

Peter further explains that those Gentiles who now have the opportunity to be citizens of God’s holy and royal nation of spiritual Israelites were not previously the people of God. (vs. 10) These are the ones whom Paul speaks of as “wild” branches who are grafted into the “natural” olive tree. Every footstep follower of the Master who is a Gentile by

birth should remember with humility that his privileges as a spiritual Israelite and the hope of glory as a joint-heir with Christ have been made available to him because natural Israel, as a nation, proved unfaithful. However, it is even more important for us to be conscious of the sobering truth expressed by the apostle, when he said, "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."—Rom. 11:21

The natural branches were broken off because of unbelief. We too will lose our position in the symbolic olive tree if we become unbelievers. Let us not assume, either, that being an unbeliever implies an outright denial of the Lord or the rejection of his truth. The unbelieving Israelites, who constituted a majority of the nation, deceived themselves into supposing that they were faithfully following the commandments of God. Let none of us, as spiritual Israelites, be similarly deceived today. Many who say "Lord, Lord," are in the category of unbelievers as God views them, and for the very reason that they fail to do the will of their Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 7:21) They are not "doers" of the Word.

GOD'S WILL

As with typical Israel, so with us of the spiritual house, it is in the "things . . . revealed" by God that we discern his will. (Deut. 29:29) These are the "things" that he expects us to do and what he wants us to be. How grand are the truths which God has revealed to his people at this end of the age—"meat in due season." (Matt. 24:45) Indeed, God has made known to us all the great fundamentals

of his plan of the ages, and he has done so because there is something that he wants us to do about all of it.

God's command that we be "doers" of his Word is based on the great privileges he has afforded us, and the work necessary for us to fully attain them. He has revealed the mystery hidden from ages and from generations—the mystery of the body of Christ—because he is offering us the opportunity of becoming a part of that body. He has revealed the prize of the High Calling because he wants us to run for that prize. He has revealed the privilege of being planted together in the likeness of Christ's death because he wants us to die with Christ. He has revealed to us the high exaltation of Jesus following his resurrection from the dead because he wants us to set our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.—Col. 1:26,27; Phil. 3:14; Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 3:1-4

There are various other features of the plan of God, such as the hope of restitution for mankind, which he has revealed to us. He has done so because it is his will that we be ambassadors for the Truth and tell forth the message of the kingdom—a message of hope and comfort to the present sin-sick and dying world. God has revealed all these things, and more, to us that we may be "doers" of his will, "and not hearers only."

Being doers with regard to our ambassadorship is briefly outlined by the prophet in Isaiah 61:1-3. It is presented as a commission of the Holy Spirit. Jesus applied this lesson to himself, and the Scriptures make it plain that it also applies to his body members—the entire Christ company. It is a

commission to preach glad tidings to the meek, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, to bind up the brokenhearted, to declare liberty to the captives, to announce the day of vengeance of our God, and to comfort all who mourn. To carry out this commission it is essential that we know the plan of God, embracing the spiritual hopes of this Gospel Age and the great kingdom hope of restitution. It also requires that we understand why there is a great Time of Trouble now upon the nations, and what the joyous outcome of that trouble will be.

This commission of the Holy Spirit is mandatory upon every Gentile branch which has been grafted into God's olive tree. It is regrettable that any of the Lord's consecrated people should view this phase of the Christian life as being merely incidental, and that it may be ignored if one is not inclined to participate in it. No part of God's will may be considered incidental, and being doers of the Word implies faithfulness in obeying the Holy Spirit's commission to preach the Gospel.

In II Corinthians, chapter 6, the apostle calls our attention to other fundamentals of the Christian life. The chapter opens with the reminder that we are workers together with God, and with the admonition that this inestimable privilege or favor from God be not received in vain. As the apostle explains, however, if we are to be approved before God as his ministers we must exercise patience "in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings."—vs. 5

Furthermore, as Paul explains, our ministry is to be pure—the pure message of God's plan. Also,

as ambassadors, we are to be long-suffering and kind, and to have unfeigned love for the brethren and for all mankind. Our ministry is to be by the power of God because his Holy Spirit has commissioned and quickened us. It is to be a ministry of the Word of truth, not of our own theories and speculations. As a minister of the Word of truth, with the backing of the power of God, we will be protected by “the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.”—vss. 6,7

If our ministry is in harmony with the will of God, and our engaging in it is truly a doing of that which he has revealed to us, we will be faithful, come honor or dishonor, evil report or good report. We will be true to God and to the commission of his Holy Spirit, even though others may accuse us of being deceivers. Faithfulness in such an approved ministry of the Truth will mean that we are dying, sacrificially, with Christ, and have the hope of the divine nature as joint-heirs with him. Any chastening which the Lord may permit for our training will not discourage nor embitter us. Patiently enduring them, and seeking to be rightly exercised thereby, we will rejoice in the peaceable fruits of righteousness which they yield.—vss. 8,9

As the apostle further explains, while we endeavor faithfully to carry out the commission of the Holy Spirit in proclaiming the glad tidings, we may at times be sorrowful, yet we will always rejoice because of our inward realization that we are doing the will of God. We will delight in the privileges of making ourselves poor in order that others may be rich. The crown of our rejoicing in this will be in

our knowledge that while having nothing because of sacrificing all to the glory of God, yet we possess all things, being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.—II Cor. 6:10

AN ENLARGED HEART

In this comprehensive outline of our responsibilities as coworkers with God, the Apostle Paul explained that his heart was enlarged toward the brethren at Corinth, and he admonished that we likewise be “enlarged.” (vss. 11,13) Indeed, the vision of truth will enlarge the hearts of all who truly believe it and obey the divine commission which it impresses upon them. Truly consecrated believers are “large-hearted” because they have grasped and continue to appreciate the fundamental issues involved in knowing the Truth and in serving God. The sacrifice of Jesus, God’s plan for the footstep followers of Christ as well as for the world, and the hope of the restitution of all things, will loom so important in their minds and hearts that there will be no room for vain speculations and the strife of words.

In these glorious fundamentals of the Truth, the followers of Christ will see reflected the image of God and of Jesus, and they will strive to have that image developed in their own lives. They will do this because they want to be like God and like Jesus, and also because they know it is a part of what God wants them to fulfill as doers of his Word. They will reflect upon the promises of God—the Abrahamic promise, the promise of restitution spoken by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets, the promise of the High Calling, the promise of

Christ's Second Coming and the fact that he is now invisibly present. Realizing that these are the things in which God has been interested and which he has caused to be recorded in his Word, the interest of true believers will also be centered therein.

All such will not permit themselves to be drawn aside from these main issues by any carnal disposition toward strife over unrevealed details, a certain knowledge of which has not been given to the saints. They will not allow the imperfections of others to stumble them, or cause them to become critics and judges of their brethren.

Let us not deceive ourselves with the belief that finding fault with the brethren, criticizing them because they do not agree with our speculations, or boasting of our own superior knowledge of the Truth, are evidences that will assure us continuance as branches in God's olive tree. Paul says, "Boast not against the branches," and again, "Because of unbelief they were broken off," and still again, "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."—Rom. 11:18,20,21

ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF

Israel's unbelief was represented in the attitude of their leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, against whom Jesus pronounced the woe of rejection. As the professed representatives of God and the prophets, their hearts should have been enlarged by the promises of the kingdom. However, instead of that, they opposed their Messiah and endeavored to "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men." They refused to enter in themselves, and did all they could to prevent others from entering.—Matt. 23:13

We may feel that there is no danger of our being in such an attitude as this. However, even in our day of enlightenment and blessing there are some who have been overanxious to close the door to the kingdom of heaven. Announcing the closing of the door to the High Calling is no part of the Holy Spirit's commission to the follower of Christ. To busy oneself, therefore, in attempting a ministry to prove this point is a departure from the real work which God wants us to do. It is only if we allow our hearts to shrink and, because of this, permit selfishness to influence us, that we will desire to limit the opportunities of the Truth in the lives of others.

Additionally, Jesus pronounced woe upon the Pharisees because of their quibbling over unimportant matters. They argued among themselves whether it was more important to swear by the Temple or by the gold of the Temple, or whether it was more efficacious to swear by the altar or by the gift upon the altar. Jesus said to the Pharisees that they were fools and blind because of this unprofitable hair-splitting. In endless controversies over words and forms of expression, they had omitted, as Jesus explained, "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." He emphasized that these were the things to which they should have given attention and at the same time leave the other matters in their proper respective places.—Matt. 23:23

From this we learn how God views our attitude toward the Truth. For us to lose sight of the main issues, putting them in the background and devoting a majority of our time to theorizing over

unproven nonessentials, is a form of unbelief—an evidence that our hearts are not properly enlarged by the fundamentals of truth. This form of unbelief usually manifests itself in boasting against other branches—that is, claiming that we are more faithful to the Lord than are those who do not agree with us, or who choose not to join us in such speculative thinking.

What, indeed, is it, but a form of unbelief when the ransom, the High Calling, becoming Christlike, laying down our lives in the service of the Truth, the hope of restitution for the world, and other great fundamentals of the plan of God are relegated to a secondary place in our thoughts and affections, while we spend most of our time considering unproven details of speculation and conjecture. Such a small-hearted attitude may not constitute a denial of the Truth, but certainly it is denying the Truth its proper place in our affections and lives.

Still another reason for the rejection of the scribes and Pharisees was their giving attention to outward show, while within they were full of extortion and excess. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) Meticulous care concerning outward appearance may not necessarily reflect purity of heart. On the other hand, those who are pure in heart are the ones who truly see God. That is what the vision of truth means to them. They see in it a reflection of God’s character of love, justice, wisdom, and power. This vision of truth inspires the pure in heart to an untiring effort to be like him—to be doers of his will.

They see God's love in giving "his only begotten Son" to be man's Redeemer. (John 3:16) They gladly offer their lives in service to the brethren. They see God's love for the world revealed in his many promises of restitution through the kingdom. They observe his great interest in the hope for the world, as manifested by his causing all the holy prophets, Jesus, and his apostles to discuss it in their message. They, too, thrill over this great project which has enlisted God's interest through the centuries. Their hearts are enlarged by the depth and majesty of the Truth.

Purity of heart not only leads to an ever clearer vision of God and his plan now, but ultimately will carry the true believer to the plane of glory, honor, and immortality, there to behold the actual person of our Heavenly Father. Only those who, being blessed by a knowledge of the Truth and the will of God thereby revealed, lay down their lives and are doers of his Word, shall be blessed with this reward of the faithful.

A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE

The abounding love of God should impel us to lay down our lives faithfully in his service. This was the practical lesson the Apostle Paul drew from the revealed plan of God toward both natural and spiritual Israel. After telling of the casting off of natural Israel, the privileges of the Gentile branches, and the final salvation of the branches that were broken off, he continues, "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.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

Much is involved in proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, and of developing the “mind of Christ.” We are to remember that God has placed each member in the body as it has pleased him. Wherever he has placed us, let us be faithful in those opportunities for laying down our lives in sacrifice. If our study of God’s Word is for the purpose of knowing his will, and being doers of it, our vision of truth will increase in brightness and we will ever have a song of praise on our lips and in our hearts, because of the lovingkindness of our God.—Ps. 63:3 ■