

The Gospel of Peace

*“Stand therefore,
having ... your feet
shod with the
preparation of the
gospel of peace.”*
—*Ephesians 6:14,15*

The sandals of peace are a part of the armor to be worn by each “soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:3) The other parts of that armor, as enumerated by the apostle, are the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the girdle or belt of Truth, and the sword of the spirit. (Eph. 6:14-17) Each of these pieces of the Christian’s armor represents, in its own way, the Truth of the Gospel in its relation to the life of the follower of Christ. The sandals of peace indicate not only that the Gospel is one of peace, but also that our walk with the Lord should be in the paths of peace.

From one standpoint, the Christian life assumes the demeanor of a soldier, yet at the same time the apostle would not have us get the thought that Christian soldiers are to manifest a contentious disposition. The soldiers of the cross are in reality peacemakers, and their success in the struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil depend

much upon having the peace of God in their hearts to assist them over all the rough places. If they do not possess the peace of God, that which comes through faith in the Gospel of peace, they are bound to accomplish less, and with greater difficulty.

Not only should the soldiers of Jesus Christ possess the peace of God which passes all human understanding, but they should seek to follow peace with all people—that is, as far as it may be possible without compromising the principles of righteousness. (Phil. 4:7; Heb. 12:14) In Romans 12:18, the apostle says, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” If we are wholly loyal to the Gospel of peace and are faithful in discharging the responsibilities that it imposes upon us, there will be occasions when we cannot be agreeable with all men. However, even where it is necessary, in order to be loyal to the Truth, that we take a stand of opposition against the desires of those who walk according to the spirit of this world, we should continue to have our feet shod with the Gospel of peace. In our walk in life we are not to go hunting for trouble; if we do, we are almost certain to find little else.

The fact that the apostle designates a portion of armor for the feet indicates that Christians are those who must expect to be on their feet. That is, they are to be alert, moving about among their fellow men, seeking and using opportunities which the Holy Spirit has entrusted to them as “ambassadors for Christ.” (II Cor. 5:20) In II Corinthians 6:3-10, the apostle outlines many of the qualifications of those who are workers together with God and indicates that it is necessary to comply with

these qualifications in order that “the ministry be not blamed.”

Among these qualifications are specified the graces of “patience” and “kindness,” and of “love unfeigned.” Undoubtedly it is the possession and manifestation of these and kindred qualities of heart and character that is implied in the matter of having our “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” What blessed qualities these are, and what a different world it will be when they are possessed and manifested by all.

That will be the blessed condition that will exist world-wide when the righteous influences of the Messianic kingdom have wrought their miraculous work in the lives of all mankind. As Christians, however, we are to walk even now as though we were in that daytime of divine favor, when the law of God shall have been written in the hearts of all people. Our lives, therefore, should even at the present time radiate benevolence, peace, and goodwill. If the Gospel of peace truly shines in our hearts and is having the proper effect upon our lives, we will, in fact, be among that class mentioned by the Master when he said, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”—Matt. 5:9

Peacemakers

“Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again.” (Luke 10:5,6) Each Christian should note well the Lord’s instructions in this passage. Wherever the Lord’s representatives go, peace should

go, not strife, confusion, turmoil, or quarreling. The Gospel message will prove to be a sword that arouses opposition at times, yet it should be the Gospel that causes the opposition and division, and not any rudeness or unkindness, of word or action, on the part of the Lord's representatives. There are plenty of things to aggravate mankind in this, our chaotic day, but all who have received the Word of Truth should receive also its spirit, speaking peace through Jesus Christ.

The peace of God which passeth all understanding should have control of each one who would represent the Lord and his message. A hallowing influence should go with each, especially in every service and word spoken in the name of the "Prince of Peace." (Isa. 9:6) The true character of God's people is described by Jesus; they who would be properly termed the children of God should be "peacemakers" and not "peace disturbers."

According to the customs of our day, it might be considered extreme if we were to apply the Lord's words literally and say, "Peace be to this house," before entering. It would also be considered extreme if, not being welcomed, we were to literally stamp the dust from our shoes in departing from the house. However, the spirit of both these matters should be with us. On entering any house, and for whatever reason, our thought should be to do good, to carry a blessing, and to exercise a favorable influence for peace, joy, and blessing to those within. If we, as the Lord's representatives, are rebuffed and disdained, not wanted, we should be careful not to intrude ourselves further. In that figurative sense of the word, we should wipe off the dust from our feet.

“If the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it.” (Luke 10:6) If at any time or place we find those having the same spirit of the Lord, desirous of knowing and doing the Heavenly Father’s will, we should rejoice to meet them, and to communicate the Gospel message as they might have ears to hear it, and thus a blessing would be theirs; otherwise, we should not remain. The Lord would not have us violate the proprieties of courtesy by imposing ourselves or our teachings upon those who are unappreciative. Jesus set a good example in this matter.

The Lord would have us know that when presenting his message, under his direction, we fully represent him, so that those that hear us, hear him. What a wonderful honor is thus conferred upon the most humble of the Lord’s mouthpieces! “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.” (Luke 10:16) If, as the Lord’s people, we could always have this thought with us, it would certainly be a blessing to us in two ways.

First, it would help us to feel the dignity of the smallest service rendered to the Lord’s cause. It would banish fear of man and all feelings of weakness and degradation. Recognizing ourselves as the Lord’s representatives, we would be courageous to go anywhere, to do any service called for in his commission and providential leading.

Second, this thought would bring to us such a sense of our responsibility that all the affairs of this present life would seem trivial and insignificant in comparison to our heavenly mission and commission. We would be more dignified in manner,

more earnest in our service, as well as less careful of what man might say of us. Our whole concern would be that we might please him who has chosen us to be ambassadors and heralds of his kingdom and of its terms and conditions.

“We Preach Not Ourselves”

In II Corinthians 4:1-5, the Apostle Paul gives us much valuable information concerning the ministry of the Gospel to which all the consecrated are invited. Here he makes it plain that our participation in this ministry is because God has shined into our hearts with the “glorious gospel of Christ,” the Gospel of peace. It is because of this that the apostle reminds us that “we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.” This is of fundamental importance if we are to be acceptable ministers of Christ. If we use the Gospel message merely as a means of getting a hearing, and then proceed to proclaim our own views in order to display what great students of the Bible we think we are, we certainly cannot expect to have the Lord’s blessing upon our ministry.

If this Gospel of peace has truly shined into our hearts, and not merely into our heads, the results thereof will be apparent by the manner in which we conduct ourselves in its ministry. As alluded to previously, the Gospel of peace should make us peacemakers, not strife-breeders. We might suppose, without consideration, that receiving the Word of Truth could have no other than this wholesome effect upon our lives. However, it has been too often demonstrated that it is quite possible merely to attain an intellectual grasp of the Gospel,

and without its taking proper effect upon our hearts and lives, to use it as a heavy stick towards others rather than to seek to bless them by humbly and peaceably imparting to them this blessed knowledge.

Wisdom from Above

In following the apostle's advice to live peaceably with all men, we should remember the limitations which are put upon this admonition, namely, "so far as is possible." The Apostle James tells us that the wisdom which is from above is peaceable, and indeed it is. However, he reminds us that the heavenly wisdom which is to guide us in our ministry of the Gospel is "first pure."—James 3:17

The heavenly wisdom is "peaceable" also, James says. So far from having a quarrelsome, bickering disposition, the new mind desires peace. It will contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints, but it will not contend simply from a love of contention or strife. On the contrary, the new mind is peaceably inclined and would prefer, as far as possible, to yield a non-essential point in a discussion. It loves and sympathizes with all others and their difficulties.

The wisdom from above is "gentle." It is not rude nor coarse, is not rough in action, word, or tone. If the earthen vessel through which it speaks has these fallen tendencies by nature ingrained, the new nature regrets them, strives against them, and seeks to conquer them. Where injury to others has occurred, the new mind is ready, willing, and glad to apologize and remove any hurt which may have been caused.

True wisdom is “easy to be entreated.” It is easy of approach, not haughty, disdainful, hard, or cruel. Yet it is firm on matters of divine principle that cannot be bent or modified; they belong to God. While affirming the principles, however, the spirit of wisdom points out its own willingness to acknowledge any good features in its opponents, and by pointing out the reason no modification is possible in relation to divine laws and principles.

It is “full of mercy and good fruits.” Wisdom delights in all things prompted by love and kindness. It takes pleasure in doing for others. It delights in mercy in dealing with brethren in respect to their difficulties. It is merciful also in the family—not over-exacting, but generous, kind, and benevolent. It is generous also with opponents and those who are contentious, not wishing to push a victory, even for the Truth, to such a point as would be injurious, hurtful, or unmerciful to others.

Heavenly wisdom is “without partiality.” It loves the good, the true, and opposes the untrue, the impure, and the unholy. Its justice is firm, but tempered with mercy. It will not approve a fault, but will extend love to the sinner. When necessary, it will reprove with gentleness and meekness, remembering that all are subject to the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It will not fail to see virtue in all others, nor hesitate to acknowledge it. Truth is its standard, not prejudice, a party spirit, or sectarianism.

Finally, James writes, the wisdom from above is “without hypocrisy.” It is genuine and does not need to feign love, because it is founded upon love. It does not put on a kindly exterior just to hide feelings of

anger or malice, for it is without these fallen character traits. Such works of the flesh have been seen to be “earthly, sensual, devilish.” (James 3:15) By the grace of God, these have been repudiated, and the heart has been justified, cleansed, and sanctified to God. It has been renewed in thought, intention, and will, and is now guided by the righteous influence of the Holy Spirit.

The Power of the Tongue

What life-giving powers our tongues are able to impart to others if they are moved by a heart filled and controlled by the Gospel of peace. Indeed, when this Gospel of peace which has shined into our own hearts sheds its light to others through the medium of the tongue, it becomes what the apostle describes as the “power of God unto salvation.” (Rom. 1:16) On the other hand, if our hearts have failed to yield to these sweet influences of the Gospel of peace, and our ministry of God’s Word is not prompted and controlled by the spirit of love, our words will likely have a damaging effect upon those to whom we minister.

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” (Prov. 18:21) With such a sobering thought before our minds, let us all more earnestly than ever guard against the old nature and its insidious attempts to gain control over our tongues. Rather, let us seek more fully to appreciate in ourselves and in others the heavenly wisdom, whose operation is so forcibly represented by the Apostle James.

The more important the various members that make up our bodies are, the more earnestly we ought to strive to keep them in full subjection to the Lord,

as his servants. Our feet are useful members, consecrated to the Lord; we may use them in many errands of mercy and kindness, to the glory of God and to the profit of his people. Our hands are likewise useful, if thoroughly consecrated to the Lord's service. Our ears are also valuable in his service, to listen for him and to refuse to hear the evil, thus setting a good example for others. Our eyes are a great blessing from the Lord, and they also are to be kept from evil, from the fleshly desires of the eyes and the pride of life. (I John 2:16) Our eyes are to be instruments of righteousness, in seeing the good, appreciating the good, assisting the good, and helping us to know the will of our God.

Of all our members, however, the most influential is the tongue. Its influence exceeds that of all our other members. To control it, therefore, is a most important work for Christians with respect to their mortal bodies and the service of these rendered to the Lord. A few words of love, kindness, helpfulness—how often have such changed the entire course of a human life! “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” (Prov. 25:11) How often, also, have evil words, unkind words, slanderous words, done gross injustice, and assassinated reputations. As the apostle declares, “the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature”—awakening passions, strifes, enmities, and thirst for battle.—James 3:6

The elected servants of the church are to some extent especially its “tongues.” They wield influence for good or for injury. Consequently, all such servants

of the Lord's body must of necessity be of his spirit. Their influence extends not only to those who are in the church. Those servants are also in considerable measure mouthpieces heard outside the church.

The same principle applies to all members of the church in the use of their tongues. It may be used wisely or unwisely, with heavenly wisdom or with earthly wisdom. It may be used for strife, in tearing down the faith and character of others, in overthrowing love and conviction, or it may be used in "edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Eph. 4:29) How often has been proven the truth of the Apostle's words, that the tongue has great possibilities, either for good or for evil. "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."—James 3:10

How difficult it is to conquer the tongue to the extent of bringing it unto subjection to the will of God, that it may minister only good to all its hearers. Let us be fully resolved that by divine grace, which has been promised to assist us, we will witness great progress in our control of this most important member of our bodies. May we thus bring it into full subjection, obedience, and service to the King of kings and Lord of lords, who has called us "out of darkness into his marvellous light."—I Pet. 2:9

Being About Our Father's Business

How wholesome and important are the foregoing admonitions. What a close relationship they bear to the manner in which we minister to others the Gospel of peace which has shined into our hearts.

If our hearts are filled with bitterness and animosity toward others, this bitterness may be manifested in direct attacks upon our supposed enemies, or it may influence our ministry of the Truth so that it ceases to be one of kindness, mercy, and refreshing to those who hear. If that is the case, we would have good reason to believe that we had either taken off the sandals of peace, or else had never properly had our feet shod with them.

As co-workers with our Heavenly Father in the ministry of the glorious Gospel, we will want to be diligent concerning our Father's business. (I Cor. 3:9) We will want to maintain the same spirit of devotion and enthusiasm as was always manifested in the Master himself. Even at the early age of twelve, he spoke these meaningful words: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) Indeed, we will want to be about the things which the Father has given us to do. Having entered into partnership with God, our whole concern should be that of enthusiastically participating in the business of this wondrous relationship as his children.

Let us remember that the terms of this partnership not only call for zeal in the work to be accomplished, but they also outline and determine for us the manner in which that work is to be done. The manner in which our service is accomplished and the zeal with which we undertake it are both important, if we are to have the Father's approval. Let us ever keep before our minds the great privilege that we have as the ministers of God's Word, and furthermore, that the message we impart is the Gospel of peace to be given forth in a peaceful, kindly manner. ■