

What Manner of Persons Ought Ye to Be?

***“Seeing then that
all these things
shall be dissolved,
what manner of
persons ought ye to
be in all holy
conversation and
godliness?”***

—II Peter 3:11

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, THE

Apostle Peter was emphasizing the worthlessness of all earthly hopes, ambitions, and desires which had their foundations and their associations in the things of this old decaying world, and are to be dissolved. The followers of

Christ look forward to having a part in the promised “new heavens and a new earth.” (II Pet. 3:13) These are the things that they should be looking forward to, and thus giving all diligence to the making of their calling and election sure.

The apostle asks, ‘What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?’ If this question was a serious consideration in his day, how much more is it true now when we stand

at the very threshold of the new dispensation, and are in the very midst of the disintegrating influences all around us that are bringing an end to an old and decaying world.

Satan's world will be fully ended soon, and the human family will come to understand the blessings that are to be established under the administration of Christ's kingdom. Within a comparatively short space of time, we believe the true church will finish her earthly course. It is important, therefore, that we properly redeem the time, zealously carrying out in our hearts and lives the Divine will for us in the evil and violent days of this closing Gospel Age.

THE DAY OF PREPARATION

The hope that we have for the future kingdom of truth and righteousness is not merely an illusion of the mind, which the worldly-wise would call wishful thinking. We know that we are now living in the 'day of his preparation,' when the old order is actually passing away. The more we look into and study the prophecies of the Word of God pertaining to this time, the more vividly do we realize the importance of the days in which we are now living. Truly, we stand all astonished with wonder when we realize that it is the joyous and blessed privilege of the followers of Christ to see the mighty events of prophecy, long awaited by the faithful throughout the centuries and that are now actually transpiring.

Time prophecies of the Bible show clearly that we are now very close to the new day of Christ's kingdom, when the world will find rest and peace, and the blessedness of health and life which is

promised. It is being abundantly realized by those whose lamps are properly 'trimmed and burning.' It is as Peter said in the context of this lesson. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."—II Pet. 3:10

TIME PROPHECIES BEING FULFILLED

We see being fulfilled the foretold increase of knowledge and running to and fro. (Dan. 12:4) This is resulting in a great time of trouble which Jesus prophesied would mark the time of his Second Presence. "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."—Luke 21:25-28

The foretold shaking of the powers of the symbolic heavens, and the mourning of the tribes of the earth because of Christ's presence are events that will mark the end of the harvest of the present Gospel Age. These were to be seen in the successive spasms of travail, the clouds of trouble, and the melting of the elements of the earth and heavens that are now taking place before our very eyes.

To those who have been blessed with present Truth has been the fulfillment of Jesus' own words that when he returned he would gird himself, and serve his people with meat in due season. (Luke 12:36,37) We are now rejoicing in the fulfillment of this promise. The truths of the Divine plan in all their glorious brilliancy are bringing to our attention not only the meaning of the times in which we are living, but also the glorious hope of restoration for the human family, and the privilege which we now have of suffering with Christ that we may reign with him.—Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11,12

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

In seeking an answer to Peter's question, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" we are reminded of the Apostle Paul's words concerning the practical application of dispensational Truth. "Comfort [exhort, *Marginal Translation*] one another with these words." (I Thess. 4:18) To those who understand the real meaning of the symbolic expressions that are found in God's Word, and the glorious truths which they set forth for the enlightenment and encouragement of the saints at this time are indeed comforting. All of the truths that have been set forth pertaining to the end of this Gospel Age are of importance to the people of God now, because we are living in the Day of the Lord, in the day when the prophecies pertaining to the time of Christ's presence are being fulfilled. The foretold events are unfolding before us day by day.

Our life of holy conversation and godliness should, therefore, be one filled with thoughts,

words, and activities in keeping with the glorious fact of Christ's presence and the end of the age. We are to 'comfort one another' with these thoughts. We are not merely to learn about them and then keep them to ourselves. We are not to be ashamed of our knowledge of Christ's presence, nor think it unimportant.

The glorious truths pertaining to Christ's return and the establishment of his long-promised kingdom constituted the inspiration of the Early Church. Still more should it be the basis of our rejoicing now when we see so many evidences all around us that the elements of this world are in the process of melting with fervent heat and that soon the new heavens and the new earth will be established.

LOVE THE FINAL TEST

Examining ourselves with the thought that no promise of the Lord, nor any requirement of his, should be overlooked in view of the importance of the times in which we are living, we are reminded of the apostle's lesson on the importance of love. Paul reminds us, "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [love], I am nothing." (I Cor. 13:2) Even though we might have sufficient faith to accept these wonderful and fundamental truths, we are told that love will be the ultimate test of that faith. If these truths do not inspire within us that burning love for God and his people which will cause us to devote our all to the Divine service and the laying down of our lives

for the brethren, the apostle says that it would count as nothing.

PASSED FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE

The Apostle John also speaks of the vital test of love. He explains, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”—I John 3:14-16

In the light of the Apostle John’s inspired testimony, we understand that love is not to be viewed in its mere outward sense. We should not believe that the true love of God of which John is speaking is simply that which has no animosity toward others, and would not willingly and knowingly do them injury. The love which he points to should be the true motive of all of our ‘holy conversation and godliness’ in our consecrated lives. It should be the Christlike principle that will motivate us to lay down our lives for others. The practice of justice, therefore, may keep us from injuring our brethren and our fellow men, but love will prompt us to serve them.

Our love for the brethren should be manifest toward all, as the Apostle Paul says, “The foundation of God standeth sure [steady, *Marginal Translation*], having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (II Tim. 2:19)

Our knowledge of the brethren may be limited. "By their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. 7:20) Therefore, our service for the brethren should not be limited to those few with whom we may be immediately associated, but we should reach out in an effort to acquaint all who may have a hearing ear with the glorious truths that have been such a comfort and encouragement to us. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."—John 13:35

LABOR OF LOVE

The Lord could have made it easy for us to serve the brethren had he so desired. He could have let us know exactly who the individual brethren are in our particular area, and arrange matters so that all we would need to do is to call upon them with the Truth. They would in turn accept the wonderful truths of God's Word, and we would rejoice in the privilege of thus being used of the Lord to communicate his message to his people.

The Lord in his wisdom, however, and as a test of the genuineness of our love, has arranged that it should be done in a different manner. God's way has called for self-sacrifice, labor, reproach, and persecution. That is why the apostle refers to our ministry on behalf of his people as a labor of love. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."—Heb. 6:10

We must be willing and rejoice in the privilege of laboring in the Lord's service on behalf of his brethren. We could question how much true love

for God has filled our hearts if our response to this labor be lacking. We may spend a great amount of time in ministering the Truth to others, yet seldom if ever are we rewarded with a certain knowledge that our efforts have borne fruit in the enrichment of other hearts and lives.

God tests our faith as well as our love. The principal result of what we do is the preparation of ourselves for future joint-heirship with the Master. If faithful, we will later have the privilege of sharing with him in the enlightenment and blessing of all mankind. How profitable will our efforts be during a few fleeting years this side of the veil, if thereby we are found faithful unto death, receive the crown of life and are privileged to share in bestowing God's blessings to the whole sin-cursed and dying race of mankind!

We should learn to view what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness from God's standpoint. The apostle said that 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.' It should not matter to us whether men hear or whether they do not, whether they appreciate our efforts or are indifferent to them since God does not forget. We may enjoy the rich blessings of faith and hope now, and will be rewarded with all the great joys of the kingdom in his glorious presence if we are faithful unto death.

REASSURING OUR TRUTHFULNESS

During the past many years of the church's experiences, we have witnessed many outstanding fulfillments of prophecy. These should reassure us of the truthfulness of present Truth. It is now necessary

more than ever to maintain a burning zeal for the service of the Truth and the brethren, and to maintain our zeal for God and his service. In the former days, the zeal of many was quickened by the momentum of being associated with a larger group movement. It is always easier to go along with a crowd than to walk alone.

The Lord has permitted conditions to arise among his people which are calculated to test their individual loyalty to him. We must be prepared to meet this test. The beauties of the Truth should still be an inspiration to us, an inspiration that will carry us on to self-sacrifice in making known its glories to others. The Truth today is the same and should be just as vital an influence in our lives as in the past. Jesus is still the Captain of our salvation, and the Truth which he has served to his people should still be the motivating factor in our hearts and lives. "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles."—Ps. 43:3

OUR FIRST LOVE

If our faith in present Truth is strong, it becomes a reality to us, and is something that will lead us in the footsteps of the Lord regardless of how few or how many may also be walking with us in the same narrow way. Paul said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." (Phil. 3:13) We may look back with profit to some of the former days if thereby we may be inspired to return to our first love and enthusiasm for the

Lord and his Truth, remembering the admonition of John the Revelator to not leave our first love.—
Rev. 2:4

The Apostle Paul speaks of an earlier time, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.” (Heb. 10:32,33) According to this text, these brethren were at one time zealously engaged in a ministry of love to the Lord’s people, but they had evidently permitted a spiritual lethargy to creep over them. In his effort to revive their first love, Paul admonished them to ‘call to remembrance the former days.’ Their zeal in their former days had led to a ‘great fight of affliction,’ and they had been ‘made a gazingstock both by reproaches and affliction.’ Yet they had taken the experiences joyfully.

Here is a vitally important lesson for any who may have permitted their first love and zeal for the Truth to slacken. God does not want his people to outgrow that wholehearted and irrepressible enthusiasm with which they responded to his love, and when he first shone into their hearts the wonderful Gospel message. What God does want is to see that zeal continue until it consumes our lives even unto death in his service. Let us all then, with profit, call to remembrance our former days, not merely as a pleasant memory, but with the view of having our zeal rekindled thereby, and that we may continue our labor of love faithfully unto the end of our earthly sojourn.

WHEN INIQUITY ABOUNDS

In Jesus' great prophecy, he sets forth signs that would indicate his Second Presence and the end of the Gospel Age. "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." (Matt. 24:12) Here is another reminder that we should be especially on guard lest the conditions to which the Master refers should cause a cooling off of our love and zeal. Surely, if we are giving proper consideration to what manner of persons we ought to be, we will not only be avoiding iniquity in our own lives, but will not permit the iniquitous influences with which we are surrounded to turn us away from our consecrated walk and course of sacrifice.

The iniquity to which the Master referred may apply to anything that may be out of harmony with the Lord and his Truth. Iniquitous practices of false leaders in the church have contributed to the dampening of zeal on the part of many, and this should not be so. Our relationship to God through his Truth should be so independent of others that even if they should turn aside from the narrow way it would not influence us. Our belief in the Truth should not rest upon our confidence in men.

Many are the tests today—the fiery darts of the Adversary—which tend to dampen the zeal of the Lord's people if their eyes are not steadfastly fixed upon him, and their hearts not filled with his love. Ingenious are the arguments presented from various sources as to why the Lord's consecrated people should now hide their light under a bushel. Personal grievances that one brother may have toward someone may be permitted to influence his

reasoning, and where iniquity may enter into a brother's own heart his love may wax cold.

Let us seek to rise above petty personal things that have no real bearing on the Truth and our relationship to it. It should not matter if someone may say that which does not please us. If something is said purposely to injure us, is not the Lord able to overrule and cause all things to work together for our good? (Rom. 8:28) Let us not permit iniquity to enter our hearts and take us away from the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren.

Giving closer consideration to what manner of persons we ought to be, let us therefore remember that first and foremost we should try to be like Christ. If we are truly endeavoring to follow his example, we should remember that he was tested in all points like we are. (Heb. 4:15) He was reviled, persecuted, finally put to death, and yet, in his dying moments, he continued to be a faithful ambassador of the Truth. Let us remember that the servant cannot expect to be above his Master, and if we are true servants we will daily strive to be more like him.

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Holy conversation and godliness, if genuine, is not something that we can wear merely as a veneer. True godlikeness springs from within and is based upon our habits of thinking. Peter's question, 'What manner of persons ought ye to be' will be answered according to the manner in which our thoughts are controlled by Christlikeness. True Christian thinking is outlined by Paul where we read, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever

things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”—Phil. 4:8

There are many good and praiseworthy things with which we are surrounded, and upon which our minds could profitably dwell. But we believe that, as Christians seeking to have our minds filled with the things from above and that truly pertain to life and godliness, we will do well to give special attention and thought first to our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son. Our thoughts should then be on the Truth in all its glory, and the brethren. Our hearts and minds will thus be elevated with things pertaining to God, his plan and his people. These pure, noble, praiseworthy, and virtuous thoughts will be constantly overflowing for the blessing of others. By holy conversation and godliness, we will be used of the Lord to comfort the brethren, and to be able ambassadors of the new kingdom. ■

“O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.

“Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

“And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

—Psalm 139:1,3,17,23,24