

Elusive Peace

***“Saying, Peace,
peace; when there
is no peace.”***

—Jeremiah 6:14

ONE OF THE STRONGEST desires of mankind is to live in peace. The world has grown from the time of Adam to the present where there are many nations and over 6 billion people. In this group of over 6 billion people are many ethnic groups and religions

which have caused differences in customs, beliefs, aims, and ambitions to arise and conflict with each other. Misunderstandings, coupled with ambition, have caused wars to erupt all over the earth, large and small. Terrorism has arisen to rob mankind of peace in normal living, causing him to fear while encountering the simplest experiences of life. Little wonder that man is despairing of life itself.

PRAYERS FOR PEACE

Early this year the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the assembling of the world's religious leaders joining the Pope in a peace prayer. Billed as a response to terror, the article title was “*World Religious Leaders Join Pope in a Peace Prayer.*” The sub headline was, “Italy: About 200 clerics gather to denounce violence and pledge tolerance. The event was organized as a response to the September 11 attacks.” The article reported:

“Leaders of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and the world's other major faiths joined Pope John Paul II here Thursday to pray for peace and condemn ‘every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or religion.’

“The solemn, daylong retreat—called by the pope to answer last year's terrorist attack on the United States and its aftermath—brought together about 200 leaders of 12 religions for what is believed to have been the most broadly representative encounter of its kind.

“Huddled in a tented arena on a cold, drizzly day, the polyglot assembly of imams, patriarchs, monks, cardinals and rabbis lighted candles and found common ground against what the Roman Catholic

pontiff called ‘the dark clouds of terrorism, hatred and armed conflict that ... have grown particularly ominous on humanity’s horizon.’

“Their 10-point communal pledge for peace avoided mention of the Sept. 11 attacks or the U.S. counterstrikes against Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda terrorist network and Afghanistan’s Taliban regime.

“Instead, the clerics called for attacking the root causes of terrorism, siding with the poor and the helpless and urging leaders to create ‘a world of solidarity and peace based on justice.’

“The Vatican-drafted appeal, read one point at a time by a succession of clerics speaking different languages, committed the world’s religions to preach mutual tolerance and address their differences through ‘frank and patient’ dialogue. They pledged to forgive one another for ‘errors and prejudices’ that have fueled violence and terrorism, which they called ‘incompatible with the authentic spirit of religion.’

“‘Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again!’ John Paul declared in a strong voice, reading the final section to the spirited applause of more than 2,000 spectators.

“The 81-year-old pope met fellow clerics at the Vatican and rode with them on the 110-mile trip to this hill town aboard a special seven-car train provided by the Italian government. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi met the train at Assisi and attended the gathering.”

OTHER GATHERINGS

There were other similar occasions to this one that the Pope has convened. The article told of some of his previous efforts, saying:

“The Day of Prayer for World Peace took place outside the Basilica of St. Francis, the burial site of the thirteenth century Catholic pacifist. The event was bigger than two previous worldwide religious gatherings convened here by John Paul, who drew plaudits Thursday for pursuing interfaith understanding more actively than any papal predecessor.

“In 1986, John Paul convened a groundbreaking interfaith gathering here to protest the nuclear arms race and returned in 1993 to lead a similar appeal against ethnic bloodshed in the Balkans. Catholic conservatives accused him of ‘syncretism’—the blending of different religions, as if all were of equal value—but their criticism has faded.

“As at those gatherings, the pope took pains Thursday to stress that the religions were joining behind a goal but praying separately, respecting their differences. Separate prayer services took place at midday, after a round of speeches and before the peace pledge. Christians prayed together in the lower basilica, while non-Christian groups gathered in separate rooms of a convent from which crosses had been removed.

CARDINAL RATZINGER’S COMMENTS

“‘It’s a simple fact that other religions exist, and we have to take note of that,’ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the Vatican’s chief theologian and a critic of the 1986 gathering, said on the train. He welcomed Thursday’s meeting as ‘a strong signal for peace’ but added, ‘I don’t think we can expect a politically concrete result.’”

It is not surprising that Cardinal Ratzinger would say this. He was the one who recently tried to derail the Pope’s efforts at ecumenism by saying that Roman Catholics could never be a sister religion to any other church since she was the mother church and all other churches eventually have to become Roman Catholics.

HOLY WAR

In the vein of the Pope’s attempts at bridge building between different religions the article said:

“John Paul called Thursday’s gathering out of fear that the September 11 attacks would doom his bridge-building between Christians and Muslims. Aides say he is tormented by the attacks and distressed by calls from Bin Laden, the accused mastermind, for an Islamic holy war against the West.”

The article reported on an interview of a Muslim on this matter:

“Asked by reporters whether Bin Laden is a good Muslim, Mahmoud Hammad Ibrahim Sheweitah of Italy’s Islamic delegation said, ‘We don’t know. We know about him only from television.’

“Just one speaker, Singer, acknowledged that members of his faith have used religious teachings as a guide for battling enemies. Perhaps because no one else was so forthcoming, the American Jewish leader skipped that part of his prepared speech but said the audience could read it in the text that had been distributed.

“He finished with an impassioned plea for the Middle East: ‘Peace shouldn’t be left to generals; it’s too important. ... You should tell your people, and we should tell ours—all of us—to question whether land or places are more important than people’s lives. And until we learn to do that, there will be no peace.’”

SUICIDE BOMBERS

The Middle East meanwhile has reverberated with warfare as terrorists have continued attacks with suicide bombers and Israel has used military force trying to stop it. Right after the gathering of the clerics to pray for peace, the Middle East had the first female bomber. As the newspaper “*USA Today*” reported on the incident:

“Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a woman—perhaps slight of build, perhaps a young mother—piloting American Airlines Flight 11 into the World Trade Center. Imagine her praising Allah as she hurtles into the building while savoring her achievement of personal glory. Imagine her committing mass murder without regret.

“Hard to picture, isn’t it? But it can happen, and we need to think about the possibility, because the use of a least likely suspect is the most likely tactic for a terrorist group under scrutiny. Israel discovered that Sunday, when a Palestinian woman easily eluded security checks and detonated a bomb on a busy Jerusalem street.

“Contrary to initial media reports, this was not the first time a Palestinian woman has proved capable of terrorist violence. Far from it.

“Last summer, on Aug. 3, a young Palestinian woman was arrested by the Israeli police as she was preparing to detonate a bomb at a Tel Aviv bus station.

“Another woman, Dalal Maghrebi, was more successful in her mission. She was involved in one of the worst terrorist incidents in Israel’s history, in which more than 30 passengers were massacred in a bus hijacking in 1978.

“Still another, Leila Khaled, tried to hijack an El Al flight to London in 1970, but was foiled. Her attempt was one of several hijackings that day by her organization, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.”

THE SEARCH FOR PEACE AND EQUITY

In April of this year, the *Daily Telegraph of London* summarized the situation well in their article entitled “*In Search of a Fair Agreement*,” saying:

“The faces of the dead are everywhere: pictures of Palestinian martyrs peeling off the walls of Palestinian cities, portraits of dead soldiers on Israeli television, newspaper photographs of ordinary Israelis wiped out in suicide attacks, and valedictory video messages of the bombers themselves.

“The Holy Land has long been a place of violence, but rarely has blood been spilt so casually.

“‘Too long a sacrifice,’ wrote W. B. Yeats, ‘makes a stone of the heart.’ Liberal Israelis have turned into advocates of total war against the Palestinians; moderate Palestinians cheer the suicide bombers. Israelis see this as their own war on terrorism. Palestinians regard it as their belated war of independence. It is also a war between Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat in which each wants to destroy the other—politically if not physically.”

There seems to be no end to the bombings. The lives of the people of Israel have been severely shattered. It reminds us of the punishments of the Lord against Israel because of their failure to follow the precepts of the Law. Just prior to the 70 year captivity of Judah and Benjamin by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Jeremiah said to them, “O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction.” (Jer. 6:1) The words spoken at that time to Judah by the prophet that they would say ‘Peace, peace; when there is no peace’ would seem to apply to them today. We know that the punishment of the 70 years is past, and their longer period of dispersion is past, and that favor has truly been restored to Israel in spite of the warfare and aggravation she has suffered by the suicide bombings. The Lord will resolve the matter eventually. How, remains to be seen.

THE CHRISTIAN ANTITYPE

We know that Jeremiah’s prophecy has a secondary important fulfillment. Natural Israel in the days of Jeremiah pictured the present

Christian nations. The corruption that occurred in Israel then is what is occurring in Western civilization and the Christian nations today. “From the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”—Jer. 6:13,14

The prophecies pronounced against Judah then are applicable now to Christianity. “Now, because ye have done all these works [steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely—vs. 9], saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name [Christian], wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee.”—Jer. 7:13-16

THE PRAYER THAT GOD WILL HEAR

As noble as the gathering of the clerics was to pray to God for peace, the words spoken to Israel by Jeremiah apply to them. So also do these words apply to all Christian nations (and all other religions) of today. God will not hear their prayers. There is a prayer that the Lord hears. One that is uttered by many sincere Christians worldwide. Some utter it not knowing its meaning but do so faithfully because Jesus told them that they should pray in this manner. Some do so knowing what it entails. Whether uttered consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously, it is a prayer that God will answer. That prayer is, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) Only through the fulfillment of that prayer will peace come.

Jesus and the church are to be the rulers of that kingdom and Jesus has clearly been given the title “The Prince of Peace.” (Isa. 9:6) As Isaiah continued to say of him, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:7

Isaiah declares later concerning the approaching time when the world would know God saying, “Therefore shall my people know my name in that day, for I am he that speaks: I am present, as a season of beauty upon the mountains, as the feet of one preaching glad tidings of peace, as one preaching good news: for I will publish thy salvation, saying, O Sion, thy God shall reign.” (Isa. 52:6,7, *Septuagint Translation*). This is a most interesting and inspiring scripture translated into Greek. It tells of the presence of the one who will be ‘The Prince of Peace,’ and recognized and known only to those watching and waiting for him. It assures them that true peace is coming. It assures them of their salvation. It assures them that the good news announced when the babe Jesus was born, which will be to all nations, is about to be manifested to all the world. It is our privilege to tell others of these glad tidings and prepare them for the time coming soon when “The Lord shall reveal his holy arm [the glorified Jesus] in the sight of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation that comes from our God.”—Isa. 52:10, *Septuagint Translation*

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Listen Carefully

Key Verse: “Amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you.”

—Jeremiah 26:13

***Selected Scripture:
Jeremiah 25-26;
II Chronicles 36***

OUR LESSON BEGINS IN the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, and the first year of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon, around 605 BC. For twenty-three years, Jeremiah, and others of God’s prophets, had been proclaiming the message of reform. The Kingdom of Judah, under Jehoiakim, had not responded to God’s messages of making a change in their life. Now, under the prophet Jeremiah, God’s punishments were pronounced. Not only Judah and Jerusalem were to receive of God’s wrath, but all other nations around them as well.—Jer. 25:15-26

What was it the people were doing that would merit the wrath of God? We are told they were serving and worshipping other gods. Marriage among the other nations was also forbidden. (Deut. 7:3) It was written in the Law, “Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.”—Deut. 6:14,15

Throughout history, God’s mercy had been extended to both Judah and Jerusalem. The nation of Israel was the only nation in covenant relationship with him. (Amos 3:2) Over and over, God, through his prophets, had said that if the people would amend their ways, and act positively, listening and obeying, they would be allowed to stay in their land and receive his blessings. (Jer. 25:5) This did not happen and God finally proclaimed that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, God’s servant— God’s instrument of judgment—would come and destroy their nation and take them into captivity.—Jer. 25:9

There is a good lesson in the worshipping of false gods. These gods (idols) can be love of money, earthly pleasures, office, anything that takes the place of God. We are told, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (I John 5:21) Again, “I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.”—Isa. 42:8

The last king of Judah, Zedekiah, was taken captive by the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. (II Chron. 36) Thus began the domination of Gentile nations.

Listening, and following God’s commands, is a great lesson for all who have come into covenant relationship with him. Listening, and following, will always bring blessings, while disobeying will bring sorrow. It has been suggested that the act by which we pay the greatest respect to anyone is listening to him or her. How much more should we listen to our Heavenly Father.

How does God speak to us? One way is through past experiences. “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” (Isa. 30:21) Another way is through the examples of God’s people in scripture.—James 5:10

“Hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: ... For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.” (Job 34:10,11) Listening to God will bring peace and happiness.

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Justice Demanded

***Key Verse: “I spake
unto thee in thy
prosperity; but thou
saidst, I will not hear.***

***This hath been thy
manner from thy
youth, that thou
obeyedst not my
voice.”***

—Jeremiah 22:21

***Selected Scripture:
Jeremiah 22***

THIS LESSON REVOLVES around justice. God specifically held the king and his servants responsible for how they governed. Of special concern to God was the administration of justice, and that, fairly to all people. We read, “Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.”—Ps. 89:14

Since the time of the first king of Israel, Saul, the majority of the kings had taken advantage of the people under them, and had not applied God’s rules of fairness and equity. Jehoiakim’s reign was with injustice and violence, and God was going to deliver the nation and king into

the hands of the Babylonians, in punishment.

God’s message to the king and to his servants reads, “Thus saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.”—Jer. 22:3

None of the people were able to defend themselves and they specially needed protection from their governmental leaders. Accountability always starts with those in command—in Israel’s case, it was the king. This was not new because the first duty of the king was to keep the covenant. (Deut. 17:18-20) Taking care of the defenseless was a stipulation of the covenant.

We find that if the king would behave in a manner God spelled out in the covenant, the monarchy would continue in its grandeur; if not, this “house” would “become a desolation.”—Jer. 22:5

The people of Israel were being heavily taxed; they were forced to build the king a luxurious house. Widows' homes were taken and the people mistreated. Money has always been sought by those in power. We read, "The love of money is the root of all evil."—I Tim. 6:10

Jeremiah chapter twenty-two, verses thirteen through nineteen, describe in graphic language the greediness and injustice of King Jehoiakim. Jeremiah contrasted Jehoiakim's house built on injustice with King Josiah who had protected and cared for the poor and needy, and had dealt justly with those under him. (vs. 16) Now judgment was to fall on Israel because of the unjust acts of the present reigning king.

Do we take care of those who rely on us? Do we live righteously and execute justice fairly, honestly? Or do we greedily look to ourselves to gain more wealth, taking advantage of our position? Jesus gave a lesson of a farmer who had abundance of crops. He decided to pull down his barns and build greater ones, there to bestow all his goods. God said this was foolish, because he would die and who would benefit from his greed. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."—Luke 12:16-21

Mercy and judgment are to be kept by God's people in all their ways. "Keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually." (Hos. 12:6) Again, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8) If we apply these words in our lives, we will be blessed.

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Hope to the Weary

***Key Verse: “This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
—Jeremiah 31:33***

***Selected Scripture:
Jeremiah 30, 31***

THE PREVIOUS LESSONS have been about the despair and hopelessness of the nation of Israel because of injustice and greed. They went into captivity around 606 BC, when invaded by the king of Babylon. Chapters thirty through thirty-three of Jeremiah deal with consolation. Hope is firmly set in the context of the people’s distress.

Verse three of chapter thirty begins by telling the nation they would be brought out of captivity, brought back to the land that was given to their fathers and that they would possess the land. This was in stark contrast to the trembling and fear they had experienced. Like a woman in childbirth, all faces would be pale. This time of trouble is described as “Jacob’s

trouble” but that he would be “saved out of it.”—Jer. 30:7

They were not told when the nation would be freed from their tormentors, but hope was held out that they would be saved from afar, and their seed from the land of captivity. “Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid.” (vs. 10) God would first punish them for their iniquities.—Jer. 30:11

When would Israel be saved and return and be at rest? “They shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.” (Jer. 30:9) David had come and was one of Israel’s greatest of kings. But David died without the fulfillment of the promise. Who, then, was the antitypical David, Israel’s true king? We read, “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath

to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.”—Acts 2:29,30

It would be at the Second Advent of Christ when the true hope of Israel would be realized. After Christ was born, Israel’s hopes were revived but they never accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Their nation was cast off, and their hopes dashed, from becoming a nation of kings and priests. (Exod. 19:6; Matt. 23:37,38) God turned to the Gentiles and gave them the opportunity of becoming the seed blessing all nations of earth. (Gen. 22:18) Was Israel never to live at peace, be at rest? We are told, “All Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”—Rom. 11:26,27

Soon the time will come when Christ and his church, the true seed of Abraham, will take away Israel’s sins. They have been regathered in their land, but they still do not have rest or peace. Suicide bombings have disrupted their normal living. Even if this should be controlled, Ezekiel 38 and 39 tell of a final invasion by nations of the north. It is then that God will fight for them as in days of old. This will open the eyes of Israel and all nations to the recognition of God and his power.—Ezek. 39:21,22

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Faith Overrides Despair

Key Verse: ***“O LORD,
I have heard thy
speech, and was
afraid: O LORD,
revive thy work in the
midst of the years, in
the midst of the years
make known; in
wrath remember
mercy.”***

—Habakkuk 3:2

Selected Scripture:
Book of Habakkuk

HABAKKUK’S

NAME

MEANS ‘embracer,’ one who takes another in his arms, and presses him to his heart. Not much is known about his life. His prophecy was given during the reign of Jehoiakim (628-617 BC). Habakkuk was a man of faith, a prophet of faith. He believed in God’s mercy and desired that the Almighty exercise this quality upon the nation of Israel.

It was a burden to Habakkuk to deliver God’s message of coming doom on Israel. The prophecy is dramatic in form, a dialogue between God and the prophet. The prophet loved Israel even though iniquity and oppression were being committed. He writes for God saying,

“The law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.” (ch. 1:4) He hears God say that he would raise up the Chaldeans (Babylon), and that they would possess lands that were not theirs.—vs. 6

Habakkuk’s faith shines out in verses twelve through thirteen, saying, “Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”

The dialogue between Habakkuk and God changes. You wouldn’t just punish us and not the Chaldeans would you? Next the prophet says that he would stand upon his watch, and upon his tower and see what God would say to him.—ch. 2:1

In verse three God answers Habakkuk by telling him to write down the vision, make it so plain that anyone, at the appointed time, could read it and follow it. God said the nation would go into captivity at his appointed time. God's punishment upon the nation would definitely take place.

Our lesson is about faith, "The just shall live by his faith." (ch. 2:4) In chapter three, verse seventeen, the faith of Habakkuk shines out. He says, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice ... in the God of my salvation."—vss. 17,18

Though God would severely chastise his people, Habakkuk knew that he could still have faith in him. Faith has been defined as "The substance [understanding] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) Again, "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."—Heb. 11:6

Habakkuk had faith in Almighty God even though he knew God was going to punish his people for their wickedness. Let all who claim him, develop this same faith. The Apostle Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in Hebrews 10:38, and says that such "receive the promise."—Heb. 10:36

I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy

THE CHURCH OF Christ at Thessalonica was zealous for the proclamation of the Gospel, and early in his first epistle Paul commended the brethren for this. He wrote, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.”—ch. 1:2,3

Verse eight of this opening chapter reveals why Paul specially referred to their ‘work of faith, and labour of love.’ “From you,” he wrote, “sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.”

The Thessalonian brethren were evidently Gentile converts, for Paul speaks of their having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” (ch. 1:9) In verse ten he speaks of their waiting for “his Son from heaven, whom he [God] raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” The ‘wrath’ referred to is the sentence of death which rests upon all mankind because of sin. The consummation of this sentence is reached at death, so Paul refers to it as the wrath ‘to come.’ All believers are delivered from this death, by faith being justified to life through Christ. They die, seemingly, as others, but not actually so, for they lay down their justified lives and die sacrificially as Jesus did, being “planted together in the likeness of his death.”—Rom. 6:5

Unlike many of Paul’s epistles, his letters to the brethren at Thessalonica say nothing of the issues raised in the Early Church by the infiltration of Gentile converts. Evidently the Thessalonian brethren had not been affected by this controversy. Aside from words of encouragement along various lines, the principal doctrinal theme of both these letters centers around the church’s hope of the Second Coming of Christ.

He mentions this glorious hope in I Thessalonians 1:10, 2:19, and 3:13. Vitally important truths pertaining to the return of Christ are presented in I Thessalonians 4:14-18 and 5:1-5. Paul writes, “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” (ch. 4:16) These are symbolisms of the Bible, and the reference is not to a literal ‘shout’ which rends the air, nor is the ‘voice’ of the archangel a literal voice. Paul did not mean that Jesus would be blowing a literal trumpet when he returned.

Perhaps the most obvious proof of this is found in the opening verses of the next chapter. After reminding the brethren of the hope of the ‘first’ resurrection, which is so closely related to the return of Christ, and encouraging them to “comfort one another with these words,” (ch. 4:18) he continues, “Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”—ch. 5:1-6

In this brief review of the epistle, we call attention to the ‘shout,’ the ‘voice,’ and the ‘trumpet,’ which Paul associates with the return of Christ. These are symbolic evidences of his coming which are discerned only by the ‘brethren’ who are watching, otherwise the ‘day’ ushered in by his coming would not come upon the world as ‘a thief in the night.’

Thieves do not blow trumpets and shout to announce their presence, but in this lesson on the return of Christ we are told of a shout, a voice, and a trumpet, which are not heard by the unbelieving world. Their messages, nevertheless, are symbolically heard by the Lord’s people, so Paul wrote, ‘Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.’

SECOND THESSALONIANS

Paul’s second letter to the brethren at Thessalonica was written in an effort to correct a misunderstanding concerning the Second Coming of

Christ which arose among them as a result of his first epistle. Immediately after his opening salutation, he mentions the subject of our Lord's return and some of its implications. Then in the opening of the second chapter he comes right to the point. "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us [an evident reference to his first epistle], as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except [or until] there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."—ch. 2:1-4

The implications of this statement are clear. In his previous epistle Paul had written that so far as the unbelieving world was concerned the day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night; that is, unknown except by those on watch—the brethren. From this, some of the brethren in the church at Thessalonica developed the idea that the day of the Lord had already come, and that they were highly favored to be among those who knew about it.

Paul did not say to these that they were wrong in their understanding of the manner of the Lord's return; that in the day of the Lord he would be present unknown to the world. He did not say to them that they were wrong because when the Lord returned there would be great upheavals of nature, that a trumpet blast would rend the sky, and that the earth would actually be destroyed by fire.

Paul's reply implied that they were correct as to the manner of Christ's return and Second Presence. His only argument against the claim that he had already returned at that time was that according to the prophecies a very important intervening event must first occur. He described this as a 'falling away,' or apostasy from the faith, and the development of a great Antichrist system.

Later in the same chapter he indicated that this "mystery of iniquity" was already working in his day. (vs. 7) And how true that was! Looking back over church history, it is readily discernible that as soon as the apostles fell asleep in death the purity of doctrine and simplicity of

practice established among believers by these inspired servants were soon lost.

A great church system developed, united with the state, and designated itself the kingdom of Christ—Christendom. But it was a counterfeit of the true kingdom, the kingdom which was to be established when Christ returned. In the continuance of his lesson, Paul explained that when Christ did return the brightness of his presence would bring about the destruction of this ‘mystery of iniquity.’

In II Thessalonians 2:8 the real import of the text is concealed by a faulty translation of the Greek word *parousia*. In the text it is translated “coming.” Its real meaning is ‘presence.’ Paul speaks of the “brightness” of his presence. (vs. 8) Jesus said that his presence would be as a bright shining which would extend from the east even unto the west.—Matt. 24:27

Various prophecies show that the return of Christ would be accompanied by a great increase of knowledge throughout the earth, symbolized by light. It is this increase of knowledge along all lines, and particularly as it pertains to the truth of God’s Word, which reveals to the ‘watchers’ that the Day of the Lord is here.

Going further than this, the increase of knowledge—breaking down superstitions and exposing the false claims of a counterfeit Christianity—is one of the chief contributing causes of the disintegration of the Antichrist system. As the light of Truth resulting from our Lord’s *parousia* continues to penetrate into the dark recesses of human thought, systems built upon foundations of error and superstition will crumble.

FIRST TIMOTHY

Unlike Paul’s epistles thus far reviewed, this one is not written to a congregation, but to an individual brother in Christ, affectionately referred to by the apostle as “Timothy, my own son in the faith.” (ch. 1:2) Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, and they are sometimes referred to as ‘pastoral epistles,’ because they contain so much in the way of instruction to one who is a servant in the church.

In chapter one, verses three and four, Timothy is exhorted to “charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and

endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith.” In chapter two, verse twelve, Paul writes, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man.” The first thirteen verses of the third chapter present the qualification for bishops [elders], and deacons.

Chapter four, verse six, states, “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.” In verse fourteen we read, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee,” and in the sixteenth verse, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

“Rebuke not an elder,” Paul writes, in chapter five, verse one, and in the seventeenth verse he says, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” Additional instructions concerning teachers in the church are found in chapter six, verse five, which reads, “Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.”

In addition to pastoral instructions, a beautiful outline of the Divine plan of redemption and restoration is given us by Paul in this epistle, as well as other important truths. Chapter two, verses three to six read, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

It should be noted that in this passage Paul speaks of being ‘saved’ first, and then coming to a ‘knowledge of the truth.’ Salvation, in the sense that this term is usually employed in the Bible, can be attained only through belief in Christ, and a knowledge of Christ is essential to believe on him. “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?”—Rom. 10:14

But Paul speaks of a salvation which is necessary in order to come to a knowledge of the Truth. This, obviously, refers to an awakening from the sleep of death, which, indeed, is necessary for the vast majority of

mankind in order that they may learn about Christ, for they died in total ignorance of him.

Paul speaks of coming to a knowledge of the ‘truth.’ Then he outlines this Truth for us, explaining that it is the fact that the ‘man Christ Jesus’ ‘gave himself a ransom for all.’ This great Truth, he declares, will be ‘testified,’ or made known, ‘in due time.’ This due time for the world in general to learn the great Truth of the ransom is when they will be saved—that is, awakened from death—during the thousand years of Christ’s reign.

SECOND TIMOTHY

Timothy was held in high esteem by the Apostle Paul, and in this second letter, even as in the first, he addresses him as his “son.” (ch. 1:2) To this “dearly beloved son” his opening salutation is, “Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.”—ch. 1:2,3

Much in the second letter, even as in the first, pertains to the ministry of the Truth. In verses six and seven of the first chapter Paul wrote, “I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

“Hold fast the form of sound words,” Paul admonishes. (ch. 1:13) The second verse of chapter two reads, “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Then, in verses fourteen to sixteen of this same chapter, the following: “Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.”

Also in the same chapter are these wholesome instructions to teachers in the church, “Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those

that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.”—vss. 23-25

Paul emphasized to Timothy that the Word of God should always be the basis of instruction, that he need not go outside of the Word to find needed truth. He wrote, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”—ch. 3:16,17

In the last chapter, Paul says with respect to teaching, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”—vss. 2-5

Paul wrote this epistle during his imprisonment in Rome, after he had been condemned to die. Much in the epistle reflects this background. His final pastoral instruction to Timothy, quoted above, may have been prompted in part, at least, by the imminence of his own death. In it he endeavors to cover every essential point: ‘Preach ... be instant ... reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine, ... watch thou in all things, ... do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.’ Immediately after these all-embracing instructions, Paul writes, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”—ch. 4:6-8

Realizing that he would no longer be able to serve, Paul was concerned that Timothy be fully instructed to continue in the same faithful course he had begun. Incidentally, it is well to note that Paul did not expect to go immediately to heaven when he was executed. He said, instead, ‘There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,’ a crown which he expected to receive, not when he died, but at ‘that day’; that is, the day of ‘his appearing,’ when all the church would be rewarded.

Throughout the course of his faithful ministry Paul endured much weariness, ignominy, and suffering. Now he had reached the end of the way, and he was confident that the Lord would continue to give him strength for whatever might come. He had no regrets. He knew that the final outcome would be glorious, “It is a faithful saying,” he wrote, “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—ch. 2:11,12

Paul looked forward to the privilege of reigning with Christ during the thousand years of his kingdom. He knew that Christianity implied more than to suffer and to die. He knew that in God’s due time righteousness would triumph, and that joy and life would be made available for all mankind.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Prayer

THE CHRISTIAN ENJOYS a unique advantage of having access to the presence of God through prayer, at any time and in any place. All can pray, but not all have access to God's presence. Many things have been spoken and written about prayer, but one outstanding fact is clear, prayer is the vital breath of our Christian life. How vital is it? It is just as needful for spiritual existence as the air we breathe is necessary for the life of our body.

PRAYER IS UNIVERSAL

Prayer is not only an important subject but also an important aspect of our spiritual life, because without it there can be no spiritual existence. Prayer is universally practiced, and Christians are not the only ones who pray. The Jew prays; heathens, saints, and sinners also pray; but not all have fellowship with the Heavenly Father.

Communication is the buzzword of this generation. Technology continues to increase tremendously! As a result, the world is smaller, closer, and truly global. The first art of communication was probably the 'smoke signal' method. Then came the art of writing on clay tablets, followed by books, newspapers, telephones, radios, television programs, fax, e-mail, pagers, and the Internet. Never have there been so many effective ways to communicate.

Adam and Eve had special communication in the garden with the Lord God. They heard his voice! Faithful men during Old Testament times had communication with God through various means, including methods such as having dreams or visions, and talking with angels. The consecrated Christian today has the privilege of communicating with the Heavenly Father through prayer, just as our Lord Jesus had. He enjoyed the prayer relationship he had with his Father. James wrote, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16) Some take a severe position on who may pray; but we think it must please the Heavenly Father to see and hear his Creation give thanks for their many blessings of life and the recognition of God as the giver of all good things.

GOD ALWAYS HEARS

The psalmist states, “O thou that hearest prayer.” (Ps. 65:2) God may not always answer, but he does hear. David states, “Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, ... Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually.” (I Chron. 16:8,11) Jesus said, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” (Luke 18:1) Jesus wanted the prayers of his followers to be effectual, meaningful, a means of strength. He wanted his followers to enjoy the same relationship which he enjoyed with his Father.

The burden of his heart is manifest in his prayer on our behalf. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3) Remember the setting—Verse one: “Jesus, ... lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, The hour is come,” but the entire prayer is concerned about the apostles and the church and not about himself!

HOW ARE PRAYERS COMPOSED?

To many, prayer is, however, a way of extreme supplication and to others vain repetitions. It is to many a necessity when sickness and difficulties are prevalent. Some expect miracles.

Are we skeptical or appreciative of the many miracles of God’s overruling providence in our Christian lives? Whether directly or indirectly, knowingly or in ignorance, the reality is that often the underlying objective and motive for prayer is selfishness. Selfish prayers are not answered.

What is prayer? What does the Bible teach concerning it? If it is composed of empty words, void of sincerity, and spoken as an obligation, it is meaningless. Prayer is not a formalized outline of words, or a selfish demand for material advantage. It has been said, “Prayer is the heart’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.” There is much truth in this definition. God “is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12) He knows the thoughts of our hearts before we speak them.

“Do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:1, *American Standard Version*) As the Master concluded a lesson of proper and improper love, he continued to explain proper and improper prayers. (Matt. 6:1-8) The consecrated Christian’s prayer is the privilege of

having access to the presence of God, and having fellowship and communion with him.

This is a privilege that can be contrasted with the experiences of Cornelius, of whom it was said, that he was “a devout man,” who revered God and prayed always. “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.” (Acts 10:2,4) Cornelius’ prayers were heard, but he did not have ‘fellowship’ with God. Prayer is a great honor and privilege! Cornelius was then brought into the family of God as the first Gentile convert, and begotten of the Holy Spirit.

In I Thessalonians 5:17, Paul writes, “Pray without ceasing.” Or, as the *Living Bible* says, “Always keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (vss. 17,18) This is an interesting translation using expressions such as ‘always,’ ‘no matter,’ ‘God’s will.’

OBJECTIVE OF PRAYER

Prayer has objectives. One is worship. This can be expressed in praise and meditation. Another objective is communication. This is expressed by thanksgiving and requests. The attitude of being thankful shows appreciation for the many things God does for us daily. Our praise shows our gratitude and appreciation for God. We “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: ... worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” (I Chron. 16:29) We do this by prayer.

When Jesus gave his model prayer (Matt. 6:9-13), he said something which was new to the disciples. He told them to open their prayer with these words: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.” To call God ‘Our Father,’ and to hallow his name, was the privilege of sonship, and emphasized praise and worship. What a wonderful feeling we have of being able to unfold all that is in our hearts to someone who really cares, our Heavenly Father.

Many times we have experiences that we feel no one would understand, such as our problems, turmoil, regrets, and victories. But we do have someone to whom we can take these problems. Having this direct line to God is almost incomprehensible! What a heritage is ours! Our relationship of sonship is a close relationship. What a personal advantage we have! Our prayers are heard in an instant. Often our prayer opportunity is a great stress release experience. Sharing with someone

else troublesome events is a stress release factor—especially when that someone else is our Heavenly Father.

PEOPLE OF PRAYER

Prayer is the “balm” of Gilead. (Jer. 46:11) Many of the world’s great people have been men and women of prayer. Above them all stands Jesus, who continually sought his Father’s presence in prayer. Jesus taught and practiced prayer, and this made an impression on his disciples, and they asked him to teach them how to pray.—Luke 11:1; John 14:16; 16:26

If Jesus, in his perfection, needed spiritual fellowship and communion with his Father, how much more we need this contact also. Prayer is a powerful force. It performs miracles!

The greatest miracles of prayer are found in the daily supply of ‘sustaining power’ of grace and help in our personal needs. These are the kinds of prayers which can keep one from falling.

Another example of the power of prayer is its ability to alter our lives for good. We read, “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (II Cor. 3:18, *Revised Standard Version*) “Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (I Cor. 6:11) We need to pray for this Spirit as Jesus tells us in Luke 11:13, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

Prayer is the privilege which helps accomplish the transformation in our lives, but we must feel a need for this help in order to appreciate our fellowship and communion with God. Jesus had this need. How much more should we.

The trials and difficulties, the sorrows and temptations of life; often impel us to pray, but this should not be the only time to pray fervently. We demonstrate a better Christian development when we come before him with joy and thanksgiving, to give praise, and worship him. It is interesting that the word praise is used one hundred eighty times in the *Book of Psalms* alone.

The power of prayer works on our behalf in many ways. It makes us strong when we are weak, and bold when we are fearful. It gives words of wisdom in time of need, and strength to face and endure trials. It gives words when speechless, and directs where we should turn. It gives peace with God and trust in his providence, and enlightenment and understanding of his Word.

The privilege of having access to the Heavenly Father's presence is ours for personal use, and is not restricted to a certain time or place. He is always ready to hear our praise and petitions.

EFFECTIVE PRAYERS

An important question often asked is "How can our prayers be most effective?" At times, it seems our prayers are not considered or answered. Why is this? The Bible gives us some reasons. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." (James 4:3, *RSV*) "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."—Matt. 6:31-34

A prayer that will never be answered is a selfish prayer. There is much merit in the saying, "If your prayer is faithless, it will also be fruitless."

We must have faith in God; and our faith must embrace two stipulations of Hebrews 11:6—"Without faith it is impossible to please him [God]," and "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." When we seek him, it should be to know him, obey him, and serve him. Paul suggests that at times "we know not what we should pray for as we ought." (Rom. 8:26) The context, however, tells us that the new mind, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, is there to help; and God "searcheth the hearts" and knows our intentions. (vs. 27) "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (vs. 28) Also, Paul writes, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving."—Col. 4:2

Every trial of patience is an occasion to pray for the promised help. Every failure to gain victory is an occasion for prayer that we be not high-minded. Every service for the Truth becomes an occasion for prayer of thanks for the privilege of serving. Sometimes the only privilege of service will be to pray for others in service. The positive side of our prayers is highlighted by many scriptures—John 16:24, “Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full,” and Psalm 16:11, “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Also in Matthew 5:44, “Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you,” and Matthew 9:38, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.”

WATCH AND PRAY

Watch and pray is an excellent combination. “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt. 26:41) The aspect of ‘watchfulness’ is to look for an answer to our prayer. It may come in various providential circumstances—at a testimony meeting, discourse, or a conversation.

These overrulings could be the Father’s way of communicating with us. Because prayer is a ‘one-way’ conversation, it becomes very important to watch for answers through our experiences. We are to pray for one another. Paul often speaks of our prayers and supplications on behalf of our brethren. How often we hear the request, “pray for me,” or “us.” Prayer is companionship with our Heavenly Father, and in that fellowship there are many features; such as adoration and worship, confession of misgivings, pleas for forgiveness, and petition for wisdom and his Spirit.

May we always remember, ‘The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.’ God, our Heavenly Father, will take time to listen if we take time to pray. As the Scriptures say, “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”—Ps. 84:11

“The Way, the Truth, and the Life”

“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

—John 8:31,32

AT HIS FIRST ADVENT our Lord came to the Jewish nation, which was a house of servants in covenant relationship with God. The privilege of becoming sons of God was granted first to this nation and their blessing would be in proportion as they were faithful to the light that would come to them. Before they could become sons of God, however, it was necessary that Jesus should be their Redeemer,

should make reconciliation for iniquity, and open up the way. This he had come to do, but he had not done it as yet. Whoever would come to understand the Divine purposes and arrangements, and act in harmony with them, should be made free, should be liberated from the condemnation resting upon them as Jews, from the results of the weaknesses of their flesh, and would be brought into full accord with God.

We can see that this great privilege also meant something more than all this. It meant something still higher—even joint-heirship with the Messiah. But all these things were a hidden mystery as yet. They were known up to that time only by our Lord himself; they were made clear to him because he had been begotten of the Holy Spirit. There were many things hard to be understood. Jesus spoke in parables, in dark sayings, for the very purpose of making the way of life then opened up a “narrow” way. (Matt. 7:14) And so we read in the Scriptures that some said of the Master’s words, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60) Who could believe it?

The particularly hard saying referred to was that his “flesh is meat indeed,” and his “blood is drink indeed,” and that by ‘eating’ and ‘drinking’ of these they might gain eternal life. (vs. 55) And so we read that after this many forsook him and abandoned the thought of being his disciples, so blinded were they to their own interests. Instead of following on patiently, they said, This is all foolishness! We do not understand it!

Jesus was anticipating this condition of things when he spoke these words to them. He would put them on their guard. It was as though he would say, You have declared that “Never man spake like this man.” (John 7:46) Already you have heard words very different from the words of the scribes and Pharisees. Now continue; hold on for a little while. If you will do this, you will grasp the situation in due time. Exercise faith—exercise patience. You have begun to have interest in these things, and as you fully become my disciples you will be granted a knowledge of the Truth, and this Truth will make you free. It will give you all the blessings and privileges that come to the children of God. Greatly blessed were the few who took heed to the Master’s counsel.

BLESSINGS BEGUN AT PENTECOST

These words of Jesus were not addressed especially to the twelve apostles, but to the Jews in general who were sympathetically drawn. Nicodemus may have been one of these. He was inclined to stumble over the spiritual things; he could not see how one could be born again. The Holy Spirit was not yet given, we read, “because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:39) Paul tells us that “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”—I Cor. 2:14

But some saw enough in Jesus to attract them to him. These, in honesty of heart, said, Surely his words are true, and his criticisms of our nation are true. We do not see how he is going to fulfill these prophecies; but he says to you, Hold on and you will understand later. And some did hold on—“above five hundred brethren.” (I Cor. 15:6) As Jesus had promised, these were given the privilege of becoming disciples indeed.

When Pentecost came, the Heavenly Father received all who had continued in Jesus’ word, and they were begotten of the Holy Spirit into the Lord’s family. Then they began to see spiritual things—they were illuminated. All the light did not come at once, but they progressed as the days and years went by. They were indeed Christ’s true disciples—such followers of Jesus as the Father was pleased to recognize. They were not only made free from the condemnation of the Law Covenant, but made free from sin and death. They received a new will, a new mind, and the Holy Spirit showed “the deep things of God” unto them.—I Cor. 2:10

In his prayer to the Father, our Lord said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) By the word ‘truth’ Jesus was here referring to the Father’s revealment of his Divine plan through the Holy Spirit; and the sanctifying influence would come through the knowledge of that Truth, received into an honest heart. This sanctification, or setting apart, strictly speaking, began with the Pentecostal blessing, and still continues to operate. And this sanctification progresses as long as the individual allows the Truth to have its designed influence in his life. We see a difference between our text and the one just quoted. In the latter case it is the Word of Jehovah, and in the former it is the word of Jesus. Jesus says, If you continue in my word, you will become more and more acquainted with the Heavenly Father, and will know his will, his method; thus you will know his Word. All things are working out his will—the will of the Father—and seeing and doing the will of the Father, the sanctifying process will follow. Jesus says to all, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) I am the only one through whom you can come to the Father and become his sons; and abiding in me will bring you the grand consummation.

THE CHANNEL OF BLESSINGS

We perceive, then, that Christ is the sufficiency which God has provided for us in all respects. “Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness [justification], and sanctification, and redemption [deliverance].” (I Cor. 1:30) We first received, through learning of his sacrificial work on our behalf, necessary wisdom, instruction, and guidance, by which we may, through his merit, come to the Father. And he is our wisdom all along the way. The Heavenly Father had a glorious plan before the foundation of the world; this was suggested in Eden, just after the fall. In due time he gave a further intimation of that plan through Enoch and through Abraham, and still later through Moses and the prophets. But how the world was to benefit from it was all hidden, all kept secret.

Not until Jesus came was the way of life opened up, made manifest. He [Christ] “hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (II Tim. 1:10) The essence of the Gospel was never even declared, much less known, before Jesus came. The Apostle Paul says that this salvation “at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was

confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” (Heb. 2:3) Our Lord began to speak it; but the secret of the Gospel, its mystery, was not fully revealed until after Pentecost. It was not until after Jesus was begotten of the Holy Spirit that he himself began to comprehend it clearly—not until then did he begin to set before us the way of life and immortality. And even then his words were parabolic, and it was not until his followers were begotten of the Holy Spirit that they were able to enter into ‘the deep things of God.’

JESUS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

In addition to his being our wisdom, Jesus becomes our righteousness. He covers our sins. He imputes to us his own righteousness, the merit of his own sacrifice. And this imputation brings us to a condition of complete righteousness—not actual, but reckoned—which God is pleased to recognize in the way he has arranged.

Our Lord does not become the righteousness of everybody—not even of those who give some heed to his words—but to those alone who come to the point of full submission to the Father’s will. And there is a good reason for this; for only those who offer themselves to become members of his body during this Gospel Age, only the Spirit-begotten, would be profited by a justification by faith. Others would be condemned to death by it now. In the next age, others will come to him. But only those who come to him now, to walk in his steps, have a faith-justification.

JESUS OUR SANCTIFICATION

The step of consecration on the part of those who become Jesus’ disciples is in the Scriptures called sanctification. But it is not the same sanctification which comes to us through him. God says, Sanctify yourselves, and I will sanctify you (Lev. 20:7,8)—that is, set yourselves apart, and then I will set you apart; I will put you into this place where you desire to come. So, to all of us who come to the Father through him, Jesus not only becomes our justification, but through him we also have sanctification—the complete setting apart. We are accepted in him, and his grace and advocacy enables us to attain complete and final sanctification.

God sets us apart by begetting us of the Holy Spirit to the new nature and making us prospective members of the royal priesthood—

prospective members of the body of the Anointed One. This is scripturally called a foretaste, or “earnest,” of our inheritance, (Eph. 1:14) which will be experienced to the full when we are changed from the human to the spirit nature—changed in a moment, “in the twinkling of an eye.” (I Cor. 15:52) But this ‘earnest’ of our inheritance is given us with the intention of our growing in the process of sanctification already begun in us until its completion. We attain this through Christ.

JESUS OUR DELIVERANCE

Those who make satisfactory progress will have, in the resurrection, full deliverance from sin, from all imperfections of the flesh, and from the flesh itself—full deliverance through the power of the first resurrection. Christ thus becomes our deliverance. We shall then attain the full completion of sons of God on the Divine plane.

In all these things Christ is the center; through him alone can we obtain these blessings. While the Father gives them, they are given through his Son, who is the Father’s representative. Jesus received the Spirit of the Father and has shed it forth upon us. We are anointed through our Head as members of the great High Priest.

“He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus,” that is to say, Jesus will be the active agent. (II Cor. 4:14) But there are certain features of the Divine plan which Jesus will accomplish in his own name; for instance, the world’s blessing and uplifting. While the Father is the Author of the entire plan, yet this blessing comes to the world exclusively through the sacrifice of the Son. Christ will do the work of the Millennial Age, and will then deliver mankind up to the Father.

But his work for the church is different. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us.” (I Pet. 1:3) It is not the Son who has begotten us, though it is through the Son that we receive this Divine favor. The price, or cost, of obtaining this special Divine favor is the sacrifice of our lives. The particular thing which the church receives more directly from the Son is justification. Yet, this justification is of the Father’s part for us that we may come into his favor now in advance of the world—“the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.”—Rev. 14:4

Ours is a wonderful God, and his great plan of the ages is marvelous beyond expression! Our hearts rejoice that our eyes have been anointed to see these glorious things hidden to the many during this Gospel Age, knowing that all the blind eyes shall yet be opened, and all the deaf ears made to hear!

THEY TURN THEIR EARS FROM THE TRUTH

The Lord's preaching always produced two opposite effects upon the promiscuous multitudes that heard him. He attracted one class and repelled the other. Those who were full of pride and conceit, and who preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil, and because they realized that if they admitted the light of Truth they must of necessity conform their characters to it—all such were repelled by the teachings of Christ. And if the Lord had undertaken the work of the ministry according to the methods pursued today, depending for support on the good will and contributions of the people, that support would often have been very meager, or at least, very fluctuating.

On some occasions multitudes received his testimony, but later deserted him, walking no more with him as he continued to enforce the lessons of Divine Truth. (Luke 4:14-29) Sometimes the multitudes hung upon his teachings "and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth"; (vs. 22) yet again and again they forsook him, only the merest handful remaining.—John 6:60-69

What consternation would follow in the various churches of today, if the professed ministers of the Gospel should follow the Master's example in similarly declaring the whole counsel of God! How quickly they would become unpopular and be charged with breaking up the churches! The congregations of the great temples of fashion ostensibly dedicated to the service of God and the teachings of Christ would not stand it. They go there to be entertained with pleasing and eloquent discourses from titled gentlemen who presumably know the tastes and ideas of the congregation, and will preach to please them. They are quite willing to pay their money for what they want, but they do not want the Truth.

Those who followed the Lord only for a little season and then forsook him, of course then ceased to be his disciples, and were no longer so recognized; nor did they presume longer to claim to be his disciples. A disciple is a pupil of Christ, and when a man ceases to be a student and

pupil of Christ, the great Teacher, he is no longer his disciple. This was very manifest when the Lord was present, and when his name was one of reproach among men. Later, when his presence was withdrawn, and when his doctrines were mixed with human philosophies to such an extent as to divest them of reproach, and to make them void, then men began to claim to be his disciples.

DISCIPLES INDEED

The Lord's expression, "Then are ye my disciples indeed," implies a distinction between real and merely nominal disciples. (John 8:31) And since we desire to continue to be Jesus' sincere disciples, let us mark the expressed condition, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." The hypocrisy of merely nominal discipleship is an abomination to the Lord.

It is a blessed thing to take the first step in the Christian life—that of acceptance of Christ as our Redeemer and Lord and yielding ourselves fully to the Father through him. But the reward of this step depends entirely upon our continuance in his Word, in the attitude of true disciples. The disposition of human pride is to wander away from the simplicity of Divine Truth and to seek out new theories and philosophies of our own, or to pry into those of others who desire to be considered wise and great according to this world's estimate.

The reward of continued discipleship is, "Ye shall know the truth" (vs. 32)—not, Ye shall be "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (II Tim. 3:7) Here is the mistake many make; failing to continue in the Word of the Lord, they delve into various human philosophies, which ignore or pervert the Word of the Lord and set up opposing theories. To those who seek for truth among these human theories, there is no promise that they shall find it, and they never do.

Divine Truth is found only in the divinely appointed channel—our Lord, the apostles and the prophets. To continue in the doctrines set forth in the inspired writings of the prophets and the apostles, to study and meditate upon them, to trust implicitly in them, and to faithfully conform our characters to them, is what is implied in 'continue in my word' of the Lord. And this is entirely compatible with the heeding of all the helps which the Lord raises up from among our brethren in the body of Christ, as enumerated by the Apostle Paul. (Eph. 4:11-15; I Cor. 12:12-14) The

Lord always has raised up, and will to the end raise up, such helps for the edification of the body of Christ; but it is the duty of every member carefully to prove their teaching by the infallible Word.

If we thus continue in the Word of the Lord as earnest and sincere disciples, we shall indeed ‘know the truth,’ be established in the present Truth (the Truth due), and be rooted and grounded in the Truth. We shall be firm in the faith, and “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (I Pet. 3:15); to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3); to “war a good warfare” (I Tim. 1:18); to witness “a good confession” (I Tim. 6:13); and to firmly “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” even unto the end of our conflict.—II Tim. 2:3

We do not come into the knowledge of the Truth at a single bound; but gradually, step-by-step, we are led into the Truth. Every step is one of sure and certain progress leading to a higher vantage ground for further attainments both in knowledge and in established character.

The Truth thus acquired, step-by-step, becomes a sanctifying power, bringing forth in our lives its blessed fruits of righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit, love, meekness, faith, patience, and every virtue and every grace, which time and cultivation ripen to a glorious maturity.

Not only shall the true disciple thus know the Truth and be sanctified by it, but the Lord also said, ‘The truth shall make you free.’ Those who have received the Truth know by blessed experience something of its liberating power. As soon as any measure of it is received into a good and honest heart, it begins to strike off the fetters of sin, of ignorance, superstition and fear. Its health-restoring beams penetrate the darkest recesses of our hearts and minds, and thus invigorating the whole being it quickens our mortal bodies.

THY WORDS GIVETH LIGHT

Sin cannot endure the light of Truth; and those who continue to live in sin when a sufficiency of light has been received to manifest its deformity, must inevitably lose the light because they are unworthy of it. Ignorance and superstition must vanish before this light. What a blessed realization it is to be thus liberated! Millions, however, are still under the blinding influence of error. Under its delusions they fear and reverence some of the basest tools of Satan for their oppression and degradation,

because these hypocritically claim Divine appointment. They have been made to fear God as a vengeful tyrant, consigning the vast majority of his creatures to an eternity of torment. Thank God, we who have received the Truth have awakened from that horrible nightmare, and the bondage of Satan over us is broken. The light has scattered our darkness.

We are made free, too, from the fear that we now see coming upon the whole world as the great civil and ecclesiastical systems that have so long ruled the world are being shaken. All thinking people are in dread of the possible outcome of anarchy and terror. The alarm of all is increasing as we near the awful crisis toward which we are rapidly hastening, and as the danger becomes more and more apparent. Yet, in the midst of it all, and with the fullest assurance of the infallible Word of God as to the terrors of the conflict through which the world will soon have to pass, the true disciples of Christ who abide in his Word are not afraid, but rejoice. They know that God's object in permitting this mighty storm is to clear the moral atmosphere of the world, and that after the storm there shall come, by his providence, an abiding peace. Instructed in the Truth, they realize the necessities of the situation, and have confidence in the Divine providence that can make even the wrath of man to praise him, and to make all things work together for good.

Blessed promise! 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' Having received this wondrous favor from the Lord, shall we not continue in it, giving no heed to seducing doctrines but bringing forth its blessed fruitage in our lives? And shall we not be faithful to it under all circumstances, defending it against every assault, and bearing its reproach? Let us prove our appreciation of the glorious light by our loyalty and faithfulness, working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Dawn Bible Students Association