

Training to Be Merciful Priests

“He [Jesus] had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people.”

—Hebrews 2:17, Revised Standard Version

“Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

—Romans 8:29

ON APRIL 20TH, OUR nation was shocked to learn of the great tragedy that occurred in Littleton, Colorado. Two young students entered the Columbine High School armed with guns, and killed twelve students and a teacher before killing themselves. It was the worst school shooting in American history. The incident has led to heart-searching questions like, “How well do you know your kid?” and always the question arises, “Why did this have to happen?” “Why did God permit it?”

Littleton is a suburb of Denver, where a congregation of Bible Students meets. The proximity of this event enabled them to view firsthand the reaction of the people to this tragedy. The foremost question in their minds was how they might give comfort to the families and friends of the casualties.

REPORT BY E-MAIL

On an e-mail report providing information about Bible Students, a number of letters from Denver were received and printed. One letter told how, at the class meeting two days later, the group discussed what they might do to offer comfort. They decided on running a newspaper ad offering “*Comfort and Consolation*” booklets. The ad was run in the *Rocky Mountain News* on Tuesday, April 27, the day when most of the funerals were held. Other classes of Bible Students offered assistance in sending ads used by them at the time of other tragedies. Another of these ads was run in the *Denver Post*.

When the Bible Students Ecclesia learned that thousands of people from the Denver area were gathering at Clements Park, adjoining the high school, to show their sympathy and support, they also went. Two sisters went to the park to distribute “*Consolation*” booklets, which were well received by all. More brethren assisted in this work, which was continued the next day. The park became a giant memorial where people brought tons of flowers, notes, banners, teddy bears, crosses, and pictures, to express their feelings of sympathy.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

A memorial service was advertised to be held Sunday, April 25th. The Bible Student congregational meeting was cancelled so that the entire class could participate in the work of handing out “*Consolation*” booklets. Ten brethren went to the memorial service, and joined 80,000 others who gathered there. (Only 30,000 were expected.) A large supply of “*Consolation*” and “*Hope*” booklets were handed out an hour before the services began.

One participant wrote: “I have not had the privilege of participating in a truth activity like this before, and it certainly has inspired me to become more directly involved in this kind of work for the Lord. What I noticed more than anything about the people gathered there, was their hunger for something comforting from all this chaos. I don’t know how many of the booklets were even read, but people were so willing to reach out for something, we couldn’t hand the booklets out fast enough. Another very important part of this for me was sharing this experience with my dearest brethren, those of ‘like precious faith.’ What a privilege we have in doing this together!”

Another one who shared in this experience said to sad young people, “I need a hug, ... could you use a hug?” She gave many hugs that day as she gave them literature for comfort. She also observed that people were kinder, open to feelings for one another, reaching out for hope, and comfort. “I wondered why it takes a happening like this to make people soften up, to be gentler, kinder, more helpful one to another. There were no strangers—we were all together in one endeavor (to help one another).”

THE MERCIFUL PRIEST

The answer to the question, “Why does it take a tragedy like this one to make people become more gentle and kind?” lies in the program God set in motion with his Son. He sent Jesus to earth to become man’s Redeemer. In the experiences Jesus had, leading to his death, he learned also to “be a merciful and faithful High Priest” who could be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” (Heb. 2:17; 4:15) His followers must learn the same lessons in order to become a part of that faithful High Priest in God’s kingdom.

There have been literally billions of people upon the earth who have suffered poverty, famine, and hardship. When these return from the grave as promised (John 5:28,29) they will need loving assistance in learning obedience to the commandments of God. This will be a tremendous task. But God has been training certain ones during this Gospel Age who will be administrators with Jesus in this learning program. Today, these are being trained to be merciful priests in the future.

TRAINING THE PRIESTS

How is this training accomplished? The first step to be taken is that of consecration. Included in the many experiences of God’s people is learning how to be sympathetic with others. The Apostle Paul says: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”—Rom. 12:15

The twelfth chapter of Romans opens with the Apostle Paul urging the brethren that they yield their bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” The Apostle then adds: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

The succeeding verses in this chapter are an explanation of the practical way in which this remarkable transformation takes place, and the training for priesthood starts by exhorting us not to be proud, but humble, and to have a sober estimate of our capabilities. The illustration of a human body and its functions is used to impress on our minds the need for unity and cooperation with all the members of the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit distributed to these body members will differ, but all should be motivated by love. (vss. 9,10) He concludes his words of advice by appealing to us to love our enemies.—vss. 19,20

Putting into practice this advice from the Apostle Paul is the training we receive to become a merciful priesthood. There is no easy way to get this training. We must enter into the feelings of people in tragedy, in joy, in sorrow, by trying to place ourselves in their circumstances, and by showing them genuine love. In receiving this training we become transformed, and “conformed to the image of his Son.”—Rom. 8:29

CONSOLATION FROM CHURCHES

During the tragedy in Littleton, there was consolation offered by others, including ministers from many churches. They said that those killed were now ‘in heaven.’ The Bible does not support this view. Jesus said, “No one has ascended into heaven except the Son of Man who descended from heaven.” (John 3:13, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) In spite of this kind of consolation, the victims’ families and the people of the Denver area continued to be saddened by this tragedy.

In fact, the Bible does not support the concept of an ‘immortal soul’ going to ‘heaven.’ Primarily we note the Bible teaching that no one possesses immortality except God. (I Tim. 6:16) Even Jesus did not receive immortality until after his resurrection. (Rev. 1:18) Immortality is a reward given to the faithful footstep followers of Christ. (I Cor. 15:53) God did not give man an immortal soul; rather, he created man a mortal soul. (Gen. 2:7) Little do those who support the immortal soul concept realize that they are supporting Satan’s first lie to Mother Eve when he said to her, “Ye shall not surely die.”—Gen. 3:4

Is it not strange that mankind prefers to believe Satan’s lie, rather than God’s plain statement? God said, ‘If you disobey my instructions,’ “Thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) This does not mean that these victims will not be restored to their loved ones. God has promised a resurrection to everyone. (John 5:28,29) These victims are now sleeping in death. Their hope—and the hope of all—in having life restored, is a resurrection from the dead. Today very few people really have this hope, and yet it is among the firmest and most magnificent promises given in the Bible!

At the community memorial service, one of the members of the Denver congregation observed: “The speeches given were nice, but of no real comfort. Many in speaking, especially the ministers, continued to ask, ‘Why?’ It was so obvious that they do not have the answer that we are so very privileged to share. A group of twenty-three ministers from fifteen

local churches, together ran a full page ad in the local paper entitled, “Why?” They eloquently asked the questions of ‘Why my child?’ ‘Why my family?’ ‘Why did God let it happen?’ ‘Is there really a God?’ ‘How can there be an all-powerful and all-loving God when evil seems so uncontained?’

“The ministers’ answers were: ‘He is the Creator of life and he was grieved by this tragedy. Knowing him through Jesus Christ, and allowing his entrance into our lives is the only way to make sense of, and have hope in the midst of this tragic situation. He is more powerful than this tragedy, and his goodness is greater than this present evil.’ They went on to commit their time, prayers, etc., to the community. They did not answer the questions.”

PERMISSION OF EVIL

How shall we explain to these puzzled and perplexed people why God permits evil? We can only do so by outlining God’s plan:

1. Foremost, the earth became a ‘testing ground’ for Jesus, who was to become the Redeemer of mankind.—Rev. 13:8
2. Secondly, a ‘church class’ was to be found and developed from among the children of Adam. These, when faithful until death, would be raised as “joint-heirs with Christ.”—Rom. 8:17; II Pet. 1:4
3. All mankind need an experience with sin and evil so they can make an intelligent choice between righteousness and evil, as was given to Israel.—Deut. 30:19; Acts 17:30,31
4. The earth was to be filled with human beings.—Gen. 1:28, *RSV*
5. All mankind will be raised from the dead.—John 5:28,29
6. God’s kingdom is for the purpose of having mankind experience good, which is necessary before they can make an intelligent choice between good and evil.—Isa. 26:9; Jer. 31:34

The 35th chapter of Isaiah tells about God’s future kingdom, and how all handicaps and obstacles will be removed for the world of mankind, so that they can walk up “the way of holiness” to perfection. (vs. 8) No “lion” (Satan) or “ravenous beast” will be there.(vs. 9) Satan will be bound, and other agencies which cause trouble now, shall be destroyed.

What a glorious day that will be, when this prophecy is fulfilled! All the victims of the Columbine High School shooting will be there, as will be all who ever lived in Satan's empire. They will be a part of those "ransomed of the Lord" when all mankind is awakened from the dead. These "shall return, and come to Zion [the faithful and merciful priests] with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:10

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Running from Difficulty

Key Verse: “Behold, I am with thee[Jacob], and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”

—*Genesis 28:15*

*Selected Scripture:
Genesis 27:41 – 28:21*

ESAU FAILED TO SEE his own wrongdoing in the sale of his birthright, a thing which revealed his lack of respect for the promises of God. We read, however, that “Esau hated Jacob” (Gen. 27:41), a reaction so intense that Esau’s one desire was to get revenge by killing his twin brother.

When their mother, Rebecca, learned of Esau’s evil intent, she devised a plan to protect Jacob. Jacob was not yet married and because she and Isaac, her husband, did not want him to marry a Canaanite, they agreed to send him to Padan-Aram (Mesopotamia) to choose a bride from one of his Uncle Laban’s daughters.

Many years earlier, when God asked Abraham to leave his own country and his father’s house, he had promised him that his seed would bless ‘all the families of the earth.’ The Lord overruled Esau’s desire for revenge, because when Jacob left home and started out for Padan-Aram, Isaac extended to Jacob “the blessing of Abraham.” He said, “God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.”—Gen. 28:3,4

Jacob’s journey was not to be an easy one. His first night away from home found him still in Canaan. Finding nothing but stones for a pillow, he prepared a place to spend the night. (Gen. 28:11) When he fell asleep he had a wonderful dream. He saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and angels ascending and descending upon it.

The angels said nothing, but the Lord stood above the whole scene and identified himself as the God of Abraham and of Isaac. What could be more reassuring to Jacob than this! (vss. 12-15) The God of Abraham was assuring him that the birthright was indeed his.

The promise, both of the land and that all the families of the earth were to be blessed through the seed, was here repeated to Jacob, who was assured that he would be the channel through which the seed would come.

“Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not; ... this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”—vss. 16,17

In keeping with the Lord’s will, Jacob was fleeing from the land of promise, but the Lord had given him his word that in due time he would return. He said, ‘Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land.’

On his part, Jacob promised to serve the Lord and give him a tenth of all he had given him. Today, the Lord’s people ‘vow a vow,’ covenanting to give God all they have, including themselves—not just one-tenth. God gives all this back, and appoints them stewards, admonishing them to be faithful.—I Cor. 4:2

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Facing Fear and Danger

Key Verse: “ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over the Jordan; and now I am become two bands.”

—Genesis 32:10

***Selected Scripture:
Genesis 32:3 – 33:17***

AFTER JACOB LEFT Bethel, he arrived safely at his Uncle Laban’s home in Padan-Aram where he eventually found not one, but two wives. After some years, Jacob had become very prosperous and God told him in a dream to take his family and all his possessions and return to his own land.

Jacob reasoned that surely Esau would eventually become aware that he had returned to Canaan, and he decided that he would seek a reconciliation immediately. He sent messengers ahead to Esau, instructing them to tell his brother that he had been staying with Laban these many years. In addition, he said to tell him, “I have oxen, and asses,

flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.”—Gen. 32:5

“The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.” (Gen. 32:6) Jacob was frightened and he divided the people and his many animals into two groups, saying, “If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.”—vss. 7,8

Then Jacob prayed for Divine protection: “O God of my Father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.

“Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother

with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”—vss. 9-12

Jacob made elaborate preparations to appease Esau, then he sent his wives and family “over the brook” (vs. 23) ahead of him, while he remained alone. He was to meet his brother on the next day. “There wrestled a man with him [apparently an angel] until the breaking of the day.” And the man said unto him, “Let me go,” but Jacob said, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

The angel then told Jacob that his name would be changed to Israel, which means ‘a prince of God,’ which the angel applied to Jacob: “as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. ... Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: ... for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”—Gen. 32:24-30

The next morning, as the much feared meeting of the two brothers took place, Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

Jacob was greatly relieved, and happy that his brother had no evil intentions toward him. God was with Jacob and kept him, as he had promised.

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Family Difficulties

Key Verse: “Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.”
—Genesis 37:3

*Selected Scripture:
Genesis 37:1-35*

JACOB CONTINUED TO live in the land of Canaan, where his father Isaac had lived. Joseph, the next to youngest of Jacob’s twelve sons, was the firstborn of Rachel, the wife for whom Jacob served his father-in-law fourteen years. (Gen. 29:20,30) Our Key Verse explains Israel’s (Jacob’s) strong love for Joseph—more than for all his other children.

When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father loved him more than them, they grew unbearably jealous. Their jealousy and hatred increased when Joseph related a dream he had to them. He said: “We were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.” Joseph’s brothers saw in this dream the suggestion that he expected to be ruler over them.—Gen. 37:5-8

He dreamed another dream, one day and told it to his brethren, saying, “Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.” (vs. 9) After hearing this dream, his brothers envied him even more. Their hatred became so deep, they wanted to kill him.

Even his father rebuked him for relating it, asking, “Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee?” (vs. 10) But as his father thought about the matter, he sensed that God was dealing with Joseph in some special way.—vs. 11

Shortly after these events the brothers departed for Shechem to seek pasture for their flocks, while Joseph remained at home with his father. Later Jacob, wishing to know how his sons were getting along, asked Joseph to go to Shechem and bring back a report.

When Joseph arrived in Shechem, however, he learned that his brothers had moved on to Dothan; so continuing his journey, he found them there. “When they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.”—Gen. 37:18-20

Reuben, the oldest, did not want to harm Joseph. He said to his brothers: “Let us not kill him... Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit ... ; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.” (vss 21,22) But when he approached, they ripped off his coat of many colors and cast him into a pit. When Reuben was not with them, the others sold him to some traveling Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. When Reuben returned and discovered Joseph was gone, he tore off his clothes in sorrow.—vss 28,29

Jacob’s sons dipped Joseph’s coat in goat blood to make it appear that he had been killed by a wild beast. Later, when Jacob saw it, he concluded his beloved son was dead. His sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted and said, “I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.”—vs. 35

Opportunities to Serve

Key Verse: *“Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.”*
—Genesis 41:39,40

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 41:14-40

PHARAOH HAD TWO dreams, which, in the morning, troubled his spirit. He called for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt, and Pharaoh told them of his dreams. Nevertheless, he became much more greatly distressed because no one could interpret them for him. The ruler finally summoned Joseph to come before him, having heard that he was an interpreter of dreams.

Joseph quickly denied any special ability of his own but, as on former occasions, he gave all the credit to the Lord. He said, “It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.” (Gen. 41:16) Pharaoh related his dreams, after which Joseph explained that they foreshadowed a period of fourteen years—seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine over the land of Egypt.

Joseph not only interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams for him but added some excellent, timely advice. He offered his wise counsel suggesting the appointment of a food administrator who would see to it that during the seven years of plenty, surpluses would be preserved to feed the nation throughout the seven years of famine. The ruler was impressed with Joseph’s advice. “Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.”—vss. 39-41

Pharaoh dressed Joseph in royal robes and put a gold chain about his neck. He then took off his signet ring and put it on Joseph's hand. Pharaoh made him to ride in the second chariot, and the people "cried before him, Bow the knee." He also gave Joseph an Egyptian name: Zaphnath-paaneah, which means, "The man to whom secrets are revealed." And, he gave him a wife—Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On.—vss. 42-45

During the seven years of plenty "the earth brought forth by handfuls" (vs. 47), and Joseph gathered corn "as the sand of the sea." He laid up the food in the cities (vss. 48,49), then seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. In all the land of Egypt there was bread.

But, finally, when the Egyptians grew hungry, they "cried to Pharaoh for bread." He said to them, "Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do. And the famine was over all the face of the earth: and Joseph opened all the storehouses." All the surrounding "countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands."—vss. 55-57

Joseph was thirty years old when he had a mission to preserve the life of his own people as well as the Egyptians. Jesus, also, was thirty years of age when he entered upon his ministry to ensure life in his kingdom to God's people and to the whole world. If we are faithful, God will also grant us a part in blessing the world.

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Restoring Relationships

Key Verse: *“Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither for God did send me before you to preserve life.”*
—Genesis 45:5

Selected Scripture:
Genesis
Chapters 42 to 45

IN TODAY’S LESSON WE learn of the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers, and of their remorse over having sold him into slavery. In addition, we find it was God’s will that Joseph eventually would provide food for his brethren as well as for all Egypt and the surrounding countries. He presented the opportunity for his brothers to restore a proper family relationship with him, and they took advantage of it to reunite their family, and to find relief for their family from the famine. We read in the account of

Judah’s pledge to Jacob guaranteeing the safety of Benjamin. Later, in Egypt, in the presence of Joseph, he offered himself as a slave to Joseph in return for Benjamin’s freedom.

Judah went to Joseph and eloquently pleaded for his brother: “Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh. . . . We have a father, an old man, . . . and his father loveth him. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for . . . his father would die.”—Gen. 44:18-22

After Judah concluded his recitation of facts as stated in this passage, Joseph could stand no more. He was convinced now that each of his brothers had experienced a change of heart since they had sold him into slavery. He ordered all with him, except his brothers, to leave, then weeping aloud he revealed himself to them saying, “I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?”

“And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom

ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”—Gen. 45:1-7

The ‘posterity to be saved’ was the promised “seed” of Abraham (Gen. 13:15)—that seed through which all the families of the earth were to be blessed. Through fulfillment of this promise will come the great deliverance of mankind from the bondage of sin and death. The spirit of forgiveness shown by Joseph is an example for us to follow. We should seek to attain such a character. Like Joseph, we are in the Lord’s hands, and he does not permit experiences except as they are for our good. If the injuries inflicted upon us by others are preparing us for joint-heirship with Christ in the kingdom, we should not have difficulty dealing mercifully with those who bring these trials upon us.

It is interesting to note that in this respect we share experiences with both Joseph and Jesus, who endured long periods of trial, finally attaining positions of rulership. And so it will be with us, if we are faithful, that “if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:12

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God's Word in Our Lives

THE HOLY SPIRIT had such a major role in producing the written Word of God, that the work of the Lord in the lives of his people is often accredited to this powerful and holy influence. But this work of the Holy Spirit should be understood as being accomplished largely through the written Word. What is the work of God in the lives of his people during the present age? One of the ways in which the Bible answers this question is by the number of expressions it employs in referring to the work of the Holy Spirit. According to the Bible, we are 'begotten,' 'anointed,' and 'sealed' by the Holy Spirit. We are also informed that the Spirit "beareth witness" to us that we are the children of God.—Rom. 8:14-17

BEGOTTEN OF THE SPIRIT

The word 'begotten' suggests the beginning of a new life. Actually, the Bible does not use the expression 'begotten of the Spirit,' but it does speak of our being begotten "with the Word of truth," which means the same thing. (James 1:18; I Pet. 1:22,23) In the Greek language, from which our English Bibles are translated, there is but one word for both 'begotten' and 'born.' One needs to determine from the context which meaning is indicated. This has led to a misunderstanding in that many suppose it is possible to be a 'born again' Christian while still in the flesh.

Jesus did say that it was necessary to be 'born again' in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven; but in his explanation of the great change this would involve, he said that those who are 'born again' can come and go as the wind, invisible to the human eye. (John 3:3-8) Clearly this is a description of the power of a spirit being; and the followers of the Master are, in the resurrection, to be partakers of the highest of all spiritual life, even of the Divine nature itself.—I Pet. 1:4

The beginning of this new life takes place while we are still in the flesh, and it is this beginning that the Scriptures refer to as the begetting of the Spirit, through the Word of truth. God, through his Spirit draws us to himself by revealing to us some of the glories of his Divine plan. We read in the Scriptures of the hope set before those who surrender themselves

to him to do his will. We learn that God's will is that we deny self, and take up our cross and follow Jesus into sacrificial death. (Matt. 16:24) We learn of God's many assurances of guidance and strength in every time of need, and of the wonderful provision he has made through Christ to cover our imperfections with a robe of righteousness, even the righteousness of Christ.—Isa. 61:10

Continuing to meditate upon these precious truths as they come to us through the Word of God, we are finally brought to the point of full consecration, or the full surrender of ourselves to God, and to the doing of his will. It is at this point that we are begotten of the Spirit. Now the precious promises pertaining to the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" belong to us. (Phil. 3:14) We now realize that we have become "partakers of the heavenly calling." (Heb. 3:1) All the wonderful statements in God's Word appertaining thereto begin to work powerfully in our lives, causing us to grow into maturity as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Thus, through the Word, we are begotten, and our new minds are nourished in preparation for Spirit birth in the resurrection.

THE ANOINTING

The Scriptures also speak of our being 'anointed.' Jesus mentioned his own anointing, quoting from Isaiah 61:1-3. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor." (Luke 4:17-21) John wrote of "the anointing which ye have received" from Christ. (I John 2:27) So we have the same anointing of the Spirit as that which came upon Jesus.

The kings and priests of ancient Israel were anointed to office by the use of anointing oil which was poured upon their heads. The Scriptures use this custom as an illustration of the fact that we are 'anointed' by the Holy Spirit to a high position in the plans and purposes of God. This authority is expressed through the Word of God. The prophecy quoted by Jesus is a case in point: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."—Isa. 61:1

The Scriptures declare that it is the will of God for his people to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom. Each text that bears on this point confirms the anointing which we have received from the Lord. We

know that in this respect, also, God's Word accomplishes the purpose for which it was given. This anointing is not limited in its scope to the present life. Jesus was anointed not only to proclaim the glad tidings, but also, through the agencies of his kingdom, to extend God's promised blessings to all mankind.

We are anointed to share with him in this work, which is the complete and ultimate purpose of our calling. We are called of God not merely to enjoy the blessings of salvation for ourselves, but to participate in the outworking of his plan for restoring the world of mankind to life during "the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:19-21

SEALED BY THE SPIRIT

In Ephesians 1:13 we read that we are "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples, and he did so at Pentecost. It is also true that the Holy Spirit has caused promises to be recorded in the Bible by which God 'seals,' or guarantees, our relationship with him, and assures us of the necessary strength to complete our sacrificial walk in the narrow way victoriously to the end. And how essential it is that we have this blessed assurance! Without it we would probably become discouraged, and cease to run for the prize of the High Calling. God realized that we would need this portion of his Word, and by furnishing it, supplied another reason it will not return to him void, but will accomplish that which he has been pleased to plan.—Isa. 55:11

WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

Paul wrote, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ... if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:16,17) Peter wrote that the Holy Spirit "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." (I Pet. 1:11) These Spirit-inspired prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the sufferings of Christ had their fulfillment in him, and are continuing to be fulfilled through his followers; for, as Paul wrote, we are "filling up the remainder of the afflictions of the Anointed One."—Col. 1:24, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

Participation in the sufferings of Christ is thus seen to be a very important factor in the Christian life. If, through our faithfulness to the Lord and his truth, we are called upon to endure suffering, either through persecution or otherwise, then we can rejoice, for it means that we have this witness, this evidence, that we are the children of God. Truly, this should be a great source of strength and encouragement to those who are being prepared to live and to reign with Christ!—Rev. 20:4,6

SANCTIFIED BY THE TRUTH

The Word of God is indeed wonderful! Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy Word is truth.” (John 17:17) Peter wrote concerning this same work of sanctification, saying, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit.” (I Pet. 1:2) Sanctification of the Spirit is the same as sanctification by the Word, because it is by the Holy Spirit that the Word of God has reached us. Peter says that those thus sanctified are the ‘elect according to the foreknowledge of God.’

Paul wrote of this class, saying, “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Rom. 8:29) If we are to maintain our position among the elect, it is clear that we will have to be conformed to the image of God’s dear Son; and it is through the Word of truth that this image is presented to us, and it is through the Word of truth that we are exhorted and encouraged to be conformed to that image.

In Ephesians 4:13, Paul refers to the time when “we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” This is the Divine objective for the entire Christ company being called out of the world to follow the Master during this Gospel Age.

To those who have heard the Divine call, and have dedicated themselves to the doing of God’s will, his Word is rich and satisfying spiritual food for their nourishment as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. It is as water to refresh them when faint and weary. The Word is also the “armour of righteousness” designed to assure victory for the good soldiers of Jesus Christ. (II Cor. 6:7; II Tim. 2:3) Indeed, the Word of

God contains everything we need to guide us, and to enable us to walk in the narrow way.

Some examples of how God's Word guides us are:

“Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.”—I Pet. 3:8,9

“The Lord thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee.”—Deut. 15:6

“The Lord thy God be with thee [Joshua], as he was with Moses.”—Josh. 1:17

“He [the Lord] said [to Moses], My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”—Exod. 33:14

“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11

“Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence.”—Ps. 140:13

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”—James 4:8

“Brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”—II Cor. 13:11

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour [through Jesus Christ our Lord], be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”—Jude 24:25

Through his providences, God guides his people in a way to bring them into contact with his Word, and with those who are able to help them in its understanding. We need all the servants the Lord has provided. We need one another as we fellowship in the glorious truths of the Word. But may we ever remember that the Word is the only authoritative source of truth which sanctifies, and makes us “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”—Col. 1:12

May the Word continue to be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path!—Ps. 119:105

The Dreams of Two Prisoners

CHAPTER FORTY

VERSES 1-4 “And it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt.

“And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers.

“And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound.

“And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward.”

Two others were added to the list of those over whom Joseph was made guardian—two officers from the household of the king: the chief butler and the chief baker. They had offended the king, and, justly or unjustly, were thrown into prison. The account says that they were placed in ‘ward’ in the house of the ‘captain of the guard,’ where Joseph was bound. The captain of the guard gave Joseph charge of these two new prisoners.

By this time, apparently, Joseph had been in prison a number of years, and it seems reasonable that a new captain of the guard, or chief of police, had been installed; for it is hardly likely that Potiphar would have recognized Joseph to this extent, in view of the circumstances under which he had been imprisoned. The fact that Potiphar’s name is not mentioned in this connection also indicates that he had been replaced by another.

VERSES 5-23 “And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison.

“And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad.

“And he asked Pharaoh’s officers that were with him in the ward of his lord’s house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day?”

“And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.

“And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me;

“And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes:

“And Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh’s hand.

“And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days:

“Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh’s cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.

“But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

“For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.

“When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, I also was in my dream, and, behold, I had three white baskets on my head:

“And in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head.

“And Joseph answered and said, This is the interpretation thereof: The three baskets are three days:

“Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.

“And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

“And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh’s hand:

“But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them.

“Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.”

When Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker, now prisoners and under the supervision of Joseph, both had dreams, Joseph again honored God by assuring these two that only God can interpret dreams, and would do so through him. (vs. 8) How easy it would have been, under the circumstances, for Joseph to have taken the honor to himself of being able to interpret dreams, but he did not. His long imprisonment had not lessened his confidence in God, nor his desire to glorify him at every possible opportunity.

In Joseph's God-given interpretation of both dreams, he sees objects as representing days—three branches of a vine, three days; and three baskets, three days. His interpretation of the other details of these two dreams indicated good fortune for the butler and death for the baker; but Joseph revealed the truth, nevertheless. His prophecies came true in both instances, and thus his reputation as an interpreter of dreams became well established.

Joseph saw, in the case of the butler, what seemed to him a good opportunity to bring his own case before the king in a favorable manner. So he asked the butler to speak a good word for him. Apparently, the butler promised to do this, but straightway forgot his promise, and Joseph languished in prison for another two years.

But the Lord had not forgotten Joseph. He knew that these additional two years of hardship would further prepare him for the position of honor he was yet to occupy. He knew also, that a time would come in the experience of Pharaoh which would be much more favorable for Joseph's name to be brought before him.

We often think that we know how to accomplish certain ends, and we try to do so without taking the Lord into consideration. Time and again, however, all of his people have learned that not until the Lord's due time, and only in His way, can worthwhile ends be attained.

God's Perfect Peace

*“The peace of God,
which passeth all
understanding, shall
keep your hearts and
minds through Christ
Jesus.”
—Philippians 4:7*

PEACE IS DEFINED AS ‘a state of quiet, tranquillity, freedom from disturbance or agitation; calmness, repose.’

Such a state is a part of God's character. His is a tranquil mind, calm, undisturbed, never agitated nor even wearied or perplexed by any of the cares of his vast dominion. Yet this perfect

peace of God, the Scriptures show, is due neither to the fact that there are no disorders in his far-reaching domain, nor yet to any stoical indifference to pain or pleasure, but rather to that perfect poise of his glorious attributes which makes him master of his situation as Sovereign of the entire universe.

He is never confused, bewildered, perplexed, anxious or careworn, nor in the least fearful that his plans will miscarry or his purposes fail. This is because all power and wisdom are inherent in him. The scope of his mighty intellect reaches to the utmost bounds of possibility, comprehending all causes, and discerning with precision all effects.

Consequently, he knows the end from the beginning, and that, not only from philosophical principles, but also by intuition. As the Creator of all things, and the originator of all law, he is thoroughly acquainted with all the intricate subtleties of physical, moral, and intellectual law, so that no problem could arise the results of which are not manifest to his mind. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”—I John 1:5

God, the Creator of all things, is also the competent sustainer of all things. In silent grandeur, from age to age, the whole physical universe fulfills his will, without a suspicion of disorder or mishap; and the same power is pledged for its sustenance throughout the eternal future.

Thus from his own vast, inherent resources of power and wisdom springs the peace of God. But not from this source alone is the Divine

peace; for peace accompanies inherent goodness. God is the personification of every virtue and every grace; and consequently he has the blessed satisfaction and peace of conscious moral perfection as well as inherent wisdom and power.

GOD'S EMOTIONAL NATURE

God as a Father shows us that he bears a father's love for all his intelligent creatures:—"the whole family [of God] in heaven and in earth"—and that for his "pleasure they are and were created." (Eph. 3:15; Rev. 4:11) He created them in his own likeness—with the same mental and moral attributes, so that he might have communion and fellowship with them as sons, and they with him as a Father, that thus, in mutual fellowship and communion the Creator and the creature might find pleasure, happiness, and delight.

This likeness of God includes in all, not only the same mental faculties, but also the free exercise of the same in the formation of character. A creature incapable of forming character would not be in God's likeness. And for the purpose of developing character, the alternative of good and evil must be placed before him. The right and wrong principles of action must be discerned and the individual left freely to his own choice in the matter, that the pleasure of God may be realized in the virtuous character resultant from the free choice of righteousness.

Since the love of God for his newly created and innocent creatures is akin to, but much stronger than, the love of an earthly parent for an innocent infant, and since that loving interest and solicitude does not grow cold as the creature advances in years, but earnestly watches for the development of the principles and fruits of righteousness, it is manifest that, like an earthly parent, God experiences the sense of either pleasure or pain, according as his free, intelligent creatures choose the right course or the wrong.

Of this we are fully assured, not only by thus reasoning from the fact of his Fatherhood, but also by all of those scriptures which speak of some things as abominable, displeasing, hateful, and despicable to him, and as giving him no pleasure; which say that his anger burns against them, and that his indignation and wrath wax hot, even to their destruction. Other scriptures speak of his pleasure, love, joy, and delight in pleasing things—in the principles of righteousness and those who obey them—the

appreciation of pleasurable emotions of an opposite character, for pain and pleasure may properly be considered the ebb and flow of the same emotion.

These exhibitions of the mind of God indicate clearly an emotional nature in the Divine being, of which fact we might also judge from the realization of our own emotional nature, since man was created in God's image. No, dear friends, God is not a God of stoical indifference, insensible to the emotions of pleasure and of pain; but the perfect poise of his attributes preserves the equilibrium of peace under all circumstances, whether of pain or pleasure.

GOD'S PEACE UNBROKEN

With this thought in mind, then, let us consider the circumstances under which the marvelous peace of God has been perpetually maintained. The deeply laid plan of God in all his Creative works required long ages (Greek: *aions*) for its accomplishment. Across the vista of ages he saw in his purpose the glory of an intelligent creation in his own likeness, established in righteousness and worthy of his gift of eternal life. He therein saw the mutual pleasure of the Creator and the creature, and with a peaceful patience he resolved to wait for the glorious consummation.

As the plan developed and time rolled on, the free moral agency of his creatures, misused by some, was allowing them to develop evil characters. By this means, discord was introduced into his family—"the family [of God] in heaven and in earth"—all his creatures, angels and men; and the family was divided, some holding to righteousness, and some choosing to do evil. But such a contingency was one of the foreseen necessities of the far-reaching plan, the glorious outcome of which was, in the Divine judgment, worth the cost of all the trouble and loss which he foresaw.

Family discord is a dreadful thing! How a prodigal son or a wayward daughter often brings gray hairs of the human parent down with sorrow to the grave! The Heavenly Father knows something of such sorrow; for he saw Satan, one of his sons (Isa. 14:12), an angel of light, fall as lightning from heaven. (Luke 10:18) For six thousand years, at least, that son has been in open, defiant rebellion against God, and most actively and viciously engaged in inciting further rebellion and wickedness. He

saw many of the angels leave their first estate (Jude 6) and become the allies of Satan; and then he saw also the whole human race fall into sin. Did ever any human parent find such a conspiracy—so virulent and hateful—spring up in his family? Surely not!

Consider the love against which these unfaithful ones sinned. From God comes every good and perfect gift; but his favors have been despised; his love spurned; his righteous authority conspired against and defied; his character maligned, misrepresented, made to appear odious, hateful, unrighteous, and even despicable! Through it all the peace of God continues despite the approximately six thousand years that he has endured the discord of sinners. And still, O wondrous grace, his love abounds. It is written that God so loved the world that, even while they were yet sinners, he gave his only begotten Son to die for them. Through Jesus, judgment (trial) is also to be extended to those angels that fell—with the exception of Satan, the leader and instigator of the whole conspiracy, the father of lies.—John 3:16; I Cor. 6:3; Jude 6; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 20:10,14

GOD'S PEACE COMPATIBLE WITH SORROW

God beheld the fall into sin of a large proportion of his family. Their recovery required the sacrifice of the dearest treasure of his heart—the subjection of his beloved Son to the most abject humiliation, ignominy, suffering, and death. Again, the illustration of a parent's love assists us in comprehending the cost of this manifestation of God's love. In addition to all the graces of character manifested since Jesus' prehuman existence as the *Logos*, he was now adding the further grace of full submission to the Divine will, even when the pathway led to humiliation and pain.

Did the Father let him go on that errand of mercy without the slightest sensation of sorrowful emotion? Had he no feelings of the pangs of a father's love when the arrows of death pierced the heart of his beloved Son? When our dear Lord said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt," did it touch no sympathetic chord in the heart of the Eternal One? Yes, the unfeigned love of the Father did sympathetically share the Lord's sorrow.—Matt. 26:38,39

The principle taught in the Divine Word—that true love weeps with those who weep, and rejoices with those who rejoice—is one which is also exemplified in the Divine character. The immortal Jehovah could not himself die for us, his Divine nature being proof against death. And even if he could have died, there would have been no higher power to raise him out of death. Thus, all Creation would have been left forever without a Governor, and only disaster and ruin could have ensued. But God could, and did, sacrifice at great cost to his loving, fatherly nature, the dearest treasure of his heart. Thus he manifested the great love wherewith he loved his deceived and fallen creatures.—I John 4:9

Our Lord Jesus also manifested his great sympathy for the Father in the misrepresentation of his character which he had so patiently endured for ages. It was the one effort of his life to glorify the Father and to rectify among men the false impressions of his Father's glorious character. His aim was to show men God's goodness, benevolence, love and grace, and to lead mankind to love the merciful God who, even while they were yet sinners, so loved them to such an extent that he planned for their eternal salvation.

GOD'S INHERENT PEACE

There has been great commotion in the disrupted family of God—wickedness in which the Lord declares he has no pleasure. (Ps. 5:4) Nevertheless the peace of God has never been disturbed. In the full consciousness of his own moral perfection, his unerring wisdom, his mighty power; and with the fullest appreciation of justice; and the keenest and most ardent love of the beauty of holiness; patiently and peacefully—even joyfully in the midst of tribulation—he has endured (as did his Son—Heb. 12:2,3) the “contradiction of sinners against himself,” for some six thousand years.

But, during the seventh millennium, according to the Divine purpose, it will be the joyful privilege of our Lord Jesus fully to manifest to all creatures in heaven and in earth the Father's glorious character. Then will the Father rejoice in the grandeur of his finished work, and in the everlasting peace and happiness of his family in heaven and on earth, reunited “under one Head.”—Eph. 1:10, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

This blessed consummation will not be realized, however, until the incorrigible fallen sons of God, disowned and disinherited because they

love unrighteousness and would not be reclaimed, shall have been cut off. This will be the last unpleasant duty of the Creator and Father of all, who positively declares that it is a sad duty, yet nevertheless one which he will have the fortitude to perform in the interest of universal righteousness and peace. Hear him: “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?”—Ezek. 33:11

Thus we see that the peace of God is compatible with great commotion and with sorrow and pain of any kind; for it is not dependent upon outward circumstances, but upon the proper balancing of the mind and the conditions of a perfect heart. Such peace—the peace of God—was also enjoyed by our Lord Jesus in the midst of all the turmoil and confusion of his eventful life.

Dawn Bible Students Association

“If Ye Love Me”

*“If a man love me,
he will keep my
words: and my
Father will love
him, and we will
come unto him,
and make our
abode with him.”
—John 14:23*

MUCH HAS BEEN SAID and written emphasizing the importance of the Christian’s personal love for Jesus. Yet, strange as it may seem, so far as the historical records of his life are concerned, Jesus himself said very little on this subject. Matthew reports Jesus as saying that those who love their own people more than they love him are not worthy of him (Matt. 10:37); and John, the disciple of love, quotes Jesus on this point only a few times. In our text, as well as in other statements of Jesus,

we find the Master stressing the thought that love for him would be reflected in obedience to his teachings, and by faithfulness in serving—even at the cost of life itself—those whom he loved and looked upon as his sheep.

THE LOVE OF THE APOSTLES

The Apostle Peter wrote concerning Jesus, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” (I Pet. 1:8) Peter addresses this remark to the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”—vs. 2

The Apostle John refers several times to our love for God, and emphasizes that those who possess such love will manifest it by loving their brethren; which is a similar viewpoint as that expressed by Jesus when he said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) This would indicate that John, the apostle of love, caught the essence of Jesus’ teachings on the subject, which is that our personal love for the Master and for our Heavenly Father is not measured by how much we

talk about it, nor by emotional feelings, but by the manner in which we obey their commandments and rejoice in the Divine plan of salvation.

HENCEFORTH NO MORE

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, ... henceforth know we him [so] no more.” (II Cor. 5:16) This text indicates that there were many in the Early Church who had been personally acquainted with Jesus while he was in the flesh. For these, the memory of their acquaintance and contact with him must have been sweet indeed. Even so, Paul was pointing out to them that their true relationship with the Master was one which transcended their memory of him in the flesh. Such a treasured memory, held by those who enjoyed a measure of personal fellowship with Jesus, would naturally lead to a very strong attachment to him, but might not necessarily inspire obedience to his commands and loyalty to his doctrines.

Failing to understand the doctrines of the Divine plan, and the wonderful position the Divine Christ now occupies in the Father’s arrangement, the tendency of churchianity has been to deify the man Jesus, and to judge the genuineness of Christian experience by the depth of emotional love one might feel toward him. It was to aid in this that statues of the man Jesus were introduced into the church, ignoring Paul’s statement that we no longer know Christ ‘after the flesh.’

This does not mean that a Christian should not appreciate the perfection of the man Christ Jesus, nor be inspired by his unswerving devotion to God and his love for righteousness. The manner in which Jesus obeyed his Father’s will, and by so doing laid down his life in sacrifice for both the church and the world, should ever be a pattern for us to follow. His gentleness, patience, sympathy, compassion, and love constitute a standard of character which we should continually strive to attain. Our hearts naturally go out in love to the One who, in displaying his Father’s love, so willingly gave up all in order that we might live.

It is surely inspiring to read, and to meditate upon, the historical records of the Master’s life of perfect obedience to his Father’s will. In our minds we love to go with him as he moves from city to city, and from one scene of active service to another, and hear those gracious words which fell from his lips. We almost envy the great privilege enjoyed by

those first disciples of being personally with Jesus, and so intimately associated in his work.

NOBLE OF HEART

Jesus appreciated every evidence of love which was displayed toward him by his disciples and friends. Those who are noble of heart naturally appreciate nobility in others, and the disciples' love for the Master was an evidence to him that they appreciated the godlike qualities which they saw displayed in him; and his love went out to them in return. This reciprocity of love is quite understandable even by the natural man, and although a beautiful characteristic, is in itself no evidence at all of special spiritual discernment.

An understanding of the marvelous virtues of Jesus' perfect character as a man must be accompanied by an appreciation of spiritual things. The Apostle Peter loved the Master, a love which must have been based upon his glorious personality, but he had little spiritual discernment. When Jesus announced his intention of visiting Jerusalem where he expected to be arrested and put to death, Peter said, "Be it far from thee, Lord." (Matt. 16:22) Commenting on this, Jesus explained that Peter had expressed a purely human viewpoint.

John loved Jesus, delighting to be near to him. But despite this deep personal attachment, John was just as bewildered as the others when Jesus was crucified, and, together with Peter and James, decided to go back into the fishing business.

JESUS' COMMANDMENTS

Outstanding among Jesus' commandments is the one in which he enjoins upon his followers the necessity of loving one another as he loved them. (John 13:34) This was a love which expressed itself in sacrifice. It rose far above natural affection and impelled the Master to lay down his life for those who became his disciples and espoused his Father's cause. Jesus considered it important for his disciples to understand his unselfish interest in them, and indicated that they could express a higher love for him by their willingness similarly to lay down their lives for one another.

This 'new' commandment surely points to a very understandable and practical manner in which we can express our love for our risen and glorified Lord. We cannot see him, even as we cannot see our Heavenly

Father, but we can see the members of his body—those whom he particularly loves, and for whom he laid down his life. By loving and serving these, even to the extent of laying down our lives for them, we demonstrate our love for the Master. No matter how much we may claim to love Jesus, if we are indifferent to the needs of our brethren, it means that our professions are vain and empty.

Equally important to demonstrate our love for Jesus is the keeping of his commandments. Jesus explained that his followers were to be the “light of the world,” and said that we should not keep our light under a “bushel.” Then he added, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:14-16) Our professions of love for Jesus would be but as empty words should we fail to obey this commandment.

SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” is another of Jesus’ commandments. (Matt. 6:33) To keep this ‘saying’ means that everything else in life must be made secondary to seeking the kingdom of God. We ‘seek’ the kingdom and its righteousness through our study of the Word and obedience to all its precepts. We ‘seek’ the kingdom by laying down our lives for the brethren, and by letting our light shine for the blessing of others; and Jesus accepts all of these as evidences of our love for him.

We cannot properly ‘seek’ the kingdom of God without being enthusiastically interested in all the things which the kingdom will mean to both the church and the world. Seeking the kingdom from the standpoint of our own share in its spiritual phase means that we will lay up treasures in heaven, and will not have our hearts set upon laying up earthly treasures. We will set our affections on things above, not on things of the earth.

We will also be enthusiastic about the blessings of restitution which the Lord has provided for all mankind. As our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus view the matter, one would give little evidence of love for them if in any manner he was indifferent to the wonderful provisions they have made for the blessing of the fallen and dying race. The restitution feature of the kingdom was so important to God that he caused all his prophets to write about it! God so loved the “world,” not merely the

church, that he gave his Son to die in order that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Surely our seeking the kingdom, through which the blessings of restitution will be made available to the people, must include a lively interest in this great objective of the kingdom.

If we thrill at the thought of the coming ‘times of restitution of all things’ we will want to talk about this theme of the prophets, and we will want to tell the world about it. To be in this attitude of mind and heart does not indicate a lack of love for Christ, or for God, but the opposite; for it reveals our appreciation of one of the outstanding features of the plan of God.

Satan would like us to believe that our love for Christ can be demonstrated apart from consideration of the doctrines of the Divine plan, particularly the great doctrine of restitution. But this is just one of his cunning sophistries by which he endeavors to take the truth away from God’s people, or at least to minimize its importance so that it is no longer a vital issue in their lives.

How logical this is! How empty would be our professions of love for God and for the Master if at the same time we were to minimize the importance of the arrangements whereby Divine blessings reach both the church and the world! How else, indeed, could we know anything about God and Jesus, except as they have revealed themselves to us through the truth? Let us, therefore, demonstrate our love by our continued appreciation of, and loyalty to, the truth.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Searching the Scriptures

“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.”

—Acts 17:11,
12, Revised Standard
Version

BEFORE THE APOSTLE Paul reached Berea, he had been in Thessalonica where, according to his custom, he visited a synagogue of the Jews, and on three Sabbaths he reasoned with them from the Scriptures. (Acts 17:2, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) The Greek word in this account, which is translated ‘reasoned’ is *dialegomai*, meaning ‘a dialog, or discussion.’ The same Greek word appears in various other Scriptures, emphasizing that this method of proclaiming the truth was then in common use.

While the dialog, or discussion method of proclaiming the truth is not now generally used among Christians, it still is an excellent one, because it helps the interested listeners to find

answers to their own questions.

It was by reasoning or discussing the Gospel message with his hearers that Paul opened up the Scriptures to them, unfolding that which was hitherto concealed or obscure; “alleging”—laying down the proposition—“that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus ... is Christ.”—Acts 17:2,3

Doubtless other important features of the truth were also explained to these devout Jews; but the highlight of Paul’s reasoning seems to have been, “This Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.” A mob formed by opponents of Paul’s teachings in Thessalonica caused a riot, and forced the brethren to send Paul away.—Acts 17:5-10

The Apostle Paul always went to a synagogoué first in entering a new city, and upon arriving in Berea he lost no time in locating one. Here he found some who were very susceptible to the truth, and “more noble than those in Thessalonica.” (Acts 17:11) The Greek word here translated ‘noble’ seems to suggest persons of noble birth. However, true nobility implies reasonableness, as distinguished from prejudice. Actually, those of so-called ‘noble birth’ are often the least susceptible to the truth.

The Bereans were reasonable—and from this standpoint, truly ‘noble’—for they welcomed the servants of God who drew their attention particularly to the things written, and showed that the Gospel they were proclaiming was the same good news which had been previously expressed by the holy prophets. With all readiness of mind these Bereans began to examine the Scriptures—not merely on the Sabbath days, but daily—to determine how well Paul’s reasonings and arguments were supported by the testimony of the Law and the prophets.

As could be expected, many of the noble Bereans accepted the good tidings. Compared with those of Thessalonica, these Bereans were more generous and noble in their feelings—more disposed to inquire candidly into the teachings being advanced to them. They did not reject and spurn it as unworthy of examination.

It was proper that the Bereans should search the Scriptures to make sure that the teachings of Paul agreed with the inspired record. It is also our obligation now to search the Scriptures, to prove whether the teachings being advanced to us are true or false. We are to “examine all things. Hold fast the good.” (I Thess. 5:21, *Diaglott*) “To the Law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.”—Isa. 8:20

The entire testimony of the Scriptures (allowing for interpolations and faulty translations) is harmonious, whether it be communicated by the Law, the prophets, the Lord Jesus, or the apostles. This harmony is one of the proofs of the Divine inspiration of the Bible. The testimony of Jesus and the apostles reveal things new and also confirms the old. Thus the entire Word of God becomes increasingly stimulating the more we study it in sincerity and in truth.

If we are like the noble Bereans we also will zealously and daily search the Scriptures, in the consciousness that the full testimony of the Word is

to be our guide. Paul wrote, “All Scripture, Divinely inspired, is indeed profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for that discipline which is in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for every good work.”—II Tim. 3:16,17, *WED*

A knowledge of the truth is essential in order to possess the spirit of the truth. However, one might have much knowledge of the Scriptures, yet be sadly lacking in the spirit of the truth—which is an essential in the Christian walk—it is necessary to come into heart harmony with the truth; into mental accord and cooperation with the Divine will as expressed in the Word of God. This condition can be attained only by first accepting the Lord Jesus as our personal Savior, and then consecrating oneself unreservedly to do God’s will.

In due course the great privilege of proclaiming the true Gospel will come to us, as it has so graciously been revealed. We will find it effective to use much the same method as did the Apostle Paul—the reasoning, or dialog method.

Not many have the opportunity of proclaiming the truth in lecture form from the public platform, but we can all find opportunities to reason with those with whom we come in contact, thus setting forth to them the good news and encouraging them to read the Word and to meditate upon it.

Thus we will prove ourselves to be “an approved workman, irrepachable, rightly treating the Word of truth.”—II Tim. 2:15, *WED*

Dawn Bible Students Association