

A person is shown from the back, their silhouette dark against a bright sky. They are looking up towards a sun that is shining intensely, with rays of light breaking through a layer of clouds. The person's right arm is extended downwards. The overall mood is one of awe and spiritual contemplation.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

The Mind of Christ

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Longwood, FL 32752

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www.dawnbible.com

Printed in U.S.A.

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CHAPTER 1

Christ—Our Wisdom and Righteousness

*“Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us
wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification,
and redemption.”
—I Corinthians 1:30*

IT IS A JOY to provide this series of twenty-four lessons, in which we will examine various aspects of the important subject, “The Mind of Christ.” This phrase is taken from the words of Paul in I Corinthians 2:16, which reads, “Who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” Paul, in another place, says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) Indeed, it is only as we develop a mind and mindset similar to that of our Master, that we will be faithful to our Heavenly Father.

An honest and humble appraisal of ourselves must lead to the inevitable conclusion that, as members of the fallen and sinful race of mankind, we have nothing of virtue or character by which we can commend ourselves to God with any hope of being acceptable to him on the basis of our own righteousness. This means that our sonship privileges in his family are only possible through the abundance of his grace in providing a way whereby he could be “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Rom. 3:26) Salvation, and all the divine blessings incidental thereto, are ours not because of our own merit, but because of the Heavenly Father’s love in giving his son to be our Redeemer. Well has the apostle put it, saying, “By grace are ye saved

through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”—Eph. 2:8

The value of salvation is appreciated most by those who, having a proper evaluation of their own undone condition, realize their great need for it. Indeed, the riches of divine favor are represented in the provision the Heavenly Father has made through Christ. Those who come to God in simple faith and full devotion, may not only enjoy peace with him, but have access to the inner chambers of his grace, and therein rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1,2) This “great salvation,” the apostle explains, began to be spoken by our Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.—Heb. 2:3

The First Advent of Christ marked the opening of the age during which the high, or heavenly, calling of those who were to reign with him in glory was to operate. Not until he came and shed his blood as the Redeemer of mankind would it have been possible for anyone, no matter how earnestly he may have tried, to meet the conditions laid down for those who are called to glory, honor and immortality.

CHRIST—OUR WISDOM

Not only was Christ the first one to walk in the narrow way that leads to immortality, but only through his merit, and by virtue of his counsel and example, is it possible for others to walk acceptably in the same narrow way. One of the very fundamental ways in which we are to follow after his example is to seek the same quality of heavenly wisdom that he possessed. As our opening text emphasizes, Christ is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption, or deliverance. In other words, he is all and everything to us that is necessary in order that we may be heirs of God and joint-heirs with him in the heavenly reward offered to the saints during this age. He is our ultimate example and standard in all things, and it is necessary that our mind be patterned after him.

One of the titles the Scriptures give to Jesus is that of Counselor. (Isa. 9:6) If we are to be truly wise it is essential that we follow the instructions and counsel of Christ. The wise man Solomon said, “The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10) To reverence God implies respect for his words of enlightenment and instruction, a respect that will lead us to fully obey his divine will.

The quality of reverence for God is necessary from the very beginning of our approach to him, for it means that we recognize his greatness and our own nothingness—his perfection of holiness, and our own depravity and unrighteousness. To recognize this is the true foundation of wisdom's structure, for it implies a willingness and desire to put aside our own imperfect viewpoints and ways and to accept instead the counsel and will of the Heavenly Father.

As we first approach God in this wise attitude of humility, desiring to be taught of him, one of the first lessons we learn is his wondrous provision through Christ. It is this provision, despite our imperfections, whereby we are able to enjoy the blessings which his grace promises to all who long to be in harmony with him—those who “pant” after him “as the hart panteth after the water brooks.”—Ps. 42:1

An honest recognition of our own imperfections, hence the need of Christ as our Redeemer, is the first step in wisdom's way, but we need also to recognize the wisdom of making a full consecration of ourselves to do the Father's will. The recognition of our own lack of wisdom would be largely in vain should we fail to devote ourselves fully to him who has promised to give to his own that wisdom which is from above. (James 1:5; 3:17) While the Word of God is filled with all the necessary counsel to make us truly wise, its instructions become the guiding star of our lives only when we give ourselves unreservedly in consecration to the doing of the will of God represented therein.

Christ is our wisdom in this fuller sense also because he is to us the living Word of God. That is, in the perfect example of his life, we have patterned for us the manner in which God's instructions apply in the lives of the consecrated. He is the Captain of our salvation, the Forerunner, the Head of the body, who, being guided by the words of God himself, has shown us the true meaning of those instructions as they affect the lives of those who are following in his footsteps.

WISDOM FROM ABOVE

The Apostle James gives us an overall picture of heavenly wisdom, saying that it is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17) In Christ we have a revealing example of the manner in which these

various elements of heavenly wisdom operate in one who is fully devoted to the doing of God's will. Earthly wisdom functions along lines quite contrary to the principles mentioned by James. It is selfish, therefore its objective is to promote self, frequently at the expense of purity, and often by strife, arrogance, and stubbornness. Where selfishness reigns supreme, it resorts even to cruelty to attain its ends, while personal favoritisms and hypocrisy are considered virtues if they can be used to attain the ends sought by the selfish heart.

How different, as the apostle has shown, is the heavenly wisdom which is in harmony with the divine character of love. How wonderfully did Christ display the love qualities of heavenly wisdom as he went about in the divine service doing good. Christ was first "pure." He was this by nature, even as a child, having been born perfect. His moral and intellectual purity was sealed by his obedience to the Law Covenant. He was pure also in his wholehearted devotion to the divine will from the time of his consecration at Jordan until the very end of his earthly pilgrimage. With Jesus, it was not a case of doing some things for self and some things for God. He was all for the doing of his Father's will only, and fully in harmony with the instructions of the written Word wherein that will was revealed.

Neither men nor devils could turn the Master aside from the purity of a wholehearted, absolute devotion to his Father's will. Satan, the prince of devils, tried it. Near the beginning of Jesus' ministry Satan brought pressure upon him in the form of subtle temptations to take a course of "halfway" devotion to his consecration vows. However, Jesus was wise and resisted the attack. He was wise in his own right as a perfect human being, but even more importantly, he was wise toward God in that he not only knew the divine will for him, but hesitated not a moment in his resolute determination to be wholly loyal thereto. Thus, his response to the Adversary was direct and decisive: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."—Matt. 4:10

"THEN PEACEABLE"

The Apostle Paul admonished, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Rom. 12:18) He knew, from his many experiences in the narrow way,

and as had been exemplified in Jesus' life, that putting purity first in the consecrated life means that we will not always be able to dwell in peace in the world and with the worldly-minded. Had Christ not put purity first, and had he yielded to the Adversary's suggestions to compromise the divine will, he doubtless would have avoided much of the persecution that came upon him. Had he taken the course pleasing to "the god of this world," he could have dwelt peaceably with those who do the will of that god.—II Cor. 4:4

Jesus was not a promoter of strife. One of the prophetic titles descriptive of the spirit of his mission to earth was that of the "Prince of Peace." (Isa. 9:6) In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said the peacemakers are considered blessed of God. (Matt. 5:9) The gracious words which fell from his consecrated lips were such as to promote peace and goodwill in the lives of those whose hearts were not calloused by selfishness, and whose minds were not blinded by the darkness of this world. Because the darkness hateth the light, however, the Master's words of peace and goodwill stirred up enmity against him from the world, an enmity that was not satisfied until the Prince of Peace hung limp and lifeless upon the cross.

In following the Master's example, we may not be confronted with similar large and dramatic issues to test the purity and wholeheartedness of our devotion to God. Even so, his loyalty to the principles of righteousness in the big as well as in the little things of life, constitutes a perfect guide for us irrespective of the manner in which we may be tested.

Putting purity first in the carrying out of our consecration vows will cause us the loss of worldly friendships. It may even test the depth of our devotion as it applies to our association with some who profess to be followers of the Master. Where issues of the Truth and its service are concerned, a peace-at-any-price attitude is not wise. It does not conform to the example of Christ who, by the appointment of our Heavenly Father, has been made unto us the embodiment of heavenly wisdom. Worldly wisdom often compromises principle in order to avoid suffering, but Jesus did not do this. He was guided by his knowledge of the divine will, even though it meant travail and sorrow, and thereby proved himself worthy to be the Savior of the world.—Isa. 53:11

“GENTLE, ... EASY TO BE ENTREATED”

Following the course of heavenly wisdom must lead to gentleness of demeanor and character. The coarse, rough ways of the flesh and the world should give place, as we make progress in the narrow way, to genuine refinement and gentleness of heart and disposition. Christ was pleasingly gentle and so “easy to be entreated” that even the children were completely at ease in his presence. Those who sought for the blessings he could bestow were given audience and consideration even though, in some cases, they succeeded only in touching the hem of his garment. The Master’s gentleness was in keeping with his purity. He was gentle to those deserving gentleness, but stern in his rebuttal of the hypocritical Pharisees.

In our desire for peace, and in our disposition to promote it, we, like the Master, should be gentle. We should have an open heart toward those who cross our pathway, and for whom, in God’s providence, we may have blessings of comfort to share, if they would but receive them. Yet, as with Jesus, so with us, we will not be easily entreated to walk contrary to the will of God, or to lend our support by sympathy, word, or deed to anything that is out of harmony with the spirit of heavenly wisdom.

“MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS”

Heavenly wisdom rejoices in mercy. How beautifully Jesus exemplified this quality of the divine character, both in his teaching and manner of life. When he was asked how far one should go in forgiving, he gave that “seventy times seven” formula of divine mercy. Such mercy, when manifested in the Christian life, serves to bypass nearly all friction and disputes that otherwise rob followers of the Master of the fullness of joy in the Lord that should be theirs. Whether in our individual lives as followers of Christ, in our homes, or in our fellowship with one another, the mercy element of heavenly wisdom serves to sweeten all of our experiences and to make us more like our Father in heaven.

The “good fruits” associated with heavenly wisdom are the fruits of the Spirit. The growth of such fruit, and its proper ripening, will inevitably take place in the heart which is illuminated with the wisdom from above. Here again the fullness of our devotion to God will be the measure of the fruitage developed in our lives. If we are to be full of good

fruits we must be empty of self. The selfish heart of the flesh is barren. However, to the extent that self and self-will is renounced, and the will of God in Christ becomes the possessing power of our lives, there is certain to be an abundant crop of good fruit.

“WITHOUT PARTIALITY”

The Scriptures explain that “ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28) Therefore, to show partiality in our dealings with fellow members of the body of Christ would display a lack of wisdom from above. Just as God is no respecter of persons, we who are trying to be like him must ever maintain his viewpoint, which is one of love that seeks to bestow blessings upon all—without partiality.

To be partial in our dealings with each other, or even with the world, would imply a measure of injustice. This would be contrary to the course of heavenly wisdom, and contrary to the example set by Christ. It is true that some of the disciples seemed to be more appreciated by Jesus than others, and these were granted some additional privileges. In doing this, however, the Master did not work any injustice upon the others. His nearness to Peter, James, and John was doubtless because of their greater love and understanding of him. God is not unjustly a respecter of persons, yet he makes it plain in his Word that he draws especially near to those who draw near to him.—James 4:8

“WITHOUT HYPOCRISY”

The heavenly wisdom which we see exemplified in Christ is also “without hypocrisy.” It is so pure, so peaceable, so gentle, and so merciful toward all, that there is no necessity for hypocrisy where it is in control. Those guided by heavenly wisdom must, of necessity, be out of harmony and sympathy with all that is sinful—not merely outwardly, but in their hearts. To be truly a follower of Christ, who is our wisdom, we must indeed “practice what we preach.” We are not only to outwardly support and be in sympathy with that which is pure, peaceable and gentle, but these divine qualities of heavenly wisdom must also be the adornment of our heart and inward character.

From whatever viewpoint we analyze the wisdom which is from above, we find that in the life of Christ we have a perfect example of how it should control those who are following

him in the narrow way. Not only, therefore, does the beginning of wisdom lead us to Christ as the Redeemer, but we find wisdom's perfection manifested in his every word and deed, which, by God's grace, we are trying to copy in our own lives.

CHRIST—OUR JUSTIFICATION

In addition to being our wisdom, the apostle explains that Christ is also our righteousness. In explaining this point, Paul used the Greek word *dikaiosune*, which, according to Professor Strong, literally means "equity," and specifically, "justification." Various forms of this same Greek word are used in the New Testament, and are translated as "justified," "justification," and "righteousness." As used in our text, the word could properly be translated justification.

Considering the literal meaning of the word *dikaiosune* as being equity, we have presented to us a comprehensive view of what Christ means to us in connection with our relationship to the Heavenly Father and our hope of life. He is our "equity." That is, the merit of Christ's ransom sacrifice is the thing of value which gives us a standing—equity—in the sight of God, and permits us to enjoy the privileges of fellowship with the Father and his Son. The merit of Christ's righteousness is imputed to us upon the basis of our faith, giving us a standing of righteousness, or justification, before God.

No matter how perfect our heart's intentions may be toward God and righteousness—no matter how determined we are to lay down our lives in his divine service—no matter how much we appreciate the invitation to suffer with Christ, that we may reign with him—that which makes possible the carrying out of our desires, and enables us to render acceptable sacrifice, is the equity of Christ's righteousness imputed to us by divine grace.

The fact that Christ's righteousness makes up for our deficiencies does not mean, as the apostle explains, that we can "continue in sin that grace may abound." (Rom. 6:1) We cannot hope to reach the high standard of perfection displayed in the holy and undefiled Jesus, yet we should strive toward this end. He is our example of righteousness, our pattern and guide, to show us the righteous way in all the experiences of life. We should daily wage an aggressive struggle to control our thoughts, words, and deeds, and bring them into captivity to the will of God, as expressed by the teachings and example of Christ.

It is important to us as Christians that we always keep in mind the fact that Christ is our righteousness, our justification. To remember this will help to keep us humble. The recognition of our own sinful condition, and of the wondrous provision made for us through Christ, should be indelibly impressed upon our hearts and minds each and every day of our walk in the narrow way.

This recognition is something that should serve as a touchstone of our relationship to God throughout our entire earthly pilgrimage. If at any time we feel that victories over sin and imperfection have been attained to the point where we have somewhat of our own righteousness wherewith to commend ourselves to God, we should call to mind the pit of sin and death from which we have been rescued by divine grace, and the solid rock, Christ Jesus, upon which we have been granted the privilege of standing. (Ps. 40:2) Our continued standing with the Heavenly Father as his children depends upon Christ's righteousness to the very end of the way. Only thus will we be victorious.—Isa. 51:1; I Cor. 15:57 ■

CHAPTER 2

Christ—Our Sanctification and Redemption

*“Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us
wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification,
and redemption.”
—I Corinthians 1:30*

IN THE PREVIOUS chapter, we considered the first in a series of lessons on the general subject, “The Mind of Christ.” The above scripture was reviewed as to its first two parts—wisdom and righteousness—and how Christ Jesus is “made unto us” these things as we seek to develop his mind in our life. We will now reflect upon the last two features of this verse—sanctification and redemption—considering how each of these also plays an important role in the establishment in us of the mind of Christ.

When we read in the Scriptures of having “the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16), more is included in this than simply thinking like Jesus did, although this is an important part of what is meant by this phrase. According to *Strong’s Greek Dictionary* and *Thayer’s Greek Definitions*, the word “mind” as used in this verse also includes these deeper meanings: the faculties of understanding, judging, and determining in a sober, calm, and impartial manner; the capacity for spiritual truth; the ability to perceive divine things, and to recognize goodness while hating evil; a particular mode of thinking as related to one’s purposes and desires; the will. When viewed in this way, we can begin to appreciate the fact that developing the mind of Christ is a full-time job for those who would be his footstep followers.

Sanctification and redemption [deliverance] rank very high on the list of the benefits made available to us as a result of the sacrifice of our precious Redeemer. In order to fully appropriate these benefits, however, it is necessary that we take them deeply into our mind, our will, and the innermost purposes and desires of our heart, that they may more fully assist us in the transforming of our character into the image of Christ. These benefits must also produce from us, to the extent of our capacity and ability, good works, wholesome words, and righteous deeds. In other words, every aspect of life—our will, thoughts, words, and actions—should reflect as much as possible that mind which was in Christ Jesus. Only thus will he be fully “made unto us” sanctification and redemption.

CHRIST—OUR SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification signifies setting apart to holy service. The Greek word *hagiasmos* used in our text, which declares that Christ is made unto us sanctification, literally means, according to *Strong's*, purity, or purification. We should remember, however, that the standard of purity to which the apostle refers is not one of human conception—not merely moral uprightness—but a purity of relationship to God, which means a full dedication of ourselves to do his will. The true meaning of sanctification from the divine standpoint is well illustrated by the inscription appearing on the mitre worn by Israel's high priest on his forehead, which read, “Holiness to the LORD.” (Exod. 28:36-38) It meant, in the case of the typical priest, that through a properly constituted and carried-out service of consecration or dedication, he had been set apart to serve God in the holy things of the Tabernacle, including the offering of sacrifice.

In the consecration service by which Israel's priests were dedicated to fill the office of the priesthood (see Leviticus 8), a part of the blood from the ram of consecration was placed upon the tip of the right ear, the right thumb, and the great toe of the right foot. Thus was indicated the all-comprehensiveness of their consecration. Antitypically, in the case of those who follow the Master, it means that all of our life's efforts and works are to be dedicated and used in the divine service. As the blood was put upon the thumb of the right hand, so our consecrated sentiments will be, as expressed in the hymn, “Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love.”

(*Hymns of Dawn*, #277) As the blood was put upon the great toe of the priest's right foot, so we will endeavor to walk in the footsteps of the Master, to walk by faith in the way that the Holy Spirit leads, to walk as Christ walked. (Eph. 5:2) In our hearts and by our words and deeds, we will say to our God these additional words from the hymn, "Take my feet and let them be swift on errands, Lord for thee."

Similarly, as the blood was placed upon the right ear of the priest, so our hearing is to be one of faith in action. We are to "hearken unto the voice of the LORD" (Deut. 15:5), in order that we may not only know his will, but also do it. If the dedication of our lives is complete, if our devotion is unmixed and wholehearted, we will not give ear to other suggestions of any kind, whether from the world, the flesh, or the Adversary, the purpose of which may likely be to turn us aside from the narrow way.

The life of the fully consecrated is one in which moments and days are made to flow in channels which can be used for showing forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. (I Pet. 2:9) Our every thought and power should be used in keeping with the divine will, and brought "into captivity ... to the obedience of Christ." (II Cor. 10:5) We will want the will of God enthroned in our heart so completely that our life will be poured out to him and his service, and our whole being consecrated fully and forever to the doing of his will.

In all of this, Christ is our sanctification because the fullness of his devotion to God—a devotion so zealously performed that he was consumed with fervent zeal—is the example which we should follow. The work of sanctification is not a momentary one. While there is a moment in which an individual definitely decides to consecrate himself to do God's will, the carrying out of that consecration, the living of a life set apart to the holy purpose of God, is the work of a lifetime. Daily we should study the Word of God by which we are sanctified. Daily we should look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. These daily endeavors are necessary in order that we may more and more set aside the old ways of the flesh, and have the Spirit of Christ filling our hearts, with the will of God the supreme issue in our lives.

Jesus, praying on behalf of his followers, asked that they be "sanctified" by the Truth. (John 17:17) It is important to realize that error will not sanctify. Neither will ignorance

sanctify. This is an important reason why our study of God's Word should be sincere, and in the spirit of humility. In this way only will we glean from its pages what God expects of us, rather than to be searching the Word for justification of our own ideas. The Prophet Micah expresses this sentiment, when, enumerating the requirements of the divine will, he lists among them, "walk humbly with thy God." (Mic. 6:8) We are not walking humbly with our God if we resist the plain instructions of his Word with respect to any of the details of our consecrated life.

EMOTION NOT SANCTIFICATION

Confusion exists in the minds of many professed followers of Christ with respect to the life of sanctification. They erroneously couple it with religious emotion, mistakenly expecting an outward manifestation of some spectacular nature, or some inward feeling of ecstasy as an evidence of their acceptance with the Lord. The peace and joy of the Lord which fill the hearts of truly consecrated believers will be manifested to a large extent in keeping with their own natural dispositions. Some are by nature more emotional than others, and it is understandable that when such are introduced to the joys of faith and the blessings of a life that is lived for God, their emotions may be greatly stirred.

On the other hand, the same joys of faith in the hearts of those consecrated ones who by nature are more practical and less demonstrative, can be just as deep and satisfactory. In other words, religious emotions, to whatever extent they may appear, are to be viewed, not as a guide in the Christian way, but merely as the result of being made free from condemnation and of having the assurance of acceptableness with God.

We should remember, too, that the sanctified life goes far beyond a mere turning toward goodness and righteousness, and a turning away from evil and unrighteousness. It is also more than an endeavor to be morally upright and pure. It includes these, upon the basis of one's best efforts to be righteous, but there is the further privilege of devoting that life to the service of God. Sanctification, then, goes far beyond the mere giving up of bad habits, the mere forgetting of a few worldly pleasures. It is indeed a giving up of these things, but at the same time it is a living for God, his purposes, and his plan.

One who is fully devoted to the doing of God's will, and who is laying down his life in the divine service, will have little,

if any, time to indulge in worldly pleasures, even those that appear wholesome by nature. He will not find it necessary to determine whether such things are sinful or impure. His life being devoted to the service of God, he will have little or no time for things of the world. One who, from the bottom of his heart, can truly say to the Lord, quoting again the words of the hymn, "Take myself, I wish to be ever, only, all for thee," will not be seeking worldly entertainment, because there will be too many things to do for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren.

CHRIST—OUR DELIVERANCE

Christ is also made unto us redemption, says the apostle. The word redemption is here used in the sense of deliverance, or salvation. This is the outcome of the redemptive work—the result of a ransom, or a corresponding price, having been given. It is the same Greek word translated "deliverance" in Hebrews 11:35. The thought is that of the child of God's full victory through Christ, and of the ultimate attainment of a position of glory with him in his kingdom.

If this ultimate and full deliverance of the footstep followers of Christ is to be realized, however, there must also be the intermediate and incidental deliverances of the faithful all along the narrow way. Christ is made unto us deliverance, both in our daily experiences of trial and testing, as well as in the final deliverance from this "vile body," in the glories of the first resurrection.—Phil. 3:21

The redemption provided by Christ will eventually result in the deliverance of all mankind from sin and death, but in the divine program the redemption and deliverance of his followers of this present age comes first. This redemption, or deliverance, which is in Christ Jesus, both as it applies to our present experiences and, also, to our ultimate deliverance into the kingdom, is always identified with his sacrifice, made on our behalf. In connection with that sacrifice, our Lord was severely tested and tried, and the apostle explains that by reason of this, "He is able to succour them that are tempted." (Heb. 2:17,18) That is, he is able to deliver them from temptations which otherwise might overpower them.

Because Christ is dealing with us as a faithful and sympathetic High Priest, we have the promise that God "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (I Cor. 10:13) True, our Heavenly Father may

permit us to stumble temporarily, but even such an experience will be overruled for our good, if we continue to put our trust in him and maintain our assurance of the fact that he will help us, assist us, deliver us, in every time of need.

We are permitted to stumble at times, perhaps, in order that valuable lessons may be learned respecting our weaknesses. Sometimes we may forget our need of divine help. We may think that we are able to stand in our own strength. It is then that we need to take heed lest we fall. The Lord in his wisdom permits us to stumble, therefore, in order that we may be reminded of our need of him, our need to lean upon his strength, that we may find in him our staff of support to keep us from actually falling.

If, through all of our daily experiences in the narrow way, we learn to put our trust more fully in him who is our redemption and deliverance now, who has provided a covering for our sins, and who has promised us help to overcome our temptations, we will finally experience that great and ultimate deliverance into the kingdom. This grand hope is especially meaningful today, because the signs around us in the world indicate that the faithful followers of Christ will soon all be delivered and united with him in glory. If we are faithful as individuals we can take comfort in the Master's blessed assurance, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption [deliverance] draweth nigh."—Luke 21:28 ■

CHAPTER 3

Communion with Christ

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”

—I Corinthians 10:16

DURING THE SPRING of each year, congregations of the Lord’s people gather together to observe the memorial of Jesus’ death. The time of this annual celebration coincides with a similar event which took place nearly two thousand years ago, in an upper room in Jerusalem, when Jesus and his chosen apostles sat down together for the last time. The Luke account tells us: “When the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”—Luke 22:14-20

For centuries the nation of Israel has faithfully observed the Passover feast. To them it is a memorial, instituted by God, which recalls the saving of their firstborn from the avenging angel that slew the firstborn of Egypt. (Exod. 12:14,15) As a consequence of that event, Israel was freed from Egyptian bondage. However, they have been unaware of the deeper

significance of the Passover supper, which was a picture, or type—a type fulfilled by the death of Jesus. “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.”—I Cor. 5:7

MEMORIAL INSTITUTED

Jesus, knowing that he would fulfill the type, instituted a memorial—a remembrance—of his death, using symbols of unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine to represent his perfect body and life. When Jesus took the unleavened bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take, eat; this is my body” (Matt. 26:26), it was to indicate that the unleavened bread represented his sinless, perfect body, which was sacrificed willingly so that we, and all Adam’s children, might live. Likewise, the cup and the fruit of the vine symbolized Jesus’ suffering and death. The fruit of the vine was symbolic of blood, which in turn represented life. (Deut. 12:23) Jesus’ life, his being, his soul, was poured out unto death (Isa. 53:12), in perfect obedience to the Heavenly Father’s will.

To comply with Jesus’ instruction, “This do in remembrance of me,” the various Christian church denominations throughout the world have established rituals involving these emblems. There are many variations in these rituals, but nearly all refer to them as the “taking of Holy Communion.” This expression, no doubt, has its basis in our theme text—I Corinthians 10:16. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines “Holy Communion” as “a Christian rite in which bread and wine are consecrated and received as the body and blood of Jesus, or as symbols of them.” *Webster’s Dictionary* also defines our normal usage of the ordinary word “communion” as: a) the act of sharing, b) possession in common, c) participation. These definitions of communion are what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote the words of our text to the brethren at Corinth. It is most likely that communion as a word was a condensation of two other words, “common” and “union.” The basic thought in communion is a sharing of something by several individuals (having it in common). Furthermore, these individuals are drawn closer together (in union) because of this sharing.

WHAT IS OUR COMMUNION?

What is this “something” which is shared by several individuals, spoken of by Paul? It is the privilege, in which all the consecrated followers of Christ share together, of becoming a part of the family of God. This shared privilege

is ours because of our faith in, and appropriation of, the benefits of Christ's sacrifice—his broken body and poured out blood—represented by the symbolic unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, the cup. These benefits have, by our complete faith in them, caused us to be considered as justified in God's sight. Thus, we also have the privilege of walking in the footsteps of Jesus, sharing in his experiences and in those of our fellow brethren.

We note in the several biblical accounts of that last supper, when Jesus instituted the memorial of his death, that he never used the expression "communion" in speaking of the bread and wine. This is because it was not yet the "due time" for the further thought of "communion" to be understood. Jesus simply wanted the apostles to know that these two symbols which he instituted represented the fact that he was about to die as the antitypical Passover lamb. Later, the Apostle Paul used the expression "communion" when speaking of these memorial symbols in our theme text. Now, Jesus had died, had been resurrected from the dead, and had ascended to the right hand of the throne of God. Paul appreciated the fact that because these things had taken place, a new and living way had been opened up for Jesus' footstep followers. This was a way in which each one would have a "common" or "shared" standing, because all were made acceptable based on what Jesus had faithfully accomplished by the giving up of his perfect human life. To put it simply, the followers of Christ have the privilege of "communion" with one another and with their Lord because he was their "passover."—I Cor. 5:7

Since Jesus was the antitypical Passover lamb, and as a result his followers have partaken in the benefits of his sacrifice, one of the important privileges extended to these is that of sharing in all of the experiences of Jesus, even unto sacrificial death. God has invited these to become partakers with his Son in suffering and death. This "communion" with Christ and with one another in sacrifice is not because his footstep followers have added anything to his broken body and poured out life, represented by the symbolic bread and cup. Christ's followers "commune" together, in fellowship and in the footsteps of Jesus, their pattern, because of what he has already accomplished on their behalf. Paul emphasizes this in the verse following our theme text: "Because there is one loaf [Jesus], we, the many, are one

body [have the privilege of communing together as his body members]; for we all partake of [the benefits of] the one loaf [symbolically, Jesus' broken body sacrificed for us].”—chap. 10:17, *Diaglott*

SHARING TOGETHER IN SACRIFICE

It was God's plan that there should be a group of people called to share in the sufferings and rewards of his Son Jesus. Those who have partaken of, appropriated to themselves, the benefits of Christ's Passover sacrifice, rejoice in the opportunity to give their lives in sacrifice as Jesus did. As a reward, if faithful, they will live and reign with him in the kingdom, assisting in the blessing of all the families of the earth. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us."—II Tim. 2:11,12

When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, he knew that eventually they would have to endure experiences similar to his. In Matthew 20:20, the mother of James and John asked Jesus that her sons be permitted to sit on the right hand and the left of Jesus in his glory. Jesus knew that this desire was in the heart and mind of James and John, so he replied directly to them: "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father."—vss. 22,23

When James and John replied to Jesus, "We are able," did they really know the true significance of the cup and baptism? They could not at that time, for the completion of his baptism was yet future. In Luke 12:50, we read, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Jesus was here speaking of the sufferings and death awaiting him on Calvary's cross.

When Saul of Tarsus, who became the great Apostle Paul, was intercepted by the glorified Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was blinded by a brilliant light. He was brought to Damascus, where he stayed three days in this condition of complete blindness and neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9:1-9) Then the Lord appeared in a vision to Ananias, a disciple of

Christ, and told him to go to Saul. When Ananias hesitated because Saul had been persecuting the Christians, the Lord explained to Ananias, “Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”—Acts 9:15,16

It was not long after his conversion that the Jews sought to kill Paul, but he escaped these attempts on his life. (vs. 29) Later, when he began his missionary tours, at Lystra, Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and persuaded the people to stone Paul, after which they dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. (chap. 14:19,20) However, he revived and continued preaching, telling the brethren that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (vs. 22) The Apostle Paul was a wonderful example of enduring great suffering under very difficult and trying circumstances. Very few of the footstep followers of Jesus in this day are required to endure the same kind of physical violence, but rather are tested along more subtle lines. Nevertheless, the attitude of mind must still be, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”—Job 13:15

GREEK WORD AND ITS USES

In order to understand the meaning of “communion” used by the Apostle Paul in our theme text, we need to look at the Greek word *koinonia* from which communion is translated, and how it is used in other New Testament scriptures. *Koinonia* has been translated as “communication” once; “communion,” four times; “contribution,” once; “distribution,” once; “fellowship,” twelve times; and “to communicate,” once. The verb form of the word, *koinoneo*, has been translated “to make partaker of” once; “be partaker of,” four times; “communicate,” twice; and “distribute,” once.

A few examples of texts containing *koinonia* are as follows: “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (I Cor. 1:9) “Fellowship” in this text is the same word translated as “communion” in chapter 10:16.

“When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.” (Gal. 2:9) “Fellowship” again is the same Greek word, *koinonia*.

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 3:8,9) Here again, “fellowship” is translated from *koinonia*.

These texts show that God had, “from the beginning of the world,” planned the inviting of a group of people to share experiences with his Son and with one another. This kindred fellowship is really the acknowledgment of those so invited, made acceptable through Jesus, their Passover sacrifice.

Likewise, “fellowship” in Philippians 1:5 and 2:1 is translated from *koinonia*. Philippians 3:10 says, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” This text states as directly as possible that the Apostle Paul expected to share similar experiences to those of Jesus, including suffering and death. Once again, “fellowship” is translated from *koinonia*. Nor was this teaching exclusively that of the Apostle Paul concerning himself. The Apostle John spoke in a similar way, but expanded on the thought of fellowship, saying, “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,” and “we have fellowship one with another.” (I John 1:3,7) “Fellowship” again is here translated from *koinonia*.

In the thirteenth chapter of Hebrews, where allusion is made to the Tabernacle, *koinonia* appears again (vs. 16), but is translated “communicate”: “To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” This translation is not as clear as the *Revised Standard Version* rendering: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” This appears to be a better translation, but it leaves the impression that God is pleased with the sharing of our possessions with others, which, of course, he is. However, God is far more pleased with our sharing one with another in the sacrificial work of his Son Jesus.

The context of Hebrews 13:16 draws on the lessons from Israel’s Tabernacle, saying: “The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also,

that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate [share together in this work of sacrifice] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” (Heb. 13:11-16) The Apostle’s point is that, as Jesus was scorned by the world in his sacrificial life, so also we should expect the same, because we have been asked to share his experiences. Therefore, another translation of verse 16 (*Rotherham*) uses the word “fellowship” for *koinonia*, and this appears more appropriate, because it has the connotation of sharing, one with another, in Jesus’ experiences.

There are other words with the same root meaning as *koinonia* which have been appropriately translated “companions” and “partners.” Indeed, we are companions and partners of Jesus and of each other. “Partaker,” also, has been used to translate *koinonia*. An outstanding example is in the well-known words of II Peter 1:4, which read, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” From this we note also that our communion with Jesus and with one another is not limited to the present life of sacrifice, but extends to the glory that follows. “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:17

COMMUNION WITH JESUS

The most important phase of the ministry of Jesus was that of laying down his life for his friends and all the world of mankind. This feature is symbolized by the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine at the Memorial observance. Jesus laid down his life willingly, gladly, telling his disciples, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” (John 15:13,14) We, too, must be willing to lay down our lives for our brethren and thus have communion with Jesus by sharing in his experiences. “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”—I John 3:16, RSV

Another outstanding feature of our Lord's ministry was his preaching of the kingdom. The beginning of his ministry is described in Luke 4:16-21: "He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." From that day forward, wherever Jesus went, he preached that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. We, too, must be willing to preach the kingdom message, out of love for it, even as he loved it, and have communion with him and others similarly so engaged.

Jesus also performed many miracles and many kindnesses. The testimony given by Peter in Acts 10:38 is explicit: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another," Jesus sent back the answer: "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Matt. 11:3-5) These miracles were samples of the kingdom work to come. Much good was done by them. They were performed by the Early Church on a limited scale to establish the church, and then they ceased. However, doing good continued to be necessary, and the Apostle Paul gave us the admonition, saying, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10) By so doing, we share in the experiences of our Lord, and commune with him.

OBEDIENCE—THE TEST OF COMMUNION

All these experiences were to develop in Jesus obedience. God, the great, supreme Creator, desired to give the divine nature to his Son. Before he could do so, however, it was necessary that Jesus be tested fully. Hence, we read, “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Heb. 2:9,10) To have communion with him, we must emulate him, being obedient, as he was. To do this, we must have his mind, or disposition, even as admonished by the Apostle Paul, “Let this disposition be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though being in God’s form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God, but divested himself, taking a bondman’s form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” —Phil. 2:5-8, *Diaglott*

We rejoice that Jesus was faithful and that as a consequence “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, ... And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (vss. 9-11) May we be faithful and obedient footstep followers of Jesus, having communion with him and with one another, so that we may share his glory and reign with him. ■

CHAPTER 4

Oneness in Christ

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.”

—John 17:21,23

AS WE CONTINUE our study of the subject, “The Mind of Christ,” let us now examine the important topic of oneness with God, with Jesus, and with the brethren. In the words of our text, Jesus prayed the night before his crucifixion that his followers, including us nearly two thousand years later, would have oneness with each other and with him, just as he was one with the Heavenly Father. As is clear from Jesus’ words, he was not speaking of oneness of person or identity, but oneness of purpose and character. Indeed, Jesus had said earlier that evening, “My Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28) We also know that, as our Master, Jesus is above his footstep followers in rank, as stated by the Apostle Paul, “He is the head of the body, the church; ... that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Col. 1:18) Thus, there is no thought in our examination of this subject which would lead us to believe in a literal interpretation of oneness between God, his son Jesus, and those for whom Jesus prayed—his footstep followers.

An important part of our learning to have the mind of Christ is to understand the spirit of oneness and unity which he and the Father have. Then we must seek to apply the principles which govern their oneness to ourselves. One of the chief measures and evidences of oneness with God and his son Christ Jesus is the degree to which we have oneness

with our brethren. In the Book of Ephesians, chapter four, the Apostle Paul gives us wise counsel concerning oneness and unity among the Lord's people. He begins, "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."—vss. 2,3

In these verses, Paul makes it clear that oneness, peace, and harmony among the brethren of Christ are possible only where there exists an attitude of lowliness and meekness. These, he says, are to be mingled with long-suffering, which enables us to bear with the imperfections of one another because we love them as fellow members in the body of Christ. Paul refers to this blessed harmony among the brethren as "unity of the Spirit," and where these elements of Christlike character are lacking, there will be no unity of the Spirit. On the other hand, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering and love could not, apart from other considerations, produce the unity of the Spirit of which the Apostle Paul speaks.

In addition to possessing these fundamentally important elements of character, they must be practiced upon the basis of, and in harmony with, our knowledge of the fact that "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (vss. 4-6) This would indicate that true oneness in Christ is based upon a unity of fundamental knowledge. It is not difficult to realize why this is so. Any group of people whose aims and efforts are akin will find themselves drawn together in a common interest. In the circle of the family of Christ and their endeavors, the same principle holds true.

We should all heed Paul's admonition to "keep the unity of the Spirit." The brethren at Ephesus had special need for it, as the epistle shows. As was quite generally true in the Early Church, some in the group at Ephesus had formerly been Jews, and some had come into Christ from among the Gentiles. This is clearly shown in chapters two and three. In these chapters, Paul explains that in Christ these two groups had been brought "together"—that the Gentiles who had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise," were now "made nigh by the blood of Christ." Paul says that peace had been preached to the Gentiles, "which were afar off, and to them that were

nigh [the Jews]." He explains that because of this, both Jews and Gentiles now had "access by one Spirit unto the Father." —Eph. 2:6,12,13,17,18

ONENESS OF JEW AND GENTILE IN CHRIST

It can readily be seen why a congregation made up of converted Jews and Gentiles would find it necessary to forbear with one another in love. Their former viewpoints and experiences in life had been entirely different. The viewpoint of the Jews was that they were exclusively God's people. God had said to them, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2) They were the "chosen people" of the Lord, and the Gentiles were mere "dogs" in the eyes of the Jews.—Matt. 15:22-28

On the other hand, the Gentile converts would view matters quite differently. Accustomed to being treated as "dogs" by the Jews, it would now be difficult for them to feel kindly toward those who had so disdainfully regarded them. True, they had become followers of the Jewish Messiah, but old prejudices would not easily be forgotten. The Gentiles would also naturally exercise a greater degree of liberty with respect to their food, and other living habits, than would the Jewish converts. They would not have in mind the restraining ordinances of the Law, hence might be inclined to do things which, to the Jewish converts, would seem very wrong. In other ways also, these two groups of Christ's followers would find obstacles in the way of their viewpoints and activities being blended in a wholehearted oneness.

Under these circumstances, only a unity and oneness produced by the Holy Spirit could make harmony in the church at Ephesus. Indeed, only the power of the Holy Spirit can overcome the carnal spirit of division wherever it is found. Such a unity is much more than merely a kind feeling brethren may have toward one another. This "unity" is admirable, but it is based merely on friendship, and friendship is usually based upon a certain degree of similarity in temperament, habits, station in life, etc. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, produces oneness among the brethren in spite of natural obstacles that might stand in the way, such as differences in background, training, education, and nationality.

The unity of the Spirit is that oneness among the brethren which is inculcated only through the Word of God. Speaking

through the prophets, through Jesus, and through the apostles, God had made it clear that believing Gentiles and Jews were to become “fellowheirs” in Christ. (Eph. 3:6) This was contrary to the experiences of the Jews throughout all the centuries of their national existence, but it was now God’s will, made abundantly plain by the working of his Holy Spirit. In the conference at Jerusalem, Peter explained that the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles even as it had upon the Jews, and for this reason there was to be “no difference” between them.—Acts 15:8,9

ONE GOD AND ONE FAITH

Before becoming followers of Christ, the Jewish and Gentile converts served different gods. The Gentiles usually had many gods. However, now they all had but the one God, who was the Father of them all. They were all members of the one body of Christ. There was not to be one body of Jews and another of Gentiles. There was but the one faith for all—the “most holy faith.” (Jude 20) Followers of the Master, whether Jews or Gentiles, were all called in the “one hope” of their calling. There was but one true baptism for all, and that was baptism into Christ, which meant being “planted together in the likeness of his death.” (Rom. 6:5) For a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile converts to order their lives in keeping with a program of this kind required the indwelling of a large measure of the Holy Spirit.

For God’s Spirit to dwell in the heart and control the life requires the subjugation of the selfish human will and desires. God’s Spirit is an enlightening influence in the lives of Christ’s footstep followers, and its power to change one’s life is partly in the fact that it reveals the need of change, and outlines a new program to be followed. It was this phase of the Spirit’s influence in the lives of the Ephesian brethren that called for the “endeavoring” mentioned in the text quoted earlier, in order that they might “keep the unity.” That is, all of the Lord’s consecrated people were to work in harmony with the divine plan of the Gospel as it had been brought to them.

This new program, revealed to them by the Holy Spirit through the divinely appointed channels of our Lord, the prophets, and the apostles, was different from that which any of them had previously followed. This meant that all of them, Jews and Gentiles, had to give up their former viewpoints

and habits, and endeavor by God's grace to conform themselves to his plan as it had been revealed to them through his Spirit. The one God, the one faith, the one baptism of their wills, was to take the place of their former many gods, many faiths, and many forms of devotion.

To be successful in such an undertaking they would need true humility of mind, a great deal of forbearance, and much Christian love. This has been true of all the consecrated followers of the Master throughout the age. With true lowliness of mind, one would not be likely to exalt his own opinions and ways above the knowledge of Christ. He would realize that the knowledge of Christ was to be the order of his life, even as it should be the guide in the lives of all the brethren.

NEEDS TO BE PRACTICED

Humility needs to be practiced, not merely thought of and talked about. One might have a true appraisal of his own lack of wisdom and ability, yet not manifest it in his association with the brethren. This could lead to resentment when others seemed to be used more in the service of the Lord. It might also lead to unwarranted controversy over details of the Truth. When one is humble, truly lowly of mind, he will not be a troublemaker among the brethren. Such would rather withdraw from a scene of controversy than permit himself to become a storm center.

Meekness is also a necessary qualification for those who are successfully "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit." Meekness is teachableness, and unless we are willing to be taught by God through the influence of his Holy Spirit, we can never be in harmony with others who are likewise being taught. The wisdom of the world and of the carnal mind is foolishness with God. Both the Jews and the Gentiles in the church at Ephesus had many foolish ideas before they became followers of the Master. Most of us in the past have had foolish ideas. There could have been no unity in the Early Church had the believers brought their ideas along with them, and insisted upon promoting them among the brethren. Likewise, we must give up our theories, our hobbies, that we may all be taught the "one faith."

NOT WEAKNESS

Meekness, however, is not weakness. God wants us to be teachable, in that we will accept the instructions of his Word

without reservations or doubts; but he does not want us to open our minds to teachings which do not come from his Word and are not in harmony with its spirit—the spirit of truth. Not only should we lay aside our own ideas, but we should also resist the wrong ideas of others. As each consecrated follower of the Master endeavors to bring his mind and heart into closer harmony with the Lord, through his Word, he will find himself in closer unity with all others who are doing the same thing. Thus a willingness to be taught of the Lord is very important if we are to be successful in doing our part to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

The spirit of long-suffering and forbearance is also necessary. One might be lowly of mind, and meek, yet be unable to bear patiently with the imperfections of others. There was great need for forbearance among the various groups of disciples in the Early Church, and there is still great need for it today. We are all so very imperfect that forbearance with one another as we worship and serve together is most necessary if our viewpoints and activities are to be blended into that one harmonious program outlined for us by the Holy Spirit.

Love must be the motive behind this endeavor. Only unselfish love, shown by a desire to glorify God and to serve others, will make possible the exercise of true forbearance and humility in our association with the brethren. To the extent that self-interest enters into our fellowship, true humility and forbearance will be lacking. It might be possible for a time to get along with the brethren while having only a veneer of humility and forbearance: one might be seeking position, or popularity, and deem it good policy to be courteous to the brethren. This is not a proper basis, however, for attaining oneness and unity of the Spirit.

THE DIVINE PROVISION

How much the brethren now need God's grace to help them maintain the unity of the Spirit! Unity of the Spirit, like all other spiritual attainments, is possible only through the grace of God—that “grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) This is especially true today in view of the severe trials through which all are passing during this present “time of trouble.” (Dan. 12:1) How necessary that we all keep humble before the Lord and before each other—that we bear patiently with the imperfections of the brethren, and that we do this in the spirit of unselfishness and helpfulness.

Thus the Lord's name, and not our own, will be glorified, and his cause, not our selfish interests, will be advanced.

Only by God's grace can this be done. Continuing our examination of Ephesians, chapter four, Paul speaks of this grace. Verse 7 reads, "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Here Paul says that God's grace toward us is measured by the "gift" of Christ. As we study the succeeding verses we learn that the "gift" of God's grace here referred to consists of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, all of whom the Lord has provided for the express purpose of "perfecting"—making complete—the saints. These have been given by God's grace, Paul continues, for "the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in [into, *marginal translation*] the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature [age, *marginal translation*] of the fulness of Christ."—vss. 11-13

OF THE SPIRIT AND OF FAITH

It is apparent from the sequence of Paul's argument that he wants us to understand that the unity of the Spirit includes unity of the faith, as it also includes oneness in baptism. His testimony is that "there is one faith," and the Lord, in helping us to attain unity in our understanding of that one faith, has given us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. It is through these various servants of the body of Christ that the Spirit of God finds expression. As we scrutinize their teachings, we are given knowledge concerning the "one faith" which constitutes the basis of our oneness in Christ.

Due to endless doctrinal controversies among denominational groups, many of their leaders have adopted an interpretation of this chapter which makes the unity of the Spirit mean simply a kind attitude which all believers in Christ should be able to manifest toward one another, while unity of the faith, although desirable, is not, in their view, fundamentally important. In these circles, unity of the faith is usually looked upon as a good ideal, but a condition which will probably never be reached.

This liberalizing of the apostle's lesson is not in keeping with what he would have us understand. It seems clear that the "Spirit" which is the means of unity in Christ is not our spirit, or disposition, but the Spirit of God. It follows, therefore,

that to the extent unity is attained, it means also a unity of the faith, or leads thereto. This one faith is the "most holy faith" taught by all God's inspired writers of the Scriptures in presenting the divine plan. The teachings of these inspired servants constitute the outline of the faith within which the followers of the Master are to worship and to serve.

The extent to which this unity can be attained is in proportion to the degree of humility and determination with which the endeavor is made. We should not expect perfection on this side of the veil, and so long as imperfection exists, there will not be complete unity of the Spirit and of the faith. This is not because the Spirit, through the inspired Word, has not made the basis of unity clear, but because of the carnality of the fallen flesh, which more or less limits the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

If Paul's formula were followed without reservation, complete oneness of the Spirit and of faith would be attained. However, the fallen, imperfect tendencies of the flesh usually assert themselves, thus hindering to some degree the attainment of perfect unity. In some cases, we might not be able to bear with the imperfections of others as we should. In other experiences, a little selfishness of one sort or another may prevent divine love from fully controlling our lives. Any of these and other slight degrees of failure to control the tendencies of the fallen flesh will impair the unity for which we are striving.

Additionally, our vision of the one Lord, one faith, and one baptism may not be as clear as it should be. Perhaps we are permitting other gods to supplant in our affections to some small degree our wholehearted devotion to the one Lord who has been revealed to us by his Spirit. There are many of these idols which we are prone to set up in our wayward hearts, permitting them to displace the "one Lord," whose will should be the unifying power among all the consecrated. To whatever extent we permit the idol of pleasure, or of pride, or of ambition, or of vainglory, or of wealth, or of ease, to influence our habits of thought and action, it means that we will not be wholly at one with those whose devotion to the "one Lord" is more complete.

It may be that the "one faith" is not as clearly delineated in our hearts and minds as it should be, due to our imperfections. Perhaps we find a measure of selfish satisfaction in mixing the most holy faith with theories of our own. These theories in

themselves may not be harmful, but because they are ours we may attach too much importance to them and, by attempting to force them upon the brethren, may be lending our influence in the direction of disunity rather than unity.

A failure to enter wholeheartedly into the “one baptism” by which our wills are immersed into the divine will, would also affect our oneness with the brethren. The unity of the Spirit is only in proportion to the degree to which each of the Lord’s consecrated people submits his will to the instructions and leadings of the Lord. To whatever extent our own spirit—or the spirit of others who may influence us contrary to the divine will—is permitted to govern what we think, say, and do, we will be standing in the way of attaining the full oneness among the brethren which could be our blessed portion if we were more completely immersed into God’s will.

ECCLESIA ORGANIZATION

We also find that the Scriptures teach a certain decorum for the church, in the way of local ecclesia arrangements in which elders and deacons are appointed by the brethren to represent them in service. We should be lowly enough in mind to recognize these arrangements, and be subservient to them. This will call for long-suffering and forbearing one another in love. However, if we permit our own interests, of whatever sort they may be, to supersede or nullify the influence of these Christlike qualities, and decide that we can get along as well, or better, by ourselves than we can with the brethren, it will mean failure, to that extent, to keep the unity of the Spirit.

We may attempt to justify our failure by claiming that we are standing for principle. Let us be on guard, however, lest we interpret our own carnal approach as being a principle of righteousness. There are real principles for which every consecrated child of God should stand, and when these are at stake the way before us should be clear, and our course uncompromising. Let us be sure, though, that we are standing for principle. Let us remember that the brethren probably find it just as hard to get along with us as we find it difficult to get along with them. Rather, let us all encourage each other to keep our hearts and minds fixed more and more upon the perfect pattern, Jesus, and to have our lives controlled more and more by the truth of the divine plan, the “most holy faith.”

CHRIST THE HEAD

If, to any extent, we have wandered off into bypaths of false doctrine and false practice, let us come back to the “old paths,” back into the narrow way of full submission to the divine will, as that will is revealed in the Scriptures. Thus may the Holy Spirit, through the Word, lead us ever nearer to the center of that glorious unity of faith, where we will be “no more children [acting childishly], tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”—Eph. 4:14,15

While Paul makes special mention of certain servants in the body of Christ, and shows the value of their aid in helping the brethren attain oneness in the faith, he would not have us understand that these special servants are the only ones who help bring about this true oneness in Christ. The fact is that we all have some part to play in helping to bring about this unity, and no matter what that part may be, we should be faithful in performing it. We should all be promoters of oneness and love among the brethren.

The basis of that unity, however, must be the Truth. We cannot promote true oneness in Christ by compromising the doctrines of the Truth. However, we can promote unity by “speaking the truth in love,” by forbearing with one another, and by lowliness of mind and meekness. Thus, when our endeavors are in harmony with the Truth, and the Spirit of the Truth, we will have God’s blessing because we will be working in harmony with his will. Paul expresses the thought beautifully, saying, “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”—Eph. 4:16 ■

CHAPTER 5

Crucified—Yet Living— with Christ

*“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but
Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh
I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me,
and gave himself for me.”
—Galatians 2:20*

ONE OF THE important ways that we develop the “mind of Christ” is to remember Jesus’ example of being daily crucified in his sacrifice of all earthly things, yet living to perform his Father’s will for him. While Jesus’ ultimate crucifixion on Calvary’s cross was the literal climax of all the experiences of his earthly ministry, it was his daily sacrifice and fulfillment of his consecration vows which truly showed his faithfulness to God in being crucified, yet living. Jesus told his disciples, including us, that if one truly desires to follow in his footsteps, he must likewise “take up his cross daily, and follow me.” —Luke 9:23

It is to this end that Paul, in our opening text, states that he was “crucified with Christ.” It is clear from Paul’s words that he was not talking about literal crucifixion, because he immediately says, “nevertheless I live.” Then he explains that his “life” consisted of Christ living in him, by means of faith. To Paul, that which was crucified was his former will, desires, and deeds, which were now to be replaced by those exemplified in his perfect pattern—Jesus. He was crucified, or dead in Christ, yet he lived for Jesus by serving him and the Heavenly Father. Similar to Paul, we are also to be crucified with Christ as he was, yet living in faith. This, in reality, is

the true essence of the daily fulfillment of our consecration vows. This is what is meant by the taking up of our cross daily [being crucified] and following him [living in and for him].

REFLECTING ON OUR CONSECRATION

Do we often reflect on the circumstances that brought us to the point of consecrating our lives to God, and on the vast change that has taken place in us since first we believed? Surely, we who are striving to walk in the steps of Jesus, were drawn to God in the first place by an appreciation of the fact that we were in need of a Redeemer, and that Christ had died for our sins. We came to know that this was necessary if we were ever to come into God's favor. Based on our faith in Christ's precious blood, we gave our hearts and will to God in full consecration. Then, through the begetting power of the Holy Spirit operating on our minds, we began to know and appreciate more fully the fact that Adam was created perfect, that he had sinned willfully, and that therefore the sentence of death was pronounced upon him. We saw that this meant Adam's extinction. We saw, also, that this sentence applied not only to Adam but to all his offspring—even to us.

How wonderful was the knowledge of the philosophy of the ransom—that since all were condemned in Adam, even so, because the perfect man Christ Jesus took Adam's place in death, the condemnation could be lifted from Adam and all his offspring. Then came the full realization that salvation was not just for us, as consecrated footstep followers of Christ, but for every human being that has ever drawn the breath of life. We understood that this was to be accomplished by a "restitution of all things"—a restoration of mankind to perfection, to have communion with and be re-established in the favor of God. (Acts 3:21) We appreciated that these great truths were all made possible, and guaranteed, by Jesus' death as the ransom price.

It was after we realized these truths that the hope of being a part of the body of Christ became a real and living hope, that if faithful we would have the responsibility and opportunity of bringing blessings to all the families of the earth. Let us be assured of this—that it is the wonderful hope of man's full recovery from sin and death that makes our consecration to God a joyful experience. Without this understanding, we would have little in which to truly rejoice. This beautiful gem of truth is held out before us just as it was held out before

our forerunner, Jesus, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) We must never lose sight of this lofty and holy purpose of God. It is really his eternal purpose, formed from the beginning, to have this earth filled with perfect human beings who will love God supremely and their neighbors as themselves.

WORKERS TOGETHER WITH GOD

It is through the kingdom that this eternal purpose is to be realized. (Eph. 3:10,11) We, as Christ’s footstep followers, were included in the structure of God’s original design and purpose, to be instruments to help bring his objective to fruition. The Apostle Paul expresses both our privilege and responsibility in the matter thus: “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace [favor] of God in vain.”—II Cor. 6:1

It is because of our appreciation of the wonderful provision of mankind’s restoration in God’s plans and arrangements, and especially that we have been invited to share in this greatest of all creative works, that we are moved to follow in the footsteps of Christ, and to be crucified with him, yet live by him. With Christ as our pattern, we endeavor to walk in his footsteps, experiencing the things that he experienced in order to be conformed to his image and to be developed, as he was, as a sympathetic high priest. We read in Romans 8:29, “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

The experiences we encounter in the narrow way of sacrifice have a very definite correlation to our being crucified with Christ. The Apostle Paul expresses the matter in more detail with these words: “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead [the first resurrection]. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect

[mature], be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” (Phil. 3:8-11,15,17) Then again, in Galatians 4:19, Paul states, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.”

HOW CRUCIFIED, YET LIVING?

As we contemplate all these things, and the great privilege set before us, we ask this all-important question—what is meant for us to be crucified with Christ, yet live in him? The Bible clearly indicates that we are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. As previously quoted, Jesus said that if we desire to come after him we must “deny” ourselves—that is, renounce our own will and follow the will of God, as exemplified in his perfect Son. We must also daily “take up” our cross, by following in Jesus’ way of sacrifice and suffering for righteousness. So if we desire to walk after him, in his footsteps, and pattern our lives after his, let us find out what our perfect Master did. How did he spend his life and strength as he served his Heavenly Father?

In the Book of Isaiah, we are given a prophecy concerning Jesus and his mission. Our Lord applied the prophecy to himself in Luke 4:18,19, and therefore we can be certain that he used it as a guide for his ministry. The prophecy reads, “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; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”—Isa. 61:1-3

As we analyze this wonderful prophecy, it becomes evident that Jesus was to spend his ministry—this most important part of his life—making a proclamation of the kingdom. As we review the gospels, we find that this was one of the primary things that occupied his time and efforts. Even the miracles of raising the dead and healing the sick were illustrations of the kingdom and the great blessings that would come to the

people when it would be established. Preaching the Gospel of the kingdom was the chief concern of Jesus. This was his life, and it is to us an important part of how we “yet live” even as we are crucified with Christ. His was a life of service, spending his strength and talents to the glory of the Heavenly Father and to the benefit of his fellowman, especially to those whom God had called—his disciples. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, left his place of glory and honor in the heavenly realm and became the greatest servant the world has ever known.

In another prophecy concerning himself, Jesus says, as recorded by the psalmist, “I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.” (Ps. 40:9,10) With this sense of fulfillment, it was possible for Jesus to say on the cross with confidence, “It is finished.”—John 19:30

IN NEED OF CHRIST'S ROBE

As we strive to be crucified, yet live, with Christ—that is, endeavor to walk in the footsteps of Jesus—we become more acutely aware of his perfection and of our imperfections, for try as we might, we cannot perform perfectly. How thankful we are for the provision of Christ’s “robe of righteousness.” (Isa. 61:10) In God’s sight, we are righteous because of this, and we fulfill the requirement that those who engage in his work must have “clean hands, and a pure heart.” (Ps. 24:4) However, our standing with the Heavenly Father through the righteousness of Christ should not remove our desire and responsibility to be as nearly pure in heart, thought, word, and deed as it is possible for us to be. In fact, the Lord expects that we will attain to perfection of intention, or will. In his mercy, he accounts the perfection of intention for the deed.

The experiences we receive in conjunction with our activity in the Heavenly Father’s work are the tools he uses to help us grow up into Christ, and to help us be conformed to his image. As our forerunner, Jesus was conformed to the image of his Father, not in body or person, but in his spiritual mind. The Apostle Paul states, “It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons

unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect [complete in character] through sufferings.” (Heb. 2:10) Further on, Paul says in Hebrews 5:8,9, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect [complete in character], he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” In John 14:9, Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” In other words, the mental and moral characteristics of Jesus were the same as those of the Father.

ENDURING SUFFERING

The Apostle Peter relates our experiences incurred in the Heavenly Father’s work, and our being crucified with Christ, saying, “This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” (I Pet. 2:19-21) The word “suffer” means to endure or experience. How did Jesus suffer for us? He did so by holding forth the Gospel message, and because he did, we are blessed with the Truth. However, this activity brought on persecution by his natural brethren. He was the object of scoffing, ridicule, derision; he was even accused of blasphemy. With all of this, however, our text continues, “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”—vs. 23

In endeavoring, then, to be crucified with Christ, we can expect to receive evil for good, and these experiences will be difficult. However, they will be used by the Heavenly Father to form Christ in us—thus allowing us to live in him. In all these experiences we must conduct ourselves as he did, so that as representatives of the Father we will bring only glory to his name.

MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

The Apostle Paul, in II Corinthians 6:3, states the matter thus: “Giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed.” In the concluding verses of the previous chapter, the apostle summarizes what our ministry is, saying, “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus

Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." (chap. 5:18-20) The unmistakable thought is that the ministry of reconciliation was originally given to Jesus. After his death and resurrection, this ministry, and the responsibility that is inherent with it, was passed on to his footstep followers. In confirmation of this, Paul says, as quoted earlier, that we are "workers together with him."—chap. 6:1

To the Apostle Paul, and to us also, the privilege of the ministry of reconciliation transcends all other responsibilities and privileges that we have in following in Christ's footsteps, being crucified with him, yet living in him. Such an honor identifies us as being representatives of the Heavenly Father, doing his work and will during this age. (John 4:34) This is why the apostle admonishes that we are in no way to give offense, that the ministry be not blamed. Rather, Paul says, in everything we should prove ourselves as God's servants "in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."—II Cor. 6:4-10

CHARACTER QUALITIES NEEDED

This is how we establish, or prove, ourselves as ministers of God. This is an important part of our being crucified with Christ, yet living because of him, and is the underlying reason for all the scriptural admonitions to purity and righteous living. The Apostle Peter tells us, "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (II Pet. 1:8) These qualities of character and mind will demand

activity in the Lord's service. In Philippians 2:14-16, we read, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life." In I Peter 2:9, the Apostle Peter tells us, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." In these scriptures, Paul and Peter tell us that one of the important purposes of our calling is that we hold forth the wonderful light of truth.

The well-balanced consecrated believer is aware of the need for developing the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. These are also important as we are crucified, yet live, in Christ. All our efforts in the Lord's service would not be acceptable if they were not accompanied by love and the other Christlike graces. Furthermore, the fruits and graces of the Spirit alone will not benefit us ultimately, unless they are accompanied by good works. Our development as well-balanced followers of Christ, however, must be done in the proper way. "If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." (II Tim. 2:5) In the Lord's arrangement, he has designed that we will develop in the character of Christ largely through our activity in the service of the Truth, rather than in service to the many causes of the present world. The all-important purpose of our service is that by it we will put into practice the lessons taught by the experiences God permits us to have. If we do this, and do so in the proper way, directing our service toward the proper channels, we will develop love, joy, peace, long-suffering, and all the fruits and graces of the Spirit which will make our efforts to serve and please God acceptable.

BORN IN ZION

Jesus, in speaking to his disciples and to us, said, "Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." (John 4:35,36) It will be said of those who are faithful in their ministry of reconciliation, "This and that

man was born in her [Zion]: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there.” (Ps. 87:5,6) These will be those spoken of as having faithfully been “beheaded [symbolically] for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.”—Rev. 20:4

Let us, as we strive to more fully develop the mind of Christ, seek to know and follow ever closer to his pattern of life, being crucified with him, that we may live with him. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—Rom. 6:3-5 ■

CHAPTER 6

The Renewed Mind

“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.”

—Romans 12:2

THE RENEWING OF the mind is a necessity for every dedicated follower of the Master who wishes to know and do the perfect will of God. Thus, it is also a necessity to do so if we are to have the “mind of Christ.” The mind of the fallen flesh, developed in the environment of the world, views essentially every aspect of life from the standpoint of self-interest, whereas the will of God for his people is that they be motivated by love, setting aside interests of self that others might be blessed, and that he might be glorified.

In verse 3, immediately following our opening text, Paul mentions the first logical and necessary change of viewpoint on the part of one who has consecrated himself to do the Heavenly Father’s will. He says, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

The viewpoint of the world is that anyone who expects to be a success in life must have a high estimation of his or her own self and ability. Nor do most people of the world hesitate to advertise their qualifications. While this may not be wrong according to the standards of the world, a disciple of Christ should learn soon after entering the narrow way of sacrifice that his accomplishments in the service of God, and his growth in Christlike character, will not be

due to his own qualifications and ability. Rather, they will be due to the power of the Holy Spirit, through the grace of God.

This does not mean that we are to think of ourselves as having no ability. Paul's admonition is to "think soberly." Here, the Greek word translated "soberly" has the meaning of being sound. It is the same word that is translated "sound mind" in II Timothy 1:7, which reads, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Paul explains that we are to "think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." He then reminds us of our membership in the body of Christ, and of the various services which are to be rendered by those of his body members. (Rom. 12:4-8) The lesson is that those who think logically, and in keeping with their faith in the divine promises, will recognize the type of service they can render, and will not be undertaking to serve along lines for which they are not qualified.

The fleshly, worldly mind might well conclude that it would be illogical not to do everything possible to improve one's standing among the brethren, and thus to attain as much honor from them as possible, but the renewed mind, the "sound mind" of a dedicated follower of Christ, should not take such a view. In the process of renewing his mind, a Christian should learn that if there is to be any advancement, it can come properly only from the Heavenly Father, and not because he sought or promoted it.

A SOUND MIND

In renewing his mind, the follower of Christ considers as "sound" only those viewpoints which he knows emanate from God. He accepts God's invitation to reason with him, and rejects as unreasonable every thought which does not square with the written Word. His renewed mind approves only those things known to be in harmony with the "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

This results in far-reaching and sweeping changes of viewpoint. One of these is reflected in Paul's reference to the spirit of a "sound mind," quoted earlier. Human reasoning might well conclude that the spirit of a sound mind means great carefulness and caution lest we overexert ourselves in attending meetings, or in other efforts in the service of

the Lord. Taking the context into consideration, however, it would seem that Paul was admonishing Timothy quite differently.

In this epistle, Paul explained to Timothy that many of the brethren had forsaken him in his hour of great need. (II Tim. 1:15) Paul sensed his need of comfort and encouragement and urged Timothy to visit him in his prison home, where he was awaiting execution. By responding to this invitation, Timothy would, of necessity, show himself to be a friend of Paul and a believer in the Gospel of Christ, for which the apostle's life was soon to be taken. Such a visit could well have been very costly to Timothy.

Paul endeavored to strengthen his "beloved son" Timothy for this hazardous undertaking. In II Timothy 1:8, he continues, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."

Here was a definite invitation to Timothy to knowingly place himself in a position in which he would be a "partaker of the afflictions of the gospel." He would thus experience the spirit "of power" which the Lord promised to him, not necessarily for his protection, but for grace to help in his time of need. Should Timothy be fearful of such an undertaking, he was to remember that his fear would not come from the Lord, for he does not give the spirit of fear, but only of "power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

The Scriptures are silent as to whether or not Timothy actually made this much-urged trip to Rome to visit his beloved and aged Paul. However, we can be virtually certain that he made every possible effort to do so, even though he must certainly have known what the possible result could have been. The point we are making here is that from the standpoint of human reason, to accept Paul's invitation would have seemed very illogical, and in no sense a reflection of sound judgment to thus risk his young life, when there were so many other opportunities of service before him.

GOD'S VIEWPOINT

God's will for his consecrated people is in many respects different from what the fallen human mind might conceive to be right. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil:

but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.” —Matt. 5:38-41

Human reasoning dictates that we stand up for our rights, and demand just treatment from our fellows. However, Jesus indicates otherwise. Instead, he says, accept abuse and injustice. Do not resist. Let them smite the other cheek if they wish. Give them more than they unjustly demand. Since these are the instructions of our Master, we must conclude that to obey them would be exercising the spirit of a sound mind, and bringing ourselves into line with that “good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Continuing along this same line, Jesus said, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.”—vss. 43-45

How unsound such a viewpoint seems to the worldly-minded. Prior to knowing God and consecrating ourselves to serve him, we all had more or less of this mind. Now, however, our minds are being renewed. The old viewpoints are being supplanted by God’s thoughts. Thus, from his standpoint, our minds are becoming more and more in harmony with the divine standard. The spirit of a sound mind is one which prompts us to love our enemies, and to do good to those who persecute us. This is not an easy thing to do, yet it is the course which is dictated by the spirit of a sound mind—a renewed mind.

Jesus reasons this point out for us. He says, “If ye love them [only] which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”—Matt. 5:46-48

How reasonable this is in the light of Jesus’ explanation. God has begotten us as his children, and we are growing up into Christ in preparation to be born of the Spirit on the divine plane of life to live and reign with Christ. Our Heavenly Father therefore expects us to be like him, not like the publicans or others. God showers his

blessings of rain and sunshine upon the just and the unjust, and sent his Son to redeem the whole world which was alienated from him because of sin. Therefore, he wants us to have the same largeness of mind and heart, to be “perfect” in this respect even as he is perfect. To make every effort to do so is to exercise the spirit of a sound and renewed mind, because it is the mind of our Heavenly Father and his Son.

THE FATHER KNOWS

The worldly mind likes to be appreciated and praised. Jesus mentions this viewpoint in his reference to those who “do ... alms before men, to be seen of them,” and those who “sound a trumpet” to call attention to their benefactions, “that they may have glory of men.” (Matt. 6:1,2) This principle is operative all around us every day. The larger the gifts, the more fanfare there is to glorify the giver. This is not considered wrong by the world. Indeed, it is a common practice of the world’s “best people.”

This, however, is not pleasing to the Lord and, from his standpoint, such a course is not exercising a renewed mind, because it is not his mind. In learning what is “that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God,” we are to take heed to Jesus’ instructions, “When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.”—vss. 3,4

“IF, WHEN YE DO WELL”

The Apostle Peter was greatly used by God to reveal his will to his people. He wrote, “This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”—I Pet. 2:19-21

“This is acceptable with God,” wrote Peter. We are endeavoring to have our minds renewed that we may know and prove what is the acceptable will of God, and here Peter explains a very important aspect of the divine will for all dedicated followers of the Master. It is simply that we endure

suffering patiently, when it is inflicted upon us because we did well.

How unsound this appears from the human standpoint. In this passage, Peter reminds us of the possibility of being punished for our faults, or for doing those things which we and others know are wrong. Human reasoning would say that this would be all right—just what we should expect. Yet, as Peter explains, there is no glory in this—no cause for feeling that simply because we have gracefully accepted just punishment for our faults, we are especially pleasing to God.

It is only when we “do well” and suffer for it, that we truly demonstrate our love for God and his ways. For, as Peter explains, this is the example set before us by our Lord. Jesus, who simply went about doing good, was arrested and crucified, and he voluntarily surrendered to this ignominy and suffering because he exercised the spirit of a sound mind.

Herein is a basic principle of the life of one striving to develop the mind of Christ. Prior to Pentecost, Peter could not understand it himself. He said to Jesus, “Be it far from thee, Lord.” (Matt. 16:22) However, Jesus explained to Peter, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (vs. 25) How utterly illogical this is from the standpoint of the worldly mind. Actually, though, from the standpoint of our Heavenly Father’s will, Jesus reflected the spirit of a sound mind in surrendering himself to be killed.

Later, through the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, Peter understood this, and was able to encourage the brethren along this line. “It is better,” Peter wrote, “if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.” (I Pet. 3:17) The reason for this is that we are following in Jesus’ footsteps, and he suffered, “the just for the unjust.”—vs. 18

To the human mind how illogical is the idea that it is better to suffer for well doing than for evil doing. Yet, this is the will of God as we renew our minds. The mind of the flesh rebels against this “unsound” viewpoint, and we need to examine ourselves very carefully, and very sincerely, to make sure that we do not yield to the fleshly reasoning, which exalts self above the will of God as expressed through Christ Jesus. As Paul admonishes, we are to bring “into captivity every thought” to the divine will.—II Cor. 10:5

OUR “REASONABLE SERVICE”

The exercise of the spirit of a sound or renewed mind enables one to reason and reach logical conclusions. However, the conclusions reached depend upon the information used by the mind as a basis for reasoning. While in the world, we reasoned on the viewpoints of the world. All the information available indicated that self should be given first consideration under practically all circumstances, therefore we came to selfish conclusions.

Now it is different. We have, as indicated in Romans 12:1, presented our bodies a “living sacrifice,” and have reached the conclusion that this is our “reasonable,” or logical, service. Having entered upon this course of sacrificing all in the service of the Heavenly Father, it would be illogical to sidestep the opportunities that present themselves from day to day to carry out the terms of our consecration.

Thus, it is not enough that we have formally dedicated ourselves to sacrifice. It is not enough that we hear, read, and study the subject of sacrifice. The transformation of our minds must be so complete that we will be impelled to action, and thus demonstrate that we have actually accepted the baptism into Christ’s death as our new way of life. The true spirit of a sound and renewed mind will not permit any other course.

“ON THESE THINGS”

The renewing of our minds should affect every facet of our thinking. While it is the merit of Christ which makes our imperfect sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, it is incumbent upon us to bring every thought and deed as nearly into line with divine righteousness as possible.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”—Phil. 4:8,9

What a wonderful formula for holy thinking. The mind that is daily being renewed will delight to dwell upon the things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. Such holy thinking will surely leave no room, or have no time for the selfish, sordid things of the fallen flesh, and of the selfish, sinful world.

Let us pray with David that such holy thoughts will indeed be the meditations of our heart.—Ps. 19:14

However, meditation alone is not sufficient, nor did Paul indicate that to “think on these things” was all that was necessary. He added that “those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do.” Indeed, we are to “do” as well as “think.” We are to do the things which, through the Scriptures, we have seen in Paul, or, as he mentions, we are to follow him as he followed Christ.—Phil. 3:17; I Cor. 11:1

Here again, to the worldly-minded, it would seem very illogical to do the things in the service of the Lord that Paul did. No inconvenience to himself, no hardship, no danger, nothing that would adversely affect his well-being as a man, motivated his decisions as to how and where and when he would serve. To those who endeavored to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem, thus to expose himself to his enemies who were waiting there for him, Paul said, “I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”—Acts 21:13

Referring to the trouble which awaited him at Jerusalem, Paul said, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24) As here stated, the secret of Paul’s unfaltering course of sacrificial service was that he had learned to think properly with a renewed mind. He was guided by the spirit of a sound mind, and therefore did not consider his life to be dear unto himself.

CHRIST’S MIND

Paul wrote to the brethren at Philippi, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) Certainly Jesus possessed a sound mind from his Heavenly Father’s standpoint, and it was a mind which led him in the way of humble and submissive sacrifice. In addition to leaving the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—vss. 7,8

How unwise it would seem to the worldly mind for one to make himself of no reputation. However, the mind of Christ, guided by heavenly wisdom, led him to do just this, and further, to actually give his life on the cross for the sins of the world. "Let this mind be in you," Paul admonished. This mind will be in us, and will dominate our decisions and our whole course in life if, day by day, we are being "transformed by the renewing" of our minds. To put it another way, this mind will be in us if we take up our cross and faithfully follow Jesus into death.—Matt. 16:24

APPROVED SACRIFICE

Sacrifice in itself is also not enough. Paul wrote that even if we give our bodies to be burned, and have not love, it will profit us nothing. (I Cor. 13:3) Here Paul reminds us that our motive for sacrifice must be right. It must be God's motive, which is unselfish love. It was this love that prompted our Heavenly Father to give his Son to die for the sin-cursed and dying race. It was the same love that impelled Jesus to suffer and to die in carrying out the divine will. It was unselfish love also that prompted Paul to lay down his life in the service of the Lord and the brethren.

Thus, as our minds are renewed day by day, our motives should become purified. Love should replace every semblance of selfishness. Otherwise, all our giving, our labor, our sacrifice, will be in vain so far as the will of God is concerned. With love ruling in our hearts and minds, and motivating our actions, what a wonderful transformation it will mean. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth."—vss. 4-8

The thoughts which engender these gracious and godlike qualities of character are dominant in the renewed mind of the faithful follower of the Master. They are the pure thoughts which reflect the spirit of a sound mind given to us by the Holy Spirit of truth. Finally, it is these motivating thoughts of love which will urge us on to faithfulness as day by day we continue to present our bodies a living sacrifice, rejoicing to realize that this is our "reasonable service." ■

CHAPTER 7

Putting on Christ

“As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other.”
—Colossians 3:12,13 (NASB)

THE KING JAMES Version renders these verses: “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.”

From the outset, we note that these words are addressed to the chosen, or elect, of God. He has chosen a select group from the world of mankind during the present Gospel Age who desire to serve him and to seek for glory, honor, and immortality. These have responded to the call, “My son, give me thine heart.”—Prov. 23:26

PUT OFF THE OLD—PUT ON THE NEW

The foundation for our discussion is given earlier in Colossians, chapter 3. We are admonished to “Seek those things which are above. ... Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” (vss. 1,2) Before we can “put on” the things mentioned in our theme text, we must first adjust our heart affections heavenward. We also must “put off the old man with his deeds.” (vs. 9) In another place, Paul gives us similar words: “Put off ... the old man, which is corrupt; ... And ... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”—Eph. 4:22,24

To put on Christ requires that we each transform our minds. This transformation requires nothing short of full consecration and service to the Heavenly Father. Only a

heart which is daily fully dedicated to him will prove to be acceptable in his sight, and such faithfulness will require the sacrifice of our earthly interests, aims, and ambitions.

Bringing about this transformation will require much in the way of special testing. At times, fiery trials may be permitted by God to test our faith and the depth of our consecration. In these, our goal should be the realization that there is nothing of this earth which we should desire. If we have made this precious vow of consecration, we are reckoned as being dead with Christ to the things of this earth, and that our new life is “hid with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:3) Our life is hid with Christ in the sense that the Heavenly Father’s plan is being accomplished through Christ. It is he who has redeemed us, and through whose blood we are justified. We see this expressed in the words: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—chap. 1:27

If we are putting on Christ, and his character likeness is growing in us, our efforts along the lines of letting our light shine, and giving ourselves in service to the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren should be seen by others. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) Indeed, the desire of our heart and mind should be to serve the true and living God. Apostle Paul expresses the matter in these words, “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; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men.” (I Thess. 1:3,4; II Cor. 3:2) To this Peter adds, concerning the footstep followers of Christ, that they are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:2) Having these words before our minds, we are able to claim the promise: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”—Phil. 4:13

BELOVED OF GOD

Let us now consider these words: “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” “He [God] hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Mark 1:11; Eph. 1:6) The term “beloved” is used in these texts with reference to God’s love for his son Jesus. It is also used many times by the Apostles as

an expression of endearment with regard to Christ's followers. For example, we read these words from John, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—I John 3:2

To be counted "beloved" in God's sight entails our becoming more Christlike in character—more loving, gentle, compassionate, and merciful, as indicated in our theme text. These character traits are to have special significance to us at this present time as we strive to be obedient to our vows of consecration. The development of these graces mentioned by Paul will have a purifying effect upon us, assisting in the cleansing of our hearts from any wrong intentions and motives. Thus we will be refreshed through the Holy Spirit to continue on, though we walk through the "dry and thirsty land" of this world as pilgrims and strangers, until we hear the words, "enter thou into the joy of thy lord."—Matt. 25:21

At the present time, "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10) However, we have the assurance, through faith in his blood, that we are covered under Christ's robe of righteousness. In "the beloved," our consecration and resulting sacrifice is deemed acceptable. By him we have a standing before God, who can now also look upon us as objects of his love, giving us the opportunity of also being sons—brethren of his only begotten Son. Paul describes this relationship, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."—chap. 8:17

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." (II Cor. 5:17) It is as New Creatures that we are beloved in God's sight, having been made acceptable through the merit of our Redeemer, and prospective members of his bride. We have entered "a new and living way" (Heb. 10:20), which Christ opened for us. Faithfully walking in this way, Paul says, is our "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1), requiring daily obedience to the divine will. Truly, our sentiments should be, "We love him, because he first loved us." (I John 4:19) God's love for his people is expressed well in these words, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."—Jer. 31:3

THE CONDITION OF OUR HEART

To follow the way of the cross requires that we daily examine the condition of our heart. Its condition will go a long way in

determining our success in cultivating the spirit of meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, and love, which is “the fulfilling of the law.” (Rom. 13:10) If we develop these things to the best of our ability, in a good and honest heart, we will have part in this promise: “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: ... they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6) Notice only those who are both “blessed and holy” in character will have part in this reigning company.

To be one that “hath part” in the first resurrection, and to receive the divine nature, requires faithfulness in progressing toward the various attainments of development along the narrow way. These waymarks or mileposts, and our attainment of them, give us evidence and assurance that we are progressing toward the ultimate mark set before us—“the mark for the prize of the high calling.” (Phil. 3:14) Paul, in another place, speaks of the desired goal of our progress, “That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”—Col. 4:12

“Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” (II Cor. 3:3) A heart of flesh is pliable, able to feel and understand the needs of others, and to show forth sincere love and sympathy to them. As “the epistle of Christ,” we must seek to develop our hearts, and conduct our lives, in harmony with these words. These are words of truth, and are part of that which washes us “with pure water.”—Heb. 10:22

We should also desire this: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” (Eph. 3:17) If Christ and the spirit of Christ dwell in our heart, we will be properly motivated as a true believer, and find ourselves “doing the will of God from the heart.” (Eph. 6:6) We should think of this process as the writing, or tracing, of the character likeness of the Master in our hearts. Thus, we desire to serve God, not with a heart of stone, hardened by sin and coldness of character, but with a heart that has been cleansed, washed “white as snow” (Isa. 1:18), pliable and usable in the hand of the Lord.

EARNESTNESS AND FAITH

As we seek to put on Christ, we should be continually aware of the earnestness, seriousness, and sincere determination by which we should be giving our all to the Lord.

Much is required of those who would make up the bride class—the called, chosen, and faithful. The importance of earnestness is shown in these words of personal testimony from Paul: “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.” (Phil. 1:20) The earnestness Paul spoke of, and which we must emulate, highlights the importance of our pledge of fidelity to God in each and all circumstances, whether “by life” or “by death.” We can have such earnestness because of the assurance that daily we will be recipients of enlightenment through the Holy Spirit. God has also given us a foretaste, through his precious promises, of good things to come in the fulfillment of his plan. This knowledge also assists us in maintaining an earnest desire to be faithful. It is surely with seriousness that we “should earnestly contend [struggle] for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”—Jude 3

Earnestness goes hand in hand with faith. We must have a faith that fully comprehends and appreciates the depth of our Redeemer’s sacrifice. Likewise, our faith must be unwavering in the justification he has provided us, and in our standing as sons before God. We must, by faith, claim the promise, “Ye are washed, ... sanctified, ... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (I Cor. 6:11) Although this scripture applies to each one individually as a follower of Christ, it also should help us, collectively as brethren, to maintain our hold on the Truth and to have our feet be swift to serve one another along the narrow way.

As brethren, we are part of the “household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10) In the natural family arrangement, each member has faith and trust toward those who are part of the household. So it should also be in the household of faith. We must develop an attitude of heart and mind in which we have faith in, and trust, our brethren’s similar desires to be faithful. This requires that we learn to overlook the weaknesses of the flesh in our brethren, which most certainly will arise from time to time in our dealings with one another. It takes patience, love, faith, and trust to make this all work together in the brotherhood. Prayer, self-examination, and humility are also necessary in order that we place our viewpoints and our feelings in their proper perspective, when it involves matters of mere preference. In all things, however, we are to

put the Lord first, and all other matters in our life will fit into their proper place. Let us remember the words, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”—Josh. 24:15

PUT ON CHARITY/LOVE

The Master stated, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. ... These things I command you, that ye love one another.” (John 15:12-14,17) Jesus certainly was the epitome of this, because he was both willing and able to lay down his life for his friends—his footstep followers of the present age. In Christ’s kingdom, all of the world of mankind who are willing and prove obedient to God’s righteous laws, will also become friends of Jesus, having developed a Christlike character. This love, whether developed now in Christ’s footstep followers, or by and by in his kingdom by the world of mankind, is “the bond of perfectness”—or completeness.—Col. 3:14

It is evident that our love for the brethren has been, and continues to be, a special test to all of the Lord’s footstep followers during the present Harvest time in which we are now living. Indeed, it has always been of great importance. However, conditions in the earth are such that today, more than ever before, selfishness, pride, and a general lack of love and brotherly kindness pervade much of the spirit of the world. This knowledge should raise the level of importance we place on the development of love, making it one of our chief priorities. It may be the final test in our desire to reach the mark of the prize of our calling.

BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER

To bear with one another implies several things. First, it can be viewed as a way of conducting ourselves—our manner—toward others, especially our brethren. It also includes the thought of endurance. It implies awareness and recognition of our brethren’s individual circumstances or situations which may call for our “bearing” with them.

The *King James* translation of our theme text uses the word “forbearing.” This has the thought of patient restraint, and requires much in the way of self control. We must keep self in check and examine closely our motives, words, and actions when dealing with others along the lines of forbearing. Paul

often took note concerning what he had heard of or witnessed in his brethren. Although he certainly had to be forbearing toward them in their weaknesses, yet he went to great lengths to be positive in his assessment of their progress: “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.” —II Thess. 1:3

FRUIT-BEARING

Proper fruit-bearing is required in order to prove our acceptance to the Lord, and to maintain our standing as branches of the true vine. In John 15:5, Jesus states, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” Each consecrated member of the household of faith is a branch in this vine, and is to seek the development of the same fruitage, and to run for the same prize—the one hope of our calling. As branches together in this vine, we are yokefellow with each other and with our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. Together we are being fed, watered, shaped, and pruned in order that we produce fruitage unto the character likeness of our dear Lord.

The Apostle Paul lists the various fruits which we are to produce as we abide in the true vine. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance. (Gal. 5:22,23) To develop these fruits requires that we separate ourselves from earthly ambition, as it is out of harmony with our consecration unto death and with the Holy Spirit which engenders these Christlike qualities. Thus separated, the Spirit of the Lord extends an even greater influence over our lives, allowing more and more production of fruitage.

To make fruit-bearing possible requires first an output of effort and energy. In the natural sense, fruitage must be preceded by proper growth of the plant, which is provided by nutrients from the soil, energy from the sun, and sufficient watering. Pruning is also needed to yield the sweetest and largest fruit. In the spiritual sense, our fruit-bearing must be preceded by an ample supply of nutrients from the good soil of our heart, life-giving rays from the Sun of righteousness, the water of the word of truth from the Scriptures, and the pruning trials and experiences of life. All of this must be accompanied with a zeal and fervor to be pleasing to God.

Fruit-bearing should be manifested in a variety of ways—toward our Heavenly Father, his son Christ Jesus our Lord, our brethren, and toward all mankind in proportion as we have contact with them. This is a lifelong work, and we are reminded to not become tired in its accomplishment: “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9) Rather, let us always have close to our heart these sentiments: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD.”—Ps. 19:14

FORGIVING EACH OTHER

We should, with everything pertaining to our spiritual lives, go back to the words and teachings of our Lord Jesus for guidance. When one of his disciples requested of him, “teach us to pray,” Jesus included these important words in the model prayer he provided: “When ye pray, say, ... forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us [who trespass against us].” (Luke 11:1,2,4) It is important to note that Jesus was not in need of speaking these words when he prayed to his Father, being “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) However, he knew that his footstep followers had need of praying for forgiveness. Similar words are recorded in Matthew 6:14,15: “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” What a serious thought this is! We will be forgiven only if we have the same spirit of forgiveness in our heart toward others. If we do, we have the promise that “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”—I John 1:9

We, and all others, are imperfect and cannot keep the divine law as we might desire. We should not expect perfection from any during this present time in which we are living. Perfection of thought, word, and deed is reserved for a future time. Rather, as our Lord told us when giving the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) If we are merciful, we have a blessedness because we have been both its recipient as well its giver. To continue faithfully in such an attitude will result in true pureness of heart, and permit us to “see God.”—vs. 8

The very essence of Christian principle is found in love, sympathy, and the spirit of forgiveness. In Matthew 18:21,

when Peter inquired of the Lord concerning how many times he should forgive someone, he asked, “till seven times?” Peter perhaps thought that this was proper, since the number seven was a symbol of completeness and perfection. Our Lord, however, stated clearly, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” (vs. 22) In reality, Jesus meant that the spirit of forgiveness in our character and the desire to exercise it toward others should be without limit.

Let us then, as those chosen of God, holy and beloved, strive to fully put on Christ. Let us have a heart, thoughts, words, and actions developed into a fullness of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, daily bearing with our brethren, and forgiving one another. This is truly our reasonable service. ■

CHAPTER 8

Claiming Christ's Promise

*"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure
to give you the kingdom."*

—Luke 12:32

THE "KINGDOM" IS one of the prominent themes of the Bible, being referred to considerably more than a hundred times in the New Testament alone. The Bible's many references to the kingdom fall into two general categories—one having to do with its rulers and the other with its subjects. The references of scripture pertaining to the rulers in the kingdom include those which set forth the conditions upon which one may hope to attain to such a high position, while the references to the subjects of the kingdom include the many promises of the blessings of joy and life which, through the kingdom agencies, will be showered upon them.

When Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," he referred to the hope of sharing in the rulership of the kingdom. Jesus addressed this assurance to his disciples, who at that time were composed entirely of the natural descendants of Abraham. Long centuries before this, God had promised the Israelites as a nation that if they were obedient to his law he would make of them a "kingdom of priests, and an holy nation," and Jesus' disciples, by accepting him and following in his footsteps of self-sacrifice, were proving their worthiness to inherit this promise.—Exod. 19:5,6

However, there were not many in Israel at that time to whom it was "the Father's good pleasure" to give the kingdom. The majority followed the leadership of their religious rulers by rejecting the one whom God had sent to be the

King in the long-promised kingdom, so he said that the kingdom would be taken from them and given to a nation “bringing forth the fruits” of obedience and righteousness. (Matt. 21:43) Later, the Apostle Peter identified this new “nation” to which the kingdom would be given when, addressing an epistle to “the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” he said, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” To this, Peter adds, “Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God.” —I Pet. 1:1; 2:9,10

Peter’s reference is to Gentile believers who had become God’s chosen, or elect people, “through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience.” (I Pet. 1:2) The Scriptures reveal, however, that the first of these who comprised the new nation to which the opportunity for eventual rulership in the kingdom was given were believing Jews. In John 1:11,12, we read concerning Jesus, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” It is the “sons,” or children of God, by faith and obedience who will share the rulership of the kingdom with Jesus. Paul wrote, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17) Thus, to this special class, a key element to their development of the “mind of Christ” is the importance of claiming the promise, “Fear not, little flock.”

THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION

We note Paul’s words—“if so be that we suffer with him.” This is one of the conditions upon which followers of Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, may hope to reign with him. In another place Paul, in exhorting the brethren to continue in the faith, explained that it is through “much tribulation” that we will “enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) On the night before he was crucified, Jesus said to his disciples much the same thing, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33

How reassuring it is to hear Jesus say to us, “Fear not,” with the explanation, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Offering us the “prize of the high calling” is not something that our Heavenly Father reluctantly

does. It is his “good pleasure.” He wants us to “live and reign with Christ,” and has placed all the necessary resources at our disposal to enable us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.—Phil. 3:14; 4:13

So fear not! “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves,” Jesus further said. While he wants us so far as possible to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves,” we need not be concerned that we will be devoured by the “wolves,” for they will be permitted merely to threaten us with harm. (Matt. 10:16) This is in order that our faith and confidence in the Heavenly Father and his ability to care for us might be tested. Fear not, for actually there is no one that can harm us, no circumstance or combination of circumstances that can injure us as “new creatures” so long as we do “that which is good.”—I Pet. 3:13,14

In exercising the wisdom of serpents, “Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake.” However, fear not, “when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”—Matt. 10:17-20

Many of the little flock at the beginning of the age experienced literally these aspects of persecution. It has been true of some even in this end of the age. We are confident that all of these experienced the fulfillment of the Master’s promise that the Father, through the Holy Spirit, was present to give the needed aid, to strengthen them, and to give them utterance in bearing witness to the Truth. Those who use their quiet moments to study and to meditate upon the Word of God will be so filled with its message, that out of this rich abundance of their hearts the Lord will enable them to speak forth the proper words of life and truth under any and all circumstances.

Fear not, for even though members of our own family or household may be opposed to us, he whose good pleasure it is to give us the kingdom will stand by us in our most severe moments of loneliness and ostracism. This will be true even though “the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death,” and even though you will be “hated of all men for my name’s sake.”—Matt. 10:21,22

“Fear not,” the Master tells us, for the Father is merely testing our loyalty to him. It is his good pleasure to exalt us to the divine nature to reign with Christ, and he wants to prove us to see if we love him more than father, or mother, or sister, or brother, or even our own life. So we must be faithful, yielding to whatever experiences divine love may permit. Our faith should enable us to trust him, come what may, knowing that it is the Father’s good pleasure for those who are faithful unto death to receive a crown of life.

We, however, do not seek persecution. “When they persecute you in this city, flee into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come.” (vs. 23) Neither should we, through fear, retreat in the face of persecution. Instead, remembering the Master’s admonition, “fear not,” we should be prepared to face any experiences which the Lord’s providences may permit. On the other hand, it is sometimes better to withdraw from a trying situation and seek opportunities of service elsewhere, or along other lines. To do this might require more grace and courage, but we should follow the leadings of the Lord whatever the cost might be.

AS HIS MASTER

How needful it is to be reminded by Jesus that we cannot expect to experience fewer difficulties in the world than those which surrounded and confronted him. “The disciple is not above his master,” Jesus said, “nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.”—vss. 24-26

Paul wrote, “consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Heb. 12:3) Jesus’ enemies attributed wrong motives to much that he did and said. He was the prince of devils, they said, and a blasphemer. Again, “Fear not,” said Jesus. While the world will treat us as it treated him, our true position of loyalty to the Father, and to his great kingdom cause, will in his due time be recognized, “for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed.” Meanwhile, he whose pleasure it is to give us the kingdom, and who is able to

read the heart, knows our love for him. Since we have been called according to his purpose, he will cause all things, even the false charges that may come against us, to work together for our good.—Rom. 8:28

Our enemies, and the enemies of the Heavenly Father, may “kill the body,” but fear not, for they are not able to take away life eternal. (Matt. 10:28) If we have taken up our cross to follow Jesus we must expect to die sacrificially, because we have presented ourselves for that purpose. (Rom. 12:1) The only way now to save our life and to live and to reign with Christ, is to lose our life in sacrifice. (Matt. 16:25) To suffer and to die with Jesus is the manner in which it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

As we lay down our life in sacrifice, and one after another of those earthly things which we may have once cherished are destroyed, we may at first wonder if the Heavenly Father really cares, but fear not. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”—chap. 10:29-31

“Beloved, think it not strange,” wrote Peter, “concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” Since we are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, it is the good pleasure of the Heavenly Father to sustain us in every trial, for “the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.”—I Pet. 4:12,13; 3:12

It is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom only to those who seek for it with all their hearts, making every other interest of life of secondary consideration. There are certain necessities to which we must give attention, such as food, raiment, and a place to live for ourselves and for our families. However, these are to be viewed in the light of seeking “first” the kingdom of heaven. “Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. ... Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—Luke 12:29-31

SECURE IN HIM

“My sheep,” said Jesus—that little flock to whom it is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom—“hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) Have we heard the “voice” of Jesus, the voice of truth, inviting us to take up our cross and follow him? If we have, and we have accepted his invitation, then we are secure if we continue on in this way of righteousness, for Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”—vss. 28,29

“I and my Father are one,” said the Master. (vs. 30) Just as it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom, it is Jesus’ good pleasure also. “The Father himself loveth you,” and Jesus loves us also. (chap. 16:27) “Having loved his own which were in the world,” we read that Jesus “loved them unto the end.” (chap. 13:1) He gladly laid down his life for them, that they might have life, and be with him in his kingdom.

The good pleasure of the Heavenly Father and of Jesus is shown in the precious promises made to his disciples, many of which were given by Jesus in the “upper room” the night before his crucifixion. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ... I go to prepare a place for you, And if I go, ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (chap. 14:1-3) Fear not, for Jesus went away to appear in the presence of the Father for us, so that if we continue to love him, and keep his commandments, we may ask whatever will be for our highest interest as members of his little flock, and it will be given unto us.—vss. 13-15

“MUCH FRUIT”

As we have noted, Jesus said that the kingdom would be given to a nation, or people, bringing forth the fruits, and in the upper room he said, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (chap. 15:8) Paul wrote, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22,23) In a sense, love is the sum of all these, and this is the love which emanates from the Father. “As the Father hath loved me,

so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."
—John 15:9,10

The little flock to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom, is an elect, or chosen, people. However, it is essential to make that "calling and election sure," and that is done by bearing much fruit. "Unto us," Peter wrote, are given "exceeding great and precious promises," the purposes of these being to assist us in attaining unto the divine nature, and to association with Jesus in his kingdom.—II Pet. 1:4

These "precious promises" are among the evidences of the Father's good pleasure. He wants to give us the kingdom, and he has provided every needed help in order that we might attain to this high position, but there is the necessity of bearing much fruit. So we are to give "all diligence" in adding to our "faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."—II Pet. 1:5-11

"FEAR NOT"

Because of his knowledge of the Old Testament promises of God, Jesus could, with authority, assure his disciples of the Father's love and protection, and, therefore, that they had no need to fear. How strengthening it is to our faith to hear the Father speak to us through Jesus, "Fear not." If we love him with all our heart we will be dwelling in the "secret place" which God has provided, that place of security that is overshadowed by his love and power.—Ps. 91:1

The psalmist said of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust." We, too, can claim this promise, because we have the Master's own assurance that

the Father loves us even as he loved him. (vs. 2; John 17:23) “Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler,” our “adversary the Devil,” who goes about as a roaring lion “seeking whom he may devour.” Yes, the psalmist continues, “he shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” —Ps. 91:3,4; I Pet. 5:8

The mother hen must take pleasure in protecting her chickens under her feathers and wings. So our Heavenly Father, whose good pleasure it is to give us the kingdom, will see to it that “no evil” shall befall us, and that no plague shall come nigh our dwelling. So we fear not, claiming the promise: “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night: nor for the arrow that flieth by day.” (Ps. 91:5) None of the bitter words of envy and hatred will harm us if we have on the whole armor of truth and abide in the Father’s love. Because it is his good pleasure to give us the kingdom, he will help us to fight every battle in the “good fight of faith” that we might come off “more than conquerors” and receive the promised “crown of life.” —I Tim. 6:12; Rom. 8:37; James 1:12; Rev. 2:10

Fear not, for “he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Ps. 91:11) Jesus claimed this promise for himself, and told Peter that if he wished, he could ask his Father, and the Father would send “more than twelve legions of angels” to protect him. (Matt. 26:53) Jesus did not ask this protection as a man, for he had come to give his flesh for the life of the world. However, he did realize the protection and care which were afforded him as a New Creature by the holy angels, who, he said, “always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (chap. 18:10) The same is true of us. How wonderful it is to be in the encircling arms of divine love in which we can enjoy the same benefits of the Father’s good pleasure as were bestowed upon Jesus.

Continuing in Psalm 91, the Heavenly Father speaks to Jesus and to us, the little flock, whom he will not allow to be plucked out of his hands, saying, “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life [immortality] will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.” —vss. 14-16

Have we set our love upon the Heavenly Father? Then we may be sure that he will deliver us, even as he delivered Jesus. He will set us on high, even as Jesus was highly exalted, and we can call upon our Heavenly Father and be assured of an answer. Jesus' life confirmed this statement, "I will be with him in trouble." Jesus was not delivered, or spared from trouble, but he was given strength by the Heavenly Father to overcome. To us, he said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) We know that the same power which enabled Jesus to overcome will give us strength to bear our burdens, and courage to go forward, knowing that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

Just as the Father was with Jesus in trouble, so he will be with us, and in his own due time will deliver us in the "first resurrection" to live and to reign with Christ. This is the Father's good pleasure for us, and also Jesus' good pleasure, for he said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—Rev. 3:21

What more could the Heavenly Father say to assure us of his love and protection, and of victory! So fear not, knowing "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul's conclusion was that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Rom. 8:32-39

Let us then remember the words, "Fear not, little flock." Though we may be small in number, unnoticed and unknown to the world except as objects of scorn, yet the great God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, our Heavenly Father, wants us to share with his Son in the rulership of a world government which will establish peace throughout the earth, and assure joy, health, and life to all mankind. It is his good pleasure that his faithful little flock shall have this kingdom! ■

CHAPTER 9

Provoking One Another

*“Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”
—Hebrews 10:24,25*

ORDINARILY, THE WORD “provoke” is used to denote a stirring up to anger or ill will. Here, however, the apostle’s thought is clearly that of an incitement to good, a stimulation of Christian growth in love and good works. The apostle shows that such a provoking is the true objective of Christian association, and the purpose for which the followers of the Master bring themselves together. We cannot exhort one another unless we are associated. We all need the help and encouragement that come from fellowship with those of like precious faith. The apostle shows, furthermore, that fellowship with the brethren, in order that we may mutually exhort one another unto love and good works, becomes increasingly essential as we “see the day approaching.”

Jesus set a perfect example for us in this regard, as always in fellowship with his disciples he sought to provoke them, in a positive manner, toward love and good works. If we are to successfully develop the “mind of Christ,” we too must rejoice in the privilege of assembling, and provoking toward love and good works, among the body of Christ. There is a beautiful spiritual balance displayed in this exhortation. Neither love nor zeal for good works, possessed independent of the other, can make the Christian all that God expects him to be. Indeed, true Christian love cannot exist in the life of a Christian unless it is manifested in good works. Likewise,

there cannot be works that are “good” in the Lord’s sight except those which are the outgrowth, the manifestation, of true Christian love.

Our imperfect minds need to be constantly on guard along this line. Those whose natural dispositions enjoy activity and who are most happy when their time is used fully in working for the Lord need to watch lest they find themselves over-stressing this phase of the Christian life to the detriment of the proper development of love. On the other hand, those who by nature are more quiet and contemplative should exercise care lest they ignore what the Scriptures say concerning the importance of activity in the Lord’s service.

The subject of love is made so very important in the Word of God that some have stressed it to the exclusion of other things that the Lord requires. To do this is just as injurious to true Christian growth in grace as it is to ignore what the Scriptures say about love and to overstress what they say concerning works and activity. How very glad we are that the apostle, in pointing out the true objective of our association in Christ, stresses the importance of exhorting one another both to love and to good works.

WHAT IS LOVE?

A proper understanding of what constitutes Christian love is probably the best safeguard against a misuse of Scriptures which urge its development and prominence in the Christian life. Fundamentally, the love which should fill and control the Christian life is the love of God, the love possessed and exemplified by our Heavenly Father in his attitude toward the fallen race. John 3:16 declares that God so loved them that he was stirred to action and works—he “gave.” He gave that which cost him more than anything else he could have given. He gave his only begotten and well beloved Son because he loved the fallen race. On account of his love, he was glad to make this sacrifice, and to provide an opportunity for all who would accept it to return to harmony with him and enjoy everlasting life.

Jesus was of the same disposition as his Father, and the love of God which controlled his life urged him on day by day in a self-sacrificing effort that was wholly on behalf of others. An exhortation encouraging the growth of love is quite incomplete unless we consider the example of the Master’s life of self-sacrifice. The love which filled his heart

called for the use of every nerve and sinew of his body in the sacrifice of his perfect humanity in the interests of God's plan of recovery for his fellowmen. He was doubtless many times weary and ready to faint, but he was never weary of well doing. He was never fainthearted in his determination to continue using all the strength of his being that others might be blessed.

In Jesus, therefore, we have an example of the perfect blending of true divine love and the good works of God. We cannot, of course, perform all the works that he did, but we can have the spirit which will prompt us to do all we possibly can.

WORKS PROMPTED BY LOVE

In I Corinthians 13, Paul reminds us of the true relationship between love and good works. He mentions a number of items which the Scriptures show should be looked upon as good works, such as speaking "with the tongues of men and of angels," "the gift of prophecy," bestowing all one's "goods to feed the poor," and giving one's "body to be burned." (vss. 1-3) Paul also mentions other important considerations in the Christian life, such as the understanding of mysteries and the possession of mountain-moving faith. The apostle is not discounting the importance of work and knowledge and faith. He shows, rather, that these, in order to be good, must be prompted by love. Work, knowledge, and faith—without love—Paul says, are profitless in making one truly acceptable to God.

Paul's reference to speaking with the tongues of men and of angels could be understood as applying to the gift of speaking with tongues, with which many were blessed in the Early Church, or it might also properly apply to exceptional ability in expounding the Word of God, such as Apollos possessed. Whether the reference is to one or both of these means of serving the Lord, Paul is not condemning the service but is using examples of legitimate Christian work in order to point out its proper relationship to love.

Among the brethren at Corinth there had developed a spirit of sectarianism, which certainly was contrary to the principle of Christian love. In the first chapter of the epistle, the apostle reveals that they were taking sides with respect to leadership. Some were saying, "I am of Paul," while others said, "I [am] of Apollos," and still others stated, "I [am] of

Cephas.” (I Cor. 1:12) Apollos was noted for his oratory, and it seems quite possible that Paul’s reference to speaking with the tongues of men and of angels may have been a timely warning to the brethren at Corinth that oratory alone should not be considered the basis upon which they accept any brother as a leader in their midst.

Paul was faithful in exhorting the brethren at Corinth to be motivated by love in their good works, and thus he warned them not to be overly influenced by a brilliant display of good works in the form of great ability to present the Word. Paul’s warning, however, should not be construed as discouraging the use of all the ability one may possess in sounding forth the praises of God. None in our day is able to speak with such eloquence that it can be said he speaks with the “tongues of men and of angels.” Nevertheless, there is no question that God would have all of us use our tongues as efficiently as we possibly can to make known the glad tidings of the kingdom and to exhort one another. We will find, of course, that at best, our efforts, comparatively speaking, will be those of lisping, stammering tongues. Yet, God can bless even such feeble efforts when they are prompted by love.

FEEDING THE POOR

Paul says that though we bestow all our goods to feed the poor and have not love, it profits us nothing. On the other hand, Paul knew that true love should prompt every follower of Christ to bestow his goods to feed the poor, not literally, but in the spiritual sense of sacrifice. The sacrifice of earthly treasures is one of the conditions of the narrow way. Where true love exists, this sacrifice will be kept upon the altar until it is wholly consumed. Jesus explained to the rich young ruler that in order to lay up treasure in heaven it was essential that he bestow his goods to feed the poor and take up his cross and follow the Master. Paul would know of this requirement of the narrow way. Thus, in his lesson on the subject of Christian love, he points out the relationship between love and sacrifice—that one prompts the other, and that any display of interest in the poor that is not prompted by love and directed by the Holy Spirit is not acceptable to God.

In II Corinthians 6:10, Paul speaks of us as Christian workers together, “As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” While few of the Lord’s people are of the wealthy class, the reference here is

not so much to one's temporal poverty as to the fact that they have made themselves "poor" by sacrificing their all in response to the Lord's invitation to follow in his footsteps. Jesus, though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, laying aside the glory and the riches he had with the Father. His course of sacrifice resulted in poverty as a human being. (chap. 8:9) He said that while the birds of the air have nests and the foxes have holes, "the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."—Matt. 8:20

"Yet making many rich," adds the apostle, concerning those who through sacrifice have made themselves poor according to the standards of this world. How very true this is concerning Jesus, who became so very poor. He laid aside the heavenly riches in order to take the sinner's place and to lay down his earthly life in sacrifice. Becoming poor, he has made us rich, spiritually speaking. Indeed, the riches of God's grace which have filled the lives of all the Master's followers have reached us because he became poor. Had he not made himself poor on our behalf, we would not be enjoying any of the riches of his grace today.

We do not have the abundance of riches to sacrifice that were possessed by the Master. Indeed, most of us possess very little of time, strength, and substance that can be devoted directly to divine service. Yet, if we are filled with the same spirit of love that prompted Jesus to lay aside his heavenly riches and to sacrifice all that the earth held for him as a perfect man, God will bless our offering of love and use it to the enrichment of others. It is impossible for a Christian, prompted by love and guided in his sacrifice by the truths of God's Word, to lay down his life in the service of God and not have that sacrifice enrich the lives of others.

"POSSESSING ALL THINGS"

If we accept the Master's invitation to bestow all our goods to enrich others, we will be among those described by the apostle as "having nothing." At the same time, however, it will be our blessed privilege to possess "all things." The "all things" here referred to are spiritual possessions, which become ours in proportion to our sacrifice of earthly interests. The Lord's favors to us through Christ, such as his promises of grace to help in time of need, the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, the encouragement of his exceeding great and precious promises, our privileges of association

with his people, and the honor of being coworkers with him, all constitute a part of our present riches in Christ. They are some of the “all things” which are ours to enjoy if, by the influence of love, we are sacrificing earthly advantages in order that these spiritual blessings may, indeed, be our blessed portion.

In addition to these present riches, there are also the treasures that are being laid up in heaven by those who are sacrificing the things of this earth. How fully it will be true, when we receive our heavenly inheritance, that we possess all things. According to the exceeding great and precious promises, the faithful followers of the Master will be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. When we enter into that inheritance, all things indeed will be ours, even to a position in the immediate divine family of our Heavenly Father, the Creator. Words are wholly inadequate to describe, even if our minds could grasp, the grandeur, the riches, and the glory of such an inheritance.—II Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8:16,17; Eph. 1:18

THE ALTAR OF SACRIFICE

In showing further the proper relationship between love and good works, Paul says that though we might give our bodies to be burned in literal sacrifice, and have not love, it profits us nothing. (I Cor. 13:3) It is understandable that one might give his body in sacrifice for some reason other than that of love. Indeed, throughout the Middle Ages millions were burned at the stake and otherwise cruelly put to death. Yet, we can hardly suppose that all of them were prompted thus to forfeit their lives by the true spirit of love. The spirit of martyrdom, the viewpoint which makes one proud that he is persecuted, oftentimes leads even those who do not profess to be Christians into making great sacrifices. In some cases, the impetus to sacrifice one's life has come from the myth of “glorious death” for king and country, or for personal pride or some other reason. It is equally true that not all those of ages past who were martyred “gave” their lives, but were in fact not able to successfully defend their innocence against the powers of the day.

Nevertheless, there is a true Christian sense in which one may give his body to be burned. This viewpoint of Christian sacrifice is beautifully illustrated in the typical sacrifices of the Tabernacle, where the bodies of animals were burned.

In Romans 12:1, Paul writes, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

Offering our bodies in sacrificial service is one of the essentials of the narrow way. Having offered ourselves in consecration to God, having entered into a covenant with him by sacrifice, we are no longer privileged to view these terms of our consecration as incidentals. They are on the “must” list, as it were. If we do not offer up our body as a living sacrifice—that is, if we do not lay down our life in the service of the Lord and his truth, we cannot hope to receive the new divine body and nature promised. This sacrifice of ourselves, in addition to the sacrifice of our possessions, is included in the “good works” to which the apostle says we should provoke one another.

Even so, love must be the motive behind our sacrifice. If we are serving the Lord to be seen and known of men or to be merely viewed as zealous by the brethren, our sacrifice will not be pleasing to God. There is a reward in accomplishment, especially from the viewpoint of the flesh. If the sacrifices we make for the Truth and for the brethren are made in order that we might see outstanding present results of our efforts, certainly our good works are not prompted by the proper motive. The good works of the Lord are owned and blessed of him only when they are actuated by love, the same kind of love that prompted him to give his Son that we might live. Sometimes, of course, we are made to rejoice by seeing the good that results from our labors, but this joy should be considered merely as a bonus of divine grace. If our works are prompted by love, we will continue our labor of love faithfully unto death, even though the Lord may not permit us the great joy of seeing significant present results.

ELEMENTS OF LOVE

Further reminding us of the futility of all Christian effort in the absence of love, the Apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 13, identifies some of the characteristics of love and some of the things it will enable the Christian to do and to keep him from doing.

Love “suffereth long,” says the apostle. (vs. 4) If we should find ourselves becoming fretful under trial, or inclined to rebel against the providences of the Lord which are not pleasing to

the flesh, we may well question the degree of love that fills our hearts, for love suffereth long. Remembering the terms of our consecration—that we agreed to give up all that we are and have and hope to be—we will not feel rebellious when our earthly blessings, whether of health, of friends, or of worldly goods, are, in the Lord's providence, put upon the altar of sacrifice. If our consecration was prompted by love, and if love continues to fill our hearts and lives, we will take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, rejoicing in every evidence that our sacrifice is being consumed to the glory of God.

Love "is kind," adds the apostle. No matter how extenuating the circumstances of life may be, regardless of how bitterly our enemies may assail us or how maliciously they ridicule us, if love fills our hearts, we will not be unkind. There are no exceptions to this—no circumstances whatever under which a Christian may justifiably be unkind.

A Christian has no right to hide behind the excuse of righteous indignation and thus permit himself to be unkind. If it becomes necessary for us to express admonition against wrongdoers, it should be done in kindness. To whatever extent we are unkind in our dealings with others, it means that we are just that much lacking in Christian love. How important, then, that love control our lives as workers for the Lord. How much more effective will be our witness for the Truth if our words are kind and manifest a genuine and understanding sympathy for those to whom we minister. How tragic, then, the condition would be of any who may be overstimulated in their zeal to work for the Lord and yet lack the kindness of love. Truly, love and good works must go together.

Love "envieth not," Paul continues. To envy those who may enjoy advantages which we do not possess would be evidence of a lack of love. The spirit of unselfishness which prompted our consecration—our agreement to give up all in the service of the Lord—is quite incompatible with envy. True love, rather, would prompt one to give what he had to others that they might be enriched, instead of enviously desiring that which does not belong to him. Whether the blessings enjoyed by others are those of material wealth or comfort, special privileges of service for the Lord, or other valued opportunities they may have in connection with the Truth, love will cause us to rejoice with them, rather than to envy their advantages. Any service we might render for

the Lord while our hearts are envious of the privileges of others could not possibly be acceptable to him. Thus again, we see that love and good works are, from the divine standpoint, inseparable.

Love “vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly.” (I Cor. 13:4,5) Those who are puffed up with pride are almost certain to attempt a display of their greatness, to vaunt themselves before the brethren and before their fellowmen. It is not love that causes one to do this, but selfishness—the selfish desire to be seen and honored and praised of men. Love, on the contrary, leads to the opposite course.

Of Jesus, who was wholly motivated by love, it is said that he “made himself of no reputation.” (Phil. 2:7) True love will do this. It will lead in the direction of meekness, humility, self-effacement, taking a back seat, rather than seeking prominence. When one in an unseemly manner vaunts himself through pride of heart, it proves that his service for God is not being rendered because of love, but because of his ambition to shine before men. When such is true, one’s works, no matter how great or imposing, are, nevertheless, not good as viewed by God.

Love “seeketh not her own.” (I Cor. 13:5) The only “rights” that really belong to a consecrated Christian are those represented in his privilege of sacrifice. We have the right, by divine authority and through the merit of Christ, to lay down our lives in God’s service. We have the right, if we are faithful in the use of our privileges of sacrifice, to receive the divine promise of glory, honor, and immortality. If, in our daily sacrifices to the Lord, we find our earthly rights being trampled upon, we should view this as an evidence that God is accepting our sacrifice. Having made a full consecration of all that we have to the Lord, it is our privilege to fulfill our consecration vows. (Ps. 50:5) It is the Lord who decides the circumstances that may constitute the altar upon which our sacrifice is consumed. Love prompts to sacrifice that which is our own. Hence it could not, at the same time, prompt us to hold back from the altar that which we have agreed to place in God’s hands.

Love “is not easily provoked.” (I Cor. 13:5) The *Diaglott* translation of this statement is better. It says that “love is not provoked to anger.” The word “easily” is not in the original text. Paul wants us to understand that love cannot

be provoked to anger at all. If a Christian becomes angry under provocation, it is an evidence that love is not in full control in his life. It is true, of course, that the Bible speaks of God as being angry with the wicked, and we are admonished not to let the sun go down on our wrath. However, the anger Paul speaks of here, which is not provoked by love, is not the proper indignation which God and all those in harmony with him of necessity feel toward unrighteousness. It is, rather, a display of temper, which gives vent to unkind looks and words and deeds, which do not edify but malign and injure. This type of anger is no part of good works, but wherever manifested by the Christian, it discredits the Truth of which he is an ambassador.

Love “thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity.” (I Cor. 13:5,6) This means that one whose heart is filled with love does not accredit wrong motives to the actions of others. He, rather, will in every way possible construe what might on the surface appear to be evil as though it were good, attributing at least a good motive to that which seems to be wrong on the part of others. This does not mean that love compromises with evil or condones sin. It does mean, however, that one who is controlled by love, knowing that the Lord covers unwilling imperfections with the robe of Christ’s righteousness, will not expose the faults of the brethren.

Love “rejoiceth in the truth.” (vs. 6) If love fills our hearts, we will always rejoice in the Truth and in the knowledge that others are being blessed by the Truth. We will rejoice in truthfulness and will find ourselves out of harmony with all forms of deception, compromise, and unrighteousness.

Love “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” (vs. 7) If we are zealous in the good works of the Lord, there will be many hard experiences to bear. If love is not prompting our efforts, we will become discouraged—weary in well doing. However, with love urging us on in the way of sacrifice, we will be able to endure all things which, in the Lord’s providence, he sees needful for our development as “new creatures” in Christ Jesus. (II Cor. 5:17) Love will enable us to believe all his precious promises and attribute the best of motives to the efforts of others. Love will enable us always to have a hopeful outlook, not only with respect to our present experiences in the narrow way, but also in the fulfillment of the promises of God concerning our heavenly inheritance.

Love “never faileth.” (I Cor. 13:8) It cannot fail. If we fail in any of our Christian efforts, it is because we are lacking in love. God is love. All his blessed designs on behalf of the followers of Christ and the entire world are expressions of his love. If we are wholly under the control of divine love, it means that we are living near to God—that our viewpoint is the same as his. It means that his interest in mankind is our interest, that his interest in the body of Christ is our interest, and that what we do in his service is done because we want to be like him and want his spirit to be our spirit. Our position in life may be such that we can do very little directly in God’s service. Yet, if we have his spirit of love we will do what we can, earnestly praying, meanwhile, for greater opportunities of showing forth his praises, serving the brethren, and doing good unto all men.

How appropriate, in keeping with God’s Word, that each of us, as fellow members of the body of Christ, uses every opportunity that is ours to exhort and provoke one another both to love and to good works. No matter how long we may have been in the Christian way—no matter how faithful we may have been—we still need the encouragement and the incentive that come from exhortation by the brethren. May this desire continue to incite us, in harmony with the divine arrangement, to the privileges of association, of assembling, of cooperation, of partnership, with one another and, through Christ, with the Heavenly Father himself. ■

CHAPTER 10

Anointed for the Witness of Jesus

“I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

—Revelation 20:4

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER of Revelation follows what is depicted in the preceding chapters as the final overthrow of all that has been associated with Satan and his empire, particularly the false church systems, as represented by the harlot woman. There also is shown the overthrow of the forces instrumental in destroying the false “woman.” Beginning with the twentieth chapter, there is shown another series of events having to do with the establishment of a new rulership on the earth, and the inauguration of true religion, based upon the knowledge of the true God. The “tabernacle of God” is at last seen to be with men. He deals with them, and they become his people.—Rev. 21:3

In the opening verses of Revelation 20, we have identified those who will reign with Christ in the new kingdom. The marks of identification are very interesting, being summed up under two headings. First, they were “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,” as stated in our opening text. In this witness, they are shown not to have been in any way associated with the false, beastly systems that had gone before. They had been witnesses only for Jesus, even unto death. Everything they possessed, even their own

lives, they cast aside and accepted Jesus as their only head, and thus they died.

Second, they were “holy.” (Rev. 20:6) The formula for attaining holiness, as suggested by Jesus, is a proper application of the Word of truth. Jesus prayed that his disciples might attain holiness—entire devotion to the cause of God. He said to his Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) As the sanctifying power of the Truth lays hold upon the individuals who make up this class, it brings about a condition of true holiness. As this condition of holiness is gradually attained, these individuals find themselves in the position of being witnesses for Jesus and for the Word of God—that is, co-laborers with God.

THESE QUALIFICATIONS STILL NECESSARY

It is these same qualifications by which we today, as followers of the Master, may hope to be among those who will live and reign with Christ a thousand years. Inasmuch as it is our privilege to be living at the very time when the destructive forces outlined in the preceding chapters of Revelation are tearing down Satan’s rulership over the earth, how very important it is now to give earnest consideration to the conditions upon which we may have a part with Christ in his kingdom. These conditions center in copying the “mind of Christ,” and emulating his “witness ... for the word of God.”

Jesus was indeed a faithful witness. He laid down his life bearing witness of his Father and declaring the Word of truth, the Gospel of the kingdom. In doing this, he carried out the commission that had been given to him through the anointing of God’s Holy Spirit. This comes to our attention very early in the experiences of the Master, when he was in the synagogue at Nazareth and was given the Old Testament scriptures to read, as was the custom. He turned to Isaiah’s prophecy, chapter 61, and upon reading a portion of the first two verses, claimed that this statement was the authority for the ministry upon which he was then embarking. Isaiah’s prophecy states: “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; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”—Isa. 61:1,2; Luke 4:18,19

Jesus did all of these things because he was commissioned to do so by the anointing of God's Holy Spirit. The footstep followers of the Master are members of his body. This is why the Revelator saw them as those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus. They had accepted him as their head, in place of their own, and thus had become members of his body. The anointing of the Spirit, therefore, that came upon the head, is effective for every member of his body. Hence, this royal commission from heaven applies to these, even as it applied to Jesus. This means that if we, as footstep followers of the Master, desire to live up to all of our spiritual privileges, having the same mind as he did, we must also obey this commission of the Spirit.

As we consider the privileges of our anointing to be witnesses for Jesus, it is important that we realize this is not the only work associated with the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Thus, busying ourselves in witnessing for the Truth should never be done to the jeopardy of any other aspect of our spiritual interests. Indeed, the spiritual life of the Christian is made up of a number of elements. We are begotten of the Spirit—there is an energy in us, a new hope of life, which the Holy Spirit begets, nourishes, and builds up. The Holy Spirit is said also to seal us. That is to say, the promises of God that are recorded in his Word, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, give us God's assurance of victory. The Holy Spirit is also said to bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Not the least in importance, however, the Holy Spirit of God also anoints us to work and witness for Jesus, and if we neglect this anointing influence we are not living up to all of our spiritual responsibilities and privileges.

Notice again how this witnessing commission begins: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me." This would mean that if we are not living up to what the anointing signifies, the Spirit of the Lord is not fully "upon" us. To ignore this anointing, or to count it as of secondary importance, or upon the basis of some fanciful theory which we develop to decide that the commission associated with the anointing of the Spirit no longer is effective or needed in the christian life, means that we are resisting the power of God. Paul likens this to grieving, and possibly quenching, the Holy Spirit of God in our lives.—Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19

The term "anointing" is the Bible illustration by which God tells us that he authorizes and commissions us by his

Holy Spirit to go to work for him and his son, Christ Jesus our Lord—to be coworkers with them. Therefore, in bearing witness to the Truth, we are partners with God, Jesus, and even with one another, as we work together forwarding God’s great plan of salvation, by which the whole world is to be reconciled to him in due time.

PREACHING TO THE MEEK

“The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.” Notice, we are commissioned to preach good tidings only to the meek. We are not to force the gospel message upon anyone, or attempt to impose it upon the consciences of the people. We are merely to preach good tidings to the meek—that is, to those who are willing to listen. How are we to do this? The Scriptures give us the proper methods. We are to “sow beside all waters.” (Isa. 32:20) We are also informed that in the morning we are to sow the seed and in the evening to withhold not our hands. (Eccles. 11:6) God has made it plain that if we thus proclaim the glad tidings as far and wide as we possibly can, then he will direct the issue as to the number of meek ones who will be reached and blessed thereby. Thus, we are to proclaim the glad tidings even in the “evening.” We are pretty far into the evening now, but this is no excuse for ceasing to bear witness to the Truth.

Inasmuch as the Lord thus gives us the commission to continue preaching even at the very time when the dark night is settling down upon the world, it evidently means that there are still a few meek ones to be found—one here and one there. We may not know where these are to be found, but if we sow the Truth beside all waters, God will see that it reaches those whom he desires to call—he “giveth the increase.” (I Cor. 3:7) It is for us to be faithful in proclaiming the message by every means possible, to sow the seed in the morning and in the evening, and beside all waters, everywhere, and let God take care of the results. This is God’s command through his Word, and it has a direct application upon our being “beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God.”

Some may say, what good does it do to bear witness to the Truth? This is not the time for converting the world. True, this is not the time for converting the world, but it is the time to witness to the world, and this witness is to be given to the world whether they hear or whether they forbear. We might just as well ask, what results did Jesus’ witnessing

produce? Jesus laid down his life witnessing for the Truth, as he was commissioned to do, but not because he expected immediate results. We are to do the same, because the same royal commission of God likewise applies to us. How blessed it is to be conscious of the fact that we are guided and strengthened by the same instructions of the Holy Spirit as was our Master and Head.

Jesus bore witness to the Truth right down to the very end of his earthly life. When Pilate asked him if he were a king, he replied, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John 18:37) On Calvary's cross, with his last breath almost spent, Jesus preached the wonderful hope of the kingdom. (Luke 23:42,43) Throughout the years of his ministry, he used his strength to perform those remarkable miracles that illustrated the message he was proclaiming.

So we might well ask, what results did Jesus have? Did he convert the Jewish masses? No, he did not. In fact, just five days before his crucifixion he wept over Jerusalem, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."—chap. 13:34,35

Did Jesus convert Pilate? No, but he witnessed powerfully to him! Did Jesus convert the gainsaying crowd that heaped ridicule upon him as he hung upon the cross? He certainly did not, but he bore witness to them nevertheless. After the Master had said that the hour of darkness had come, still he continued to fulfill the terms of his anointing, even unto death. It was only his death that stopped him from witnessing "for the word of God."

We are also to work until the "night cometh, when no man can work." (John 9:4) This does not mean that we are to arbitrarily decide when the night comes, and on this basis conclude that it is time to stop witnessing to the Truth. God's instruction is to keep on until "no man can work." Additionally, we are not to be concerned about how much good it will do, or the present results. We are not to expect such rewards for our service this side of the veil. If we are willing to serve the Lord only if he shows us immediate results for our labors, then we do not have the Spirit of Christ. God does not want this kind of service.

THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION

“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.” These expressions, while telling us to whom it is our privilege to bear witness, also outline the nature of the message we are to proclaim. As we analyze these statements, they reveal that one of the great fundamentals of the kingdom message is the fact that it holds out a hope of resurrection from the dead.

If we should remove from our message the hope of the resurrection of the dead, we would have no message at all worth talking about. We would have no message of comfort for the church, and nothing wherewith we could bind up the brokenhearted in the world—nothing that would give the hope of “liberty to the captives.” The apostle says that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then our faith is vain, our preaching is vain, and we are found “false witnesses.”—I Cor. 15:13-15

Thus the apostle informs us that the true witnesses of Jesus are those who proclaim the message of the resurrection of the dead. This is true not only concerning our hope, the hope of Christ’s footstep followers, but it is equally true respecting hope for the world of mankind. Paul outlines the fact that in our suffering with Christ, in our being held “in jeopardy every hour,” it is because we are being baptized with Jesus “for the dead”—that is, for the eventual benefit of the dead world of mankind. (vss. 29,30) If the dead world is not to be resurrected, then this “death-baptism” of the true witnesses for Jesus is in vain.

Certainly the kingdom message which we are commissioned to preach is one that must, if it has God’s approval, have incorporated in it the hope of restitution, “spoken by the mouth of all his [God’s] holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:21) This restitution—a complete restoration of man to the perfection that was lost in Eden—has as its centerpiece the glorious resurrection hope for the world of mankind. Thus, even if our witness for Jesus produces little or no results as far as gathering those who might accept the present Gospel Age call to sacrifice, we are to rejoice in the fact that many will be comforted by the seeds of hope which we can sow concerning man’s future resurrection prospects.

THE ACCEPTED TIME

Jesus was also anointed to “proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Here is that part of the message that has to do with Jesus’ footstep followers of the present time. Jesus began the proclamation of the acceptable year of the Lord. So far as he was concerned it began at the time of his consecration. For his followers it began at Pentecost. While the dark night appears to be close at hand, and certainly much closer when compared to the days of the Early Church, yet we still enjoy the privilege of proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord.

Proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord simply means holding out the hope of the High Calling. This is based upon the fact that during the Gospel Age God accepts the sacrifices of his saints, counting them “holy and acceptable,” because they are offered through Christ, and also because they are offered in the “acceptable year.” Paul says, “Now is the accepted time” for the calling, selection, and development of Christ’s body members.—II Cor. 6:2

Are we still to preach this? Yes—there is nothing in the Scriptures that cancels this part of the commission. Only when this work is completed will the night settle in “when no man can work.” In our study of God’s plan, we have learned to know enough about him to realize that he is a God of order, a God of power, and that he has his entire plan completely in hand. We can note with what definiteness the High Calling was opened up to the Early Church. There was no guesswork about it. This age of sacrifice was begun so definitely that there was no doubt in the minds of the Early Church about it.

Can we suppose that at the end of the age God would withdraw his overruling providence with respect to the message of truth, and permit his zealous people to continue preaching the acceptable year of the Lord after he had closed the door to enter therein? Would he permit any to have engendered in their hearts this hope of winning the prize if there were no such hope? Would God allow himself to be placed in a position where he would need to explain that his people had no right to preach the High Calling—that he had no place in the body of Christ for those who had thus been inspired by his truth?

Can we imagine God running his affairs like this? Most emphatically—no! The Gospel message pertaining to the

acceptable year of the Lord started out definitely, just when God wanted it to. Likewise, when this time comes to an end, and there is no further opportunity for spirit-begetting, we may expect it to stop just as definitely. God will not permit us to preach this acceptable year of the Lord when that door is closed. The very fact that we find dear ones still offering themselves in full consecration to the Lord means that this time has not yet come, and we are to continue to proclaim this acceptable year. It is still a part of our commission.

THE DAY OF VENGEANCE

The Master did not quote further from the commission of Isaiah 61:1-3, and wisely so, because the next part did not apply to him while in the flesh. It reads, “To proclaim ... the day of vengeance of our God.” (vs. 2) This “day of vengeance” was outlined in the prophecies as the period of trouble at this end of the age that brings about the overthrow of Satan’s empire. It was not the due time in Jesus’ day to proclaim it, but we are now living in that day of vengeance. The hand of God is heavy upon the nations, and because it is we see throughout the world exactly what the Master stated would be the condition, namely, that all the tribes of the earth are mourning because of him. (Matt. 24:30) It is these mourning ones that we are to endeavor to comfort with the kingdom message.

To declare the day of vengeance does not at all imply the thought of pronouncing vengeance—“Vengeance is mine, ... saith the Lord.” (Rom. 12:19) Our proclaiming the day of vengeance is simply giving the Bible explanation of the significance of what is taking place in the world—that the time has come for God to rid the world of Satan’s corrupt dominion, so that Christ’s kingdom of righteousness can be established. It is the hope of this glorious remedy that brings comfort to those who otherwise would be bewildered and mourning. When we see it from this viewpoint, the day of vengeance message is the most blessed, the most encouraging, the most cheering one that God’s people ever had the privilege of proclaiming.

MOURNERS IN ZION

There is still another part of the commission, namely, “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning.” (Isa. 61:3) If

we apply this to the systems of Christendom, we would all agree that there is plenty of mourning going on there—perhaps more than at any previous time, because these systems are failing. Millions who have had the idea that the church would convert the world, and that civilization was reaching ever higher levels, are losing faith. They are seeking an answer to the unexpected developments in today's world. Today, indeed, orthodoxy means very little, because these disillusioned ones realize it cannot furnish the answer to their problems. The Truth, however, does furnish the answer, and it is our privilege to proclaim it to as many of these mourning ones as we can.

There is even a more vital application of this commission to comfort those who “mourn in Zion,” and that is to the true Zion, the Lord's true people. It is to these, especially, that we are commissioned to “give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” (Isa. 61:3) Many of the Lord's consecrated people are “mourning” in the sense that they are going through severe trials—trials of health, of job, of family, of financial distress, and of other difficulties which burden them greatly. Indeed, we have the promise that the Lord will not allow us to be tested and tried above what we are able to bear—yet, because we are still tabernacled in the flesh, we sometimes “mourn” under these hard experiences. As fellowbrethren, we are commissioned to “appoint” to those so burdened encouraging words of “beauty,” “joy,” and “praise,” that they might be spiritually lifted up from the “ashes,” “mourning,” and “heaviness” of heart which trouble them.

That these dear ones now mourning in Zion are the Lord's people, is shown in the fact that they are called in this same verse “trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.” Yes, they are the planting of the Lord—a part of the “wheat” class—the remaining members thereof presently being prepared and developed. Surely we cannot conclude that the great majority of those thus “mourning in Zion” will, in the final picture, turn out to be merely tares. Rather, God is permitting these severe tests to come upon his people. By these, he is teaching each of us the lesson of individual obedience and faithfulness to our consecration vows. He is teaching us to stand with him in our hour of trial.

Some need a helping hand to stand—we should consider it a privilege to extend ours to them in the hour of their trial.

Let us not conclude that those who may be mourning in Zion are not the planting of the Lord. It is our privilege to lay down our lives for these because they are our brethren. Indeed, we have a glorious privilege in such experiences to carry out the commandment of Jesus—to love one another as he loved us.

If we are faithful in doing this, and in witnessing the Truth to all as we have opportunity, the Lord will bless us. In such a course of faithfulness to him, we can have the confidence that this is what God's Holy Spirit has commissioned us to do. By obeying this commission in its true spirit, we will be among those who are "beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God," and who will "live and reign with Christ a thousand years." ■

CHAPTER 11

Strength and Protection in Christ

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

—Ephesians 6:10,11

FOR THOSE STRIVING to follow in the footsteps of the Master, and who are engaged at this time in developing the mind of Christ, it is of utmost importance to realize that our great Adversary, the devil, is making every effort within his power to stumble and defeat us. It was so with Jesus, and it is no less so with us. To help combat this formidable foe, our Heavenly Father has provided us, through the Scriptures, the illustration of a soldier’s armor. A soldier’s armor in our Lord’s day was made up of numerous items, and each of these served an important purpose. If any piece was not worn properly, the soldier would be vulnerable to attack, perhaps resulting in his death, by the enemy.

The “armor of God” also has numerous pieces. Each of these is vital in the conquering of the great enemy—Satan. Looking back at the life of Jesus, the “captain of our salvation,” although he was a perfect man, he saw the necessity for wearing this symbolic armor. In doing so, he was ever prepared for the attacks of Satan, whether direct, or through those whom the Adversary used to do his bidding. Jesus’ mind was firmly set in this regard, fully realizing the “wiles of the devil.” Thus, to have Christ’s mind developed in us, also means a constant vigilance and awareness of our great enemy. Further, it means that we, as did our Captain, must

continually wear the spiritual armor provided by our all-wise Heavenly Father.

PROTECTION FOR THE NEW CREATURE—NOT THE FLESH

It is impossible to appreciate the value of the armor of God unless we understand what is to be protected by that armor. Paul writes, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” (II Cor. 5:17) The Christian is a New Creature in the sense that he, as an individual, has a new mental outlook on life. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit of truth. To illustrate: one who, through certain influences and willingness of mind, has decided to become a doctor, takes a doctor’s viewpoint. He studies to be a doctor. His mind is alert to everything that will assist him in the practice of medicine, and his sympathies are for the suffering.

So with the Christian—through certain influences, and a willingness of mind, he has the viewpoint of Christ, who said, “Not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:42) As Christ looked upon life from the standpoint of God’s plan as revealed in his Holy Word, even so does the Christian. Therefore, the armor of God is for the protection of this mental state—the new mind—the viewpoint of Christ, which the Christian has adopted as his own. Let us then examine each piece of this symbolic armor, and as we do so, we shall find that the proper use of each piece serves as a mighty protecting power.

GIRDLE OF TRUTH

The first piece of armor is the girdle of truth. (Eph. 6:14) In olden times, a girdle was a cloth garment, similar to a belt, used to bind up the robes and other outer garments while work was being performed. Therefore a girdle is a fitting symbol of work or servitude. The girdle of truth signifies that, as Christians, we are servants of the Truth. We find this clearly taught in the Bible—as Christians, we are “ambassadors for Christ,” holding forth the “word of reconciliation.” (II Cor. 5:18-20; Phil. 2:16) One may ask, “How is the girdle of truth a protecting power to the New Creature?” In answering this, we first must realize that man is so constituted that he is made to be active. If he is not active in doing one thing, he is more than likely active in doing something else. In the case of the Christian, if he has not been thoroughly convinced that he is to be a servant of the Truth, eventually he will be influenced to be a servant of

some other purpose in life, even though that purpose may be solely one of self-interest. The piece of armor called the girdle of truth protects the new mind—the New Creature—against all teachings or tendencies which draw the Christian away from being a servant of the Truth.

The girdle of truth, in totality, is comprised of the teachings of the Word of God. If the Christian understands these teachings, and brings his heart into harmony with the spirit and intent of them, he has set up in his mind a barrier to all hostile or intruding teachings. Thus the follower of Christ is protected against every misleading and intriguing sophistry of the world and the Adversary. We might illustrate the point in this way: if one were to be “protected” against losing his way on a highway, he would need to know the designated number of the road, as shown on a map, which would take him to his intended destination. He would then watch for that road number sign all along the way. So with the Christian—if he is to be protected by the girdle of the Truth, he must clearly understand that he is a servant of the Truth. Believing this, and looking to the Scriptures for direction, he must act in accordance with the guidelines of the Word of God.

BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The second piece of armor is designated “the breastplate of righteousness.” (Eph. 6:14) The fact that it is spoken of as a “breastplate” over the vital organs of the body, including the heart, suggests that it is extremely important. There are two very prominent teachings in the Bible concerning the thought of righteousness. The first one relates to the righteousness found in the perfect sacrifice of the man Christ Jesus. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) He gave himself a ransom sacrifice for Adam and his race. We, being sinners by nature, can approach God only through faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. We recognize that, only as we are covered by the merit of his sacrifice, do we have a standing in God’s presence. This is an important teaching, and protects us from all ideas which would engender in us a feeling of actual personal perfection—a dangerous thought, indeed. It is good for us to know our condition and place, and our debt to God and Christ Jesus for redemption, the only means whereby we have a standing before our Heavenly Father. “The breastplate of righteousness” accomplishes this proper state of mind, and keeps us humble and thankful.

The second prominent teaching concerning the thought of righteousness is that which teaches us to be righteous, just, honest, in thought and motive—and to the greatest extent possible, in action and word. As followers of the Master, we are to love righteousness and hate iniquity, even as he did. This teaching, if heartily accepted and made an integral part of our character, will protect us as New Creatures when temptations present themselves to our mind. Many times we may be assailed by subtle temptations to be a little dishonest or unjust for selfish reasons. If we have on the “breastplate of righteousness,” we will resist these temptations, and thus be protected from them.

ARMOR FOR THE FEET

The third piece of armor is for the feet. “[Have] your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” (Eph. 6:15) The word “preparation” is translated from a Greek word, the root of which means to prepare or make ready. Therefore, the meaning would seem to be that this piece of armor prepares us, or makes us ready, to walk in the narrow way of Christ’s footsteps. The explanation is beautiful and simple. The gospel of peace is the good news of the coming kingdom of God. It is good news, indeed, to know that a kingdom is to be established upon earth in which God’s righteous will—not selfish man’s will—shall be done, even as it is done in heaven. Then, all wars and trouble and death will cease. In due time, those who “sleep in the dust of the earth” (Dan. 12:2), will awake under these new conditions of God’s kingdom, under the rulership of his son, Christ Jesus, and his faithful body members, the “little flock.”

The consecrated child of God has been convinced of the truthfulness of this good news. He has accepted it, but he has done more. He has responded to the invitation to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer, which means that he stands for the same ideals and purposes that Jesus did. He lays down his life in willing sacrifice in the service of God, which is the service of the Truth and on behalf of God’s people. In connection with all this are certain precious promises of God’s watch care and affection. These precious promises also include the offer of a rich reward at the end of the narrow way—“glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) All of this—the good news of the coming kingdom of God, the invitation to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer, and the

precious promises—bring to the footstep follower of Christ a state of mind called “the peace of God.” (Phil. 4:7) In the midst of the difficulties of life, and the trouble in the world, and while he walks in the “valley of the shadow of death” the Christian has peace of mind. (Ps. 23:4) No wonder the third piece of armor is spoken of as sandals protecting the feet. Without the “peace of God,” the child of God would not be prepared to go through such difficulties. Thus, God, in a very simple way, protects his consecrated people against discouragement, and provides them with joy, peace, and hope.

A PEACEFUL CONFLICT

In still another way, we are protected by the sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace. The Scriptures teach us to use our faculty of combativeness to resist the tendencies of the old will to be selfish and self-reliant. We must be a fighter in the “good fight of faith.” (I Tim. 6:12) We must “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:3) However, we must not use our fighting qualities against our fellow man, but only against evil in ourselves, and in defense of the Truth. Therefore we are taught to be peacemakers: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”—Matt. 5:9

In developing the mind of Christ, we are taught to prefer peace to an uncontrolled exercise of the faculty of combativeness. Thus we are protected against any natural tendencies we might have to argue or fight just for the sake of opposing something. When we understand that the ultimate object of discussion or resistance is to establish peace upon proper grounds, how it helps us to be self-controlled and kind. Even when we may find it our duty to “speak sharply,” we are protected against bitterness and unrighteous anger by the sandals of peace. How simple to explain, yet how mighty in effect, is this piece of armor!

SHIELD OF FAITH

The fourth piece of armor is “the shield of faith.” Paul says, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” (Eph. 6:16) The apostle, in using the words “Above all,” suggests that the shield is extremely important. If we do not have faith, or confident belief in the teachings of the Bible, then in reality we are not a follower of Christ, neither can we stand the

assaults of the Adversary. Faith is increased and strengthened in at least three ways: first, by the knowledge of the attributes of God as revealed by his loving plan of salvation for all mankind; second, by a consideration of fulfilled prophecy in harmony with that plan; and third, by the witness of God's Spirit in the individual experiences of our lives.

In the first way, how it increases our faith to understand that the Creator is loving and kind, even in permitting the reign of evil for a time. How our gratitude goes out to him when we are assured by his Word that eventually this earth will be made a paradise, man's eternal home, and that the dead will be awakened from the tomb to live forever, if obedient to the laws of righteousness. How it increases our faith to know that God's special reward to the bride of Christ—that of joint-heirship with his Son—is an evidence of his infinite wisdom, and not an evidence that the non-elect of the world are to suffer loss and cruel punishment.

In the second way, how it increases our faith to understand prophecy and to be able to appreciate the significance of world events, as they fit into the spectrum of God's plan. More than twenty-five centuries ago, Daniel prophesied that in the "time of the end,"—that is, the end of this present evil world, which would give place to the kingdom of God—many "shall run to and fro, ... knowledge shall be increased," and there shall be "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:4,1) Today, the Lord's consecrated people can see the actual fulfillment of these prophetic words in the many events of the last century and a half. During this time, we have seen with our own eyes exponential increases in man's ability to "run to and fro" by all forms of transportation. We have seen an explosion in man's ability to gain knowledge, particularly by means of electronic communication, and the nearly endless supply of information available at the touch of a computer, or by electronic devices no larger than the human hand. We have seen also the ever-increasing distress of nations, resulting in the current "time of trouble,"—the greatest period of trouble the world has ever known.

In the third way, how it increases our faith to be able to detect in our lives the witness of the Spirit. If we can trace in our life the evidences of the Holy Spirit's influence—the intention and purpose of God for us—then we have reason to rejoice and be full of confidence and trust. God's purpose

for us is outlined in his Holy Word. These words of our loving Heavenly Father are especially addressed to us. If our minds bear witness, or show a fulfillment, of God's purpose in us as expressed in his Word, then our spirit witnesses with God's Holy Spirit that "we are the children of God."—Rom. 8:16

There is much in this turbulent and changing world to challenge faith, and the shielding protection it should provide, if it were founded upon something sound and understandable. The "increase of knowledge" prophesied by Daniel has stimulated the minds of all to think. Yet, much of this thinking, and the so-called "knowledge" resulting from it, has been along the lines of error, and out of harmony with the knowledge of God contained in his Word. As a result, confidence in religious beliefs has suffered. Nothing less than this should be expected, however, because most religious belief is not based on reasonable "substance" and "evidence" (Heb. 11:1), but on ignorance and credulity. Reliance upon the Bible has suffered as a result, because the teachings generally accepted as true Christian faith have been seen to be based upon contradictory and illogical thinking, and it is supposed that the Scriptures encourage such ignorance and credulity. How thankful we are, though, that in this time when knowledge has increased, we have been provided "meat in due season" (Matt. 24:45), and have been given a portion of knowledge more than sufficient to enable us to exercise a strong faith in a reasonable and proven Bible.

THE HELMET OF SALVATION

The fifth piece of armor is the "helmet of salvation." (Eph. 6:17) As with the other pieces of armor, so with this one, the position gives us a clue to its function in protecting us from the attacks of the Adversary. The "helmet" being worn upon the head suggests a protection in the form of knowledge, intelligence, and information. True followers of Christ all down through the Gospel Age have had knowledge from God's Holy Word. This knowledge has been an explanation of God's plan of salvation—a knowledge sufficient to enable each to grasp the Heavenly Father's will concerning them.

Now, in this "time of the end" spoken of by Daniel, we continue to need the benefits provided by this symbolic helmet. We, as disciples of Christ, have special need of this helmet to enable us to stand in an intellectual world, one

full of “foolish” wisdom. The increase of knowledge has discredited many beliefs that were formerly thought to be well founded in the Scriptures. Just at the right time, however, God has provided earnest Bible Students with concordances, Bible dictionaries, and numerous translations of the Scriptures. More than even this, God in his providence has given us access to exhaustive and convincing *Studies in the Scriptures*.

This is of tremendous importance to God’s people, in view of the many appeals to have our minds filled from other quarters than the Word of God. There are tens of thousands of books, websites, blogs, and opinions—all available at the touch of a computer—each one possessing the power to affect the mind in some way. How bewildered we would be if we were not provided with the helmet of a proper knowledge of the Bible, the Word of God. Our helmet proves that the Bible is true. It shows what God’s plan of salvation is, and refutes arguments against the Scriptures. It explains prophecy, and even interprets the significance of many world events. Suffice it to say that without the helmet, we would be in total confusion, and easy prey for the attacks of the Adversary.

ONLY OFFENSIVE PIECE OF ARMOR

The final piece of armor is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (vs. 17) This is the only offensive piece of the Christian’s armor. It, like all other weapons, can be used properly or improperly. The sword of the Spirit is not intended to be used to cut and wound others, but is intended to be used in defense of one’s own position and for one’s own upbuilding. Our Lord Jesus gave us an illustration of its use, in defense of his position. Let us observe carefully the example he set us.

Turning to Matthew 4:1-10, we read, “Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels

charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

We understand that these temptations were suggestions to our Lord’s mind by the Adversary. We do not believe the Lord was literally taken to a pinnacle of the Temple, or that he was literally taken to a mountaintop. Rather, his mind formed impressions of these things suggested by the Adversary. Most importantly, though, we observe the use our Lord made of the sword of the Spirit in resisting the temptations. Not once did he bitterly accuse or threaten Satan. Instead, he counteracted the Adversary’s argument with well-chosen and properly applied Scripture. In all three temptations, he vanquished the devil’s malevolent intent with “It is written”—the sword of the Spirit. Satan also used the sword of the Spirit, or so it seemed, in the second temptation. However, he misapplied the Word of God in his attempt to stumble our Lord into unrighteousness.

CASTING DOWN IMAGINATIONS

The sword of the Spirit is also for the purpose of destroying those things in our character which are contrary to the knowledge of God, that every thought may be brought into full obedience to Christ. We read Paul’s words, “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:3-5) Thus we see that the purpose of the sword of the Spirit, according to this Scripture, is to nullify all teachings and influences, even those within our own hearts and minds, that would subvert the knowledge of God. Such use of this sword should have the effect of bringing our “every thought” into obedience to Christ.

Thus, we would understand that each piece of armor, when accepted and utilized, erects in our mind an effective barrier to all opposing teachings and influences. As we have discussed, the armor itself is contained in the Word of God. However, in order to protect us, it must be “put on,” as stated in our opening text. Each piece must become essential to us and a very part of our character and disposition. In this respect, some have made a mistake. They know where the armor is and what it is, but they do not take the trouble to put it on, thus failing to make it a component part of themselves. As a consequence, they readily succumb to opposition, not even realizing that they are being overcome.

In concluding his discussion of this subject, Paul cites one more critical element which helps us to put on—and keep on—all the pieces of armor God has provided. He states, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” (Eph. 6:18) Prayer and supplication, as well as watching, are vital to the proper placement and use of each piece of the armor, not only on behalf of ourselves, but also “for all saints,” as together we battle against the forces of Satan. This communion with God, through prayer, is our lifeline in the battlefield of life. Without it, even with the armor, we would surely succumb to the enemy eventually.

Having on the armor, and exercising the privilege of prayer, means that we are alive as a soldier of Christ, alert to danger, and able thereby to defend ourselves. When the armor is properly worn, a state of mind is created, which is nearly as important as the armor itself. Our Lord was forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, weak and impoverished physically. When he came forth, however, he was strong in mind, fortified by the Word and Spirit of God, and by the prayer, supplication, and communion with his Heavenly Father that he had experienced. We also must be molded, as Christ was, by the Word and Spirit of God. We must commune with him in prayer at every opportunity. If this thought is fully appreciated, then we have comprehended the means by which we can be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” ■

Christ's Most Difficult Command

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”
—Matthew 5:43,44

THIS PASSAGE IN the Gospel of Matthew deserves our greatest attention. There is perhaps no other passage in the New Testament that sums up the heart and attitude of the Christian as well as this one. These verses talk about the most powerful testimony one can have in his life, when Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” A noted historian, Will Durant, was once asked how he would sum up the Christian ethic, and he said, “Basically, it’s love your enemies.” Without a doubt, our Lord set the highest standards possible in all aspects of life, but this command is the most difficult to achieve for those striving to develop the “mind of Christ.”

THE LORD’S STANDARDS

In the sermon on the mount, there are two statements that sum up the standards of those who claim to be followers of Christ. One is found in Matthew 5:47: “What do ye more than others?” Even those who do not profess Christianity love those who treat them well. Jesus was saying that if one professes to be a Christian, something should make him different than others. The second statement is in Matthew 6:8: “Be not ye therefore like unto them.” The simple lesson

of this statement is that the followers of Christ are not to conform themselves to the thoughts and actions of the world in general. In these two statements, Jesus was pointing out that his standards were much higher than those of anyone else in the world around him.

The Pharisees were generally thought to have the highest religious standards during the time of Jesus' First Advent, but they were not high enough. The Master said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (chap. 5:20) By this statement, Jesus showed that his standard was higher than any human standard, even that of the scribes and Pharisees. Those religious leaders had many laws, ceremonies, and rituals. They were considered the most religious people of their time, yet they came well short of the righteous standards of God.

The highest human standards have always fallen far short of God's perfection. This was the case not only during New Testament times, but also is borne out in the Old Testament narrative. In both cases, God called his chosen people to a higher standard. As an example, after rescuing his people Israel from Egyptian bondage, he made a covenant with them saying, "I am the LORD your God, ... after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances [customs or manners]. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God." (Lev. 18:2-4) God was telling his people that his standards, which they were to follow, were higher than those of the people in the land to which they would be brought.

Since God had made a covenant with Israel, they were his chosen people. As antitypical "Israelites indeed," the Lord's people today are, as Peter says, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (I Pet. 2:9) Thus, we are to be totally different from all others. We are to follow God's commandments and live by the highest standard known—God's standard. This is most difficult, as we all know. To live separate from the world's ideas and standards means we must be continually looking toward higher goals in the conduct of our lives. However, this must be done to the best of our ability if we are to inherit the kingdom promised to the overcomers.

We read from I John 2:15-17, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” We note in these verses the three standards of the world in general—love of the flesh, love of what the eyes see, and the pride of life. These are the fallen standards with which all spiritual Israelites must continually battle.

As recorded in Leviticus 18, the Israelites kept forgetting their uniqueness and continually fell into sin. The Prophet Balaam said of them, “The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.” (Num. 23:9) Although it was God’s desire that Israel dwell alone and not mingle with other nations, they emulated most of the heathen practices around them. Psalm 106:35 says that the Israelites did not destroy the idolatrous nations in their midst, “but were mingled [mixed] among the heathen, and learned their works.” This was a sad commentary as to their lack of obedience to God’s will.

LOWERING GOD’S STANDARDS

It is possible that the same snares into which natural Israel fell may also befall us, as we endeavor to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Instead of following the high standards of God, we may attempt to change them. Hence, we must examine ourselves carefully along this line. We can dilute God’s standards in various ways. We may overlook what the Bible says, thinking that it is not of critical importance in a given situation. We may use the mantle of love to go against the clear teachings of God. This is, of course, not to say that we should not love. However, we must be careful not to use love to obscure what God says in his Word.

If we find any indication of such tendencies in our lives, we must remember that we have a wily Adversary who makes darkness appear as light, and light as darkness. Paul said, concerning Satan, “We are not ignorant of his devices.” (II Cor. 2:11) One of these devices is the attempt to gloss over sins with the mantle of love. This is a very subtle temptation. The Apostle Paul sharply rebuked the Corinthian brethren for not properly addressing a situation within their fellowship

involving immorality which they thought could be overlooked by simply exercising love. (I Cor. 5:2,6) To believe that God overlooks all of our failings under the mantle of love is a subtle device of the Adversary.

In I Samuel 8:19,20, we read that the Israelites wanted a king in order to be like other nations. "We will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations." They even went so far as to say, "We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone." (Ezek. 20:32) This was displeasing to God, and he sent prophets to remind Israel that they were to be different. "Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen." "Defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt." (Jer. 10:2; Ezek. 20:7) In these statements, the prophets pleaded continuously with Israel to maintain the high standards given to them by God. This same plea was made to the Israelites during Jesus' First Advent, and it still applies today. God expects his people to be different from those in the world around them.

The standard Jesus presents in Matthew 5:44, "Love your enemies," is not popular today. This is because it is not an earthly standard, but one that is unique to God and his Son. It is a far greater ethic than any of us can keep without help from our Heavenly Father. However, it is the standard to which we must adhere. We read in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." To be "perfect," as used in this verse, means to be complete and mature. This means we must set our standards after the pattern of Christ Jesus our Lord, who followed the example and pattern of his Heavenly Father.

Throughout his sermon on the mount, Jesus showed the Pharisees that their system was substandard, and warned that unless they would come and learn of him, they would never be able to live by his standards. As religious as they claimed to be, and as legalistic as was their thinking, yet they could not qualify to be part of the Heavenly Kingdom. They thought it was enough to perform the acts of the Law, such as not to commit adultery, but Christ told them that one who even thought about it "in his heart" was guilty of the same sin. (Matt. 5:27-30) Similarly, the Pharisees thought it was acceptable to get a divorce if all the legal paperwork was complete, but the Lord said divorce was not proper except in the case of fornication.—vss. 31,32

The Pharisees said it was proper to keep sworn vows, but Jesus told them not to swear at all—rather, to simply obey God. (Matt. 5:33-37) They thought it was right to take “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” but our Lord said not to retaliate at all. (vss. 38-42) In Matthew chapter 6, the Master said that their prayers were inadequate, and then told them how to pray. (vss. 5-15) He said their giving was wrong, and told them how to give properly. (vss. 1-4) In verses 19-34, Jesus told them they were concerned with material things when they should be seeking first the kingdom of God. In our theme text, he contrasts the limited love that the Pharisees had with the unselfish love that should characterize God’s true children. In all of these examples, we see that the Pharisees and others of our Lord’s day pulled down the high standards of God to a much lower, fallen human level.

God has called us to be a separated people, with convictions and standards that are not of this world. Jesus confronted the Jewish leaders of his day, because they were walking after the flesh, while claiming to be very religious and God-fearing. Their humanistic religious practices and traditions fell woefully short of God’s standards.

We must listen carefully to Jesus’ words on the subject of love recorded in the context of our opening Scripture: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (chap. 5:43-48, *New International Version*) In these verses, Jesus tells us that the greatest way we can show love is to show it to our enemies. This is the supreme test of the Christian, and is one in which many will fall short of God’s standard.

KEY TO OBEYING GOD’S COMMANDMENTS

In Matthew 22, we read of a lawyer who came to Jesus and asked him, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (vs. 36) The Lord answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all

thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (vss. 37-40) Jesus here is saying that to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, is equivalent to keeping all of God’s commandments. The Apostle Paul corroborates this, saying, “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”—Rom. 13:8-10

The phrase in our opening scripture—“Ye have heard that it hath been said”—indicates that what follows was a Jewish tradition that had been passed down from generation to generation. Indeed, to “hate your enemy” was not taught in the Law, as given in the Old Testament. It had been added as a tradition, and was taught by the Rabbis, but not by God’s Word. Accordingly, the Jewish leaders believed and taught that once a determination was made as to who constituted their neighbors, they were authorized to hate everyone else. Their low standard of love, therefore, was based solely upon their definition of a neighbor, rather than on God’s commandments. They had ignored teachings of the Old Testament such as found in these words: “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.”—Prov. 25:21

Another phrase that the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day had “heard that it hath been said” was, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour.” This was partially correct, being a quote from Leviticus 19:18. However, the entire quote from Leviticus says, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The “as thyself” portion of God’s commandment had been left out by the Rabbinical teachers—a very convenient omission on their part. The Jewish leaders had developed such a spirit of pride that rather than be required to treat any others equal to themselves, they dropped the phrase, “as thyself.” They, in fact, did not desire to love anyone like they loved themselves. Their pride of self did not allow them to love anyone else equally.

HOW MUCH DO WE LOVE OTHERS?

As footstep followers of Christ, we must examine ourselves as to what is meant to love someone as we love ourselves. If we were to love someone, but not as we love ourselves, we could do it at a distance. We would not have to treat them as well as we treat ourselves. We could perhaps easily demonstrate one-half, one-third, one-tenth, or some other small portion of the love that we would show ourselves. It could be very tempting to our fallen flesh to do as the Jewish leaders did—drop the little phrase “as thyself.” Jesus, however, wanted to drive his point directly to the heart of his disciples, including us, and so he told the lawyer, as previously cited, “Love thy neighbour as thyself.”—Matt. 22:39

There may be times when we feel that we do not truly love ourselves. Certainly, we do not love the mistakes that we make, or the fact that we seem to struggle to do God’s will at times in our lives. Yet, the fact remains that we do have a love for ourselves, evidence of which is manifest each and every day in our activities. We get out of bed each morning. We prepare ourselves for the day’s activities. We manage our personal finances. When we are sick, we call the doctor. In these and many other ways, we daily show love for ourselves in the sense that we are concerned about our needs. For the follower of Christ, this applies to both spiritual and temporal needs. In order to meet our needs, we must have an unfeigned love for ourselves. It is not an exhibition of pride to do this, as long as the needs we are striving to meet are wholesome and in accord with our consecration vows. Such properly motivated love for ourselves is genuine, habitual, and permanent. Thus, when we have an interest, we attempt to fulfill it. When we have a need, we strive to meet it. When we desire something that is proper, we endeavor to obtain it. The desire to meet our various needs should be understood to always include this underlying heart sentiment: “Thy will be done.”

Based on these principles, we are to be concerned about our physical, spiritual, temporal, and eternal needs, all of which gives evidence that we love ourselves. Just as important as the way we love ourselves, however, is the way we are to love everyone else, including our enemies. Jesus showed that we are to have a genuine, habitual, and permanent love for others that considers their interests, needs, wants, hopes, ambitions, welfare, safety and comfort. To truly be our Lord’s

disciples, and to fulfill his higher commandment, we must desire to help fulfill others' needs and wants just as much as we desire to fulfill our own.

EXAMINING OURSELVES

All of us must gauge our progress in fulfilling the Lord's commandment concerning love. We must ask ourselves such questions as: The last time we had a choice between doing what we wanted, or sacrificing our wishes for those of someone else, which path did we take? The temptation, in many cases, would be for us to pamper our own flesh, loving only ourselves. God's standards are very high, and from the fallen human standpoint, to love our neighbor as ourselves is nearly impossible. This is because we tend to become so absorbed with our own needs that we fail to take the time to look at those of others. We must see to it, therefore, that we are developing the spirit of love which will cause us to lay down life itself for our neighbors, and even our enemies. Only in this way will we become "more than conquerors."—Rom. 8:37

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus tells us of various ways in which we, as his footstep followers, are to set ourselves apart from others. Although doctrinal views are certainly part of what sets us apart from the world in general, it is clear from Jesus' teachings that our character must have an equally important part in being separate from the world. The Adversary may tempt us to believe that our doctrinal views alone distinguish us from the world. Yet, as the Prophet Isaiah said concerning Israel, these do not make us "holier than thou." (Isa. 65:5) We must all take time to consider in what way our life is a testimony before the world and our brethren. The Apostle Paul said, "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read of all men." (II Cor. 3:2, *New American Standard Bible*) At the present time, it is primarily our character which is "known and read" by those around us. We must endeavor, to the greatest extent possible, to develop an all-inclusive love, the crowning feature of the "mind of Christ." By so doing, we will let our light shine forth brighter and brighter, illuminating all our deeds and actions.

THE GOAL BEFORE US

We are to love others as much as we love ourselves. We must also learn to love our enemies. This is not an easy task. We

have to battle the Adversary and our flesh—the “old man”—constantly. (Col. 3:9) Daily we must make a conscious effort to think about the interests, needs, welfare, safety and comfort of others. We must remember that the true test of our discipleship is our willingness to love those who do not love us.

A practical way of progressing toward the goal of loving even our enemies is to think of specific people with whom we are having problems, and find ways to show love toward them and to do them good. We should also pray diligently that we might grow in love and develop its fullness in our thoughts, words, and actions. Let us not be like the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day who did not even live up to the love presented to them in the Law. Let us never be guilty, as they were, of lowering God’s standards to our own fallen human level.

Our Lord gave an important lesson in Matthew 5:43-48 that we might benefit from and use to assist us in making our calling and election sure. To summarize his lesson, Jesus said that the purpose of this development is, “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.”—vs. 45 ■

CHAPTER 13

The Mind of a Servant

*“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
Who ... took upon him the form of a servant,
and was made in the likeness of men.”
—Philippians 2:5-7*

IT IS AN HONOR to be a servant, for the Christian who serves in the proper spirit is emulating the example of Jesus. He came to earth to be man’s Redeemer, and thus became servant of all. Jesus, whom we should endeavor to emulate, copied the example of the Heavenly Father, who always has been, and ever will be, the greatest of all servants. While it is noble to serve, yet the true spirit of service is that which prompts one humbly to do for others without hope of recognition or reward.

It is clear from our opening text that there is a direct connection between being a servant and developing the “mind of Christ,” the only begotten Son of God. Jesus, in his prehuman existence, was a servant of his Heavenly Father, having been his active agent in all the creative work. “Without him was not any thing made that was made,” declares John. (John 1:3) There was no loss of reputation or no need for him to be humiliated in this service. However, his humility was exhibited in his willingness and desire always to cooperate with his Heavenly Father, no matter what was required of him. Lucifer, at that time, was also a servant of God. However, unlike Jesus, he aspired to a higher position in the universe than that designed for him. He said in his heart, “I will be like the most High.”—Isa. 14:14

Perhaps Paul had in mind the ambitious course of Lucifer when he wrote concerning Jesus, saying, “Who, though being

in God's form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God." Rather, as Paul continues, he was willing to make himself of no reputation, and take upon himself the form of a servant, "having been made in the likeness of men." (Phil. 2:6,7, *Diaglott*) What a different attitude was thus manifested by him who is now exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on High.

Man was created to be the king of earth, hence was no more a servant than were those created on the various planes of spiritual existence. The reason that the humble servitude of Jesus is associated with his becoming a man is because of the erroneous viewpoint adopted by the human race. Man has come to believe that those who serve are less noble than those who are served. Seldom has any servant been considered to be equal with those whom he serves. Jesus became a "servant" in the sense that his service was disesteemed by men—its importance not being recognized by them.

The viewpoint of fallen man with respect to servants is reflected in the attitude of the disciples prior to Pentecost. On the night before Jesus was crucified a dispute arose among them as to which one would be the greatest. They believed that their Master was to be a great ruler over men and that they were to be closely associated with him in his kingdom. There was "strife" among them as to which one was to be the greatest with him in this position of rulership.—Mark 9:33-37; Luke 22:24

Jesus observed their wrong attitude—wrong because it was the attitude of the world. He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth."—vss. 25-27

Here Jesus acknowledged that from the standpoint of the world those who are served are esteemed more highly than those who serve, but that he was establishing a new viewpoint, the true viewpoint—namely, that those who serve are truly the greatest. Applying the lesson to his disciples, he made it plain that the greatest among them would be the one who served most faithfully. Adherence to this principle is one of

the things that separates the true followers of Christ from the world and causes them to pursue a course contrary to the spirit of the world.

The erroneous viewpoint of the world with respect to the matter of servants is due to man's fall into sin and selfishness. Created to be a king, the rulership instinct has become over-dominant in the fallen human nature. Man's dominion was to be over the lower forms of earthly creation, but men endeavored to lord it over each other. Those who succeed in establishing themselves in high positions of authority are looked upon by many as the benefactors of the race.

This is not God's viewpoint. One of the outstanding characteristics of the Creator is that he is a servant of his creatures. He is, indeed, their most faithful servant. His greatness in the hearts of those who are loyal to him is not because he is their ruler, but rather that he serves them. For thousands of years he has continued to serve even those who have been in rebellion against his will. All the material blessings which make life possible upon the earth are enjoyed by fallen man because the Creator continues to be a servant.

When Jesus humbled himself in becoming a servant he was exemplifying the spirit of his Father. God's esteem for him was exalted as the Master humbled himself in the sight of men and served them. The secret of Jesus' ability thus to place himself in an ignoble position before men, was because he highly valued the esteem of his Father as a most priceless possession. He took upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh in order that he might condemn sin in the flesh. One of the ways in which he condemned sin was when he spoke against the distorted viewpoint of what constitutes greatness. Along with giving his life as a ransom, he set an example of true godliness for all who turn from a state of rebellion against God to one of reconciliation with him.

It was truly at great cost that he set this example. It was not merely a case of cold indifference by the world, but hate and derision were active against the Master until his death was accomplished. As the apostle explains, he "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8) This was obedience by means of humility—that is, by demonstrating that to be a servant is, from the divine standpoint, to be esteemed as the highest form of obedience, and worthy of greatest exaltation.—vss. 9-11

Jesus suffered “even the death of the cross.” This was the death of criminals in Jesus’ day. It was a slow, painful death. From the Master’s standpoint, even worse than the physical pain was the ignominy attached to it. Here was the Son of God, who was daily the delight of his Father, who was sent into the world to be a great king, being crucified upon the charges of blasphemy and sedition. All the scheming ability of fallen human hearts and minds, aided by Satan, the fallen Lucifer, was employed to shame and deride him. Yet, in his deepest humiliation, Jesus was rendering a service to his accusers which yet will provide them with an opportunity for everlasting life. In a challenge of his greatness, the deriding chief priests, scribes and elders cried out, “He saved others; himself he cannot save.” (Matt. 27:41,42) How little they realized that by refusing to save himself in the manner they challenged him, Jesus was providing salvation for them, and for the entire fallen race. Truly, this was the highest form of service which could be rendered on fallen man’s behalf!

SERVICE FIRST—EXALTATION LATER

To Jesus, the bitterness of man’s misunderstanding and disapproval was more than over-balanced by the sweetness of his Father’s understanding and approval. Jesus humbled himself to serve fallen men, and they, because of their debased, selfish viewpoint, humiliated and killed him. His humiliation in the eyes of fallen flesh, however, was dignity and greatness to his Father. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:9-11

This is a fundamentally important lesson for all who profess to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, for the apostle introduces it by saying, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (chap. 2:5) Lest we lose sight of the very simple and practical manner in which we should manifest the mind of Christ, he also explains, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”—vs. 4

The basis of “strife” among the disciples at the last Passover supper was the question of who would be greatest among them. Each one was looking to his own interests, disregarding the

interests of others. This was the wrong way, the selfish way, Satan's way of seeking greatness. The ultimate, utter failure of this "self-first" way is well illustrated by the contrasting experiences of the prehuman Jesus [Greek: *Logos*] and Lucifer.

Lucifer, looking to his own interests only, meditated a usurpation to be as God. His course will finally end in everlasting ignominy and eternal death. The Logos humbled himself, becoming lower in nature than originally created, and continued in the course of humility even unto the death of the cross. He is now exalted to the divine nature, and to a position at the right hand of the throne of God.—Phil. 2:6, *Diaglott*; Heb. 12:2

The disciples had not yet learned this lesson. They wanted to be great, and knew of no other way of attaining greatness except at the expense of others. They did not understand, and could not, until enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that the true path to greatness and glory was that of service—considering the interests of others even before their own. This is a hard lesson for even the Spirit-begotten followers of Jesus today to learn, and even harder to practice.

Many are the cunning sophistries of selfish human reasoning, which attempts to convince New Creatures in Christ that the way of self-denial, service, and sacrifice is extreme and unnecessary. These reasonings tend to influence us both as individuals and as groups. We may, for example, try to convince ourselves and others that the time is now too short to be interested in others, that we should devote all the remaining days of our earthly pilgrimage to preparing ourselves for exaltation in the kingdom without regard to others. What subtle reasoning, and how it appeals to the viewpoint of the flesh. In reality, the entire life of Jesus was spent serving the interest of others, rather than in preparation for exaltation. The climax of his life, fully spent for others, was reached upon the cross, and there he qualified for his present high position by giving himself a ransom for all—the ultimate act of his life of service.

The time can never be so short that it is too late to serve others. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, he delivered a message of hope to the dying thief, telling him of the hope of restitution in the restored paradise. Had Jesus, even at this last moment, decided that he would think only of his own interests, and turned a deaf ear to the inquiring thief, would it not have been contrary to the true spirit of service for which

he came into the world? Even during those last hours upon the cross he served by forgetting self and thinking of others.

The matter of being a servant to others enters into and helps to make godlike every phase of a Christian's life. It helps to smooth out difficulties that may arise in our fellowship. Many problems that arise among brethren in Christ exist because one or more individuals in a congregation display too much self-interest in disregard of the interests of others. A brother, for example, may seemingly be imbued with the spirit of service, yet regard it only from the standpoint of being prominently before the brethren as a teacher. Such an attitude is not the true spirit of service, but what Jesus described as the spirit of the Gentiles who, by ruling over others, consider themselves to be benefactors. This is an attitude, furthermore, which can engender strife and rivalry among the people of God.

The spirit of true humility in service prompts one to sacrifice himself for the good of others, and without respect to any present reward in the way of appreciation, praise, or positions of honor. It is a spirit in which one is willing to serve unnoticed and unknown, and if need be, even at the cost of misrepresentation and persecution. It is just such an example that we have in Jesus, who made himself of no reputation, but in due time was exalted, not by himself, but by his Heavenly Father. Let us "humble [ourselves] therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt [us] in due time!"—I Pet. 5:6 ■

CHAPTER 14

Liberty in Christ

“Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”
—Galatians 5:13,14

PUTTING ON THE “mind of Christ” necessitates that we first be made free from the mind we have inherited from Adam. That is a mind which suffers from the many besetments of sin and fallen tendencies passed down to us from our first parents. Thankfully, through the mercy and grace of our loving Heavenly Father, he has made possible the means whereby his consecrated people can both attain, as well as maintain, this freedom. It is this provision, which we have titled “Liberty in Christ,” that is the focus of our present lesson, an understanding of which we believe can greatly assist us in developing a mind and character that is in the likeness of our pattern, Christ Jesus.

For thousands of years, countries and individuals have debated the meaning and value of liberty. Some have claimed liberty grants complete freedom of thoughts, words, and actions to each individual without regard to others. However, throughout history we have seen most countries restrain liberty through laws and customs designed to balance individual liberty with the needs and peace of all. This restraint of individual liberty for the greater good of all may have been most famously stated in the second sentence of the United States Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator

with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

FREEDOM FROM THE LAW

When considering liberty in Christ, we find similar restraints on individuals which are intended to benefit the body in general. The Apostle Paul never suggested the saints were to consider themselves to have total liberty without regard to others. His epistle to the Galatian church was a proclamation that they had been freed from the bondage of the Law in order to gain the liberty which was in Christ. Upon seeing some Jews failing to let go of the demands of the Law in favor of this liberty in Christ, Paul expressed his disappointment in them with these words: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.”—Gal. 1:6,7

In the third chapter, we read an even more stern condemnation of this distortion of the Gospel of Christ. The *J. B. Phillips* translation entitles the words of Galatians 3:1-8: “What has happened to your life of faith?” Note the apostle’s harsh words as translated by *Phillips* in these verses: “O you dear idiots of Galatia, who saw Jesus Christ the crucified so plainly, who has been casting a spell over you? I will ask you one simple question: did you receive the Spirit of God by trying to keep the Law or by believing the message of the Gospel? Surely you can’t be so idiotic as to think that a man begins his spiritual life in the Spirit and then completes it by reverting to outward observances? Has all your painful experience brought you nowhere? I simply cannot believe it of you! Does God, who gives you his Spirit and works miracles among you, do these things because you have obeyed the Law or because you have believed the Gospel? Ask yourselves that. You can go right back to Abraham to see the principle of faith in God. He, we are told, ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Can you not see, then, that all those who ‘believe God’ are the real ‘sons of Abraham’? The scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles ‘by faith,’ really proclaimed the Gospel centuries ago in the words spoken to Abraham, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’”

Continuing this powerful lesson about liberty, Paul reminds these early Jewish converts of God’s purpose concerning the

Law in Galatians 3:24-26, saying, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Paul clearly instructs them that the Law kept them in bondage through the imperfection of the flesh. This made it impossible to keep the Law perfectly. The Gospel of Christ, however, is based on faith, needing no perfection of the flesh. So Paul continues, saying, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—vss. 28,29

This is true freedom—this is meaningful liberty, for Jews and Gentiles alike! The detailed rules, customs, and ceremonies of the Law no longer need to be followed. Rather, a full dedication to do God’s will and complete faith in the shed blood of Christ result in our being justified in God’s sight. If we are thus justified by faith in Christ, we will be, Paul says, Abraham’s seed and heirs according to God’s promise. This was the liberty Paul explained to the Galatian brethren and to us.

LIBERTY—NOT LICENSE

A closer examination of liberty in Christ makes it clear that our liberty is not without some restraints. The word translated “liberty” in our opening scripture comes from the Greek word *eleutheria*, meaning “freedom (either legitimate or licentious)—liberty.” The word “license” is similar to “liberty,” but with one very distinct difference. One of the definitions of “license” states that it is “freedom that allows, or is used with, irresponsibility and disregard for standards of personal conduct.” Clearly this definition has no part in our liberty in Christ.

Paul emphasized this very point when using the Greek word *eleutheria*, saying that it was not to be used “for an occasion to the flesh [licentiously], but by love serve one another.” Thus he established a vitally important principle in his words to the Early Church and to all the footstep followers of Christ throughout the entire Gospel Age. Indeed, we have been granted liberty, but this great gift must be used properly and responsibly.

FREE MORAL AGENTS

To understand liberty in Christ requires understanding free moral agency—that is, free will to make choices. The Bible is filled with individuals who were granted gifts by God, along with the liberty to exercise them in accordance with his great plans and purposes. Their choices, made through the exercise of free moral agency, help us better understand the importance of rightly exercising liberty.

Let us consider and compare the Logos [Jesus in his pre-human condition] and Lucifer. Both were created perfect spirit beings by God and were his great delight. However, they responded much differently to God's love for them, and exercised their liberty of action in opposite directions. Here is the account of Jesus exercising his liberty: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart."—Ps. 40:7,8

Compare that account with the record of Lucifer's use of the same liberty. Of him it is said, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north." (Isa. 14:12,13) Both Jesus and Lucifer had liberty, but they exercised it in very different ways.

Let us also consider Adam, who was created a perfect human being, in the image of God, with the liberty to make his own decisions. After Eve ate of the tree forbidden by God, which carried the penalty of death, we read how Adam exercised his choice: "The man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." (Gen. 3:12) God gave Adam the liberty to make his own choice, and Adam chose to disobey. As New Creatures, we have now been given the liberty which comes through Christ. Will we exercise it properly, in accordance with our consecration vows, or will we follow some other course of action?

LIBERTY TOWARD BRETHREN

Paul lays down the principle of exercising liberty toward our brethren in our theme text, quoting again: "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all

the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”—Gal. 5:13,14

By moving away from the same fallen fleshly nature which led to Israel’s bondage under the Law, Paul instructs us to use our new-found liberty in Christ to serve one another. We are thus to use the power of love in action—“by love serve one another”—to displace our prior bondage to the weaknesses of the flesh, which tended toward serving self and self-interest.

There is good reason why liberty in Christ should create in us a desire to serve our brethren, rather than serving selfish interests. We must remember that we have not chosen one another, but God has chosen each of us. “Now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”—I Cor. 12:18-25, *New American Standard Bible*

Understanding that God loves each member of the body of Christ even as he loves our Lord should make us exercise our love toward one another in a pure and genuine way. (John 17:23) Paul speaks to this point, saying, “Let us have no imitation Christian love. Let us have a genuine break with evil and a real devotion to good. Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other man have the credit.”—Rom. 12:9,10, *Phillips*

Faithfulness demands that we exercise Christian love for one another unconditionally. This is one of the basic requirements of exercising our liberty in Christ which cannot be ignored. There are many more scriptures which describe how we should exercise liberty toward our brethren. However, we will quote just one more which summarizes this point: “Now if your experience of Christ’s encouragement and love

means anything to you, if you have known something of the fellowship of his Spirit, and all that it means in kindness and deep sympathy, do make my best hope for you come true! Live together in harmony, live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you. Never act from motives of rivalry or personal vanity, but in humility think more of each other than you do of yourselves. None of you should think only of his own affairs, but should learn to see things from other people's point of view."—Phil. 2:1-4, *Phillips*

RESTRAINTS ON LIBERTY TOWARD BRETHREN

As we consider how we should restrain exercising our liberty toward brethren, we must first remember that we are not free to criticize one another's convictions. "Welcome a man whose faith is weak, but not with the idea of arguing over his scruples. One man believes that he may eat anything, another man, without this strong conviction, is a vegetarian. The meat-eater should not despise the vegetarian, nor should the vegetarian condemn the meat-eater—they should reflect that God has accepted them both. After all, who are you to criticize the servant of somebody else, especially when that somebody else is God? It is to his own master that he gives, or fails to give, satisfactory service. And don't doubt that satisfaction, for God is well able to transform men into servants who are satisfactory."—Rom. 14:1-4, *Phillips*

Second, we are instructed to not exercise our liberty to remain at odds with our brethren. "If, while you are offering your gift at the altar, you should remember that your brother has something against you, you must leave your gift there before the altar and go away. Make your peace with your brother first, then come and offer your gift." (Matt. 5:23,24, *Phillips*) With these words, Jesus makes it clear that peace with our brethren is a requirement that must be met, even before sacrifice, if we are to rightly exercise our Christian liberty.

LIBERTY TOWARD THE WORLD

When considering how we should exercise our liberty toward the world, let us remember that we are representatives of our Heavenly Father. Consider the consistent scriptural testimony along this line. "Let your light so shine before men, that

they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” “I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.” “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ.”—Matt. 5:16; I Cor. 4:9; II Cor. 5:20

As representatives of God, we should exercise our liberty toward the world with love and compassion, because we know their fallen condition in Adam. God sent his son to die for all while they were yet in their sins, and we need to show similar sympathy and love. Paul provides these words which instruct us to treat the world with love and respect: “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”—Rom. 12:14-18

The Scriptures further testify that our liberty in Christ should cause us to seek to do good to those in the world. “Let us not be weary in well doing. ... As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”—Gal. 6:9,10; Matt. 5:44

Remembering that mankind is currently in a broken condition because of Adam’s disobedience, our Christian liberty should incite us to humbly preach the Gospel, as directed by God’s Holy Spirit. We are not to do this as if it is our gospel. Rather, we are to give credit always to God for the great privilege we have been granted of sharing with others the truth of his Holy Word. It is only through the gift of God’s enlightening spirit that we know the beauty of his plan. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—I Cor. 2:9,10

Therefore, when we have the opportunity to give witness to the Gospel of Christ, we should give credit to the Heavenly

Father—the author of that Gospel—by quoting scripture. This means we should further exercise our liberty by diligently studying the Scriptures, in order to gain a better understanding of them and how they fit into God’s great plan of salvation. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”—II Tim. 2:15

RESTRAINTS ON LIBERTY TOWARD THE WORLD

While remembering that we are representatives of God, and that we are to show love and compassion to all, Christian liberty also requires that we separate ourselves from the things of the world. While we are in the world, we cannot partake of its fallen spirit. Paul makes this very clear with these words: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

LIBERTY TOWARD GOVERNMENTS

As students of the Bible, we are aware that governments and their leaders are just as much in a broken condition as is the world itself. However, we are to remember that the governments in power today exist as part of God’s plan. When interpreting the dream of an impressive image seen by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, the Prophet Daniel said that God gave him a kingdom, power, strength, and glory, which was represented by the image’s head of gold. Daniel then said that three subsequent kingdoms would arise in succession following Babylon, through the appointment of God. (Dan. 2:37-45) This succession of kingdoms, though fallen and imperfect, would nevertheless provide a period of order during the present evil world, until the time came when God would set up a kingdom that will last forever. This is the same kingdom for which Jesus taught his disciples to pray in Matthew 6:10—“Thy kingdom come.”

The foregoing shows us that God has permitted fallen kingdoms and governments of men to exist continuously until the establishment of his kingdom. This being the case, our liberty toward them should be exercised in harmony with the instructions of Jesus, on the occasion when the

Pharisees tried to entice him into speaking against the rule of the Roman Empire. Instead of criticizing this ruthless government, which had been allowed to rule according to God's arrangement, Jesus took a Roman coin and answered with these words: "Whose is this image and superscription [on the coin]? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."—chap. 22:20,21

Jesus did not criticize the government or leaders who would eventually consent to his being put to death. Paul followed this same pattern and actually took advantage of his Roman citizenship to fulfill his mission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Exercising our liberty toward today's governments and leaders should follow the example and pattern of our Master, Jesus, and of the Apostle Paul.

RESTRAINTS ON LIBERTY TOWARD GOVERNMENTS

The Apostle Paul summarizes how our liberty towards governments and political leaders should both be exercised and restrained in his epistle to the Romans. He says, "Every Christian ought to obey the civil authorities, for all legitimate authority is derived from God's authority, and the existing authority is appointed under God. To oppose authority then is to oppose God, and such opposition is bound to be punished. The honest citizen has no need to fear the keepers of law and order, but the dishonest man will always be nervous of them. If you want to avoid this anxiety just lead a law-abiding life, and all that can come your way is a word of approval. The officer is God's servant for your protection. But if you are leading a wicked life you have reason to be alarmed. The 'power of the law' which is vested in every legitimate officer, is no empty phrase. He is, in fact, divinely appointed to inflict God's punishment upon evil-doers. You should, therefore, obey the authorities, not simply because it is the safest, but because it is the right thing to do. It is right, too, for you to pay taxes for the civil authorities are appointed by God for the good purposes of public order and well-being. Give everyone his legitimate due, whether it be rates, or taxes, or reverence, or respect!"—Rom. 13:1-7, *Phillips*

Let us not waste consecrated time criticizing governments and people we know are merely part of the broken, fallen systems of this present evil world. Instead, let us follow

Paul's advice and give respect to those appointed of God. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour."—I Tim. 2:1-3

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND FORGIVENESS

No discussion of liberty in Christ would be complete without examining the principle of forgiveness. When Paul told early Jewish converts that the bondage of the Law had been replaced by liberty in Christ, he emphasized the fact that God's unlimited love toward the human family should also become their new pattern of conduct. As all liberty requires some restraint for the sake of the greater good of all, Paul stressed that Christ's followers must be restrained only by the character of Christ, not by fallen human thinking. Jesus was in full harmony with his Heavenly Father, and the standard which he set for us to follow was intended to develop in us the very character of God himself. (Matt. 5:48) Key to God's character is his unrestricted love for his human creation, to the extent of providing his "only begotten son" to die to be the ransom price for Adam. If God can forgive fallen man for his sins, we also must forgive just as freely.

While this requirement seems impossible to the flesh, we have examples of those who fulfilled it. Consider what Stephen said as he was being stoned for Jesus' sake: "They stoned Stephen, [who was] calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."—Acts 7:59,60

Paul gives us instructive words concerning the importance forgiveness plays in exercising our liberty in Christ. "As, therefore, God's picked representatives ... purified and beloved of God himself, be merciful in action, kindly in heart, humble in mind. Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another, always ready to forgive if you have a difference with anyone. Forgive as freely as the Lord has forgiven you. And, above everything else, be truly loving, for love is the golden chain of all the virtues."—Col. 3:12-14, *Phillips*

Nowhere is the principle of forgiveness, as part of our liberty in Christ, expressed so clearly as in these words spoken by Jesus himself: “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt. 6:14,15) Liberty in Christ requires that we forgive others—not just our friends, but even our enemies. Doing so teaches us to be more humble, and more like our blessed Master.

In summary, liberty in Christ does not make us better than others, nor does it give us the right to act in a superior manner. Exercised properly, it will not help us accumulate momentary treasures upon earth, but will instead help us accumulate eternal treasures in heaven. Those striving for heavenly riches bear a great responsibility toward others as well as to themselves with regard to properly enjoying the gift of liberty in Christ. May we ever recognize and faithfully seek to carry out the important tasks associated with this great privilege, and thus be assisted in the development of the “mind of Christ.” ■

CHAPTER 15

Labors of Love

*“God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love,
which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have
ministered to the saints, and do minister.”
—Hebrews 6:10*

DEVELOPING THE “MIND of Christ” most assuredly includes the thought of our title. It was love which prompted the labors of the Master on behalf of mankind in securing redemption for Adam and his race. It was also love which prompted many other works of our Lord during his earthly ministry. These “labors of love” were not only provided to show forth Jesus’ beautiful character, and that of his Heavenly Father, but also served as examples to the Lord’s foot-step followers of the privileges we have toward one another as members of the “little flock.”

Ministering to the saints is one of the Christian’s most blessed privileges, as indicated in the words of our opening text given to us by the Apostle Paul. In I Thessalonians 1:3, he also writes of the “work of faith,” the “labour of love,” and “patience of hope.” The work of faith seems to refer to those activities of the Christian life which require faith to meet challenges, such as preaching the Gospel, and standing loyal for God, the Truth, and the brethren in the face of opposition and persecution. Patience of hope implies the need for endurance and constancy as we view the hope set before us in the midst of trials and difficulties.

The expression “labour of love” is descriptive of those kindnesses which we extend to our brethren because they are fellow members of the body of Christ, and because we esteem it a great privilege to serve them—even to lay down our lives

for them in rendering services which may tend to lighten their burden. All of the Lord's people enjoy such opportunities. Many of us have had labors of love extended to us, and how much we have appreciated these. In many instances, our love for the brethren has thereby been increased.

THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

These labors of love on behalf of the people of God have not been limited to the present Gospel Age. In the Jewish Age, we recall the Prophet Elisha as being the recipient of the labor of love from a man and woman of God totally unknown to him until he became the benefactor of their love. The account of this is found in II Kings 4:8-18.

It is the story of a Shunammite woman, otherwise not identified, except that she is referred to as "a great woman." It seems that the Prophet Elisha, in his rounds of service, often passed through the town of Shunem. He apparently, in doing so, followed a road that was not far from the home of the "great woman" of the account. After noticing this, the woman used the first opportunity she had to assist, and "constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread."—vs. 8

After this occurred a number of times, the Shunammite woman said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there."—vss. 9-11

This woman's great labor of love must have meant much to the Prophet Elisha. It was a simple act of kindness—beginning with taking him into her home for lunch, and then, with the consent and cooperation of her husband, building an extra room on the home so this man of God might have a place to rest when he needed it, and perchance to stay overnight. The kindness to this man of God was not without expense, because the building of an extra room on one's home is quite costly. However, this woman's love was great. Her spirit of sacrifice abounded toward Elisha, and we are sure the Lord was pleased.

Certainly Elisha was pleased. He instructed his servant to learn from the woman what they could do for her in return

for all her kindness. She wished for nothing in return, but the servant learned from her that she was childless, her husband was old and the probability of ever having a child was very slight. Elisha prayed to the Lord about this, and his prayer, coming from a righteous man, availed much. In due course, the woman gave birth to a son.—II Kings 4:12-17

Later, while the lad was still young, he suffered what was possibly a sunstroke, and died. Elisha was sent for, and he returned to the home, and restored the boy's life. (vss. 18-37) Thus, while this "great woman" had not desired any favor from Elisha or from the Lord for her labor of love, she did receive a highly appreciated blessing, as is so often the case with those who unselfishly and wholeheartedly minister to the people of God.

MARY'S LABOR OF LOVE

Martha and Mary are two women of God who stand out prominently in the life of Jesus. Jesus loved them because of their devotion to God and to his Word, and they loved him for the same reason. Their brother Lazarus died, and Jesus returned from Galilee to Bethany, the home of these two devout women, and awakened him from the sleep of death. This was a genuine labor of love by Jesus, and they showed their appreciation in part by arranging for a special supper the next day, at which Lazarus and Jesus were present.

This was a remarkable setting for such a gathering. Lazarus, who had been dead four days, had been awakened, and was with the others to enjoy the meal and the fellowship. Martha served at this supper. While it was in progress, Mary arose from the table, and using "a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, ... anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."—John 12:3

This was a labor of love which was very costly. By it, Mary, as best she could, showed her appreciation to Jesus for the great kindness he had bestowed upon their family by awakening her brother from the sleep of death. She had doubtless expressed her thanks to the Master before this. However, in many cases words seem inadequate, and this was so in the case of Mary. She wanted to back up her words with a pound of spikenard ointment with which she bathed the Master's feet, and she wanted to use her own hair to wipe his feet.

As is oftentimes the case, there was one at the supper who criticized this labor of love. It was Judas Iscariot, but the record reveals that he was not sincere in his criticism. The lesson is that Jesus appreciated what had been done for him. Replying to Judas, Jesus said, "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this." (vs. 7) Jesus recognized Mary's labor of love as a real service that had been rendered to him. How wonderful that the Lord should cause the record of this to be preserved for us as a beautiful example.

In another account, Jesus said of Mary, "She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." (Mark 14:8,9) What a precious example this is—"She hath done what she could!" We today do not have the opportunity of anointing the feet of our Lord, but we do have the privilege, in various ways, of rendering service to the members of his body still in the flesh. Are we doing what we can to render this labor of love on their behalf?

DORCAS

A member of the Early Church who was active in performing loving service for the brethren was Dorcas. Of her, we read, "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." Dorcas became ill, and died, and "they laid her in an upper chamber."—Acts 9:36,37

The disciples in the area heard that Peter was in the vicinity, so they sent for him. "Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them." Then, having them all leave the room, Peter through prayer restored Dorcas to life. This miracle soon became known throughout the area, and as a result of it many believed.—Acts 9:38-42

We have only this short account of the zeal of Dorcas in serving the widows by her sewing. Like Mary, she did what she could, and as a result of her labor she brought blessings to many. In addition, through God's grace in awakening

her from the sleep of death, many became believers. Thus, through her labor of love, the Gospel effectively reached others. How encouraging this must have been to Dorcas!

LYDIA

Another of those whose labor of love is noted in Scripture is Lydia, a seller of purple dye, who maintained a home at Philippi. It was in Philippi that the first European ecclesia was established. Lydia had an important part in connection with this—the first meetings of the brethren being held in her home. Paul and his companions were the first to take the Gospel to Philippi, going there in response to the call which he heard in a vision, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”—Acts 16:9

Arriving in Philippi, Luke writes that “on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”—vss. 13-15

Here was a labor of love operating in the form of hospitality to the brethren. Evidently Lydia was not a poor woman. Although she is said to be of Thyatira, evidently she did business in Philippi and maintained a home there for convenience, and she invited Paul and his companions to be guests in her home.

The record states that God had opened Lydia’s heart. Now we see her opened heart reaching out to serve the brethren in the best way she was capable of doing. She was not long enough in the Truth, perhaps, to give a clear witness to the message, but she could care for the material needs of those faithful servants who had greater ability. Throughout the age, the temporal assistance provided to those active in the service of the Truth has been a very important part of the total efforts of making known the glad tidings of the kingdom. Lydia is in the forefront of this little band of servants whose labors of love have meant so much to the brethren.

EPAPHRODITUS

Epaphroditus was a member of the ecclesia at Philippi. Paul was now a prisoner in Rome, and the brethren in Philippi decided to send him a gift to help supply some of his needs, and to comfort him. Epaphroditus was the brother chosen to take this gift to Rome, and to deliver it to Paul. This was evidently during the two years in which Paul was privileged to live in “his own hired house,” although in the custody of Roman guards.—Acts 28:30

It would seem that in addition to delivering this gift to Paul from the brethren at Philippi, Epaphroditus desired to remain with Paul to serve him in whatever way he could. Paul decided to let him remain for awhile—at least until he found out how things would go with him when his case came up for trial. He was hoping that then he would be set free and could visit the brethren at Philippi himself. Then he adds, “Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.”—Phil. 2:25,26

It is evident that Epaphroditus had endeared himself to Paul by his faithful labor of love. The record shows also that this service had been rendered at great cost. Through his faithfulness, Epaphroditus had become ill. Paul wrote that “he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.”—vss. 27,28

We can understand Paul’s feelings in this matter. He was being held as prisoner, and while it was for the cause of Christ, it is not an easy matter to be a prisoner, for any reason. This dear brother from Philippi had come with a gift from the brethren, and was serving him and became seriously ill. Had he died, it would have indeed been a crushing blow to Paul—“sorrow upon sorrow.” However, the Lord spared him this sorrow. Epaphroditus had recovered and was now returning to his brethren in Philippi, and Paul wrote, “Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.”—vss. 29,30

Notice Paul's exhortation—"hold such in reputation." Paul believed in giving honor where such recognition is due, and he was sure it was merited by Epaphroditus. He had gladly risked his life to serve the beloved apostle—a service which Paul describes as "the work of Christ." We cannot visualize all the details involved in this service. However, we can enter into the spirit which prompted it, and we can understand to some small degree how it must have brought comfort and joy into those weary days which Paul spent in the custody of Roman guards.

THROUGHOUT THE AGES

Beginning in ancient times, and continuing even to our day, there have been faithful ones who have seen and used their opportunities to bestow labors of love, and thereby helped to lighten the burden of many of God's people. The Heavenly Father has promised to give his people the necessary strength for their every time of need, but often he uses their fellow brethren to render this assistance.

We have noted a few of the instances of this labor of love mentioned in the Bible, but we are sure that there were many other faithful individuals whose labors are not recorded in the sacred Word. In many of our ecclesia gatherings today, we have "comfort" committees to serve and encourage those who are ill, or for other reasons need our help. Indeed, every brother and sister in Christ should think of himself or herself as a member of a comfort committee, made up of all the Lord's people. We all should be on the alert to render help as opportunity and ability affords.

It is not in the big things, as a rule, that we are able to serve, but a cordial greeting at the meeting, a message of love and encouragement to a distant brother or sister which may be dispatched by the ecclesia, and in which we have the privilege of having a part. Sometimes, however, these privileges may come in more definite form. We may learn of a brother or sister who is in need of much help along a specific line. Rendering such assistance may be costly to us. Let us not hold back in these cases either.

The Shunammite woman saw her privilege of building an extra room onto her home so that a prophet of God might enjoy periods of refreshment and rest. Dorcas sewed clothing for the widows in the church at Joppa. Not every woman is able to sew, but Dorcas was, and she used her ability to render a labor of love where it was needed. Epaphroditus did not

hesitate to hazard his life in order to minister to the needs of the Apostle Paul.

All of us should emulate these faithful servants of the Lord and of his people to the greatest extent possible. Let us possess their spirit of sacrifice and devotion to God's purposes and plan. This is the true spirit of the Lord, the spirit with which we should seek to be filled as we lay down our lives in his service, developing the "mind of Christ"—the mind which led our Master to labor and give his all. ■

CHAPTER 16

The Mind of Prayer

“Pray without ceasing.”
—1 Thessalonians 5:17

IN THE FOUR Gospels of the New Testament, there are many instances in which it is recorded that Jesus prayed to his Heavenly Father. It might seem to some that since Jesus, in his prehuman existence as the Logos, was with God since the beginning of creation, he would know the Father sufficiently so as not to need to pray to him during his relatively short time upon earth. However, such was not the case at all. As a human being, physically apart from God for a period of time, Jesus saw the necessity of approaching the Almighty in prayer in order to maintain the close communion which he had previously enjoyed with the Father.

Jesus' habit of going to the Father often in prayer came about because his mind was “stayed” on God at all times. (Isa. 26:3) He sought continually to do the will of his Father, and realized that prayer was an all important part of determining that will. Likewise it must be with Jesus' footstep followers, as we seek to do God's will and to develop the “mind of Christ.”

Prayer is one of the blessed privileges enjoyed by every true disciple of Christ. It is, in fact, a necessity if we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. Prayer can be thought of as the life-giving breath of a child of God. Just as from the natural standpoint it is essential to breathe in order to live, so as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, we need to pray daily to remain spiritually healthy and alive.

To “pray without ceasing,” as cited in our opening text, does not imply the necessity of being on our knees continually. It means, rather, that prayer will be one of the regular habits

of our lives as New Creatures, and that we will go daily to the throne of heavenly grace, there to “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) More than that, it means that whenever the need arises, regardless of how many times in the day it may be, our hearts will turn to God in prayer.

This thought is brought to us in the parable of the importunate widow. (Luke 18:1-8) The lesson Jesus taught in this parable was that the disciples “ought always to pray, and not to faint.” (vs. 1) The thought is that when trials are severe, and the way is rough—when the road is dark, and the direction uncertain—when the burden is heavy, and we become weary with its weight—instead of “fainting” and giving up, we should pray. Paul expressed a similar thought when he wrote, “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.”—Rom. 12:12

PRaise AND THANKSGIVING

Prayer may be thought of from two general standpoints. There are prayers of praise and thanksgiving, and there are prayers which are in the nature of requests—prayers in which we petition the Lord in one way or another. It is appropriate to thank the Heavenly Father for all the benefits which he daily showers upon us. The very act of going to him with thanks in our hearts and upon our lips increases our appreciation of the marvelous privilege we have of being his children.

The psalmist wrote, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” (Ps. 103:2) To go to God with thanksgiving will surely help us to remember his benefits. On account of our imperfect fallen minds, we cannot remember all the Lord’s benefits, but how tragic it would be to forget them all. We will not forget them all, if daily we think of what God is doing for us, and go to him with prayers of thanksgiving for the many ways in which he showers his love upon us.

In another place, David wrote, “I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. ... O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.” (Ps. 34:1,3) Paul, who agreed with David, wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.” (Phil. 4:4) The follower of the Master who daily goes in prayer to the Heavenly Father with lips of praise and thanksgiving will be a rejoicing Christian. We cannot habitually recall his goodness to us without being made glad.

PETITIONS

Our petitions to God are equally important, and it is essential to give consideration to what we may properly request from him. While petitions which are to be considered by our Heavenly Father and favorably answered must be sincere, they must also be in harmony with his will. Throughout the ages there have been many whose hearts' desires have been sincere, but their prayers have not been acceptable to God.

The Bible teaches us that the heart can be very sincere, but its desires quite out of harmony with the will and plan of God. We doubt not that when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the brethren in the Early Church, he sought God's blessing upon his efforts, and sincerely so. However, he was wrong—terribly wrong—and this has been true with many others, even professed Christians.

James wrote, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts [desires]." (James 4:3) This is another way of saying that prayers which are selfish, and those requests made for things merely to satisfy the desires of the flesh, will not be favorably answered. Such prayers are "amiss" in the eyes of the Lord.

An expression frequently used is: "Prayer changes things." This is quite true with respect to one's own attitude toward God and toward his overruling providences in our lives. If, perchance, we have become discouraged by severe trials which the Heavenly Father has permitted, and are possibly a little resentful, our whole attitude will likely be changed by going to the Lord in sincere prayer and asking him to help us to bear the trials, and, if it is his will, to show us the divine purpose regarding them.

Perhaps we are becoming embittered toward those who may be opposing us, our "enemies," when we know that we should love them. If we follow the instructions of the Bible and pray for those who despitefully use us, this also will "change things," for we will find that love is developing in our hearts toward those for whom we pray. We cannot continue to hate those whom we ask God to bless.

Indeed, sincere prayer many times changes our own attitudes, and our own ways of thinking, but it does not change God's plan. God does not depend upon our prayers as a way of learning the manner in which he should bless us. Things are chaotic in the world today, but how much worse

they would be if God answered favorably all the petitions that are made to him by sincere and well-meaning people. Even among God's specially chosen people there are often conflicting petitions expressed in prayer.

CLAIMING GOD'S PROMISES

All acceptable prayers must be in harmony with God's will, and all the blessings which the Heavenly Father "wills" to bestow upon his people are comprehended in the many "exceeding great and precious promises" of his Word. (II Pet. 1:4) Therefore we could say that prayer is the claiming of God's promises. Has God promised the blessings which we request of him? This is a test upon which we can determine whether or not our prayers will be favorably answered.

There are proper and improper ways of approaching God in prayer. Our Lord's model prayer opens with the statement, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." (Matt. 6:9) This suggests the necessity of a reverential approach to God in prayer, a proper recognition of his sanctity and glory. The glory of God should be the principal motive inspiring all our prayers. We should ever have in mind the question: Will the blessing I am requesting be to the glory of God? Certainly, if it is within the range of those good and perfect gifts which he assures us he is glad to bestow upon his children, we know that it will bring glory to his hallowed name.

If we properly hallow our Heavenly Father's name we will heed the instructions of his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, as to the only way we can approach him in prayer. That way is through the name of Christ and through the merit of his shed blood. (John 15:16; Rom. 3:24,25) Jesus said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."—John 14:13

Jesus also said that if we abide in him, and his Word abides in us, we may ask what we will, and our request shall be granted. (chap. 15:7) This is a sweeping promise, but by no means unconditional. If we abide in Christ, and his teachings abide in us, then we will ask only for those blessings which are in harmony with the Father's will. What we "will" to request should be only what we believe to be the Father's "will" to give us. Thus, our petitions should always be subject to the statement: "If it be thy will."

MANY PROMISES

Praying within the limits of God's promises gives much latitude, for his promises are vast, far-reaching, and varied. We are reminded of many of them in our Lord's prayer. First in this prayer is the request, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) Throughout the Old and New Testaments, by implication and direct statements, through types and symbols, God has promised the kingdom. First, he has promised the kingdom of Christ to put down all rebellion against the divine will, and then the operation of God's sovereign authority and power throughout the earth.—I Cor. 15:24-28

When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we are requesting that which God has promised. Our prayers do not furnish God with the idea and incentive to establish a kingdom. Rather, it is by our prayers for his kingdom of promise that we manifest our harmony with, and interest in, his glorious kingdom plan, and the hope we have of a share in its operation.

We want God's kingdom to come because we want to see his will done throughout the earth. We know that when his will is done the people will be blessed, because they will be walking in the light of his countenance and in the knowledge of his ways. Therefore, our prayer, "Thy kingdom come," is in reality an unselfish prayer, because it is on behalf of the whole world of mankind.

In presenting the petition, "Thy kingdom come," we are also asking for God's blessing upon all of his arrangements through which the kingdom will come. We have been privileged to be of those that God has called out from the world to be associated with Christ as "kings and priests" in his kingdom. Indirectly, therefore, whatever blessings we need as we are being trained for the kingdom are comprehended in the request, "Thy kingdom come." Our petition for the kingdom to soon come, with the hope of being part of its administration, would be empty and meaningless if we were not yielding wholeheartedly to the rule of God's will in our own hearts and lives.

"DAILY BREAD"

The first request in our Lord's prayer for personal blessings is, "Give us this day our daily bread." (Matt. 6:11) The primary application of this is to our spiritual needs, although our Heavenly Father is not unmindful of our physical needs, and

will supply them in keeping with his knowledge of what is best for our spiritual interests.

The spiritual “bread” promised in the Scriptures is, first of all, Christ himself. Jesus said to his disciples, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35) In this same discourse Jesus also spoke of “eating” his flesh and “drinking” his blood. (vs. 53) To the disciples this was a “hard saying,” so Jesus explained, “It is the spirit that quickeneth [giveth life]; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (vss. 60,63) It is not the literal flesh of Jesus that we eat. This would profit us nothing. However, as Jesus explained, it is his words, his teachings, and his example, of which we partake. The teachings of Jesus embrace the entire structure of truth contained in the Word of God, and are in complete harmony with it. Thus, it is through the study of the Truth, and the application of its principles in our lives, that we feed upon Christ. It is in this way that we partake of our “daily bread.”

It is through the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to comprehend the Truth in such a manner that it becomes life-giving bread to us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. The Heavenly Father gave us a reassuring promise through Jesus concerning the Holy Spirit. He said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”—Luke 11:9-13

In a similar statement by Jesus, appearing in Matthew 7:7-11, his conclusion is: “How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” The “good things” mentioned by Jesus are all those blessings which are promised to New Creatures in Christ Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They include the Spirit-revealed truths of the Word of God which constitute our daily spiritual bread. Thus, in praying, “Give us this day

our daily bread,” we are claiming the promises of God to supply us with all necessary spiritual food. Surely every truly consecrated follower of the Master can testify as to how bountifully the Lord daily fulfills these particular promises.

ASKING FORGIVENESS

As we make use of our Lord’s model prayer, we also request our Heavenly Father to “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” (Matt. 6:12) As followers of the Master we know that God has promised forgiveness to his people. Through the merit of Christ he has made provision to cover our imperfections, to fellowship with us as though we were perfect, and to give us life. How reassuring it is that we can go to the throne of heavenly grace and “obtain mercy.”—Heb. 4:16

However, there is a condition attached to this provision. If we are to receive forgiveness from our Heavenly Father, we must extend it to those who trespass against us. (Matt. 6:14,15) What a wise and just condition this is. How unworthy we would be to obtain forgiveness and mercy from our Heavenly Father if in our own hearts we were harboring ill will and resentment toward others. The spirit of mercy on God’s part is reflected in the fact that “while we were yet sinners” he made provision through Christ for our reconciliation. (Rom. 5:8) If we are truly godlike, we, too, will have the spirit of mercy in our hearts, and will be glad to extend forgiveness at the first indication that it is desired by those who have trespassed against us.

DELIVERANCE PROMISED

In order to be understood clearly, the closing petition in our Lord’s prayer should be considered as a whole. It reads, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matt. 6:13) Here we are reminded of additional aspects of God’s wonderful promises. The phrase “Lead us not into temptation” in no way implies that the Heavenly Father ever has any inclination to direct his people toward temptation and sin.

There are many wonderful things which God has promised to do. He has promised the kingdom, and we pray for it. He has promised our daily bread, and we pray for that. He has promised to forgive us, and we ask his forgiveness. Our asking for these blessings does not imply the possibility that God might fail to fulfill his promises. There are some things

which God has promised not to do, such as to tempt us, so in our prayers we also claim these promises. James wrote, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."—James 1:13

We can take this as an assurance from God that he will not lead us into temptation. We rejoice in this assurance and by prayer, claim it for ourselves, coupling with it the remainder of the petition, "but deliver us from evil." God does not lead into temptation, but delivers from evil, and how precious are his many promises along this line.

Sometimes we are aware of the fact that God has delivered us from evil, and other times we are not. Doubtless every day there are situations from which God delivers us, of which we are not aware—circumstances which would result in grave injury to us as New Creatures if we were not delivered. We may not know in detail just how the Lord protects and delivers. However, we remember that one of his precious promises is that "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." (Ps. 34:7) We rejoice in this assurance, and in the many similar promises of God's Word. Thus with confidence we pray, "Deliver us from evil."

Additionally, we understand that there will be the final and glorious deliverance of each member of the body of Christ into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The hope of this deliverance is today an especially vital one. Referring to the troublous conditions in the world with which we are presently surrounded, Jesus said, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption [deliverance] draweth nigh."—Luke 21:28

That will be a complete and everlasting deliverance from evil, and from this "present evil world," or age. More than that, it will mean that although "sown in weakness," we will be "raised in power," exalted to "glory and honour and immortality," to live and reign with Christ. (I Cor. 15:43; Rom. 2:7) We rejoice, too, that the deliverance and exaltation of Christ's body members into the glory of the Messianic kingdom will be followed by the deliverance of all mankind from sin and death, and the complete "restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:21

WISDOM PROMISED

James wrote, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” (James 1:5,6) This is not a promise that God will give his people worldly wisdom. It pertains, rather, to the “wisdom that is from above.” This heavenly wisdom is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”—chap. 3:17

God’s answer to our petition for heavenly wisdom is for the purpose of leading us to purity in thought, word, and deed. It will make us more peaceable and gentle, and “easy to be intreated.” It will fill our hearts with mercy and all the good fruits of the Holy Spirit. It will make us impartial in our judgment of, and dealings with, others, and it will cleanse us from hypocrisy.

When we ask God for this heavenly wisdom, we must make room in our hearts and lives for what the answer implies. We must want to be all that the “wisdom from above” will lead us to be. We must be emptied of self and self-will if we truly want the Holy Spirit of wisdom to fill and control our lives. God will fulfill his promises in this regard only if we do our part.

In summary, while we are to pray without ceasing, we are also to cooperate unceasingly with God in harmony with our prayers. We should also be prepared for whatever experiences the Lord may permit to come to us in order that our prayers might be favorably answered. If we pray, “Lord, increase our faith” (Luke 17:5), we may well expect to be providentially given an experience which tests our faith. If we pray for patience, we may be sure that our patience will be thoroughly tried. If we pray for mercy and forgiveness, we will need to search our hearts to make sure that we are harboring no ill will toward others.

Prayer, therefore, is not only claiming the promises of God, but to be effective it must be associated with sincere efforts on our part to comply with all the conditions attached to those promises. If we are fully surrendered to the Lord—if we want his will done in our lives more than we want anything else—if we are daily searching his Word to learn his will, and to receive strength to do it—only then may we go to the Heavenly Father in prayer to ask for the fulfillment

of his promises. By so doing, however, God will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing to us so abundantly that “there shall not be room enough to receive it.”—Mal. 3:10 ■

CHAPTER 17

Workers Together with God

“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”

—II Corinthians 6:1

OUR PRIVILEGES AS workers together with God begin in the present life, as we follow in Jesus’ footsteps of sacrifice and develop the “mind of Christ.” If faithful, our work will continue into the future, and will include the awakening of those who are asleep in death, as well as teaching them during God’s kingdom, under the leadership of Christ. This is a blessed hope, and we rejoice in the assurance that the Heavenly Father will preserve his people who are now coworkers with him—that he will help them in their every time of need.

Paul points out in our lesson, however, that we have responsibilities in this matter. We are to give “no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” (vs. 3) The matter of giving “no offence” pertains primarily to our relationship with the Lord. We are to conduct ourselves and our ministry in a manner which will be approved by God, according to the standards laid down in his Word. We cannot do this perfectly, but we have the blessed assurance of the wonderful provision he has made for us through the blood of Christ, whereby our imperfect works are made acceptable to him.

By contrast, we cannot hope to receive the approval of the world in general. Rather, from the world we expect to receive ridicule, misunderstanding, tribulation, and perhaps even

hatred. The world responds to us even as it did to Jesus. However, we are not to give the world any just cause for reviling or hating us. Jesus did not, yet he had tribulation in the world, and indicated that this would also be true with us. To the extent that we receive the disapproval of the world, it should be for the same reason that Jesus did—namely, that we are faithful in letting the light of truth shine out for the blessing of those to whom the Lord may give a hearing ear.

“In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God.” (vs. 4) From here through verse 10, Paul mentions many items associated with our being approved as ministers of God. In the same verse, he lists four of these: “In much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses.” Being a minister of God—a worker together with him—is not an easy task. First, Paul says it requires “much patience.” This will be needed to meet the daily problems which may confront us. Since ours is a vocation which is a lifetime in length, it requires patient endurance, lest we become weary in well doing.

If we are faithful to the ministry we will also encounter a certain number of “afflictions.” Paul ministered in “labours more abundant,” and testified of suffering “stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”—chap. 11:23-27

Paul was indeed an example of an ambassador for Christ and a worker together with God, and because of his faithfulness, he suffered “afflictions,” “necessities,” and “distresses.” In the seemingly more tolerant world in which many of the brethren live today, it may be difficult to imagine how so much tribulation could touch the life of one servant of God. One reason for it was Paul’s wholehearted determination to be faithful to the cause for which he had been called and chosen by God, and to which he had gladly dedicated his life.

The apostle continues enumerating his afflictions, showing that they were all related to his being an approved minister of God: "In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings." (II Cor. 6:5) Paul could have avoided all these simply by settling down in his home town of Tarsus. Perhaps he could have enjoyed to a point the wonderful vision of truth which the Lord had given him. He knew, however, that this was not why the Lord had called him, so he went forth into the ministry, not turning aside for anything, even though he knew many times that suffering and perhaps death awaited him. He was willing to suffer physical pain, to become weary of flesh, to go without sleep and food, that he might be faithful to the ministry to which he had been called.

ASPECTS OF AN APPROVED MINISTRY

Beginning with II Corinthians 6, verse 6, Paul sets forth various facets of an approved ministry. We not only need to endure patiently the many afflictions and distresses which come upon us in the world, and from our great Adversary, the Devil, but we are also to regulate our own lives in keeping with the Lord's provisions for us, and in harmony with the righteous principles of his laws.

Paul says that we approve ourselves as ministers of Christ and workers together with God "by pureness." We must shun those things which God, through his Word, has declared to be impure. Here we must be guided by the divine standards, not by the standards of the world. How ineffective our ministry would be, and how displeasing to the Lord, if we did not carry on our ambassadorship in the spirit of purity.

"By knowledge," Paul continues. How important it is that we have a clear knowledge of the one with whom we serve as coworkers. We must understand the plans and purposes of our Heavenly Father, the author of the great plan which his Son, Jesus, executes. It is a mistake to suppose that a knowledge of the Truth is not essential for those who are workers together with God. How many there are who, not knowing the truth of the Father's Word, think they are serving him by preaching eternal torture for the wicked, and other erroneous doctrines.

"By long-suffering." It is not enough that we are to be faithful in this ministry today, and when circumstances are favorable. Our consecration is until death, and we are to be

faithful to our covenant of sacrifice regardless of the hardships we may encounter. In terms of human tranquility and ease, the ministry of reconciliation to which we have been called is a costly one. Notice again in the earlier verses of this chapter how costly it was to Paul.

The Lord gave Paul strength and courage to endure the suffering which came upon him because of his faithfulness, and he testified that he could endure all things through Christ who gave him strength. The same is true with us. Though our trials may not be so severe as those that came upon Paul, still they are more than we could bear without the Lord's help. However, with his help we can endure and suffer "long," even unto death. Indeed, it is those who are faithful unto death who receive the crown of life.

"By kindness." The true minister of God and of Christ must be kind. To testify to the Gospel in any other manner than the spirit of kindness would render our ministry very ineffective so far as those to whom we witness are concerned, and very displeasing to the Lord. The Gospel of Christ beautifully reflects the loving-kindness of our God, and how out of place it would be to present it in an unkind manner.

"By the Holy Spirit." It is by the Holy Spirit of anointing that we are authorized to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom. It was written of Jesus, "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; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."—Isa. 61:1,2

This same anointing has come upon us as members of Christ's body. It is this anointing that constitutes us his ambassadors, and ministers of reconciliation. Since we carry on his ministry by the authority of the Holy Spirit, it is implied that this work will be conducted in keeping with the Spirit of the Lord—that is, humbly, patiently, and lovingly. No other attitude would be pleasing to God and result in a ministry approved by him.

"By love unfeigned." Love, an unselfish desire to bless and help others, must be the motive for a ministry approved by God. Paul says it is to be an "unfeigned" love—sincere in its motivation. It would be possible to deceive our brethren, or any to whom we minister, as to our sincerity, but not the Lord.

He knows whether or not there is any element of selfish or worldly ambition in the sacrifices we make to promulgate the glad tidings. Paul stated it correctly when he said that though we may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if we have not love, it profits us nothing.—I Cor. 13:1-3

“By the word of truth.” We are not to preach our own opinions, or the opinions of others. The Word of truth, the Bible, contains the Gospel of Christ which we are to proclaim. We should be able to prove what we proclaim by a “thus saith the Lord.” Otherwise our preaching would be in vain. The truth of God’s Word as it is centered in Christ Jesus our Lord is the “word of reconciliation.” It is by this that people are drawn to the Heavenly Father, and it is under the influence of the Word of truth that they are led to dedicate themselves to his service.—II Cor. 6:7

“By the power of God.” A ministry of the Truth which is conducted solely by the power of oratory, or the influence of numbers, or on the basis of human prestige, is not acceptable to God. The power of God—his Holy Spirit—also works through the hearts and lives of those who, so far as their natural talents are concerned, can speak only, as it were, with a lisping, stammering tongue. Where his servants humble themselves and allow his power to work in and through them, their ministry is approved, regardless of their abilities and talents, according to the flesh.

“By the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” In Ephesians 6:13-17, Paul urges us to put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil in this evil day. He also identifies the various parts of this symbolic armor. He speaks of the girdle of truth, and the “breastplate of righteousness.” He says that we should have our “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” “Above all,” he admonishes, “taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.”

Another item of the Christian’s armor mentioned by Paul is the “helmet of salvation.” Since the helmet was worn on the head, it suggests our knowledge of the Truth—the things we know about God and his glorious design for the recovery of the lost race from sin and death. Another point we should by all means know is that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) This knowledge is essential in

order to conduct a ministry which requires much patience and long-suffering.

The last item of the armor mentioned by Paul is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Every part of the armor represents one application or another of the truth of God’s Word. The sword is chiefly an offensive weapon. However, we are not to slay others with the Word of God. Chiefly, it should be turned toward our own imperfections, and when used in the ministry of reconciliation, it should be with the thought that through imparting a knowledge of the Truth, our enemies may perchance appreciate it and become friends. The sword of the Spirit is directed against error, not personalities. When used properly, as it should be in our ministry of reconciliation, it will help to reveal the length, breadth, height, and depth of God’s love.

IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Continuing our lesson from II Corinthians 6, Paul points out, beginning in verse 8, various situations in which we will find ourselves, and admonishes preparation to meet them in the spirit of the Gospel which we proclaim: “By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true.” There is, on occasion, some honor attached to the ministry. Even some in the world appreciate the message up to a point, and respect us as we present it to them. However, we are not to become puffed up in these experiences. Neither should we be discouraged when our message is rejected, and we find ourselves looked upon with dishonor. Both the evil reports and the good reports are to be accepted as of the Lord.

When Paul speaks of our being “deceivers, and yet true,” he is not implying that followers of the Master will actually practice deceit. Rather, it is the Truth that is looked upon by those in darkness as being deceitful and untrue. We may well be referred to as “false prophets,” yet in reality, if we are conducting a ministry which is based upon the Word of God, it will be true, for it is the Gospel of Christ, which is “the power of God unto salvation.”—Rom. 1:16

“As unknown, yet well known.” (II Cor. 6:9) The Lord’s people, as a rule, are not well known. Often, however, through circumstances brought about by faithfulness in the ministry, we may for a time stand out in the eyes of our neighbors. As true Christians, we should accept both of these situations

with the constant desire that, regardless of what people may think of us, our Heavenly Father is to be glorified. How we rejoice to know that in God's due time the knowledge of his glory will indeed fill the whole earth "as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:9

"As dying, and, behold, we live." We are dying daily with Christ—sacrificially—yet we live because Christ lives in us. Additionally, by faith we rejoice in the hope of living with him in the kingdom, and sharing in the great future work of blessing all the families of the earth.

"As chastened, and not killed." As we are "workers together" with God, and conduct our share in the ministry of reconciliation, we are being trained for the future and glorious work of the kingdom. God may well use our trials in connection with the present ministry to thus chasten or train us, but we will not be "killed" by these, for we will realize that they are among the "all things" which are working together for our good.

"As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." In this chaotic world of suffering and death, if we are truly a tenderhearted Christian, we are sure to view with a measure of sorrow the plight of the groaning creation around us. Even our own experiences as an ambassador of Christ are bound to make us sorrowful at times. However, shining above these conditions, which might tend to discourage and sadden us, are the promises of God. These are a source of joy to us which the world can neither give nor take away. Thus, we should be able to rejoice, not in ourselves, nor in our surroundings, but in the Lord.—II Cor. 6:10

"As poor, yet making many rich." We are all "poor" in the sense that, as consecrated followers of Jesus, we have laid our all on the altar of sacrifice. If we are sacrificing our lives in the Lord's service, however, we are sure to be making others rich. We do not make others rich in worldly goods, but in their knowledge of God and of his plans. We provide riches by giving the promise that in God's plan there is an assurance of health, happiness, and the opportunity for everlasting life for all mankind. If any embrace this message fully, and accept the invitation to the High Calling, then they too will partake of the legacy of joy which Christ left for his followers, which will make them rich indeed.

"As having nothing, and yet possessing all things." As followers of the Master, and as workers together with God,

we should realize that nothing which we seem to possess really belongs to us. The earthly goods which the world treasures so much, we have laid upon the altar of sacrifice. We possess much, however, of the spiritual things of God. We have his promises, his assurance of care and guidance, the hope he has provided to us of a part in the heavenly phase of the Messianic kingdom. How boundless are the possessions—"all things"—which belong to us, if we have made a covenant of sacrifice.

ENLARGED HEART

In the items of truth which we have considered from II Corinthians 6, it is evident that Paul desired to present us with various details involved in living wholly for the Lord, devoting our all to his service, and doing this in a way that the "ministry" will have divine approval. It would seem that as Paul considered these truths, one by one, he became awestruck with their grandeur, and exclaimed, "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged."—vs. 11

Paul had labored much toward the brethren at Corinth. Unlike the brethren at Philippi, for whom he had no words of correction, there was still much to be desired from the Corinthian brethren. In his first epistle to them, he reminded them of their carnality as reflected in the divisions among them which were based upon personalities—some claiming to be the follower of one, and some of another of God's messengers. In addition, there was moral laxity in the ecclesia which Paul condemned, and instructed them to remedy.

In his second letter, there is evidence that much improvement had been achieved. Perhaps Paul had some of this in mind when he said that his heart was "enlarged" toward them. How glad he was to be able to speak to the brethren at Corinth of their having made significant spiritual progress. It was for this joy that his heart had grown in love on their behalf.

This attitude on Paul's part reveals his own maturity as a Christian. Whatever the Corinthian brethren had done in the past, he loved them, and in his heart a great joy welled up as he instructed them in the ways of the Lord more perfectly, and saw their positive response. Sometimes we may be slow to show such enthusiasm toward brethren who in the past, perhaps, had a wrong viewpoint on some point of truth, or some other defect which was displeasing to us. Let us, however,

follow Paul's example, who was genuinely joyful when his brethren showed progress in the narrow way.

Paul spoke these words as he concluded his lesson: "(I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged." (II Cor. 6:13) The details of an approved ministry, as presented by Paul, must have tended to enlarge the Corinthian brethren's hearts, as they did his. These great truths of the Word, which reveal the wisdom and love of God, should enlarge our hearts as we, too, lay down our lives in his service. Therefore, let us rejoice at every evidence of spiritual progress in our lives, and in the lives of our brethren, as we continue to develop the mind of Christ and become workers together with God. ■

CHAPTER 18

Peculiar and Zealous

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”
—Titus 2:14

THE WORD “PECULIAR” has attached to it today the thought of being odd, or strange, but in our text it means that which is very special, or beyond the ordinary. This is also the meaning of the Greek word from which it is translated. It is true enough that the world looks upon God’s people as being odd. However, our text is not describing the Lord’s people as they appear to the world, but as they are viewed by God. They are to him very special—a treasure in preparation to be a “royal diadem” in his hand, through which his glory will be reflected to all mankind in his own due time.—Isa. 62:2,3

Jesus was the first of these “peculiar,” special treasures, prepared by God to be the channel through which all the families of the earth would eventually be blessed. While on earth, he too encountered the general ridicule and disdain of the world, particularly the religious leaders of the day. In prophetic words, Isaiah described in advance this viewpoint of Jesus. “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; ... we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ... We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” —chap. 53:2-4

To God, however, Jesus was a “peculiar,” special treasure. Continuing his prophecy, Isaiah speaks of the Father’s viewpoint of his beloved Son. “The pleasure of the LORD

[God] shall prosper in his hand. ... Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.” (Isa. 53:10-12) As we strive daily to further develop the “mind of Christ,” we must take note of those things in his character and works which caused him to be considered such a special treasure to the Almighty. By emulating his “mind” and considering the many scriptures bearing on this important subject, we will be enabled, by God’s grace, to be esteemed by him as a “peculiar people,” and found worthy to “divide the spoil” of the heavenly inheritance with Christ Jesus, our Head and Forerunner.

PROMISES OF HELP

Because those called to the heavenly phase of the kingdom to be joint-heirs with Christ are a special treasure unto the Heavenly Father, he has made every necessary provision to supply all their needs. When they are weak, he gives them strength. When they are weary and faint, he refreshes them with the water of truth and the food of his Word. When they lack wisdom, he supplies their need. When they know not which way to go, his Word is a light unto their pathway, and they hear a voice behind them saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”—chap. 30:21

Many are the foes of God’s peculiar people, but he has promised to protect them, and for this purpose has provided the armor of truth, and the fortress of his Word. Thus they are assured that no evil can befall them, because greater is he who is on their side than all who are against them. They claim the promise, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”—Ps. 91:1

In their present fleshly state, God’s people are weak and blemished. They come far short of the perfect standard of righteousness to which they aspire. Even this, however, does not cast them down, for God has redeemed them by the precious blood of Christ. They are thereby purified and set apart to be coworkers with Jesus, who loved them and gave his life that they might live. With Paul, they exclaim, “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom. 8:33,34) In the comfort of this knowledge they press forward, confident that he who began the good work in them is abundantly able to complete it in his own due time and to his own glory.—Phil. 1:6

CONDITIONS ATTACHED

While it is a great honor to be a part of God's peculiar people, and most satisfying to realize how many exceeding great and precious promises he has made to us, we should ever remember that our standing before him in this position is conditional upon our faithfulness in doing his will. In this respect, we are in much the same position before God as were his typical people, Israel. To them, he said, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine."—Exod. 19:5

There are very few of God's promises which are unconditional. Israel failed to qualify as his peculiar treasure because they did not hearken to his voice and did not keep their covenant with him. It is because of their failure, and ultimate rejection of Messiah, that this opportunity came to believing Gentiles. That is why we have been privileged to hear God's call and have been granted the opportunity to be his special treasure. We are surely glad for this, but let us remember that the conditions of our acceptance still apply—conditions of obedience.

This thought is emphasized in our text by the statement that the peculiar people referred to are "zealous of good works." These two thoughts are inseparable. There is no way to qualify as a member of the peculiar-people class apart from being zealous, but simply being zealous is not sufficient. Unless the zeal is for good works, it will count for nothing.

This thought is called to our attention by Jesus. He said that many would come to him saying, "Have we not ... in thy name done many wonderful works?" However, the Master's answer is, "I never knew you." (Matt. 7:22,23) He doubtless knew they were working, but he knew also that the work of these zealous ones was not in keeping with his Father's plan, nor was it done from a proper condition of heart. Thus, it did not gain for them his commendation.

APPROVED WORKMEN

It is fundamentally important for all who aspire to be of the peculiar people class to make sure that their zeal is properly directed. Paul tells us how to do this. In his letter to Timothy, he writes, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (II Tim. 2:15) Those to whom Jesus will

say, “I never knew you,” will be very much chagrined because they had not sought diligently enough to show themselves approved unto God, even though by men they may have been approved.

The Scriptures speak of a “zeal of God” which is “not according to knowledge.” (Rom. 10:2) Such a zeal might be for wonderful works instead of good works. It could be the zeal to promote one’s own opinions and thus to gain the plaudits of men. It might be a zeal for following a human leader, or to build up an imposing organization. One might even have a zeal for the work that God wants done, and yet his zeal could be kindled by a wrong motive.

Paul calls our attention to this latter possibility, saying that though we bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and give our bodies to be burned, and have not love, it will profit us nothing. (I Cor. 13:3) It is a part of the good works of God to give our bodies figuratively to be burned. Paul invites us to do this very thing, saying, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

Jesus pointed out the terms of the narrow way to the rich young ruler, saying, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, ... and come and follow me.” (Matt. 19:21) Indeed, we are all invited to present ourselves and all we possess to God to be used by him as he may direct. However, if any other motive than love prompts us to do this, it means that we do not have the proper kind of zeal—not zealous of what God regards as good works.

SINCERE STUDY

Paul admonished us, as previously quoted, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God.” This is the only proper motive for Bible study, and it is well to examine ourselves to make sure that we are sincerely endeavoring to learn God’s will. The human heart is deceitful, and we need constantly to be on guard lest we find ourselves misusing the Word of God in an attempt to justify some private viewpoint of our own, or perhaps some special activity in which we wish to engage. This special activity may not be wrong from God’s standpoint. It may be a special service for which we might be naturally adapted. However, if done from the motive of vainglory or personal honor, and not to the glory and honor of God, then it would be in vain.

It is well in all our study of the precious Word of God to ask ourselves whether or not we are wholly motivated by the desire to know and do God's will. "Some read to prove a pre-adopted creed," wrote the poet, "thus understand but little what they read." We may fancy that we have no pre-adopted creed to prove, but let us be on guard, for surely we do not want to be workmen who shall be ashamed.

It is well to note that proper Bible study in itself is but a preparation for the good works which have God's approval. We need also to become God's approved workmen. We endeavor, through study, to rightly divide the Word of truth, in order that in our work for God we may be workmen who will not need to be ashamed—workmen to whom he will not need to say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."—Matt. 7:23

It is necessary to rightly divide the Word of truth in order to know what God wants us to do. We need to divide it dispensationally. For example, there was a time in the plan of God when it was God's will for his people actually to slay their enemies because their iniquity had come to the full. (Gen. 15:16) However, to do that now would certainly not be manifesting a zeal for good works, since Jesus commanded us, "Love your enemies. (Matt. 5:44) Citing another example, Jesus told his disciples not to go to the Gentiles, but that restricted commission does not apply to us today. Indeed, it was changed by Jesus himself, following his resurrection.

WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS?

Fundamentally, no works can be considered good which are not in harmony with the will of God. The young man who came to Jesus and inquired as to how he could attain eternal life addressed him as "Good Master." Jesus replied, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." (Matt. 19:16,17) Jesus did not mean by this that he himself was imperfect or a sinner. He was simply emphasizing the fact that the Heavenly Father was the source of all goodness.

Jesus disclaimed inherent goodness. All that he possessed had come from his Father. He explained that the words which he spoke were not his. They were gracious words, radiating sympathy, kindness and love. Any man could justly rejoice in such words, reflecting as they did such wondrous wisdom

and authority. However, Jesus took no credit for them. They were his Father's words, he explained.

The same was true of Jesus' miraculous works. How wonderful it must have been to bring joy into the lives of the people by opening their blind eyes, unstopping their deaf ears, cleansing them from the dread disease of leprosy, and raising their dead to life again. One less perfect than the Master, and less conscious of his utter dependency upon God for everything, might have been tempted to take just a little credit to himself for the good he was doing, but not Jesus.

He was quick to remind the people that the works which he did were not his works, but the Father's. Hence, when the young ruler addressed him as "Good Master," the first essential thing to do, as Jesus saw it, was to turn the young man's mind and heart to God, who is the fountain of all goodness. Upon the same basis of reasoning, we realize that in order to be zealous for good works, we must be fervent for the things which originate with God, the things of his plan, and the work in which he has invited us to colabor with him.

OBSERVING ALL THINGS

Following Jesus' resurrection, he commissioned his disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, teaching those who believed to observe all things which he had commanded them. (Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8) This commission has not been changed nor recalled, and obedience to it designates the followers of the Master as lights in the world. In God's providence, and in keeping with the orderly progression of his plan, the results of Christian work vary, but there is little change in the work itself.

For much of the present age, the preaching of the Gospel was like a sowing of grain, but at the end of the age, the result is likened to a harvest of the matured, ripened wheat. The basic principles of the Gospel, however, do not change. During the Dark Ages, very few understood or preached concerning the kingdom, restitution, or other facets of truth because it was not God's due time for a wide disclosure of his plan. However, as these coming events drew nearer, the Lord provided for a great outpouring of the Gospel message as the time of harvest began.

The good work of proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom means more than to merely give a witness. Those who accept as believing disciples, are to be taught to observe all the things which the Lord has commanded. This means that we

are to encourage those who have a hearing ear to present themselves in full consecration to God. Those who do this and thus enter into the fellowship of the saints are to be built up in the most holy faith. Thus we all have a responsibility toward each other, and if we are truly zealous for the good works of God we will delight in the privilege of laying down our lives in this divinely appointed service.

It is well to note the limitation placed upon our work by the Master. We are to proclaim the Gospel, but we are not to impose burdens upon the believers beyond what Jesus taught us to observe. If we study the Word with the sincere desire to know what the Lord has commanded in order that we may show ourselves approved unto him, it will not be difficult to discern between those things and the various side issues which may be suggested to our minds from time to time.

FUTURE GOOD WORKS

Jesus exemplified a further consideration of God's good works to be done on behalf of men—namely, healing their diseases and giving them life. The footstep followers of Christ are being prepared to share in this future glorious work. Referring to the works which he performed, Jesus said to his disciples, "Greater works than these" shall ye do. (John 14:12) These greater works of healing and restoring mankind to life everlasting are but the logical sequence to the work of this age. The Gospel message is a call to this work and an outline of the necessary qualifications to become partners in it.

One of these qualifications is a consuming zeal in the work of making ready for those future privileges. As Jesus commissioned us, we are to teach believers to observe all things which he commanded, but it is equally important that we observe the divine commands ourselves. We thrill at the thought of God's will being done all over the earth, and we rejoice in the hope of sharing in the work of reconciliation which will bring about this blessed condition. We pray earnestly, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) However, let us never overlook the necessity of having God's will done at the present time in our own mortal bodies. This is the great lesson we should be learning now. It is the principal and present result of the good work that should be consuming us, as daily we endeavor to pay our vows of consecration unto the Lord and zealously strive to conform to the "mind of Christ."

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Should there ever be any question in our minds as to how zealous we ought to be, we can settle that question by observing the example of Jesus. It was prophetically written of him that he would be eaten up, or consumed, by the zeal of God's house. (Ps. 69:9; John 2:17) The undeniable fulfillment of this prophecy, shown by the Master's untiring devotion to the work which the Father had given him to do, is a matter of record in the four Gospel accounts of his sacrificial life and death. It would be impossible for any of us to be more zealous than Jesus.

The Master's zeal was manifested, not only in his service to God, but also in his determination to serve in the manner outlined for him by the Father. His zeal was always according to knowledge, hence resulting in an acceptable sacrifice. We, too, should be concerned about the manner in which we serve, and the spirit in which we do it. We should also be concerned over the extent to which our own lives are conforming to the high standards of righteousness outlined for us in the Word of truth. We should have zeal for doing the right work, in the right way, and at the right time.

“UNDER A BUSHEL”

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus admonishes us not to hide the Gospel light “under a bushel,” but rather to put it “on a candlestick” that it may be seen. (Matt. 5:15) There are various bushels under which the light may be hidden. The fear of man is one of them. We may be inclined to keep the Truth to ourselves for fear of what our friends and relatives may think of us. Greater faith in God, more earnest prayers for his help, and a richer indwelling of the Spirit of love for him and for suffering humanity, will help to remove this bushel.

The bushel of limitation is sometimes suggested. Because some have shown a zeal that has not been according to knowledge, the tendency may be to suppose that a safeguard against misguided zeal is to have less zeal. The attitude is adopted that the proper course is to set a limit on what we will do for the Lord. However, this is a wrong way to correct an erroneous practice.

Instead of putting our light under a bushel by a diminished zeal, and a self-imposed limitation on how much time and energy we will devote to the spread of the Gospel, all we need

to do is to proclaim the message of truth, and be sure that our activity is motivated by the Spirit of the Lord. If we are doing these two things, then we can safely remove the limitations and give ourselves wholly and zealously to the blessed work of letting our light shine.

The bushel of misinterpretation will also hide the light if we permit it to do so. For example, the parable of the net cast into the sea describes the work of fishing, and later that of sorting the fish. (Matt. 13:47,48) Jesus had also said, "I will make you fishers of men." (Matt. 4:19) The suggestion is sometimes made that the work of fishing for men was quite proper throughout the age, and even during the earlier part of the Gospel Age Harvest, but now we are in the sorting time—hence no further fishing should be done.

We should remember, however, that just as it is the Gospel message that catches the fish, it is the same message that sorts them. It is God who decides who are acceptable to him, and his decision is based upon the manner in which each individual responds to the Truth when it is heard, and in order for the Gospel to be heard, even by those who already profess to be Christians, it must be proclaimed. Therefore, it is still the will of God for his people to continue sounding forth his message.

The instructions of God are so definite on the matter of Christian service that we may safely conclude that any interpretation of his Word, the purpose of which is to hold us back from a proclamation of the Truth, is fundamentally in error. Such interpretations can serve no other purpose than that of being bushels to hide the light of the Gospel, hence are contrary to the purpose of God in giving us the Truth.

Letting our light shine involves the sacrificing of the flesh, as represented by the breaking of the earthen vessels by Gideon's little band. (Judg. 7:19,20) Those vessels concealed the light, and not until they were broken could the light be seen. The flesh holds back from being sacrificed. Hence, as New Creatures, we need constantly to be on the alert to detect the false reasoning of our human minds in attempts to find excuses not to be zealous in the service of the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. We should learn to cast down these imaginations, or reasonings, which exalt themselves above the knowledge of Christ.—II Cor. 10:5

A NARROW WAY

The conditions upon which we may qualify to be God's peculiar people are very exacting. The way that leads to glory is a narrow one. Only the truly zealous and sincere will finally hear the Lord's "well done." The Apostle Paul expressed the proper viewpoint, when he wrote, "This one thing I do." (Phil. 3:13) We cannot hope to win the prize except by giving our undivided attention, first to learning the divine will, and then zealously doing it. Some of self and some of God will not do. None of self and all for God and for the doing of his will is what it means to be his peculiar people, zealous of good works.

We cannot attain to our goal in our own strength, but, as we have already seen, God has promised to help us. He will give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not a peculiar people to him because of what we are able to accomplish, either in ourselves or for others. God does not need our help. That which he treasures is our willing minds and hearts, our appreciation of his glory, our enthusiasm for his plan. If we are truly zealous toward everything for which he stands, he will make up the rest. He will give us strength, wisdom, and forgiveness, in order that we may be effectual and acceptable coworkers with him. How highly we are honored by God, and what a glorious provision he has made through Christ that we may prove worthy of that honor! ■

CHAPTER 19

“A Faithful Saying”

“It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”

—II Timothy 2:11,12

PAUL’S SECOND LETTER to Timothy was written in prison at Rome, most likely just before his death. He had reached the end of the narrow way of sacrificing and suffering, and was quite ready to be “offered up,” or to complete the offering which he began when it was pointed out to him by Ananias “how great things” he would be called upon to suffer for, and in the name of, his Lord. (Acts 9:16) He had admonished others to present their bodies a living sacrifice, and he had never held back from offering his own. (Rom. 12:1) He had fully developed in his being the “mind of Christ.” By looking at his experiences and the example of faithfulness he provided, we can be greatly assisted as we strive to develop that same mind.

From the beginning of his walk in the narrow way until the very end, which he had now reached, Paul had never wavered. As a Christian soldier, he had fought the good fight, and he had kept the faith. An important part of that faith was his confidence in the promises of God—those promises which Paul refers to in our text as “a faithful saying”—which assured him that if he suffered and died with Jesus he would be rewarded with the high honor of living and reigning with him. That is why he could write with such assurance that a “crown of righteousness” was laid up for him which the “Lord, the righteous judge” would give to him at

“that day,” and not to him only, but “unto all them also that love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:7,8

Paul had such implicit confidence in that faithful saying that he did not permit anything to swerve him from his course of self-sacrifice, no matter how much toil and suffering might be involved. We have an inspiring example of this on the occasion when brethren in the Lord endeavored to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit had testified that “bonds and afflictions” awaited him there.—Acts 20:22,23; 21:10-14

One less resolute in his determination to lay down his life in keeping with the terms of his consecration would gladly have taken the advice of his brethren and stayed away from Jerusalem. It was the Holy Spirit that had testified as to what could reasonably be expected. However, Paul did not agree with his advisers. Possibly he remembered the time when Jesus was likewise warned against going to Jerusalem where his enemies were plotting to arrest and kill him.

In Jesus’ case, the Holy Spirit had also testified what to expect. The testimony was not as direct as it was with Paul, but none the less definite. It had been given through the Prophet Daniel in connection with the “seventy weeks” which had been determined upon Israel, and that the Messiah would be cut off in the midst of the last of these “weeks,” or seven-year periods.—Dan. 9:25-27

From this prophecy, Jesus knew that the time had come for him to give his life for the sin of the world caused by Adam’s disobedience in Eden and, therefore, that it was the Lord’s will for him to go to Jerusalem where his enemies could lay hold upon him and put him to death. When Peter said, “Be it far from thee, Lord,” Jesus instantly recognized an effort on the part of Satan to thwart the divine purpose in his coming to earth. Jesus replied to his beloved disciple, “Get thee behind me, Satan: ... thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”—Matt. 16:22,23

Peter was expressing the fallen human viewpoint of self-preservation, whose author is Satan, rather than the divine principle of sacrifice. This selfish perspective has motivated mankind almost entirely since the fall, and has led to untold suffering by millions. When Jesus seemingly addressed Peter as “Satan,” it was merely from the standpoint that he was unknowingly expressing a desire which had its origins in the deceptive influences of the great Adversary.

Returning to Paul's experience, it is not clear from the record just why he was so convinced that it was the Lord's will for him to go to Jerusalem on this occasion. We may be sure, however, that he was not acting presumptuously. As matters turned out, it was his experience in Jerusalem which resulted in his being taken to Rome under protective custody by the Gentiles.

The point to be emphasized here is that Paul did not decide against going to Jerusalem simply because the Holy Spirit testified that bonds awaited him there. Under the circumstances, the obvious conclusion to be reached by human reasoning would have been that the Lord did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem. However, this illustrates the possibility of interpreting the providences of God incorrectly, and to favor the inclinations of the flesh to avoid trouble.

Paul, however, was not guided by human reasoning. He was convinced that the Lord wanted him to visit Jerusalem at this time, so he interpreted the Holy Spirit's testimony as being a test of his fidelity and of his determination to fulfill the terms of his covenant of sacrifice. He said to his well-meaning but ill-informed advisers, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."—Acts 21:13

FAITHFULNESS LED TO DEATH

Paul was seized by a mob at Jerusalem and, but for the intervention of Roman soldiers, would have been killed by the Jews. He was arrested and became a prisoner. Two years later, still as a prisoner, he had a long and much interrupted journey to Rome, during the course of which he suffered "perils in the sea" and of the land. (Acts 21-28; II Cor. 11:25-27) Reaching Rome, he continued to be a prisoner for at least another two years, although he was granted the privilege of living in "his own hired house."—Acts 28:30,31

It is inspiring to read the account of Paul's experiences of being brought before kings, traveling from place to place, witnessing to prison guards, being attacked by mobs, and faithfully preaching the Gospel wherever he went. This he did without regard to how much it must have seemed "out of season" for him to let his light shine. (II Tim. 4:2) How often when reading these thrilling accounts do we take into consideration the physical hardships involved, the inconveniences experienced, the heartaches and the loneliness entailed

in the conduct of such a faithful ministry? How many of us today would be willing voluntarily to follow a similar course of privation and hardship?

There is always the danger of interpreting the Lord's will in terms of which course in life will contribute most to our comfort, and result in the least hardship and privation. Indeed, God's will for any one of us might well result, at times, in experiences which are pleasant to the flesh, even as his will at other times might also lead to great sacrifice and suffering. The deciding factor, however, should not be how the flesh will be affected, but what the Lord wants us to do, and that decision must be reached through the guidance of his Word.

THE WAY OF SACRIFICE

We may be sure that Paul based his decisions upon the teachings of the Word concerning the privilege of the consecrated to suffer and to die with Jesus, inspired with the hope of living and reigning with him. The faithful "saying" he refers to in our text is in reality a teaching, or doctrine. It translates the Greek word *logos*, which literally means "word." Paul is not referring to any single statement or quotation, but to the general teaching of the Bible on this subject, a teaching which is clearly set forth in both the Old and New Testaments.

It is a "faithful" teaching, or as the Greek text puts it, "trustworthy." We can have confidence in these promises of God, for he himself is faithful, declares the apostle. (Heb. 10:23) To Paul the promises of God were so sure, and they set before him such a radiant joy, that he was given strength, even as Jesus was, to endure the cross and despise the shame, which his course of faithfulness brought upon him. (Heb. 12:2) Having full assurance in God's promises he counted his afflictions as "light" and of momentary duration when compared with the "eternal weight of glory" assured by the faithful saying.—II Cor. 4:17,18

FORETOLD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The faithful saying, or teaching—that those who suffer and die with Jesus shall live and reign with him—began to be set forth by God in the Old Testament. This was done first by types and shadows contained in the Tabernacle and its services, and later through the testimony of the prophets.

It has long been recognized that the sacrificial services of the Tabernacle in a general way pointed forward to the sacrificial phase of Jesus' ministry.

However, certain of those typical sacrifices also foreshadowed the fact that the followers of Jesus would have the privilege of laying down their lives as joint-sacrificers with him. This was especially true of the Atonement Day sacrifices which were offered yearly on the tenth day of Israel's seventh month. The animals offered for atonement on this Day of Atonement were a bullock and a goat—the bullock being offered first.

In keeping with God's instructions, the bullock was slain. (Lev. 16:11) Its fat was burned on the brazen altar in the Court. (vs. 25) Coals of fire from this altar, together with incense, were taken into the Holy, where the priest put the fire on the golden altar located there, and sprinkled the incense upon it. (vss. 12,13) The blood of the bullock was taken into the Most Holy and sprinkled "upon ... and before" the mercy seat. (vs. 14) The carcass of the bullock was taken "without the camp" and burned, creating, presumably, a stench in the nostrils of the Israelites encamped around the Tabernacle. (vs. 27) Then the Lord's goat was sacrificed. In the same manner as the bullock, its blood was sprinkled "upon ... and before" the mercy seat in the Most Holy.—vs. 15

This entire Atonement Day service might have remained merely an interesting story without special concern for us but for the fact that the Apostle Paul in Hebrews 13:10-13 refers to it, telling us that Jesus "suffered without the gate." This speaks to the fact that Jesus was not only crucified outside of the gate of Jerusalem, but suffered as an outcast from the social and religious systems of that day. Paul then invites us to go "unto" Jesus, "without the camp, bearing his reproach."

In Paul's reference to this typical lesson of the Tabernacle, he leaves no doubt as to the particular service he has in mind, for he mentions the fact of the blood being taken into the Most Holy for sin. There was no other service in which this was done (chap. 9:7), and in which the carcasses of the animals, whose blood was thus used, were burned outside the camp. Since there were only two animals thus sacrificed in the service, the conclusion is clear, based on Paul's testimony, that the typical bullock represents Jesus, and the Lord's goat represents the church, Christ's footstep followers.

What an accurate illustration this is of what was taught by Jesus and the apostles. The bullock and the goat both experienced the same treatment. On the occasion when two of the disciples requested to sit one on Jesus' right hand and the other on his left hand in the kingdom, he asked, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22) In other words, the Master pointed out to them that if they expected to live and to reign with him, they would have to suffer and die with him.

"LIKE ONE OF THE PRINCES"

The faithful saying, or teaching, concerning the rich reward which will be given to those who suffer and die with Jesus, is beautifully set forth in Psalm 82:6-8. In this prophecy, the footstep followers of Jesus are referred to as "gods." Jesus himself quotes this text and applies it to those "unto whom the word of God came." (John 10:35) In this reference, Jesus also reminds us that "the scripture cannot be broken." It is a faithful saying upon which we can depend. Indeed, the Word of God was provided especially for Christ's followers of this Gospel Age. Knowing this, Jesus said, in a reference to his disciples, "I have given them thy word."—chap. 17:14

It is certain, then, that the "gods" referred to in Psalm 82:6-8 are the followers of Jesus, here spoken of prophetically. Concerning them, the Lord declared, "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." It may seem strange that gods should die like men, and fall like one of the princes, especially since they are called the "children of the most High." However, the fact that they do "fall" like prince Jesus is one of the evidences that they are the sons of God. Perhaps Paul had this very passage in mind which, like the entire record of the Old Testament, was dictated by the Holy Spirit, when he 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

Indeed, these "gods" die. As the world looks on, they see nothing in their life of sacrifice essentially different from the manner in which all mankind is dying. Any difference the world might see is not, as a rule, considered commendable. Rather it is the reverse, as illustrated by the stench which arose from those typical carcasses burning outside the camp.

These “gods” lay down their lives in the service of their Heavenly Father, letting their light shine. The darkness hates the light, however, and the sacrifices of the light-bearers are often considered unnecessary and fanatical.

This, however, is not the viewpoint of our Heavenly Father, for “precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” (Ps. 116:15) The Hebrew word here translated “precious” means “valuable.” In I Peter 1:19, we read about the “precious blood of Christ” by which we were redeemed. Here the Greek word translated “precious” also means “valuable.” It is not difficult to understand that Jesus’ work of sacrifice, as illustrated by his shed blood, was valuable, but it is almost staggering to our faith to read that our Heavenly Father looks upon our sacrifice in the same way.

Paul understood this viewpoint of the faithful saying. That is why he wrote in Romans 6:10,11, that we should “reckon” ourselves to be dead “unto sin” in the same manner as Jesus “died unto sin,” and we know that this was as a sin offering. Earlier in this chapter, in verse 5, Paul explains that we are “planted together in the likeness” of Jesus’ death, and in these later verses he is merely providing the details as to what is involved in that “likeness.”

Certainly, however, we have no merit, or no life of our own which could be considered valuable in God’s sight. It is only valuable because “the life” we “now live” is the one we receive through faith in the shed blood of the Redeemer. (Gal. 2:20) Since God authorizes us to reckon the matter thus, let us rejoice the more in the faithful saying, and endeavor daily to be loyal to our covenant of sacrifice.

TO REIGN WITH HIM

The full beauty and sequence of the faithful saying recorded in Psalm 82:6-8 is somewhat hidden by an inconsistency in the translation of the Hebrew word *elohim* as “God” in the 8th verse. *Elohim* is the plural form of the word, and is properly translated “gods” in the Lord’s statement, “I have said, Ye are gods.” It is these “gods,” these mighty ones, these “children of the most High,” who “die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” It is clearly these same ones, having been faithful unto death, who, in the 8th verse, are bidden to “Arise, ... judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.”

There seems to be no good reason for breaking up this logical sequence of thought by translating *elohim* in the

singular, as it appears in verse 8 of the *King James* translation. In addition, who could be bidding God to “Arise,” and from what condition? The “gods” of verse 6 are shown as dying, as falling, being “planted together in the likeness” of Christ’s death. The faithful saying of the Scriptures is that those who thus suffer and die with Christ, shall live and reign with him. How appropriate that this thought is borne out, using the correct plural rendering of *elohim*, in the statement, “Arise, O gods, and judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.”—Ps. 82:6-8

Since it was Jesus who identified this prophecy as applying to his footstep followers, he may well be the “I” who, in verse 6, declares prophetically, “Ye are gods.” It could also be Jesus who is bidding his faithful body members to “Arise,” and “inherit all nations.” This would be in keeping with his statements in Revelation 2:10,26,27, and 3:21: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,” and “He that overcometh, ... to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron.” “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” Indeed, these come forth in the “first resurrection” to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.—Rev. 20:4,6

GLORY TO FOLLOW

Peter reminds us that the faithful saying, or teaching of the Lord concerning the “better sacrifices” of this age, and the exaltation to which they lead, was testified by the Spirit through the prophets. He speaks of it as “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (I Pet. 1:11) When Peter was with Jesus in the flesh it was very difficult for him to be reconciled to the viewpoint that one should suffer for doing good. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, however, he grasped the true significance of this phase of God’s plan, both as it related to Jesus and also the fact that we have the privilege of suffering with him.

The glory that should follow faithfulness in suffering and dying with Jesus is what the “exceeding great and precious promises” meant to him—those promises whereby we will be “partakers of the divine nature,” if we remain steadfast unto the end. (II Pet. 1:4) Like Paul, Peter considered these promises to be faithful sayings upon which the followers of the Master can depend. They encouraged and inspired him

to faithfulness, knowing that “even hereunto” he was called, “because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”—I Pet. 2:21

“THIS ONE THING I DO”

Paul was inspired and encouraged by the “faithful saying” from the beginning to the end of his ministry. During his first imprisonment in Rome, he wrote to the Philippian brethren about it, saying to them that he counted everything else in life as “loss” compared with the prospect of winning Christ and being a joint-heir in his kingdom. It was perfectly clear to him, however, that the attainment of such high glory with his Lord was possible only through “fellowship” in his sufferings, and being made “conformable unto his death.”—Phil. 3:7-14

At this point in his Christian life, Paul did not deem himself to have fully attained that for which he had been “apprehended of Christ Jesus.” He had not yet reached the end of the way, and therefore did not consider that his trial period was over. Earlier, Paul had admonished the Galatian brethren not to become “weary in well doing.” (Gal. 6:9) He had written to the Corinthian brethren that anyone too sure of his standing should “take heed lest he fall.” (I Cor. 10:12) Paul knew that he too was a man of “like passions” as the brethren to whom he wrote. (Acts 14:15) Since he did not believe that the time had yet come to take off the “harness,” he was not in a position to express himself too confidently.—I Kings 20:11

Paul did not intend to relax his effort. Whether the remaining time of his earthly ministry was long or short, he was determined to apply himself wholly to this “one thing” of running toward “the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13,14) In doing this, he said he would keep his body under, and “bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”—I Cor. 9:27

He had served long and faithfully, and at the cost of much weariness, hardship, persecution, and suffering. Now perhaps the most severe test of all was upon Paul. Many of the brethren with whom he served, and who could have been such a comfort to him in this hour of need, had turned against him—fearing, perhaps, that identity with Paul would lead to their own imprisonment and death.—II Tim. 1:15

We do not know all the details of the trial through which the apostle was passing. It is evident, however, that at the time he wrote this epistle he had already learned definitely that he would be executed. He had said earlier in his Christian life that he was willing to die in Jerusalem for his Master, but he was not killed, for Roman soldiers were there and rescued him. Now it was different. The servants of Rome were prepared to take his life, rather than save it. The end was certain, but Paul had not wavered. I am “ready to be offered,” he wrote, for “the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”—II Tim. 4:6,7

Had the apostle held back in the face of this final test, he could not have written so confidently. He had passed all the tests up to this point, and had not wavered in his “good fight of faith.” (I Tim. 6:12) He was ready to be given “the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Cor. 15:57) Therefore he wrote, “There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” (II Tim. 4:8) Only by the strength of his Lord had he received the news of his coming execution with courageous valor befitting a “good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (chap. 2:3) With determination he had continued doing “this one thing,” and now he had “apprehended.”—Phil. 3:12,13

Even so, the great apostle knew that he needed the Heavenly Father to help him through these final hours, just as he had leaned upon him throughout his entire pilgrim journey. He had learned to know his Lord intimately. “I know whom I have believed,” he wrote, “and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” “That day” would soon come when, by a Roman guard, his earthly life would be ended and he would fall asleep in death until the return of the Lord and the exaltation to glory of all those who “love his appearing.”—II Tim. 1:12; 4:8

We can have no doubt that throughout Paul’s last hours he continued to be strengthened by that faithful saying which assured him, even as it also assures us, that “if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.” (chap. 2:12) Paul did not deny the Lord even when doing so would have secured for him release from prison and from death. We know, too, that the Lord did not deny him, but stood close to strengthen and help him. Now that the Lord has returned in his Second Presence, we believe he has rewarded Paul with the “crown”—that

“prize” for which he so untiringly ran, and for which he gave up everything else in life. (James 1:12; Phil. 3:14) Let us emulate the mind and character of Paul, as he had the “mind of Christ,” and be instructed and strengthened by the “faithful sayings” of the Word of God, written for our admonition. ■

CHAPTER 20

Be Doers—Not Hearers Only

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

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF God’s law never change. Details of his will may vary as his plan progresses from age to age, but they are always in harmony with the basic standards of his just and righteous laws. The principles of the Law given to natural Israel were summed up by Jesus to be supreme love for God and love for our neighbors equal to that which we have for ourselves. These are as binding upon the followers of Jesus as they were upon those to whom the Ten Commandments were given through Moses.

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

The Apostle James, writing to spiritual Israelites of this age, said in the verses which follow our opening scripture, “If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [a mirror]: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty [in which we see the

perfect image of Christ], and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”—James 1:23-25

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

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) Rightly dividing God’s Word is not the ultimate objective of Christian Bible study, but rather a means to the goal that we may work for the Lord—the chief work being that of doing his will. We endeavor to rightly divide the Word of truth so that we may gain understanding as to how to be “approved unto God” and counted as “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.” It is doubtful that those who study the Scriptures from any other motivation than this will be permitted by God to continue in the light of truth. It is as true today as it was in Moses’ day that the things which God reveals are disclosed to his people so that they may be governed accordingly, and his will be done in and through them.

REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE

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

Although Israel pledged to do God’s will, they did not keep their covenant with him. God was long-suffering with them, chastising them for their backslidings, and forgiving them when they repented. However, intermittent and half-hearted

loyalty did not produce in the nation the growth in righteousness and degree of faithfulness which were necessary so that they might pass the test to which they were subjected when Jesus presented himself to them as their Messiah. The law which was given to them as a “schoolmaster” to bring them to Christ did not accomplish this intended purpose because they were not obedient to it, even in spirit. (Gal. 3:24,25) Hence, when Jesus came to them, his own Jewish brethren, “his own received him not.” (John 1:11) God had revealed his will to the nation—to accept their promised Messiah—but they did not heed it. Therefore as a nation they did not enter into the promised inheritance of joint heirship in the Messianic kingdom. Instead, Jesus said to them, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”—Matt. 21:43

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

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

BRANCHES BROKEN OFF

Jeremiah 11:16 describes Israel as a “green olive tree.” The root from which this tree was nourished was God’s oath-bound covenant with Abraham. That covenant provided for the development of a spiritual seed. (Gen. 22:17,18) It was to the spiritual seed of Abraham that the royal promises of the

kingdom belonged. The Apostle Paul explains that a greater portion of these Israelites, as the natural branches in this olive tree of promise, were broken off because of unbelief.—Rom. 11:17,20

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

This remnant of Israel was far too few to make up the total number of those whom God had foreordained to be joint-heirs with the Messiah. It is this that gave Gentiles the opportunity of becoming the fellow heirs with the Jews. Paul refers to these as "wild" branches which, "contrary to nature," are grafted into the "Israelitish" olive tree. (Rom. 11:24) This grafting of Gentiles is contrary to nature because nature's laws have decreed that any branch grafted into a tree retains its own characteristics, and not those of the tree into which it is grafted. How different it is, however, with the Gentile branches that are grafted into the symbolic olive tree. They no longer are Gentiles, but become "Israelites indeed." (John 1:47) Thus, the foreordained number of the little flock of spiritual Israelites who are to live and reign with Christ a thousand years will include those who were, by nature, both Jews and Gentiles.

THE HOLY NATION

What a wonderful lesson this is to emphasize the unchangeableness of God's plan and the necessity of obedience on our part if we are to have the privilege and honor of cooperating with God. Jesus said that the kingdom was taken from natural Israel and given to a nation bringing forth its fruits. Peter identifies this nation when, in writing his first epistle, he says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy

nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

Peter further explains that those Gentiles who now have the opportunity to be citizens of God’s holy and royal nation of spiritual Israelites were not previously the people of God. (vs. 10) These are the ones whom Paul speaks of as “wild” branches who are grafted into the “natural” olive tree. Every footstep follower of the Master who is a Gentile by birth should remember with humility that his privileges as a spiritual Israelite and the hope of glory as a joint-heir with Christ have been made available to him because natural Israel, as a nation, proved unfaithful. However, it is even more important for us to be conscious of the sobering truth expressed by the apostle, when he said, “If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.”—Rom. 11:21

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

GOD’S WILL

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

God’s command that we be “doers” of his Word is based on the great privileges he has afforded us, and the work necessary for us to fully attain them. He has revealed the mystery

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

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

Being doers with regard to our ambassadorship is briefly outlined by the prophet in Isaiah 61:1-3. It is presented as a commission of the Holy Spirit. Jesus applied this lesson to himself, and the Scriptures make it plain that it also applies to his body members—the entire Christ company. It is a commission to preach glad tidings to the meek, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, to bind up the broken-hearted, to declare liberty to the captives, to announce the day of vengeance of our God, and to comfort all who mourn. To carry out this commission it is essential that we know the plan of God, embracing the spiritual hopes of this Gospel Age and the great kingdom hope of restitution. It also requires that we understand why there is a great Time of Trouble now upon the nations, and what the joyous outcome of that trouble will be.

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

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

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

If our ministry is in harmony with the will of God, and our engaging in it is truly a doing of that which he has revealed to us, we will be faithful, come honor or dishonor, evil report or good report. We will be true to God and to the commission of his Holy Spirit, even though others may accuse us of being deceivers. Faithfulness in such an approved ministry of the Truth will mean that we are dying, sacrificially, with Christ, and have the hope of the divine nature as joint-heirs with him. Any chastening which the Lord may permit for our training will not discourage nor embitter us. Patiently enduring them, and seeking to be rightly exercised thereby, we will rejoice in the peaceable fruits of righteousness which they yield.—II Cor. 6:8,9

As the apostle further explains, while we endeavor faithfully to carry out the commission of the Holy Spirit in proclaiming the glad tidings, we may at times be sorrowful, yet we will always rejoice because of our inward realization that we are doing the will of God. We will delight in the privileges of making ourselves poor in order that others may be rich. The crown of our rejoicing in this will be in our knowledge that while having nothing because of sacrificing all to the glory of God, yet we possess all things, being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.—vs. 10

AN ENLARGED HEART

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

In these glorious fundamentals of the Truth, the followers of Christ will see reflected the image of God and of Jesus, and they will strive to have that image developed in their own lives. They will do this because they want to be like God and like Jesus, and also because they know it is a part of what God wants them to fulfill as doers of his Word. They will reflect upon the promises of God—the Abrahamic promise, the promise of restitution spoken by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets, the promise of the High Calling, the promise of Christ’s Second Coming and the fact that he is now invisibly present. Realizing that these are the things in which God has been interested and which he has caused to be recorded in his Word, the interest of true believers will also be centered therein.

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

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

ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF

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

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

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

From this we learn how God views our attitude toward the Truth. For us to lose sight of the main issues, putting them in the background and devoting a majority of our time to theorizing over unproven nonessentials, is a form of unbelief—an evidence that our hearts are not properly enlarged by the fundamentals of truth. This form of unbelief usually manifests itself in boasting against other branches—that is, claiming that we are more faithful to the Lord than are those

who do not agree with us, or who choose not to join us in such speculative thinking.

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

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

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

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

A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE

The abounding love of God should impel us to lay down our lives faithfully in his service. This was the practical lesson the Apostle Paul drew from the revealed plan of God toward both natural and spiritual Israel. After telling of the casting off of natural Israel, the privileges of the Gentile branches, and the final salvation of the branches that were broken off, he continues, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

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

CHAPTER 21

What the LORD Requires

“Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? ... 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?”

—Micah 6:6-8

THE DETAILS OF the divine will may vary in their application to us as individuals, yet the basic principles of what God requires of his people are the same for all. These basic principles have operated in the past—they function now, and they will continue to do so in the future. Our text summarizes the Heavenly Father’s requirements very simply: Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. It was these principles that Jesus perfectly exemplified during his earthly ministry, and which we as his disciples must also follow as we endeavor to fully develop the “mind of Christ.”

We are to appreciate that circumstances vary according to the will of God for a particular time. As an example, for anyone to humble himself before God during the present Gospel Age means walking the narrow way of sacrifice and suffering even unto death. This has been God’s will since the death and resurrection of Jesus. To humble oneself before God during the coming Messianic kingdom, however, will not mean suffering unto death. It will mean walking the highway of life, back to mental, moral, and character perfection as human beings on a restored and “glorious” earth. (Isa. 60:13) Nevertheless, all, whether in this age or the next, will have

to humble themselves before God. No blessings will accrue to those who do not.

The tendency of the fallen flesh is to lose sight of these fundamental principles of the Lord's unchanging requirements. The inclination is to seek ways of pleasing God that are less exacting—more satisfying to the flesh. This was true in the days of the prophet when our text was written, and it is still true today. To find an easier way of serving God usually means seizing upon some detail of his will and magnifying its importance to the exclusion of other divine requirements. We should always be on guard against such tempting practices.

Some of the results of this fallen tendency of the flesh are alluded to in our text. The prophet asks, "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" Under the arrangements of the Law given to Israel, God was pleased for his people, in certain instances, to offer rams in sacrifice to him, and to have them use oil in connection with their religious services. These things were commanded by God in the Law. The Israelites could not have neglected them and at the same time have been wholly pleasing to him.

However, rams and oil were not the only things that entered into God's will for his typical people. Even though a thousand rams were brought, and ten thousand rivers of oil were used, these would not give anyone license to ignore or omit the other requirements of God. As God said to his people through another of his prophets, "Bring ye all the tithes [not some, or most, but all] into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing."—Mal. 3:10

NEW TESTAMENT CONFIRMATION

The Apostle Peter's outline of the divine will for Christians is very comprehensive. After exhorting to add what are sometimes termed, the "graces" of the Spirit, the apostle tells us that if we do these things we shall not be "barren [idle] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," and we "shall never fall." (II Pet. 1:4-10) No half-measures are acceptable. The apostle's outline of the divine will includes not only the growth of grace in our hearts, but the outward expression of it in understanding and activity.

In these verses, the Apostle Peter says we are to add to our faith virtue—that is, mental and moral excellence. Virtue is very essential in the Christian life. Without it, we shall be of those who are simply tossed about by every wind of doctrine. To have virtue implies strength of character. This is derived from a living faith in God and his Word. We should endeavor to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. This we do by prayer, by study of the Scriptures, and by fellowship with the brethren. Let us not make the mistake of thinking, however, that we can stand in our own strength. If we do, we shall surely be thrown off our guard, and fall. As the scripture says, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”—I Cor. 10:12

Not only have we the need to increase in faith and fortitude, Peter says, but we are also to grow in knowledge. Paul states the matter this way, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Col. 1:10) If we are to increase in knowledge, then we must apply the knowledge as we acquire it. Rightly dividing the Truth and fidelity to all its principles are primary requisites to our growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.—II Tim. 2:15; II Pet. 3:18

Viewed from this standpoint, we can see that knowledge is fundamentally important to us as Christians. The Scriptures testify, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (I John 3:14; 5:19; Rom. 8:28) To “know” these things is essential to our walk in the narrow way.

While the attainment of an accurate knowledge of the Truth is of primary importance to the footstep followers of Jesus now, our ultimate goal is to share in Christ’s resurrection to the divine nature. (Phil. 3:10,11) It is through the knowledge of the Truth that we are able to keep the requirements of the Heavenly Father—to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before him, and thus be found worthy of such a great reward.

Our text says, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee.” The test which God applies as to whether we love him or not, is in the knowing and doing of his commandments. Jesus said, “He that hath my

commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.” (John 14:21) We need, therefore, both to know and to do the will of God. Indeed, if we do not know the will of God for us, we will be unable to do it.

KNOWING AND DOING

God shows us what is good, and what he requires of us, through a knowledge of his Word. It is also true that we cannot know what he requires of us unless we have a knowledge of his will. Therefore, knowing God’s Word, and his will as revealed in it, is of utmost importance to his people. Hence, the Scriptures say that we are to study for the purpose of showing ourselves approved unto God—not approved unto this brother or that sister, but approved unto God.

From this standpoint alone can we glory in the knowledge of God’s great plan of the ages—not merely because we know it, but because, through it, God has revealed his will to us. As we read in Jeremiah 9:24, “Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.”

PETER CONTINUES

In addition to faith, virtue and knowledge, Peter says that we need to grow in temperance, or self-control. (II Pet. 1:6) We are reminded here of the proverb which says, “Better ... [is] he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” (Prov. 16:32) “Self” rebels against the divine leadings and direction. It must be brought and kept under control. This task is made even more difficult by the fact that each day we observe a general absence of self-control in the lives of those not begotten to a living hope. Thus, in addition to our personal fight to attain self-control, we must resist the temptation to join in the world’s lack of this same quality. Only by increasing control of self—and self-will—can we hope to bring ourselves more and more into harmony with God’s will, and do what he requires of us.

Peter says we are to increase in patience. So many and varied are the obstacles in the way of the Lord’s people that we need to increase in patience if, as Jesus said, we are to “endure unto the end” of the way. (Matt. 24:13) If we do not increase in patience, we will become “weary in well doing”

and “faint” by the wayside. (Gal. 6:9) At times, we may deal justly with others, perhaps only to receive injustice in return. We may manifest love and mercy toward our neighbor, and not have it appreciated, but scorned. We may consistently walk in God’s way instead of our own way, while at the same time being opposed by those who have the spirit of the world, the flesh, and the Adversary. We will need much patience—cheerful endurance and constant perseverance—if we are to meet the three requirements of our text.

Building on what has gone before, Peter says we are to grow in godliness. The word godliness is translated from a Greek word which means: “piety,” “holiness,” “reverence.” We should certainly be of those who worship God in the spirit of holiness and reverence. How truly pious, holy and reverent was Jesus. He could say, “I do always those things that please him [my Father].” (John 8:29) Without reverence for God and for his Word, we could never be sure what God requires of us. When answering the tempter, Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4) Wherever we are—in meetings with the brethren, in our home, where we work—let us ever maintain our reverence for God and his son Christ Jesus.

Another “grace” Peter says we must add to our character is brotherly kindness. (II Pet. 1:7) That is to say, we should always have a deep and abiding interest in the welfare of our brethren. After exhorting the Christian to become fully equipped with the God-given armor, Paul then says, “Praying always ... for all saints.” (Eph. 6:18) Brotherly kindness implies our interest in one another is to be that of a spiritual family. This family includes not merely the brethren of the ecclesia to which we belong, but all the brethren throughout the world.

There is a danger at times of becoming constricted in our spiritual outlook. The Apostle Paul said, “Be ye also enlarged.” (II Cor. 6:13) While keeping the local viewpoint and its related privileges of service in mind, let us not lose sight of that broader perspective which takes in the interest of the Lord’s people and his work generally. We want to increase in brotherly kindness toward all. We do not want that narrow, confined, limited, and selfish spirit which says, as it were, “Bless me and my wife; my son and his wife; us four and no more.”

Finally, Peter tells us to increase in love, that ultimate divine principle of unselfishness. This unselfish love enables us to bestow blessings upon all those with whom we come in contact—brethren, families, neighbors, job associates, even our enemies. If we fail to increase in love, we cannot possibly meet the requirements of our text to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

After providing this list of graces to add to our character, Peter said, “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” (II Pet. 1:10) We wish to emphasize that he did not mean if you do one or two of them you will never fall. To use the illustration of our text—it is futile to come to the Lord merely with “rams” and “oil,” even though these might be great in quality and quantity. All the Lord’s requirements are important, and should be faithfully met to the best of our abilities.

PRAYER

One of the outstanding privileges and necessities in the life of a Christian is prayer. However, even prayer loses its true value when other features of God’s will and purpose for us are neglected and ignored. It is in prayer that we express our thanksgiving to God. We seek his forgiveness for our transgressions. We ask for strength and guidance in our daily efforts to meet his requirements. When the Scriptures exhort us to “pray without ceasing” and to be “instant in prayer,” it means that we should consistently maintain the spirit of prayer in all our enterprises. (I Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12) Prayer is not a ceremonial rite, but rather one of the divine provisions of grace.

Prayer is a means to an end, but not the end itself. It is very precious to the followers of the Master. Often it has been said that prayer is the vital breath of the New Creature. Yet, we should not engage in prayer to the exclusion or neglect of anything else. It is certainly a privilege and a necessity to come before the Heavenly Father with a liberal supply of the oil of prayer, but if we lose sight of the ultimate objective of our calling, even “ten thousands of rivers” of such oil will not enable us to fulfill that which God requires of us.

FOR THE BRETHREN

We are admonished to lay down our lives for the brethren. (I John 3:16) This sacrificial service is prompted by love. To do so means that God’s requirement of mercy and loving kindness

is being worked out in our lives. Let us be on guard, however, against having too restricted a view of who constitutes our brethren. We must not restrict our outlook merely to those with whom we are personally acquainted. Do not let us think that we have fulfilled our obligations when we have done what we can for the spiritual and material welfare of these, but have ignored the same needs of others of our brethren.

Sometimes brethren with whom we are not personally acquainted need our help. This was true in the Early Church. Paul visited both the Jewish and the Gentile brethren, building them all up in the most holy faith. Our interest should be for all the brethren. As opportunities arise, let us be prepared to disregard our own personal and local preferences, if by so doing the general interests of the Lord's people and his work are best served.

The Lord richly blesses those who make self-sacrificing efforts to help the brethren. Truly, this also is a part of that which God requires of us. It, too, is only a part and must not be so magnified and emphasized as to smother other requirements of the Heavenly Father. We need to exercise the spirit of a sound mind in all these things.

PREACH THE WORD

Another important element of God's will is given by Paul when he instructed Timothy to "preach the word." (II Tim. 4:2) Faithfulness in all the requirements of the Lord means that we will be doing what we can, both as individuals and ecclesias, in the work of spreading the Truth as a witness to our God, as well as for the enlightenment of those who will accept it and make it their own.

One of the evidences of life is activity. For the Lord's consecrated people, activity in his service should be the natural result of being filled with the Truth and its spirit. At the same time, however, we do not engage in any service of the Truth with the thought that by such faithfulness we can earn our way into the kingdom. It is by grace that we are saved, and it is also by grace that we will have a place in the kingdom. (Eph. 2:4,5,8) Jesus said, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) This will not be accomplished by works alone, but God wants us to appreciate his grace. He wants us to value it so highly as to be willing to spend and be spent in the telling of the Gospel message to others. As the poet has expressed it in

the words of the hymn, “Yet low in the dust I’d lay me That the world my Savior might see.”

In the economy of God, it has been so graciously arranged that the overflow of appreciation from the hearts of his consecrated people can be utilized by him for the blessing of others. Thus we can lay down our lives for the brethren. We can bear witness to the Truth. These things we can do with the assurance that our labor will not be vain. We can rejoice because we know that it is God’s will for us, and in so doing, we are walking humbly with him.

CONTENDING

Another detail of the Lord’s requirements for his people is found in Jude 3, where we are told to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” The exercise of this privilege has a very direct bearing upon our success in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God. If we appreciate the wonderful light of truth as we should, we will gladly and earnestly contend for it. We will guard it as a very precious treasure in our own hearts, and do all in our power to help others of our brethren do the same. If we are inclined to take the view that it really does not matter what we believe, then such an attitude should be regarded as a danger signal.

Failure to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints may be caused by specializing along only certain lines of what the Lord requires, to the neglect of other important elements. For example, perhaps the conclusion has been reached that prayer and brotherly kindness are the only essentials of Christian development—that it does not really matter what we believe or what others believe. Human reasoning might conclude that such an attitude is a noble exercise of tolerance, but it sometimes arises because faith has been lost in one or more doctrines of truth which we come to regard as no longer important or applicable. The Scriptures clearly teach that we are sanctified by the Truth. (John 17:17) Thus we should earnestly contend for the Truth by which we are sanctified, keeping it clean, pure, and bright.

JUSTICE, MERCY, HUMILITY

To do justly means to obey the Golden Rule, as stated by Jesus with these words, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” (Matt. 7:12)

This is a high standard, and should be always kept in mind in our dealings with others. We are also to love mercy—that great principle of unselfishness which is the basis of all God’s works and ways. The Psalmist David says, “The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear [reverence] him.” (Ps. 103:17) Blessed, indeed, are “the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) Very little, if any, progress can be made without the quality of godlike mercy.

Even though we do justly and love mercy, we will come short of what God requires of us unless we also walk humbly with him. This means we are to sacrifice our little all upon the altar of God’s will. He wants us to bring to his altar our “rams” and our “oil.” Most importantly, however, he wants us to bring anything and everything he may ask for—indeed, life itself. We have been shown in the Scriptures what is good, and what God requires of us. It is for us to live prayerfully and zealously day by day, keeping these requirements in mind, and endeavoring to live up to them.

Let us continue to rejoice in the knowledge of the Truth, and do all in our power to show our appreciation to God for the fact that he has taken us into his confidence and under his wings. The Heavenly Father has revealed to us his gracious plan of salvation. We can know nothing about his plan except as he reveals it to us through his Word. As we are able to view all matters from the divine standpoint, our lives will be blessed even in the midst of earth’s lamentations.

It is true that we long to see the end of suffering, dying, and death. Let us realize, however, that our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus are even more interested in the human family than we are. God’s wisdom knows best just how fast his plan of the ages should progress. Like the skilled surgeon who cuts deeply in order to heal, so the Lord in his great abounding love, and vastly superior wisdom, knows exactly what is best for all individuals in order that their everlasting blessing may be assured.

GOD WILL HELP

Let us be assured that God will help us day by day. He helped his people in ages past, and we can witness that his love is still the same. He will assist us through the blessed assurance of his Word, and through fellowship with those who are truly his. He will help us in his providential overruling of all our

affairs, and in permitting those experiences which, if rightly received and endured, will make us vessels fit for the Master's use, now and in the future.

From the human viewpoint, the entire world scene is dark, confused, and full of anxiety. How blessed it is in this time of the world's perplexity to have a theme of life that lifts us above the trouble, and keeps us rejoicing in the blessings that are ahead. Our whole course in life should be governed by the knowledge that the present evil order of things is soon to give place to the new order of things—the restitution of all things as spoken in the Scriptures.—Acts 3:19-21

As followers of Christ, we must continue to be guided at all times by the Heavenly Father's Word, and more earnestly than ever before, "seek ... first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." (Matt. 6:33) Let us resolve that we will zealously do all we can to lay down our lives for the brethren, and to comfort and cheer others by bearing witness to the glorious Messianic kingdom, so near at hand. While doing so, let us ever keep in mind that which the Lord requires of us—"To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." ■

CHAPTER 22

Our “Iron Gates”

*“They came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city;
which opened to them of his own accord.”*

—Acts 12:10

WHEN JESUS, IN Gethsemane, faced the mob that had come out from Jerusalem to arrest him, Peter drew his sword and, in an effort to rescue the Master from his enemies, cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. Jesus commanded Peter to put up his sword. He healed the injured man’s ear, and then indicated that he had merely to ask the Father and twelve legions of angels would be sent to protect and deliver him.—Matt. 26:51-53; Luke 22:50,51; John 18:10,11

Later, when Jesus was before Pilate, charged with claiming to be a king, this Roman governor was somewhat irritated because the Master was so uncommunicative. He asked Jesus if he did not realize the authority of his position and what it would mean to get a favorable decision from him. However, Jesus answered, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.”—John 19:11

These two statements, by which Jesus affirmed his complete conviction of his Heavenly Father’s overruling providence in his life, should be a great source of confidence to us who are following in his steps and striving to develop the “mind of Christ.” While Jesus did not expect that his Heavenly Father would deliver him from all trouble, he had no doubt of divine ability to do this. He knew that he was to die for the sins of the world. If he should be spared from suffering and death, “How then,” he asked, would “the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”—Matt. 26:54

Shortly after Jesus commenced his ministry, the religious rulers of Israel began to show their opposition. They would have liked to do away with him long before they did. Jesus knew this and avoided situations that would give them their coveted opportunity. His Heavenly Father cooperated with him in this. We may be sure that all the powers of the Roman Empire enlisted on the side of the Master's jealous enemies could not have touched so much as a hair of his head until the "due time" came.

There was in God's plan, however, a due time for the Redeemer to give his life for the sins of the world. Jesus knew when that time was to come. He told his disciples, even before he went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with them for the last time, that he would afterward be arrested and put to death. He knew that this was God's will for him.

Twelve legions of angels were ready to protect him from harm. These were more powerful than all the armies of Rome. Pilate would have been helpless to do anything against the Master had it not been permitted by God. However, Jesus knew that it was the Father's will that he should die, so he did not ask for the host of angels to protect him from his enemies. His only way of escape from trial, now that his hour had come, was through death.

WE WALK IN HIS STEPS

As Jesus was, so are we in this world. We have covenanted to walk in his steps, develop his mind, and be "crucified" with him. (Gal. 2:20) This is a difficult thought to fathom. We know what it meant for Jesus to be crucified, and the Scriptures use this word to describe our own experiences as we endeavor to walk in his steps. Yet, at the same time we may wonder why we have such severe trials—why God does not deliver us from "fiery furnace" experiences and allow us to enjoy the apparent joy and peace that seemingly fill the lives of other Christians.

There are many promises in the Bible which assure us of God's ability and of his willingness to protect us from harm. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High," says David, "shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." (Ps. 91:1) Indeed, the Almighty is just as capable today of sending those twelve legions of angels to protect us as he was when Jesus was delivered into the hands of his enemies.

With us, however, as with Jesus, there is a due time as well as a proper way of deliverance. The lesson we need to learn is that of simple trust in our God and humble submission to his will. Jesus prayed, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” (Matt. 26:39) Jesus desired that his Heavenly Father’s will be done more than he desired release from suffering. This should be our attitude in every trial, hardship, perplexity, disappointment, and faith-trying experience with which we are confronted.

GOD’S WILL FOR PETER

Our opening text brings before us a marvelous providence of God in the life of the Apostle Peter. The miraculous power of God was employed through an angel to deliver the apostle from prison and certain death at the hands of Herod. This deliverance was accomplished, not because it was the general plan of God to protect all his consecrated people from bodily harm, but because he had further service for Peter to perform and further lessons for him to learn.

In the beginning of the chapter, we are informed that Herod “stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” (Acts 12:1,2) No angel was sent to prevent this killing. We cannot believe that this was because James was not faithful to the Lord. It was simply that God had another way for him to “escape”—in the sleep of death. Thus, we understand that God’s providential care for his people is not always manifested in the same way.

As Herod “stretched forth his hands” further, Peter was caught and imprisoned. In doing this, Herod was seeking to please the Jews, over whom he ruled as the representative of Caesar. It was the Passover season, and he was sufficiently acquainted with Jewish customs to realize that until these special days were ended, the interests of the Jews would be well taken up. Therefore, he decided to hold Peter in prison until afterward and then bring him forth to make a public demonstration of his killing.—vss. 3-5

Meanwhile, however, the brethren prayed. We cannot imagine that these consecrated followers of Christ “demanded” of God that he use his power to protect Peter. They no doubt had earlier prayed on behalf of James, who was “killed ... with the sword,” in a similar manner as Jesus had prayed while in

Gethsemane: “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” In Jesus’ case it was not possible—it was not God’s will for him—nor was it his will that James be spared from death at the hands of Herod.

The disciples did not lose their faith. They prayed for Peter also. It was the Father’s will that Peter should also die as his Master did. Jesus had prophesied this. (John 21:18,19) However, as with Jesus, so with Peter, and so with every one of us, there is a due time for all our experiences, and this was not the due time for Peter to finish his course in death.

Peter was “kept in prison,” we read, “but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” (Acts 12:5,12) What a beautiful picture this portrays in our minds—Peter in prison, the brethren gathered in the home of Mary, the mother of Mark, praying. These devoted disciples had no assurance that the hands of Herod would not soon reach them also, but they prayed for Peter.

Meanwhile Peter, chained between two soldiers, was “sleeping.” (vs. 6) What an example of faith we see in this. Chained between two guards and held in prison with a threat of execution hanging over him—yet Peter slept. He had such confidence in the Lord that he was able to leave everything completely in his hands, knowing that whatever his will might be for him, it would be the best.

Peter, who was so greatly disturbed when Jesus was arrested and attempted to use his sword to deliver the Master from his enemies, had learned his lesson. He had learned it so completely that now, when similarly held in custody and threatened with death, he could lie down and sleep, leaving the outcome of his experience wholly with the Heavenly Father. This circumstance reminds us of David’s attitude. When his enemies were pressing hard against him, he wrote: “LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.”—Ps. 3:1-5

Thus it was also with Peter. He knew that the Lord was his shield and his salvation, so he “slept.” Peter also “awaked” because God sustained him. An “angel of the Lord” appeared

before him and “smote Peter on the side, and raised him up.” The angel then said to him, “Arise up quickly.”—Acts 12:7

What a startling, and at the same time, happy awakening this must have been. When, in faith, Peter fell asleep chained between the two guards, there may have been a fleeting thought passing through his mind that possibly he would be smitten by them, awakened, and hurried to his execution. Little did he perhaps realize that he would be awakened by an angel. Not only was he awakened, but his chains also fell off, and he was bidden to arise. He was told to gird himself, put on his sandals, and follow the angel. Peter obeyed, and followed him. (vss. 8,9) This indicated that he was to leave the prison—but how? True, he was no longer bound to his guards by chains, but he was still locked up within the prison. He would surely be soon apprehended by other guards, and appeared to have no realistic hope of getting through the doors of the prison to freedom on the outside.

These thoughts may have occurred to Peter, but the account does not record them. We know only that Peter followed the angel, being unaware of exactly what was happening. He was, in fact, not sure that he was actually awake, thinking that perhaps he was having a dream or seeing a vision. The important thing, however, is that he followed, doing exactly as he was instructed. There is a lesson in this for all the Lord’s people when passing through severe trials. The Heavenly Father always sends an angel to conduct us through them. As “ministering spirits,” they are always near to help and direct us, if we obediently “follow.”—Heb. 1:14

These angels do not now speak to us audibly, nor do they appear in visible form, but they are able to overrule our experiences in such a manner as to be a positive and directing influence in our lives. We often speak of the providences of God, but we should also realize that our ministering spirits are helping to shape those providences. They may not always lead in the direction of lighter burdens or less fiery trials. However, if we follow them, they are sure to lead us finally to victory and glory.

IRON GATE “OPENED BY ITSELF”

Peter followed the angel “past the first and the second ward.” (Acts 12:10) Thus far there was no interference. Who or what could interfere with the angel of the Lord? Then they came to the iron gate that led to the city. This apparently was

the last barrier, but it was a formidable one. Whether Peter was thoroughly awake by now and fully understood what was taking place is uncertain. Although we are not told, perhaps he wondered how, or by whom, that iron gate would be opened.

The account simply tells us that the gate “opened by itself.” (*Contemporary English Version*) In this day of modern technology, gates and doors are opened automatically by various man-made devices. In many cases, the person or vehicle approaching is electronically identified and sets a mechanism into motion which opens the gate for their passage, and then closes it afterward. No such apparatus opened the iron gate of the Roman prison in which Peter was incarcerated. It was the Lord’s angel who went into action, as Peter approached, and swung the gate wide open. Indeed, it was a miracle, but only by a miracle could God deliver his servant and make him available to render further service to his people.

Peter passed through the iron gate to freedom, and then “the angel departed” (Acts 12:10), leaving Peter to find his way to the home of Mary and to his friends and brethren who were praying for him. The direct services of the angel were no longer needed, reminding us that the Lord gives us help only to the extent actually necessary. He furnishes us with our “daily bread” one day at a time, not for a year in advance.

Past the iron gate and out of prison, now fully awake, Peter meditated on the meaning of what had happened. He came to the definite conclusion that there was no other explanation than that God had sent an angel to deliver him. Fortified by this knowledge, he sought out the house of Mary, the mother of Mark. It was here that the brethren were praying for him.—Acts 12:11,12

Peter knocked at the door, attracting the attention at first of only a “damsel”—a young maidservant. She recognized Peter and quickly reported to the others that he was at “the door of the gate,” but was evidently too excited and did not think of opening the gate to permit him to enter. When she told the brethren that Peter was outside, they said to her, “Thou art mad.” (vss. 13-15) This does not necessarily indicate that these brethren lacked faith in the efficacy of their prayers. James had already been killed by Herod. Perhaps they had concluded from this that Peter would also be killed.

Most likely, their prayers for Peter had been in the nature of the one offered by Jesus, "If it be possible, let this cup pass." The main burden of their prayers was probably that Peter be given grace and strength to meet this severe test. These prayers were wonderfully answered, not only by his deliverance, but also by the fact that while in prison Peter was able to lie down and sleep while chained to the two guards.

God's providences are not always the same for all his people. James was killed, but Peter was saved from death at that time—saved for further service, to continue feeding the Lord's sheep, as he had been commissioned by Jesus. He was saved in order that through his continued faithful ministry he might further "strengthen" the "brethren," as Jesus had also told him he would have the special privilege of doing.—John 21:15-17; Luke 22:32

OUR "IRON GATES"

We look back upon the experiences of Jesus and the apostles, and note the miraculous manner in which God dealt with and blessed them. In doing so, we perhaps wish we could have been there and shared in some of those thrilling episodes. Sometimes our walk with the Lord may seem void of outstanding evidences that he is actually by our side, that his angels are encamped round about us, that every detail of our lives is being supervised by his wisdom, and that we are protected by his power and enriched by the abundance of his grace and love.

It should occur to us, however, that it requires greater faith to trust in the Lord when the outward manifestations of his keeping power are difficult to discover. Peter could always look back upon his experience of being delivered from Herod's prison as a proof of God's overruling providences in his life. It was so definite, so outstanding, that there could be no mistaking its blessed and reassuring implications. The opening of his iron gate was a lasting memorial of God's power to deliver him from evil.

We all have our iron gates to pass. If we are following the Lord's leadings, putting our trust fully in him, these may also open as we approach them. When they do, they will seemingly open of their own accord. We do not need to force the opening of these gates in an attempt to escape from trials which God in his wisdom sees that we need.

“IN PLEASANT PLACES”

Of Jesus it was prophetically written, “Lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” (Ps. 16:6) The word “lines” as used here means a “measured portion” of action or experience. Jesus had a measured course in which to walk, and to be pleasing to his Heavenly Father, it was necessary for him to keep within those boundaries.

So it was with Peter, and so it is with us. This is well illustrated by the manner in which Peter was led out of the prison. He followed the angel, who led him past the first and second wards, and then to the iron gate, which opened of its own accord. Had Peter decided that he knew a better way out of that prison, and had he not followed the angel, he would not have been delivered. Let us suppose that Peter knew the location of the iron gate and, realizing that the angel was leading directly to it, decided to take another route, hoping to find an exit not so firmly closed. We know what the result would have been.

The short journey from the prison dungeon, past the wards, and through the iron gate to freedom, might well illustrate our entire walk in the narrow way. Our “lines” of direction are God’s “measured portion” for us. They are the lines contained in our covenant by sacrifice. With Jesus, these lines had “fallen ... in pleasant places,” because he delighted to do his Father’s will. God’s will was not in itself always pleasant, but the “cup” of experiences Jesus passed through became pleasant in the certain knowledge that it was what the Heavenly Father had outlined for him.

It should be the same with us. We begin our consecrated life with the determination that we want only the Lord’s will to be done. The lines which mark out his will are clearly traceable in his Word. We claim his promises to lead us and to give strength for every time of need. We are conscious of the fact that his angel is by our side, so we have no need to fear.

We may often wonder about the trials that loom up before us. Frequently, when we awaken in the morning we perhaps are unsure, or even fear, how we will get through certain experiences which we know we will have to face that day. They are sometimes only little things, yet nevertheless, they are our iron gates. If, however, we follow the “angel” and do not attempt to go in some other direction, which for the time may seem better to us, those gates will frequently open of their “own accord” as we approach them.

If we are noting well all the little experiences of our lives, we will find that many iron gates open for us every day. As followers of Christ we should be able each night to look back and praise the way God has led us that day. We should be able to discern the opening of the iron gates and give thanks for the abundance of the Lord's strength, wisdom, mercy, and love.

In the case of Peter, the iron gate stood between him and freedom. Even more importantly, it stood between him and continued service to the Lord and the brethren. We, also, have this type of iron gate. No consecrated follower of the Master should be contented when not doing everything possible in the service of the Lord. Yet, with all of us there are hindrances—iron gates—that may at times hold us back from doing as much as we would like.

With some it may be job or family responsibilities, limitations due to age or health, or other hindrances which the Lord in his wisdom does not deem best to change. We may try, as it were, to peer beyond this iron gate and think how wonderful it would be if it would only open and permit us to go out into the service of the Lord as Peter did. However, evidently the Lord's "lines" have not thus fallen for us—not yet, at least.

On the other hand, there may be a service we can render within the confines kept closed by our present iron gate. Let us remember the case of Paul. From the time he was taken into protective custody in Jerusalem by the Romans, throughout his long and tedious experiences en route to Rome, and then for years as a prisoner in Rome, he was inside his iron gate. The angel of the Lord did not lead him immediately to freedom as was the case with Peter.

Nevertheless, Paul found service. He witnessed to princes, rulers, prison guards, and many who called on him. From behind the iron gate in Rome, he sent letters to the brethren to comfort and strengthen them. We may be able to do likewise. Whatever the iron gate may be that is preventing us from serving as freely as we would like, we should look for opportunities that may exist within the confines of our present situation. Where none may immediately present themselves, we should always leave the matter in the Lord's hands.

This is what Peter did. Chained between two guards, he fell asleep. We can "sleep" also—that is, rest in the Lord, even

though we may feel that we are chained and restrained. It would have done Peter no good that night to lie awake and worry about the chains that were binding him or about the iron gate that stood between him and freedom.

Similarly, when Paul and Silas were in prison at Philippi, they sang hymns. In his own way, the Lord delivered them, and in connection with their incarceration, the jailer received the Truth. (Acts 16:23-33) Thus, let us endeavor to rest in faith and to rejoice in the Lord, no matter on which side of the iron gate our lines may have fallen.

We may be striving for victory over some imperfection of the flesh, a weakness that may be keeping us bound or hindering our progress in the narrow way. The Lord can open this iron gate for us also, if and when it is his will. The lesson he wants us to learn in all these experiences is that he knows what is best for us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. We will rejoice in the Lord as we learn this and never try to force open our iron gates by our own strength.

As Peter looked back upon his deliverance from prison, one of the blessed assurances that it was only by the Lord's overruling providence was the fact that the iron gate opened of its own accord. May we look for similar providences of the Lord in our lives. Whether the Lord opens our iron gates or keeps them closed, let us so delight in his will that we will never be tempted to tamper with the gates ourselves, or redirect our path in "lines" not marked out by God.

We might, perhaps, force open an iron gate that is standing between us and what we would like to do. If we did, however, how could we know that it was of the Lord? This does not mean that we should go through life in a spiritually listless manner, taking little or no interest in God's providences. If we are fully consecrated to him, watching and praying for his guidance and blessing, we will want to be serving him. If an iron gate is standing between us and his service, we will sincerely desire to be on the other side of it, but only if it is his will. If it opens of its own accord, we will rejoice and with diligence enter into a wider field of service thus made possible. However, if the gate remains closed, we will gladly do what we can on the "inside."

There is an iron gate that stands between all the Lord's people and that glorious liberty of the sons of God beyond the veil. While we are on this side of that gate, we are all bound and hindered by the flesh and other circumstances

from doing the things that we would. In the Lord's due time, and if we are "faithful unto death," this last iron gate also will open of its own accord. Then we will be truly free and in the presence of our God, where there are "pleasures for evermore."—Ps. 16:11 ■

Accepted of God, Whether “Present or Absent”

“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”

—II Corinthians 5:8,9

THE WORDS OF our text and its surrounding verses express the heart testimony of the Apostle Paul and all those striving to be of the body of Christ. Each of us realizes that our ultimate goal and desire is to be “present” with the Lord and “absent” from this fallen body of flesh. Yet, it is needful for us to abide in this “earthly tabernacle” for a period of time in order that we be tested and proven fully faithful to our vows of consecration, as well as to develop the necessary character to be part of the sympathetic high priest—the Christ, head and body—in his kingdom.

Although we may not at first have fully realized it, our forerunner, Jesus, also faced this same set of circumstances during his life on earth, particularly as his ministry drew to a close. He told his disciples, “I go to my Father, and ye [shall] see me no more.” (John 16:10) It was his great desire to return to the presence of his Heavenly Father, with whom he had been for so long in his prehuman existence. He understood, however, the need for his earthly pilgrimage, and the many trials and testings which accompanied it. Making these circumstances even more challenging, perhaps, was the fact that while on earth he had come to greatly love and sympathize with the poor groaning creation which surrounded him.

Jesus also had a special love for his chosen disciples and others who had believed his message and grown very close to him. He had wept when seeing the sorrow of his friends at the death of Lazarus. (John 11:33,35) When gathered together in the upper room with his disciples for the last time, the Apostle John recalled, concerning Jesus, that “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”—chap. 13:1

Later that evening, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father with regard to what at first seemed to be a mixture of sentiments. Yet, it was with clarity that he approached the matter. He said, concerning his earthly ministry, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me ... with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” (chap. 17:4,5) He knew that it would soon be time for him to be “present” with the Father and “absent” from the flesh. Knowing that this meant he would then be physically apart from the disciples whom he loved so much, and no longer with them in the flesh, he prayed on their behalf: “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.”—vs. 11

IN THIS TABERNACLE, WE GROAN

We, likewise, are Jesus’ disciples, seeking to follow in his footsteps and develop in ourselves the “mind of Christ.” To us, the same conditions as described in our text apply. We must be “accepted” in order to be “present with the Lord” and “absent from the body.” In the first four verses of this chapter, Paul contrasts our body of flesh with our future heavenly body to be received in the resurrection. He speaks of the fleshly body as a “tabernacle” in which we live. In this tabernacle, he says, “We groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” “Not ... that we would be unclothed,” he adds, “but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”—II Cor. 5:2,4

Paul knew that in his day, and throughout the Gospel Age, for a faithful Christian’s earthly tabernacle to be “dissolved” (vs. 1) meant being “unclothed” or “naked” in the grave, until the resurrection. He would be, to use the language of another passage, a “bare grain” sown in death, there to remain until given his new spiritual body in the first resurrection.—I Cor. 15:37

To be clothed ultimately with a heavenly body has been the hope of Christ's footstep followers. Paul says, "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." (II Cor. 5:5) This "earnest of the Spirit" is God's pledge of the joy and blessing we, if faithful, will have when, in the first resurrection, our hope is changed into reality.

In several instances, Paul uses the reality of our future reward to illustrate the blessings which in a small way we now enjoy by faith. He says, "As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4) This does not mean that our resurrection has actually taken place, but merely that we should walk as though it had—in "newness of life." When Jesus was resurrected, all his former environment and experiences were left behind. By faith, we should endeavor to live as completely apart from the world and from all the "old things" of life as possible.—II Cor. 5:17

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul employs this same method of illustrating the new life of the Christian. Here he speaks of our being blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." These "heavenly places" indicate the high position of glory to which Jesus was exalted in his resurrection. (vs. 20) By faith, and in the spirit of our mind, we are now dwelling with him in these heavenly places.

In the context of our opening verses, Paul is employing this same method of illustrating our present heritage as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. As we have seen, he first speaks of our earthly tabernacle in which we "groan," contrasting it with our "house which is from heaven." (II Cor. 5:2) Thus he reminds us of the unsatisfactory conditions which we must now endure, and holds before us that great ecstasy of joy which we will experience when in the resurrection we receive our new heavenly bodies.

BEING "PRESENT" WITH THE LORD

The apostle explains that even now, through the "earnest of the Spirit," we can, by faith, be in the presence of the Lord while actually dwelling in our earthly tabernacles. In II Cor. 5:9, he says, "We labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted." Here, he is speaking symbolically, using our present sojourn in the flesh and also our glorious future home in heaven, to show that in either condition we can be

“present with the Lord” and “absent from the body.” It is in view of both our present condition and our future hope that we thus “labour, that ... we may be accepted.”

Just as our great future hope is to be in the actual presence of the Lord and to experience the fullness of joy which this will mean, so now, while still on this side of the veil, we find our greatest joy in being present with him in the Spirit, by faith. Through our study of his Word, meditation upon the Truth, fellowship with his people, activity in his service, and through prayer, we can even now be present with our Heavenly Father.

There is a certain amount of time, however, in the life of the follower of Christ, which must be devoted to temporal responsibilities. It is necessary to make a living, and to give a proper amount of time and consideration to those who are near and dear to us according to the flesh. The Scriptures enjoin this upon us, and we accept these privileges with thanksgiving, and endeavor to carry them out to the glory of God.

While we are engaged in these necessary earthly tasks, it is not always possible to be present with the Lord in the sense of directly meditating upon his Word, fellowshiping with his people, or working in his vineyard. However, here again, we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of the Lord. It should be our earnest desire to be pleasing to him in everything we do, whether it is carrying out temporal responsibilities, or enjoying more directly the spiritual blessings implied in the thought of being present with him.

THE JOY OF HIS PRESENCE

Great are the joys of faith which we now experience while in this symbolic manner we are “absent from the body” and “present with the Lord.” It is a true delight for the New Creature that we earnestly endeavor to manage every possible moment of the day that is not rightfully devoted to other things in order that we may have more time to spend with our Heavenly Father.

Immediately after using this meaningful illustration of our present privileges as New Creatures, Paul adds, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body.” (vs. 10) This is a reference to our present trial period while in the

flesh. It is what we do, and our faithfulness, while still in the fleshly “body” that will determine our fitness for our home in heaven. This is a practical test to which the Lord is putting us. If we are genuinely longing to be actually with him in heavenly glory, where we will experience fullness of joy throughout eternity, it will be natural to seek every possible opportunity we can to be near him now.

By using this as a guide, we can in large measure determine for ourselves how sincerely we are longing to be in the actual presence of God. If we are content now to be “at home in the body” (II Cor. 5:6), and do not experience a sense of great loss when we are not by faith “present with the Lord,” it might well indicate that we are not earnestly setting our affections on things above.

HEAVENLY PROSPECTS

If we prove faithful, and in the first resurrection are exalted to heavenly glory, it will mean being ushered into the actual presence of our Heavenly Father and his son Christ Jesus, our Head. There we will see Paul, John, Peter, James, Jude—in fact, all the apostles, face to face. We will also be united with all our faithful brethren who have lived throughout the age in a reunion indescribable by words.

There, too, we will meet the holy angels, and become acquainted with those who were our “ministering spirits” while we walked in the narrow way. (Heb. 1:14) What a joy that will be, and how wonderful it will be to learn of the many times they miraculously protected us from harm as New Creatures, keeping us from falling.

From beyond the veil we will also have contact with the Ancient Worthies, who will then be “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) They will be human beings, while the church will be on the divine plane. Nevertheless, the faithful overcomers who make up the bride of Christ in glory will have full knowledge of the Ancient Worthies, and will be directing their ministry.

Paul says that we will join “the general assembly and church of the firstborn.” (Heb. 12:23) Indeed, in this same context, he mentions all those with whom it will be our privilege to be associated, saying that we are “come unto” or, in a better translation, “approaching unto” them. We are approaching unto “mount Sion,” he says, “and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly

and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect [the Ancient Worthies], And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.”—vss. 22-24

Let us remember the “down payment” which is ours to enjoy even now. We earnestly look forward to cooperation with Abraham, Moses, David, and with all the prophets, in the work of the kingdom. We anticipate the joy of meeting Jesus, the apostles, and other faithful ones portrayed in the New Testament. Even now we can meet them in God’s Holy Word, for it is through the Scriptures that the Spirit gives us the earnest of our future inheritance. The Bible is a place where we can gather, as it were, with not only the Lord, but his faithful servants of both the Old and New Testaments. Every hour we spend in its pages, in addition to learning the Truth, we can be enjoying the inspirational company of those faithful patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, as well as Jesus himself and our guardian angels.

We can stand beside Noah, for example, as he preached righteousness and prepared for the coming flood. We can enter into the feelings of Abraham and be inspired by his faith. We can go with him on that three days’ journey to the land of Moriah, ascend the mountain with him, and watch while he prepares an altar on which to sacrifice his beloved Isaac. We can hear the angel speaking to him not to slay Isaac. Through the Word, we can also enjoy a wonderful association with Moses—at the burning bush, before Pharaoh, leading the Israelites across the Red Sea, and receiving the Law from God. To quote Paul, “What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.”—Heb. 11:32

In the Bible, we meet these faithful servants of God, these holy ones of old, “who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight,” and “turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” (vss. 33,34) While through the Word we commune with various ones in this “cloud of witnesses,” we can rejoice the more in the thought of their “better resurrection” and future high position in the plan of God as his earthly representatives in Christ’s kingdom.—chap. 12:1; 11:35

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the same manner, we can enjoy the fellowship of Jesus, the apostles, and all those of the Early Church whose names are mentioned in the New Testament. We can spend time with the Master, or with any of his faithful apostles, or with all of them together. We can stand beside Jesus as he heals the sick and raises the dead. We can hear the gracious words which fell from his lips, the lips of him who spoke as never a man had spoken before, or has spoken since.

We can be with the Master as Mary anointed him with the precious ointment, and can smell the sweet odors that filled the room, betokening the outpouring of her heart devotion to him whom she loved. We can seat ourselves at the table in the "upper room" on that last night before he was crucified. (Luke 22:12) We can then hear him impart those wonderful words of life recorded in John, chapters 13 to 17. We can walk with him to Gethsemane, to the judgment hall, to Pilate, and to Golgotha. We can hear him in his dying moments summon sufficient strength to give a witness of the kingdom to the thief who was dying beside him.

We can read the opening chapters of the Book of Acts, and in our minds take our place with the disciples upon whom the power of God fell on the day of Pentecost, and in some measure experience with them the joys of a reaffirmed faith, and the certain knowledge of what the Lord now wanted them to do. Time fails to mention all the wonderful experiences of the Lord's people which are recorded in the Book of Acts. Yet, they are all there for us to enter into, and from which to receive inspiration to continue our journey toward the heavenly Canaan. What a wonderful down payment of the future joys of fellowship with Jesus and the Early Church we can now enjoy if we will.

Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote letters to churches and to individuals of their day, and some general epistles. Those letters were written to us also, and bring us much closer to the apostles who wrote them, and to our Lord, as we think of it in this personal way. The next time we feel that we would very much like to receive an encouraging letter from one of our fellow brethren in the narrow way, let us go to the epistles, and read the letters which are there recorded for our admonition and joy.

We also joyfully anticipate meeting those guardian angels who so faithfully serve us from day to day. We enjoy an

earnest of this future experience because the Spirit of God has put in the Word many revealing accounts of the services of these angels. If we go with the women to the tomb of Jesus, we will there see the angel that announced to them that “he is risen.”—Matt. 28:6

We recall that angels served to release the apostles from prison. We can visit those prisons, place ourselves in the position of those who were incarcerated, and get some idea of what the ministry of the angels must have meant to them. We can turn backward and forward almost anywhere in the Bible, and come in contact with angels and their faithful ministry. Indeed, in this earthly “tabernacle” we can approach unto this “innumerable company of angels.”

We can even enjoy sweet fellowship with our Heavenly Father by meeting him in his Word, for we are present with him when we are present with his son Jesus, his holy angels, the apostles, and the faithful brethren of the Early Church. We should not overlook, either, the many direct and personal messages God has constantly waiting for us in his Word. How reassuringly he talks to us when we meet him there. He tells us: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” and “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”—Heb. 13:5; Exod. 33:14

WITH THE LORD’S PEOPLE

We can also be present with the Lord while still dwelling in our earthly tabernacle through fellowship with others of like precious faith. When we go to any of the meetings, when we attend a study or a testimony meeting, it is more than gathering with our brethren in Christ. We are meeting also with the Lord. Jesus said that where even two or three were gathered in his name he would be present, and in spirit the Heavenly Father is also present.

Through weariness or other difficulties we might be tempted to give up meetings which we could attend with a little greater effort. We might feel that we can afford to miss the fellowship of the brethren, or that they do not particularly need us. However, we would likely not feel this way if we remembered that by failing to attend a meeting we lose an opportunity to be in this special way present with the Lord.

There are many of the Lord’s people who are not situated so they can enjoy the fellowship of their brethren. This may

be due to isolation through distance, sickness, or other circumstances over which they have no control. Each saint of God yearns for the fellowship of his brethren, and through them with the Lord, but if circumstances are such that this is frequently or always impossible, he can still be present with the Heavenly Father through personal communion with him, and through the study of his Word. Every isolated brother or sister in the Truth can testify how wonderfully God has made up the great loss of not being able to meet with his people, when his Word and Spirit have been sought.

THROUGH SERVICE

When we are directly active in the service of the Lord, we are also enjoying the blessedness of being present with him. This is because we are coworkers with him, partners in his glorious plan for the reconciling of the world. It is a mistake to think that we are taking time away from fellowship with the Lord when we are serving in his vineyard.

Paul wrote, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Now, he explained further, he has given this "ministry of reconciliation" to us, and thus we are made "ambassadors for Christ." (II Cor. 5:18-20) Surely Christ was very close to his Heavenly Father when Paul could say that God was "in" him. He is in us in the same manner and for the same purpose.

As co-laborers with the Lord it is essential, through his Word, to acquaint ourselves with his plans and purposes. This brings us into close contact and fellowship with the divine Architect. As we view the grandeur and harmony of his plan, our spiritual vision sees him "high and lifted up," and we rejoice in his glory as we endeavor to tell the whole world the blessed tidings of his kingdom.—Isa. 6:1

It is indeed wonderful that, in this way also, we can be present with the Lord, and have the assurance that he is present with us. This should make every witness we give a sacred, blessed experience. It should add dignity and importance to every piece of truth literature we distribute. Let us try to realize that whatever we do in the Lord's service, or wherever he asks us to go, we are not alone, for we serve in his presence, and by his grace and strength.

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Equally precious is the time we spend in the Lord's presence through meditation and prayer. We all have our regular time for prayer, such as morning and evening. In addition to these, however, it is our privilege to lift our hearts in prayer to God at any time, and under any circumstances. It may be in the factory, on the sidewalk, in the kitchen, or in the office—it matters not where—when, through meditation on God's goodness, peace and joy well up within us. Then and there we can look up to him, and say, Thank you, Lord, for taking me into your confidence and giving me a glimpse of your glory.

Problems may arise and the difficulties of the day might be bearing heavily upon us. The way ahead may not be clear, or some earthborn cloud may have momentarily hidden the Lord's face. Whatever need we may have, we can go to him for help right at the time. His ear is ever open to the cries of our hearts, and his eyes "run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."—II Chron. 16:9

During the times when it is essential to be "at home" in the body, we can, in our hearts, rejoice in the Lord. There are usually moments with all of us, even during the rush of our everyday work, when thoughts of the Heavenly Father, his Word, his people, and his work, can be enjoyed. Perhaps in a moment of great need a thought expressed in a testimony, or a reassuring text of scripture, will come to mind to help us remember that the Lord is near, that his "angel ... encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."—Ps. 34:7

Truly the present heritage of the saints is rich and blessed! May an ever deepening realization of our present privilege of being "present with the Lord" give us increasing strength and courage to press forward toward the "fulness of joy" unto which we are now approaching. There we will experience the joy of his actual presence—"pleasures for evermore"—as we dwell in our "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."—chap. 16:11; II Cor. 5:1 ■

A Pillar in the Temple of God

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”

—Revelation 3:12

MANY PRECIOUS PROMISES to the faithful followers of the Master are recorded in the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John. In particular, the messages to the seven angels of the seven churches each contain a promise to the faithful overcomers who respond to the invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus during this Gospel Age. The promise contained in the words of our opening scripture is that of becoming a pillar in the temple of God. In considering what the Word of God has to say about pillars, it is appropriate to review their significance and also their relationship to the consecrated child of God.

PILLARS ERECTED BY JACOB

One of the earliest examples of the use of pillars is associated with Jacob’s vision of the ladder, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. At that time, God reconfirmed the Abrahamic Covenant with Jacob, and Jacob himself also entered into a covenant with God. In commemoration of this, Jacob erected a pillar as a memorial of the event, from the very stone he had used for a pillow while he slept and beheld the vision. “Jacob awaked out of

his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house." (Gen. 28:16-22) The word pillar in this passage signifies something that is stationed or set up—a column or memorial stone. Here it is seen that the pillar was erected by Jacob to memorialize or commemorate the agreement between God and himself, as well as to mark "God's house," the site where the Abrahamic Covenant had been renewed.

That the use of a pillar for such a purpose was appropriate was later attested to by God when he again appeared to Jacob and identified himself as the God of Bethel. "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." (chap. 31:13) By so identifying himself, God indicated approval of the memorial pillar, and instructed Jacob to return to his house, to the land he had left, in furtherance of God's plan for him.

Jacob, in response to God's instructions, left Haran with his family and possessions to return to Canaan. During this journey another use of a pillar to commemorate a vow is recorded, when an agreement for peace was made between Jacob and Laban. Laban was very displeased when he discovered that Jacob and his family had departed. He pursued them in anger, and it was only by the direct intervention of the Lord that Laban agreed to the peaceful departure of Jacob, his family and possessions. "Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. ... And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me

and thee; This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.”—Gen. 31:44-46,51,52

Later in Jacob’s life, while dwelling in the land of Canaan, he built an altar to God, who once more appeared to Jacob. “And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel.”—chap. 35:10-15

On all of these occasions, the significance of a pillar to commemorate a vow or agreement is clearly established. The primary use of the pillar was to mark the setting up or establishment of a particular relationship with God and the continuance of fellowship with him by one who had such a special association.

PILLARS OF FIRE AND A CLOUD

Another familiar scriptural use of the pillar is found in the many Old Testament passages describing the departure of the Israelites from Egypt and their years of wandering in the wilderness. This pillar took the form of a cloud by day and fire by night. The meaning of the word is simply that of a standing column, but its use in the Scriptures is in the very special sense that indicates the presence of God. When the Israelites departed from Egypt, this pillar marked the pathway of their journey, giving them direction. “The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.”—Exod. 13:21,22

After the Israelites left Egypt, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he pursued them with his army. As his forces approached

their encampment, this same pillar of cloud and fire served as a protective barrier for the Israelites against the Egyptians. “The pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.” (chap. 14:19,20) The miraculous cloud and fire denoted the presence of God, not only to the Israelites, but also to other nations, especially the Egyptians. Moses testified to God concerning this, saying, “They [the Egyptians] have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.”—Num. 14:14

During the forty years in the wilderness, this pillar was with the Israelites, standing over the Tabernacle when they were encamped, and leading them to a different location when, in God’s due time, he deemed it appropriate for them to move. “The LORD appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle.” (Deut. 31:15) “Thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go.” (Neh. 9:19) The brightness of the cloud and the fire made the presence of God with the Israelites very evident. These pillars served as a constant reminder that he was dealing with them and that his desire was to fulfill the promises he had made to them.

PILLARS OF SOLOMON’S TEMPLE

A more traditional use of pillars mentioned in the Bible is found in the erection of buildings, particularly in the construction of the Temple of Solomon. They were used to support the roof and various projections, and even served as support for bearing the weight of the walls. Of more interest, however, are two pillars described as standing in the porch of the Temple. These were not used in the construction of the Temple, but seem to have symbolic significance related to the unfolding of God’s plan of the ages. “He cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about, ... And he set up

the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. And upon the top of the pillars was lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished.”—I Kings 7:15,21,22

The names of these two pillars are significant. Jachin means “he shall establish,” and Boaz means “in it is strength.” When combined, these two expressions bring to mind the promise of God concerning the permanence and strength of the kingdom that would be established by David’s seed. “When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. ... But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”—II Sam. 7:12,13,15,16

PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The plan of God and the experience of Israel’s kingdom following Solomon verify that this promise of God to David was not fulfilled at that time. It is, in reality, a prophecy of the future kingdom of Christ to be established in the Messianic age as a result of the redemptive work of Jesus, who came as a descendant and heir to David’s throne. Associated with him at that time will be those who, during this Gospel Age, have responded to the invitation to follow Jesus by yielding their bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

When Peter asked the Master what they, who followed in his footsteps, would receive, Jesus replied, “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, ... and shall inherit everlasting life.” (Matt. 19:28,29) Our glorified Lord also declared, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21) The two pillars

set up on the porch of Solomon's typical Temple for all to see, were thus a prophetic witness and testimony of God's promise to Abraham and confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, for the eventual blessing of all the families of the earth. (Gen. 12:3; 22:15-18; 26:4,5; 28:14) This promise will be fulfilled by Jesus and his faithful footstep followers in the kingdom for which we pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt 6:10

The Prophet Isaiah proclaimed God's Word regarding that kingdom when he described the strength and justice of the government that would ultimately be established in the earth as a result of the birth and work of the Messiah. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 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. 9:6,7) This kingdom will bring everlasting peace to the world of mankind, in fulfillment of the promise to David. It is certain, because the "zeal of the LORD of hosts" will execute it. Zechariah also speaks of this kingdom and informs us that the temple of the Lord, the true church, will be built by Jesus. "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: ... he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne."—Zech. 6:12,13

PILLARS OF A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

The prophecies of Isaiah 4:2; 11:1-10; and Jeremiah 23:5,6, identify the promised Messiah, Jesus, as the Branch. During this Gospel Age he is building a spiritual temple, identified by Paul as a house of sons: "Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." (Heb. 3:6) The Apostle Peter also describes the development of this spiritual house. "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up ... sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (I Pet. 2:5) It is this specially chosen class—those who

respond to the invitation to run the race for the mark of the prize of the High Calling in Christ Jesus, and are begotten of the Holy Spirit—who become potential stones or pillars in the temple of God. If faithful unto death, each one will be privileged to share with Jesus in the work of blessing all the families of the earth when the glory of God fills his true temple and his Spirit is shed forth throughout the earth.

For the present—until the spiritual temple is completed—those who respond to the Gospel Age call are being built up as individual stones or pillars. “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:19-22) Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, additionally said, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”—I Cor. 3:16

APOSTLES WERE PILLARS

The Scriptures tell us that these same apostles, who left a record of the inspired Word of God, were themselves considered pillars. As we today think of ones who have been faithful servants of God, who have provided much support for others associated with them, so did Paul describe some of the apostles in his time. “When James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen [the Gentiles], and they unto the circumcision [the Jews].” (Gal. 2:9) Those who “seemed to be pillars” were ones thought of and perceived as being strong in the Truth and having the reputation of being used by God in preaching sound doctrine and proclaiming God’s promised kingdom.

Thus it is a good work to desire to be a pillar, to be shaped by Jesus and used by our Heavenly Father now, to be kept faithful and submissive to his will, that we might be used in his plan to bless all the families of the earth. God has identified the faithful followers of Christ, the called out ones from the world of mankind during the present age, as the pillars upon

which he will establish the new earth. “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, and he hath set the world upon them.” (I Sam. 2:7,8) God has purposed and determined that this shall be accomplished. “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”—Isa. 55:11

OUR ENDEAVOR TO BE A PILLAR

As we strive to be a spiritual pillar in our daily lives, we are in reality endeavoring to develop the “mind of Christ,” because it is he—the chief cornerstone of the temple—upon which we are being built. Recalling his mindset, we are reminded of the importance that “whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,” and “whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (Eccles. 9:10; I Cor. 10:31) These were the motivations which guided Jesus, and they are to be ours as well. In addition, we are not to ever doubt that God has properly prepared and equipped us to do what he asks and expects of us. When God appeared to Moses in Horeb, instructing him to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites forth from bondage, Moses expressed doubt that they would believe and follow him. God answered by asking, “What is that in thine hand?”—Exod. 4:2

This calls attention to the fact that God’s power will enable his servants to profitably use whatever the Lord provides in doing his will. Taking advantage of opportunities such as visiting isolated brethren, calling those who need encouragement, and writing letters or emails of support and comfort, can provide a blessing to the recipient and opportunity for spiritual growth to the one performing such a service. We must be ever on the lookout for opportunities to show forth to others the same love that our Heavenly Father has shown to us. Our spiritual growth as pillars or living stones is dependent upon loving service, for “we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”—I John 3:14

Our daily experiences are given to us that we might recognize and know the hand of God and respond by seeking his

counsel and striving to do his will in all things. If we but wait upon the Lord, he will supply what is necessary, for “what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (I Cor. 4:7) It is to our Heavenly Father’s praise that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) Therefore, in all things we can in full faith be confident that “no trial has assailed you except what belongs to man; and God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.”—I Cor. 10:13, *Diaglott*

In this way the called out ones are being fashioned as pillars, as living stones, being shaped and polished, that they may be “fitly framed together ... unto an holy temple in the Lord,” “which temple ye are.” (Eph. 2:21; I Cor. 3:17) The true church of the ever-living God, the body of Christ, is thus to be established as pillars on the cornerstone of Jesus. To each of these pillars, our glorified Lord has promised, reiterating the words of our opening text, that he “will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”

A NEW CITY AND NEW NAME

The features, blessings and purpose of this “city of my God, which is new Jerusalem,” have been described with these words: “Glorious City of Peace! whose walls signify salvation, protection and blessing to all who enter it, whose foundations laid in justice can never be moved, and whose builder and designer is God! It is in the light which will shine from this glorious city (kingdom) of God that the nations (people) will walk on the highway of holiness, up to perfection and to full harmony with God.”—*Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, pp. 295,296

Not only is the name of New Jerusalem promised to the overcomer, but also the name of my God, “my new name.” Paul, in writing to the Philippian, describes the power of that name. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, ... And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9-11) Jesus, our glorified Lord, has

already received this new name which, in his promise to his faithful footstep followers, he states he will write upon each pillar—upon “him that overcometh.” It was because of this that Jesus, after his resurrection, was able to declare, “All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”—Matt. 28:18

During the present Gospel Age, our Heavenly Father is extending an invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Speaking prophetically of this, the Lord, through the psalmist, said, “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” (Ps. 50:5) To those who respond to this invitation, Jesus promises that, if faithful, they will be made pillars in God’s temple and share with him in bringing forth, to the glory of God, the promised blessings to mankind during the Messianic age.

The pillars and the temple are thus seen to be a memorial to God’s promises. During Christ’s Messianic kingdom, and throughout the ages of ages to come, they will verify God’s presence and guidance in the outworking of his plan for man’s salvation. His attributes of love, power, wisdom, and justice will be evidenced in Jesus’ redemptive work as the cornerstone or central pillar. Christ’s body members will be the other pillars of God’s temple, having faithfully developed the “mind of Christ.” Together, the Christ, head and body, will attest to the reality of the successful climax of God’s plan and purposes. For on these pillars, symbolically speaking, will be supported the new earth—God’s righteous kingdom—and the culmination of his promise to bless all the families of the earth. ■

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