

The Dawn

A Herald of Christ's Presence



The DAWN

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The Church

***“And [Christ] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”
—Colossians 1:18***

In part one of our consideration of the subject, “The Church,” which appeared in last month’s issue of *The Dawn* magazine, we gave attention to the Scriptural meaning of the word “church,” how it came into being following the First Advent of Jesus, and the

requirements for becoming a member. We also discussed what is meant by being “baptized into Christ,” the symbol of water baptism, and church organization as given in the Bible.

In this month’s issue, we will give further reflection to this subject. Important topics to be discussed on the ensuing pages will include: The role of the twelve apostles and other servants of the church; the mission of the church; and the heavenly and earthly phases of God’s plan for the salvation of all mankind from sin and death through Christ.

Twelve Apostles

In the divine arrangement the entire church, beginning at Pentecost, was to be served by twelve

apostles appointed by God. (Rev. 21:10,14; Eph. 2:19,20) It was in keeping with this that Jesus chose twelve individuals to be associated with him during his ministry in order that they might receive personal training and instruction from him. These were Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas.—Matt. 10:2-4

Judas, as we know, proved unfaithful, and the Scriptures indicate that Paul was chosen by the Lord to take his place. We are informed in Acts 1:23-26 of an effort by the remaining eleven apostles to make a choice of one to take Judas' place. They decided upon Matthias. However, this action was taken before they received the Holy Spirit, and there is no evidence that the Lord honored their choice. Matthias' name does not appear after this.

The word apostle [Greek: *apostolos*] means "one who is sent," a delegate or ambassador of the Gospel. From this broad standpoint every Christian is an apostle, for we are all "ambassadors for Christ." (II Cor. 5:20) In fact, the Greek word *apostolos* is used in the Bible with reference to other individuals than the twelve chosen apostles. (John 13:16; Phil. 2:25) However, this does not mean that they occupied the same high position of authority in the church as that given by divine appointment to those specially chosen by the Lord.

The twelve apostles were more than just preachers of the Gospel. They were miraculously inspired by the Holy Spirit which enabled them to speak and write the message of God's Holy Word with authority and accuracy. Their word was, and still is, a divine

message to every Christian. It is because of this authoritative position they occupy in the organization of the church that the completed church is likened to a city. This symbolic city is shown to have twelve foundation stones and in these stones are written the names of “the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”—Rev. 21:14

Other Servants

In Ephesians 4:11, the Apostle Paul informs us that the Lord provided for other servants in the church. In addition to apostles, he arranged for prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Peter speaks of the Old Testament writers as God’s “holy prophets.” (II Pet. 3:2) These wrote as they were “moved by the Holy Spirit,” so the Christian is to take their word, even as that of the apostles, as authoritative.—II Pet. 1:21

When Paul speaks of prophets as servants in the church, however, he uses the term in a much broader sense, applying it to public expounders of the Gospel. (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Acts 11:27,28; 15:32; 21:10,11) These prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are all essential servants in the church, but not inspired as were the twelve apostles, nor are they appointed in the same miraculous way as were the apostles.

The expression in the New Testament, “ordained ... elders in every church,” according to the Greek text, more properly refers to the “stretching forth of the hand,” as in voting. See *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*, *Weymouth New Testament*, and *Young’s Literal Translation* of Acts 14:23. The clear implication is that the lesser servants of the church,

both elders and deacons, were to be elected by vote of the congregation which they were to serve.

The scriptural term “elder,” also found in the above verse, applies generally to men who serve the church along spiritual lines. A pastor, teacher, evangelist, or prophet as a public expounder, would come under the general designation of “elder.” The Greek word *presbuteros*, from which it is translated in Acts 14:23, signifies one who is mature. In the church it would describe one who is recognized as being sound in the faith and spiritually mature in experience.

The word “bishop” is also used in the New Testament and is applied to male servants elected by the church. The Greek word *episkopos*, from which it is translated means “superintendent” or “overseer.” All elders are properly, according to opportunity and ability, overseers in the church. It is their duty to watch over the flock of God and care for its needs, particularly along spiritual lines.—I Tim. 3:1,2; Tit. 1:7

The word “deacon” also appears a few times in connection with the arrangements of the Early Church. It is a translation of a Greek word, *diakonos*, which means to “run errands,” or “attend to.” The Scriptures state that deacons were “men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” appointed to help with the material arrangements of the church. The first of these to be appointed were in the church at Jerusalem.—Acts 6:2-4; I Tim. 3:8-13

The scriptural qualifications for those who can properly be elected by a congregation to serve as elders, or bishops, and deacons, are set forth by

Paul in I Timothy 3:1-13. Any group of consecrated believers, large or small, that has brethren who meet these qualifications, is authorized by the Scriptures to elect them to these services. When this is done, these appointments are recognized by the Lord.

The Scriptures make it clear that no group of Christians needs to look to a parent church for authority to elect servants, hold meetings, and carry on the work of the Lord. Likewise, congregations need not to be large in order to exercise their liberty along these lines. The Biblical record is that many of the churches, or groups of Christians, in apostolic times were organized in the homes of believers, and held their regular meetings in these homes. (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15) The same thing is being done today. Now, as in the past, the Lord richly blesses those who find others with whom they can cooperate as a group—or, within the Scriptural meaning, a church. These can elect their own servants by the simple method of stretching forth the hand. No membership roll is needed, nor is such authorized by the Scriptures.

There is not much in the Bible to indicate the nature of the meetings held by the various groups in the Early Church. Certainly the apostles and others, on occasions, gave discourses. However, profitable meetings can be held even though there may be no one qualified to preach a sermon. Meetings for Bible study, both topical and contextual, in which all present have an opportunity to express their thoughts and to ask questions, are very helpful. An elder, if one has been elected, should serve to keep the study orderly. Prayer, praise, and testimony

meetings are also spiritually profitable to those who are seriously endeavoring to know and do God's will.

The Mission of the Church

The present mission of the church is three-fold. First, it is for the perfecting [Greek: complete furnishing] of the saints for a future work of service. (Eph. 4:12,13) Second, it is to develop in each member the fruits and graces of Christian character. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-8) Third, it is to be God's witness to the world concerning Christ's kingdom of blessing now so near.—Matt. 24:14

In part one of our consideration of this subject, we noted these words of Jesus to Peter: "Upon this rock I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18) That which is "built" in due time reaches completion. It is not God's design that the "building" of the church shall go on forever. Hence it is not a case of all who will ever obtain salvation through Christ becoming members of the church. The very meaning of the word church [Greek: *ekklesia*] is "a calling out," and is contrary to this concept of God's purpose at the present time. The church is being "called out" from the world. (I Cor. 1:26; I Pet. 2:9) It will be "few" in number, a "little flock." (Matt. 7:13,14; 22:14; Luke 12:32) It is not God's plan to convert the world in general until the coming of his promised kingdom.—Matt. 6:10

"Thou art the Christ," Peter testified, "the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:16) This expression identified Jesus with the Messianic promises of the Old Testament and indicated that Peter properly recognized in Jesus the one whom God had sent to

fulfill those promises. In order to see clearly the full divine purpose through the church, it is essential to keep in mind the Old Testament promises concerning Christ; for the church is called out from the world to be associated with him in the fulfillment of those promises. God said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:18) In Galatians 3:16 Paul informs us that this "seed" of promise is Christ. The Apostle gives us additional information concerning the seed of promise. In verses 27 and 29 we read, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

The establishment of the church is not the completion of God's purpose toward the children of men. It is only the beginning of his plan to bless mankind. In James 1:18 we are told that the church is a "kind of firstfruits" of God's creatures. This expression is also used in Revelation 14:4, and it is applied to those who are associated in heaven with Christ Jesus, the "Lamb," on the symbolic Mount Zion, the heavenly phase of the kingdom of God.—Rev. 14:1; Heb. 12:22,23

In the 15th chapter of I Corinthians, Paul pointed out very clearly that the hope of life for both the church and the world depends upon the resurrection of the dead. If there be no resurrection of the dead, he argued, "then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." (vs. 18) However, he gave us assurance of the resurrection and the opportunity for all to gain everlasting life, saying, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—vs. 22

Then Paul shows that there is to be a definite order, or sequence, in the resurrection. “Every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.” (I Cor. 15:23) The “firstfruits” referred to are the church. Following this, a more proper translation of the Greek text would be, “Afterward, they [everyone not part of the church, in their own order] who become Christ’s during his presence.” (See *Rotherham Emphasized Bible* and *Young’s Literal Translation*.) The word “coming” in this verse is translated from the Greek word *parousia*, which means “presence,” and should be so rendered. This is a reference to the thousand years of Christ’s kingdom when he and his church will reign for the purpose of destroying sin and death and giving all mankind an opportunity to accept the gift of life provided by his shed blood.

Paul’s further statement immediately following is clear: “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” (I Cor. 15:24-26) This is the great, ultimate, purpose of God to be accomplished through Christ and the church—the “afterward” blessing to reach all mankind when the building of the church shall have been completed.

Heavenly and Earthly

In his lesson on the resurrection Paul reveals that some are to receive heavenly bodies, and some human, or earthly bodies—the determining factor in each case being the sort of “seed” or “bare grain”

that is sown. (I Cor. 15:37,38) The “it” or “bare grain” to which Paul refers is simply the identity, the sum total of a person’s lifetime of thoughts and character.

Those who are fully consecrated to do God’s will, and are buried with Christ in sacrificial death, will be given a “celestial,” or a heavenly body upon their resurrection. (vs. 40) This depends upon their walking in “newness of life” throughout the remaining years of their present earthly life. (Rom. 6:4) During their earthly pilgrimage they learn to set their “affection on things above;” their hopes are heavenly; through faith they are symbolically dwelling together with Christ “in heavenly places.” (Col. 3:2; Eph. 1:3) Thus, while yet in the flesh, they “sow” spiritual characters. In the resurrection, these receive a heavenly reward.

The majority of people, however, are not interested in spiritual things. This does not mean that they are necessarily wicked. Most of them are not. They love the good things of the earth because they were created human, earthly beings, and God does not condemn them for not aspiring to heavenly things. It is in the very nature of things that these, in death, “sow” an earthly character, and as a result will be raised from the dead as human beings, with “earthly bodies.”—I Cor. 15:40, *YLT*

Speaking of the resurrection of the church, described later in Revelation 20:6 as the “first resurrection,” Paul explained, “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”—I Cor. 15:42-44

To this Paul adds, “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” (vs. 44) In other words, he would have us understand that in describing the change of nature to be experienced by those who participate in the “first resurrection,” he is not implying that these are the only ones to be raised from the dead, for all mankind is to be recovered from death, only they are to receive natural, earthly, human bodies.

Paul continues his lesson, saying, “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy [those who die with human hopes and desires], such are they also that are earthy [in the resurrection]: and as is the heavenly [those who now set their affection on heavenly things], such are they also that are heavenly [in the resurrection].”—vss. 47,48

Paul concluded this lesson on the resurrection, saying, “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”—I Cor. 15:53-55

Thus, in a few words, Paul presents both the hope of the church and the hope of the world. The resurrection hope of the church is “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) No human being possesses immortality by nature. It is a reward that will be given to those who faithfully follow in the footsteps of Christ unto death. In Revelation 2:10 we read, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

The call and preparation of these for the fruition of this glorious hope in the first resurrection have been the work of God through the Holy Spirit during the present age since Pentecost. Paul explains, however, that when this is accomplished, and the last member of the church, or "body," of Christ has entered into glory, then will be the time for the fulfillment of those glorious promises of the Old Testament concerning the destruction of death: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"—I Cor. 15:55; Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14

Paul, in quoting from Isaiah and Hosea, assures us of the divine purpose to destroy man's great enemy, Death, and the grave. The word "grave," as used in Hosea 13:14, is a translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, and is the equivalent of the Greek word *hades* in the New Testament. These words are translated as both "grave" and "hell" in various places, yet the meaning denoted by them, particularly the word "grave," simply refers to the condition of death, or oblivion, not a literal place of torment. (Eccles. 9:10; Ps. 115:17; Acts 2:31) Thus, we understand the divine purpose toward the human race to which Jesus referred when he said that the "gates of hell"—the grave, death—would not prevail against the church.—Matt. 16:18

What a wonderful assurance! Throughout the reign of sin and death, hell—the grave or tomb—has continued to claim its victims, but in Revelation 1:18 Jesus tells us that he has the "keys" of hell. He purchased these keys, the right to unlock hell's gates, by his own death as man's Redeemer. When his church is completely built, she will be

associated with him in bestowing the promised blessings of life upon all mankind.

The fact that meanwhile so many millions continue to go into death, into the Bible hell, will not deprive them of these blessings. The gates of hell did not prevail against Christ; they will not prevail against his church; they will not prevail against the rest of the world; and they will not prevail against Adam and all who have died since Adam. By divine power, these gates will be swung wide open, and all Death's prisoners will be released!—Isa. 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Luke 4:18

This, then, is to be the future work of the church. What a glorious work it will be! What an incentive it should be now to prove faithful to the Lord. There is no greater peace or joy that anyone can experience than that which results from being at one with the Heavenly Father, and in living a life of full devotion to him. Indeed, there are trials, but as Paul reminds us, these are in reality “light afflictions” lasting “but for a moment,” when compared with the “eternal weight of glory” that the Lord has promised.—II Cor. 4:17,18

It is a blessed privilege to be counted among the “called out” ones, the church, at the present time. Surely God is blessing his people, especially in revealing to them the beauties of his plan of salvation. How thankful we are that through Christ and his church the whole world will have an opportunity to rejoice in the blessings the Lord has designed for them—blessings of restitution, as Peter described them, “which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:21

Jesus and Thomas

Key Verse: *“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.”*
—John 20:27

Selected Scripture:
John 20:24-29

Thomas the Apostle is often labeled “Doubting Thomas.” However, today’s lesson presents a disciple in the process of spiritual growth. Thomas had missed Jesus’ first appearance to the other disciples. (John 20:24) When the others testified, “We have seen the Lord,” Thomas sought proof before he could accept the account of his brethren. (vs. 25) He wanted to see for himself the nail marks and touch the wounds. That may sound harsh, but it is also human. After

grief, one may often fear being misled by renewed hope. Thomas was not willing to blindly accept the statement that Jesus had been resurrected. He wanted a firsthand encounter as the others had experienced.—vss. 19,20

Eight days later the disciples were inside again, with the doors shut. (vs. 26) Jesus’ resurrection had not instantly erased their fear. Still, Jesus came and said, “Peace be unto you.” These tender words from the Master would become a common greeting in the New Testament epistles of John, Peter, and Paul, to the Early Church. Before addressing Thomas, Jesus eased the room’s anxiety while teaching a valuable lesson. Faith is not pretending we are unafraid; it is trusting the risen Christ, who enters the door of our hearts.

Jesus then turned to Thomas and stated again the words of our Key Verse. “Reach hither thy finger, ... reach hither thy hand,” echoing Thomas own criteria for belief. (vs. 27) Thomas was not alone in at first doubting that Jesus had been resurrected. On the day of Jesus’ resurrection, all the disciples were doubters. They did not believe the report of the women.—Luke 24:11

Luke’s Gospel provides this further account: “Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?”—vss. 36-41

Jesus’ message to all the disciples and to us is the same as he gave to Thomas: “Be not faithless, but believing.” (John 20:27) Doubt can result in confusion and pain, but here the question was allegiance. Would Thomas entrust himself to Jesus or continue to hold back? Faith is not the absence of questions; it is, rather, placing our lives in Jesus’ hands as we seek answers.

Thomas did not hold back but responded with a climactic confession to the resurrected Jesus: “My Lord and my God.” (vs. 28). Here Thomas not only admitted to Jesus’ resurrection, but also recognized his Master as Lord. Jesus concludes our lesson with these profound words, addressed to every generation since: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (vs. 29) We can never touch the wounds of Jesus. Let us, however, exercise faith and trust in the apostolic witness, the Holy Spirit’s influence, and the risen Lord’s work of developing the body of Christ. ■

The First Christian Martyr

Key Verse:
***“Stephen, full of
faith and power,
did great wonders
and miracles
among the people.”***
—Acts 6:8

Selected Scriptures:
Acts 6:7-10; 7:1-60

appears to have occurred not long after Pentecost, following a period of rapid growth in the Early Church. That season of peace and increase prepared believers for the trials that soon followed. Stephen's death marked the beginning of persecution against the Church and illustrated the call for Christ's followers to remain faithful even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

Originally chosen to help serve the practical needs of the congregation, Stephen proved to be a man of exceptional spiritual strength and talent. He is described as “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 6:5) His faith, love, and zeal for the Lord made him an effective witness to the Truth. His wisdom and spirit of holiness were so remarkable that his opponents could not successfully argue against him.—vs. 10

Unable to overcome his reasoning, his enemies brought him before the Sanhedrin through false and distorted testimony. Though facing a charge that could lead to death, Stephen showed no fear. Instead, his face reflected calmness, purity, and confidence in God. The account states that all that sat in the council “saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”—vs. 15

Stephen's address before the council, recorded in Acts 7:2-53, showed both courage and deep knowledge of Israel's history. In its closing words he plainly charged his hearers with resisting God and bearing responsibility for rejecting Jesus. (vss. 51-53) Rather than repent, they became enraged. Stephen remained steady even as their anger rose. He was granted a vision of heavenly glory and declared that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This statement drove his accusers to end the trial and execute him by stoning. Saul of Tarsus was present and gave his approval to the act.—vss. 54-60

As he died, Stephen prayed both for himself and for those who were killing him, asking that their sin not be charged against them. In this he reflected the spirit of Christ. Verse 60 describes his death as a sleep. Most assuredly, Stephen believed in the resurrection and that he would be awakened from the "sleep" of death in due time. The phrase "slept with his fathers" appears nearly forty times in the Old Testament, referring to the sleep of death.

While being tormented by Satan, Job asked for relief in the sleep of death until the resurrection morning saying, "I wish you would hide me in a grave! I wish you would cover me up until your anger passes by! I wish you would set the time for me to spend in the grave and then bring me back up!" (Job 14:13, *New International Readers Version*) Jesus corroborated Job's statement, saying, "All that are in the graves shall hear his [the Son of man's] voice, And shall come forth."—John 5:28,29

Stephen's faithful witness became an example for later believers. Though persecution may take different forms, the call to suffer faithfully for Christ remains. Stephen was the first overcomer of the Christian Age recorded in the Scriptures following Pentecost to have been found faithful to have part in the "first resurrection." (Rev. 20:6) May his life and death encourage us to speak with grace, stand with courage, and keep our eyes fixed on the Lord. ■

Paul Speaks to the People

Key Verses: *“He said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.”*
—Acts 22:14,15

Selected Scripture:
Acts 22:1-21

religious, and from a Pharisee family. He was zealous for the Law and God’s promises to Israel. (Acts 26:2-5; Phil. 3:4-6) He was not evil as the Early Church understandably viewed him, but sincere and devout in his actions. Believing that Christians opposed Moses’ law, Saul persecuted them in good conscience.

Because Paul was sincere but spiritually blinded, the Lord stopped him in order that he might change course.

In today’s lesson, we hear the Apostle Paul recounting before his Jewish brethren in Jerusalem the experience of his conversion to Christ on the road to Damascus. God’s choice of Saul of Tarsus, his name being later changed to Paul, baffled the Lord’s disciples when it took place. There was an open hostility between the Early Church leaders and Saul because they knew him only as a persecutor of Christians. They did not appreciate that his birthplace, education, and background prepared him for his special mission to the Gentiles. He was a Roman citizen, well educated, deeply

His zeal was redirected from persecuting the church to serving Christ and his followers. This was not the turning of a corrupt man, but the correction of an honest one. God was now going to appoint him as one ideally suited to preach the Gospel message to both Jews and Gentiles.

God does not force belief on anyone but opens his Truth to honest hearts. Saul was wrong in judgment but right in intention, so the Lord opened his eyes. On the road to Damascus, Paul recounted, a bright light from heaven surrounded him and he fell down blind. Then he heard, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” When he asked who was speaking, the answer came: “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.” (Acts 22:6-8) This shows how closely Christ identifies with his people. To persecute them is to persecute him. That Truth should guide our conduct toward every member of the body of Christ.

Saul immediately asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” (vs. 10) This was a complete surrender of his will. Once he understood the Truth concerning Christ, he was ready to give his life to him. The same response should mark believers today. Those once blinded by error, yet sincere, should answer Truth with gratitude, zeal, and a life of service.

The Lord sent Saul to Damascus, where Ananias, a respected and devout disciple, learned that this new convert had been specially chosen to carry Christ’s name before Gentiles, kings, and Israel—and to suffer for that calling. Saul had not seen Christ in full divine glory, but he saw enough to know with certainty that Jesus had been raised and glorified. (vss. 11-13) Ananias was the one who spoke the words of today’s Key Verses to Saul, setting him on his mission to preach the Gospel message as a “witness unto all men.”

Paul was a faithful witness to what he had seen and heard. The same should be true of us. We must first understand Truth ourselves before we can share it faithfully with others. Like Paul, let us trust in God’s will as we witness the Gospel message. ■

Paul Encourages Timothy

Key Verse:
***“Wherefore I
put thee in
remembrance that
thou stir up the
gift of God, which
is in thee by the
putting on of
my hands.”***
—II Timothy 1:6

Selected Scriptures:
***II Timothy 1:1-14;
3:14,15***

Though the Apostle Paul apparently had no natural children, his tender address to Timothy as “my own son in the faith” shows the depth of his affection. (I Tim. 1:2) He regarded all believers as his spiritual children, and this feeling was especially strong toward Timothy, who had long and faithfully served beside him.

Paul’s words of today’s lesson are sound advice to all Christians and especially to those young in the Truth. They hold even greater impact on those who have consecrated their lives to the Lord and his service and are seeking to be useful as his ministers or servants according to their talents and opportunities.

These words were addressed to Timothy when Paul was a prisoner in Rome, shortly before his death. Timothy was no longer a child, but perhaps about forty years of age, having labored with the apostle for many years. At the time of this letter, Timothy was serving the church at Ephesus and received there the epistles that bear his name.

Paul introduces himself by reminding Timothy of

his apostleship. He was made a witness of the Lord's resurrection by having been granted a glimpse of his glorious person while on the road to Damascus. Thereafter, Paul was commissioned to declare the conditions of God's promise of life provided in Christ Jesus.—Acts 9:3-20; 22:14,15

Paul mentions his clear conscience before God, his constant prayers for Timothy, and his desire to see him again after their parting at Ephesus. (II Tim. 1:3,4) Knowing the dangers that accompany a prominent position, Paul encouraged Timothy to remain humble, faithful, and grounded in the Scriptures. (vs. 13) He needed to stand firmly in the strength God provides through his Word.

Paul also reminded Timothy of the sincere faith and piety he had received from his mother and grandmother, affirming that this heritage had laid a solid foundation in his heart. (vs. 5) Other Scriptures emphasize that godly parents can lay a foundation of character in their children upon which lives of usefulness may be built.—Deut. 6:6,7; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4

The apostle encouraged Timothy to “stir up the gift of God” within him—to rekindle it with renewed energy. He also warned Timothy not to give way to fear, reminding him that God's spirit is not one of fear, “but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (II Tim. 1:6,7) Such a spirit produces courage, loving devotion to God and his people, and wise judgment in the use of zeal. It was Paul's desire that all of God's children might increasingly gain this spirit, so that their talents would be used both fearlessly and wisely in the Master's service.

In II Tim. 3:14,15, the Apostle reminded Timothy that he had been taught of God, and this teaching had come to him through the “holy scriptures” of the Old Testament and through the words of Jesus and his inspired apostles. Just as Timothy was encouraged by Paul, let us also be fortified by these words from the beloved Apostle. ■

Lydia, a Seller of Purple

Key Verse:
***“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.”***
—Acts 16:14

Selected Scripture:
Acts 16:11-15,40

Today's lesson relates to the introduction of the Gospel to Europe. Following Paul's first missionary journey, he had become acquainted with Silas. Paul determined the time was right to take a second missionary journey through Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, and Lystra, with Silas joining him. In these places they strengthened the faith of those who had already accepted the Lord through the Apostle's first missionary journey.—Acts 15:40,41; 16:1,4

After good success in the mission up to this point, Paul intended to travel north and east through Asia Minor. However, circumstances worked against this plan until the apostle concluded that the Lord was preventing these efforts. In a dream Paul saw a man dressed like a Macedonian, calling to him and saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” Accepting this as divine leading, Paul promptly began the journey that brought him into Europe. (Acts 16:6-10) Here was unmistakable evidence of God's supervision over all the interests of his Church.

Philippi, one of the chief cities of Macedonia, was the first place in the scriptural record where the good tidings were preached in Europe. Paul and his companions learned of a small religious gathering held every Sabbath by the riverside outside the city gate. It was a prayer meeting and a place of worship and fellowship. Those gathered there were predominantly, if not all, women.—vss. 12,13

Among these women was Lydia, who our Key Verse says, “worshipped God.” “A seller of purple” refers to her profession of a dye maker. Hearing Paul preach the Gospel not only opened her heart, enlightening the eyes of her understanding, but she was also prompted to obey it in full consecration. She then symbolized that consecration by water baptism, she “and her household.”—vss. 14,15

After receiving the Gospel, Lydia used her home and resources in divine service by inviting Paul and his companions to stay with her. She did not view hospitality as a burden, but as a privilege. In receiving the Lord’s servants, she honored God and strengthened the work of the Truth in that place.—vs. 15

Lydia’s hospitality teaches humility and proper spiritual courtesy. Paul and his companions did not force themselves upon her or demand support, although they had ministered spiritual things to her and her house. She, on the other hand, pressed the invitation sincerely, saying that if they judged her faithful to the Lord, they should come into her house. This shows both her earnest desire to serve and the careful spirit of Paul and those with him, who avoided imposing upon others.

Lydia’s example shows that God can use one devoted individual in a much larger divine arrangement. This reminds us that no sincere service is too small when it is done for the Lord. A prepared heart, a faithful household influence, and a hospitable spirit can all become channels of blessing. ■

The Gospel of Peace

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peacemakers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We Preach Not Ourselves”

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

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

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

Wisdom from Above

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Power of the Tongue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Being About Our Father's Business

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

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

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

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

Visions from the Lord

***“I was not
disobedient unto
the heavenly
vision.”
—Acts 26:19***

During the time when the Bible was in course of preparation, much of God’s instructions and warnings to his people, as well as the revelation of his plans and purposes, were imparted by means of “visions.” These visions were frequently, if not always, of a miraculous nature and so impressive that they left no doubt in the minds of those to whom they were given that the information provided was from the Lord.

These visions were not given to satisfy curiosity, but in order that those receiving them might be equipped to co-operate with the Lord in the out-working of his plans, either for themselves or for others, or for both. In many instances, visions are referred to in the Scriptures as the “voice” of the Lord speaking to his people. A glance through the Bible is sufficient to impress one with the importance that God placed upon obedience to his voice and the dire consequences which would result from disobedience.

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Old Testament Visions

God spoke to Noah not merely that he might know of the coming flood, but in order that he might make preparation for the saving of himself and his family. (Gen. 6:13-18; Heb. 11:7) God also spoke to Abraham in Ur, told him of his purpose to bless all the families of the earth, and gave him instructions to leave his own people and go to a land which he would show him. The blessings to be derived from this contact with the Lord depended upon Abraham's obedience to these instructions.—Gen. 12:1-3

God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush and commissioned him to be a great deliverer of his people. Even the ground on which Moses was standing at the time the vision was given to him became holy, or sanctified, for God was using it as the place where he was imparting information to his servant as to what he wanted him to do. (Exod. 3:1-10) If Moses from then on was to enjoy the continued favor of the Lord, he had no alternative but to obey the vision.

The Prophet Isaiah was given a vision in which he saw the Lord "high and lifted up." (Isa. 6:1,8) In this vision, Isaiah heard the Lord asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" The prophet's response was, "Here am I; send me." This directive in reality was the meaning of most of the visions with which the Lord favored his people in ancient times, although not always so plainly stated.

New Testament Visions

The most notable vision mentioned in the New Testament was the one given to John the Baptist at the time of Jesus' baptism. John saw the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus and heard "a voice from

heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16,17; John 1:31-34) Here, at the age of thirty, Jesus was beginning his earthly ministry. He had come to perform the will of his Heavenly Father—all that had been written in the "volume of the book," the Old Testament. (Ps. 40:6-8; Heb. 10:5-9) All the instructions written in the Old Testament for the guidance of the Master were recorded under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There had been no one to interpret their meaning. Even for the perfect mind of Jesus to comprehend their import it was necessary that he be given a special revelation—a vision—and it was this with which he was blessed when the heavens were opened unto him.

Jesus had come to do the things that had been written concerning him. When their meaning was revealed, he unhesitatingly entered upon the task of performing them. At what great cost did Jesus obey the heavenly vision! The period of his ministry was short, and every day was a tiring one. He was reviled by his enemies, misunderstood by his friends, and the great "contradiction of sinners" finally resulted in his arrest, trial, and cruel crucifixion. (Heb. 12:3) This was the meaning of the vision. Jesus was to be led "as a lamb to the slaughter." (Isa. 53:7) He was to give his flesh "for the life of the world." (John 1:29; 6:51) He was to be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Isa. 53:3) He was obedient to his Heavenly Father in all these difficult experiences. He learned what it meant to be obedient even when passing through severe experiences of suffering.—Heb. 2:10; 5:8

To offset the cost of obedience, the Master experienced also a rich reward even while he was laying

down his life. The peace and joy he experienced more than compensated for the sacrifice he was making. (John 14:27) Indeed, it was this that enabled him to obey “for the joy that was set before him,” and to endure “the cross, despising the shame.” (Heb. 12:2) True, this was a future joy; but the anticipation of it, and his complete confidence that he would receive the promised reward, gave Jesus a present peace and joy which the world could neither give nor take away. Thus, while he was “a man of sorrows,” he was undoubtedly at peace with his Heavenly Father. The “joy of the Lord” was his strength.—Neh. 8:10

Paul's Vision

Saul of Tarsus had always been a zealous servant of God, although at first he had been wrong in his understanding of what the Lord wanted him to do. It was on an errand of misdirected service that he was favored with that revealing vision mentioned in our opening text, and concerning which he later testified that he had not been disobedient. It was this vision that halted Saul in his wrong course. It revealed to him the place he was to occupy as a fellow-sufferer with Christ, and the task he was to perform as the apostle to the Gentiles.—Acts 9:1-16

As far as Paul's earthly service for Christ was concerned, perhaps the briefest summary of its deep implications for Paul is given in the statement made to Ananias, when the Lord, in a vision, commissioned him to tell Saul what great things he was to suffer for his name's sake. (vs. 16) Obedience to the heavenly vision did mean much suffering for Paul. (II Cor. 11:23-28; 12:7-10) In this he rejoiced, for the vision revealed that he had the

privilege of suffering with his Master in the great Messianic cause.—Col. 1:24

These sufferings came as a result of his obedience to the vision—obedience in making known to others what the Lord had miraculously revealed to him. After declaring to Agrippa that he had not been disobedient to the vision, Paul added, “But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” (Acts 26:20) It was “for these causes,” Paul explained to the king, that he was accused by his fellow Jews. (vs. 21) The result was that he continued to be persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles until, finally, he finished his earthly course.—II Tim. 4:7,8; Acts 20:17-25

Because Paul had implicit faith in the Lord and knew that nothing would be permitted to come into his life that was not for his highest spiritual welfare, he enjoyed rest of mind and heart. He had no rest, though, from the impelling urgency of laying down his life in obedience to the heavenly vision. Whether in Jewish synagogues, in heathen temples, on shipboard, or in prison, the one consuming passion of his life was to impart to others the meaning of that heavenly vision. The knowledge which had been revealed to him was that Jesus was the Christ and that the hope of both the church and the world centered in him as the Redeemer. The vision further identified Christ as the one who was to reign until all enemies were put under his feet, even the great enemy death.—I Tim. 2:5-7; I Cor. 1:23; 15:25,26

Paul's faithfulness did not end with bearing witness to the Gospel of Christ. He was zealous in his service to the brethren and did not shrink from declaring unto them "all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) He was a faithful defender of the faith and outspoken in his opposition to the spirit of carnality in the church. He emphasized that Christ is the true head of the church and that for his brethren to say, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," is inappropriate. —I Cor. 3:4

The End of the Age

Prophecies by Paul, Peter, and John all assure us that the Lord's people at the end of the present age would be blessed with an increased understanding of the plans and purposes of God. The Master's own testimony is to the same effect. In describing the manner of his return and Second Presence, Jesus said, "as the lightning [Greek: bright shining] comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming [Greek: presence] of the Son of Man." (Matt. 24:27, *English Standard Version*) How beautiful is the figure of a sunrise, which Jesus used to illustrate the gradual dawning of the light of Truth in the day of his presence. Although this dawning has been gradual, eventually the full and clear brightness of his presence will banish the darkness of all evil, ignorance, superstition, and sin. While we are assured that ultimately, and as a result of the Master's presence, the "knowledge of the glory of the LORD" shall fill the whole earth "as the waters cover the sea," the Master's own disciples are the first to be illuminated by the light of his presence.—Hab. 2:14

Using a further illustration of the Truth which would be given to the household of faith at the end of the age, Jesus explained that when he returned he would serve them with “meat in due season.” (Matt. 24:45-47; Luke 12:37) The combined testimony of Jesus and the apostles reveals that the Lord’s people at this time should expect to be blessed with further understanding of Truths recorded in the Bible. However, there is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that this latter-day vision would be given by God in a miraculous manner such as in the past when he illuminated the minds of the prophets, the apostles, and our Lord Jesus. Further visions of this sort are no longer necessary, for all the plans and purposes of God are now recorded in the Scriptures.

We have reason to believe that a special understanding of the Word of God has been given to his people in this end of the age and in the manner indicated in the prophecies. What we must discover is whether or not this understanding is in fact the plan of God and the vision which had been mostly lost sight of during the many centuries of the Dark Ages. We must examine whether it is in harmony with, and is the sum total of, the promises and prophecies of the Word of God.

God’s Plan

Do we, then, at this present time, have the message of Truth? When it comes to an understanding of the entire plan of God for human redemption and salvation, we cannot properly judge Truth from error simply by examining one or even several individual points of doctrine. What we must first identify is the central theme of God’s plan and the

great objective to which every detail of that plan is leading. What is it that comes to light as we look into the prophecies and promises of the Word of God? It is the fact that God purposes to establish a kingdom here on earth which will quell the rebellion of fallen humanity against his sovereign will, and that mankind, by accepting God's provision of life through Christ, may be restored to perfection and live forever.

Jesus summed up this great theme when he taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) The Prophet Isaiah reveals that the accomplishment of this divine purpose is not dependent upon the frail arm of flesh, but that "the government shall be upon his [Jesus'] shoulder," and that "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."—Isa. 9:6,7

This great theme permeates the Word of God. It simply means that the divine purpose is the outline of what God will do for man's eventual blessing. The church fell away from this fundamental Truth of the Bible for many centuries. Instead of praying and waiting for the kingdom of God to rule and bless the world, a man-made kingdom was gradually set up by uniting church and state. This was called Christendom and, while the power and influence of that system is now much less, the underlying principle upon which it was based still governs the thinking and actions of those who are not enlightened by God's holy word. That principle seems to be that unless man does God's work for him, it will not be done at all. The result of this is that many are presently blind to the fact that God has a plan for the blessing of the nations and will carry out that plan regardless of human help.

Disappointment—Then Understanding

Prior to the great revealment of Truth at this end of the age, students of the prophecies, such as William Miller and others during the first half of the nineteenth century, had discovered, by the signs of the times and by certain prophecies, that the return of the Master was close at hand. They suffered disappointment in their expectations, however, because of a failure to understand the manner of Christ's return, supposing that he would come as a human with nail prints in his hands and feet. They had overlooked the fact that he had given his flesh for the life of the world and had been raised from the dead a glorious divine being, invisible to human eyes. Hence, when he returned he would be present invisibly, "as a thief," unrecognized by all except those who were "watching" for, and noting, the fulfillment of the prophecies.—Rev. 16:15; Matt. 24:42,43

Not too long after, in the latter half of the 1800's, a group of earnest students of the Bible had, over a considerable period of time, studied the prophecies. One of the great Truths which became clear as a result of that study was the object of the Lord's return. The Scriptures showed that he was to return to restore mankind to life, not to destroy the earth, and that the prophetic end of the world was in reality the end of the present evil social order, and the establishment of a new order, a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Pet. 3:13) In Acts 3:20,21, the Apostle Peter spoke about the plan of God that was to be accomplished through and by Christ during his Second Presence. He described it as "times of restitution of all things," and adds that it was this of which God had testified

“by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” This was the voice of God—the vision—as heard and made manifest to Peter and to us by the prophets.

The Vision Today

The vision of Truth that has reached us today in God’s appointed way, and in which we are rejoicing, is all-comprehensive. It embraces the meaning of all the great visions which God gave to his people in ancient times. Noah may not have understood this vision as we have it today, or realized that his experiences concerning the ending of that world prefigured the “days of the Son of man” in which we are now living, nearing the end of this “present evil world.” (Matt. 24:37-39; Gal. 1:4) Yet, it was a blessed thing for Noah to be informed of the coming flood and to be granted the privilege of service that he had in connection with it.

How Abraham must have rejoiced when God informed him of his purpose to bless all the families of the earth through his seed! He did not know, however, that this “seed” of blessing was to be a faith seed made up of Jesus and his body members who suffer and die with him that they might live and reign with him.—Gal. 3:16,27-29

Moses was awe-inspired when he saw the burning bush and heard the voice of God instructing him to take off his shoes, for the place on which he stood was holy ground. He learned that he was to be the deliverer of his people from Egypt and to be their lawgiver. He was given little insight, however, of the greater deliverance that was to come to all mankind, and of the reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles to God under the terms of the New Covenant. While

it is true that Moses prophesied that one greater than he was to come, like the other prophets of the Old Testament, it is doubtful if he understood very clearly the implications of this and others of his prophecies.—Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-26; 7:37; Heb. 12:18-24

Isaiah saw the Lord “high and lifted up,” and he was inspired with the sight to do the bidding of such an exalted and holy one, but his vision of God did not fully reveal the glories of the divine character as we see them today. Isaiah did not understand, as we are privileged to do, the marvelous depth and harmony of God’s attributes—his wisdom, justice, love, and power—so aptly represented in the “seraphims” that he saw in his vision.—Isa. 6:1-8

When the heavens were opened to Jesus there was revealed to him the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the purpose of his earthly ministry—that he was to suffer and die for mankind. It was not possible then to state those matters fully to his disciples, for as Jesus said, they were not able to “bear them now.” (John 16:12) When later Jesus did open up the Scriptures to them concerning the meaning of his death, their hearts burned within them, as they gained a greater understanding of these things.—Luke 24:32

It was at Pentecost when the meaning of the vision was enlarged to include the “call” of the church. (Acts 2:36-39) Then the footstep followers of Christ learned more fully of their privilege to suffer and die with the Master, thus to share in the “better sacrifices” of this age. (Heb. 9:23) This precious Truth was also lost sight of during the Dark Ages, but it is part of the glorious vision with which we have been blessed today.

The vision to which Paul was not disobedient was glorious in all its implications. In it, he saw that the plan of God had progressed to include the Gentiles and the offering to them of the opportunity to become fellow heirs with the Jews in the kingdom promises. (Eph. 2:11-22) Later, Paul was given other visions. He was “caught up to the third heaven” and to “paradise”—a “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”—and saw things which he was not permitted to utter because it was not then the due time. (II Cor. 12:1-4; II Pet. 3:13) Today, we also can see, by the eye of faith, the “third heaven” and know what Paul saw in “paradise.” He saw God’s purpose of a future restitution accomplished, and the entire human race living in a world-wide Eden of perfection of life and peace on earth. (Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:33-36) Paul was not permitted to declare what he saw, but we are bidden by our vision to tell the whole world the blessed tidings of Christ’s kingdom soon to be established!—Matt. 24:14; II Tim. 4:2

Responsibility for Truth

As we have noted, when in ancient times God gave visions to his servants, they were in the nature of commissions for service. It is the same in connection with the vision of Truth with which God has favored us. There is something for us to do about it. It is to us also a commission of service, as well as a commission that includes conditions and qualifications which must be met in order for our service to be “holy, acceptable unto God.”—Rom. 12:1

We want our hands to be used in God’s service. We want our feet to be swift in carrying the message

of divine love to “comfort all that mourn.” (Isa. 61:2) We desire to use our lips and our tongues to tell of his love. Indeed, if we internalize the proper spirit of the vision, we will want all that we possess to be used in God’s service. “Nothing, Lord, would I withhold,” is what we will say to him who has opened the eyes of our understanding to behold his glory. We will gladly devote our all to him.

All of this is included in our full obedience to the heavenly vision. Paul wrote that we should bring “every thought” into obedience to Christ. (II Cor. 10:5) Nothing short of this will be wholly pleasing to the Lord. Christ said that we should let our light shine and, in addition, outlined the many qualifications of righteousness which will make our light bearing acceptable to God. (Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:15) Let us, then, yield ourselves fully to the power of the Truth and, in our obedience to the vision, rejoice in whatever experiences may result. The time is short. Let us be faithful while the opportunity is still ours. ■

The Privilege of Anointing the “Feet” of Christ is Still With Us

*Oh, wash the “feet” with kindness,
With sympathy and with love,
Oh, comfort and refresh them
For they’re HIS, our Lord above.*

*If we wash the “feet” with kindness
Blessed “feet” of Christ, divine,
Then we have our Lord’s approval,
Blest assurance: “Thou art mine!”*

—*Pebbles and Poesies, Bessie V. M. Sennewald*

Marriage— a Scriptural Perspective

*“Wherefore they
are no more twain,
but one flesh. What
therefore God hath
joined together,
let not man put
asunder.”*

—*Matthew 19:6*

The marriage institution

was ordained by God in Eden prior to the entrance of sin into the world. It was established to populate the earth, perpetuate the human family, transmit values conducive to the preservation of social order

as well as happiness, and to provide for companionship, intimacy, and appropriate affection between man and woman. When the divine principles controlling marriage are observed, this relationship is a great blessing; if they are disregarded, much sorrow and vexation are certain to follow.

In the Old Testament, marriage is frequently used to symbolize the relationship existing between God and his chosen people Israel. We read for example, “Thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of

Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called.” (Isa. 54:5) As a symbolic wife, Israel was promised untold blessings by God. These would ultimately result in that nation becoming the spiritual seed of Abraham and a kingdom of priests if she remained obedient. (Exod. 19:5,6) Israel, however, did not remain loyal to Jehovah. History records the fulfillment of her punishments for disobedience and her subsequent destiny as foretold in the Bible.—Lev. 26:17-46; Matt. 23:37-39

In preparation for the Israelites' entrance into the land of promise, God's commands to his chosen people through Moses read, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. ... For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.” (Deut. 7:3-6) Thus, we see another aspect of marriage, that of compatibility, articulated in this passage. Such attributes as truth, righteousness, reverence for the Creator, and purity, which were inherent in the first pair prior to their fall into sin would not be fostered by the Israelites' union in marriage to heathen people. God admonished them to keep separate from idolaters.

God's dealings with Israel in many respects prefigure the instructions he has provided to the church. (I Cor. 10:11; Rom. 15:4) Just as Israel had to meet various requirements under the Law Covenant arrangement, so spirit-begotten believers of this age must fulfill their covenant obligations to the Heavenly Father.—Ps. 50:5

An attitude of mind which the consecrated should embody is reflected in these words from the Master: “Anyone who wants to be my follower must love me far more than he does his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters—yes, more than his own life—otherwise he cannot be my disciple. And no one can be my disciple who does not carry his own cross and follow me.”—Luke 14:26,27, *The Living Bible*

The First Obligation

As footstep followers of Christ, whether already married or contemplating marriage, our first obligation is to do the will of our Heavenly Father and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Faithfulness on our part will require that we seek to apply scriptural principles which are pertinent to the state of marriage and all other temporal matters in our lives. The married state was given the highest of endorsements when Jesus performed his first miracle by turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana. (John 2:1-11) The Apostle Paul acknowledged the propriety of the marriage relationship when he wrote, “marriage is honorable in all.”—Heb. 13:4

The decision to marry or not to marry is a personal one. Notwithstanding the satisfaction and mutual joy which occurs when serving the Lord with a mate, some of the Lord’s dear ones, when studying Paul’s words as well as other passages of Scripture, may come to the conclusion that for them, it would be to their best advantage in serving the Lord to maintain themselves in the single state.—I Cor. 7:24-38

Each individual believer, however, should seek to determine the Lord's will with regard to the advisability of entering into the marriage relationship. One should commit the matter to the Heavenly Father in prayer, meditating upon the scriptural testimony concerning marriage, observing and seeking counsel from brethren who have chosen to marry, and then carefully considering God's overruling providence. If one's consecrated judgment seems to indicate it would be a blessing and a spiritual enhancement to continue serving the Lord within the bonds of matrimony, additional factors should be considered in selecting a mate with whom to spend the remainder of one's consecrated life.

Being Yoked Properly

One important concern would be these words from Paul: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14) This text counsels the Lord's people to be separate from the aims, ambitions, and spirit of the world, as well as fundamentally erroneous doctrines and practices, regardless of religious origin. This point is further amplified later in the chapter when the apostle writes: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."—II Cor. 6:17

The matter of choosing to be unequally yoked at the start of a marriage relationship is quite different from being unequally yoked by virtue of having become a New Creature in Christ after

marriage occurs. We further note that the word “unbelievers” in the foregoing verse 14 is translated from a Greek word which, according to *Strong’s Greek Dictionary*, means: “actively disbelieving, without Christian faith, a heathen.” From this definition we may understand that the phrase “unequally yoked” would not necessarily apply to a consecrated believer choosing to marry another believer who is unconsecrated, yet supportive of his or her spouse’s standing with the Lord. In such cases, the word “unbelievers,” as defined, would not fit properly.

The Apostle Paul’s additional reference about marrying “only in the Lord” has been viewed by some as a commandment and by others as a suggestion. (I Cor. 7:39) Indeed, Paul himself stated at the beginning of his discussion of this subject in verse 25, “I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment.” Thus, all the consecrated should exercise great care, not only when making their own decisions concerning marriage, but also to avoid judging the decisions made by others.—Matt. 7:1,2

Seeking the Ideal Mate

We are surely living in stressful times. For those who desire to enter into marriage, it is often difficult to find a seemingly ideal mate. Certainly, none of us is perfect. If a desired spouse must fit certain detailed specifications, such an individual may prove to be non-existent. This may eventually lead to a lowering of expectations.

One should be very reluctant to enter into a union of marriage based mainly upon mutual physical

attraction before considering other matters. Is there compatibility spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually? Is each motivated by a desire to give to the other rather than merely receiving? Do each have a similarity of overall goals and outlook with regard to handling everyday practical matters? Believers who enter into marriage should also recognize that their relationship prefigures the future relationship between Christ and the glorified church. (II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7,8; 21:2) Therefore, there are certain principles outlined in the Scriptures which should guide an earthly union.

The Bible teaches that in the relationship between the sexes, headship resides in the man: "I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." (I Cor. 11:3) Properly understood, this headship in no way implies oppression or cruelty of any kind. In fact, if we look at Christ in his relationship to the church, we see that Jesus epitomizes love, care, and helpfulness with regard to the interests of his bride.—John 15:9-12; II Thess. 2:16

As an evidence of our Master's loving concern for the church, a portion of the prayer which he uttered to God on the night prior to his crucifixion reads: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 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."—John 17:20,21

As footstep followers of Jesus, we must manifest, both within and outside the marriage arrangement,

our great reverence for God, a supreme desire to be obedient to his will, loving appreciation for the magnificent sacrifice of Christ, and daily striving to be conformed to his image. Thus, given the Holy Spirit's influence in our lives, we should hearken to the instructions furnished in the Scriptures as we seek to attain this oneness of love, purpose, spirit, and purity which the Master prayed would be evident in our lives.

Counsel from Apostle Paul

Ephesians chapter 5 contains another familiar passage of Scripture which applies to our subject: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So, ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."—Eph. 5:22-29

Note that wives should submit themselves to their husbands in the same manner as the church is to be subject to Christ. Our subjection to Jesus is a willing one and is inspired not by fear or force.

Rather, it is prompted by love, gratitude, supreme confidence, and trust that he will care for our every interest. With Christ, if we are properly exercised, our subjection will always result in blessings. As our Head, in every instance, all that he will do on our behalf is always for our highest good and best interest. (Rom. 8:28) In an earthly marriage, that is the ideal, but because of imperfection, such is not always the case. Therefore, the Apostle Paul gives the special admonition to husbands: "Let each one of you, individually, so love his own wife as himself, that even the wife may reverence her husband."—vs. 33, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

A husband's love, concern, faithfulness, and sacrificial attitude toward his wife should have the effect of having her manifest reverence and respect toward him which otherwise could not occur if he did not conduct himself along such lines as taught in the Scriptures. When Ephesians 5:24 speaks of submitting "in everything," the clear implication is in everything consistent with righteousness, Christian principles, and the spirit of what would be in harmony with the divine arrangement. In Acts 5:1-10 we have the account of Ananias and Sapphira. Since Sapphira acquiesced in her husband's evil plan to withhold some of the money from the land they sold, both were destroyed. Clearly, she should not have submitted to her husband's plan, nor been party to it.

The apostle's further counsel in Ephesians 5:25-29 makes it clear that the purpose of Christ's supervision of the church and of our submission to him is not designed to limit our spiritual or intellectual abilities, to degrade us, nor is it for

any selfish purposes. It is, rather, that we may be completely sanctified, made spotless and “without blemish.” Ideally, as the husband would care for his own body and all of its interests, he is to demonstrate the same concern for his wife. He should seek to provide for her needs, both spiritually and temporally, just as Christ nourishes, protects, counsels, and guides us in the way of holiness.

Sometimes difficulties arise when a wife has superior abilities in areas of the marital relationship. Quite often today, either by virtue of education or work experience, a wife may have much greater capabilities in terms of money management, arranging affairs in the home, or a better awareness of how to handle certain situations. In such cases there could be an inclination on her part to assume the place of headship. Such a course, if pursued, could prove detrimental to the marriage. To prevent serious difficulties, it would be wise upon her part to be extremely tactful. She could, perhaps, offer suggestions for her husband’s consideration in a kindly, appropriate manner. He may thus have greater insights and be built up, in addition to appreciating her talents as a helpmate, while still retaining his position according to the divine arrangement.

Mutual Support

As previously noted, some of the consecrated may be married to one who is unconsecrated. In many instances, unconsecrated spouses would be very supportive of their mate’s activities. Surely that is a blessing. If it is the husband who is consecrated,

by consideration of his wife's needs and his devotion to biblical principles, he will enjoy a happy union. By his example, his wife may subsequently accept the Lord, and both are then able to walk together in spiritual matters.

Similarly, if the wife is consecrated and her husband is a noble and caring individual, he will be supportive of her and appreciate her stand for righteousness. It may be that she will prove to be such a positive influence upon him that he, too, will ultimately come to dedicate his life to the Lord. However, even if that does not occur, although she could not compromise on matters of principle, recognizing the fact that her husband was respectful of and treated her in a kindly and loving manner, she would be obliged to exercise some moderation and to meet the demands of the marriage relationship. This would include providing her husband with a reasonable degree of companionship even if he did not participate in all of the spiritual activities with which she is involved.

When Severe Problems Occur

Considering the immense sense of joy and elation that is so apparent between a couple on their wedding day, it almost seems impossible to conceive that such a relationship could deteriorate to the point where the love which once existed is no longer evident. The Apostle Paul addressed such circumstances when he wrote: "Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.”—I Cor. 7:10-15

Even in a very difficult marriage, to the extent possible, the consecrated husband is to perform his duties carefully even while he patiently endures this trial. The above verses point out that he should put his trust in God that the sanctifying effect of his spiritual life will at least be a testimony to his wife and children. In similar fashion, the consecrated wife also is to perform her wifely responsibilities in the spirit of meekness, patience, and respect to the extent that she can endure the situation, trusting to God for promised grace and by example, also manifesting the sanctifying influence in the home and upon her children. Despite a believer’s best efforts to maintain the marriage, if the unbelieving husband or wife chooses to depart, it may well be that this is a providential overruling by the Heavenly Father.

Unbearable Oppression

It is unfortunate that in a marriage union, sometimes an impossible situation may develop for the believer. If the husband is a consecrated believer, his wife may become antagonistic toward his beliefs.

This could result in unreasonable actions, such as forbidding brethren to visit, destroying Truth literature, making it impossible for him to attend meetings, and even undermining his influence with their children. In such an instance where the believing husband could not exercise his proper role within the marital relationship, he would be justified in considering himself as being forsaken if all attempts at resolving their differences have failed. Such treatment would demonstrate that the concept of oneness had been broken, and he would be well advised to separate himself from that environment and live elsewhere.

There may be times, too, when the wife is the believer, and the unbelieving husband's treatment of her is unbearable. If he through hostility becomes dictatorial, abusive, and demonstrates a lack of love and a loss of respect through his treatment of her, the wife would have grounds for considering herself deserted. She should prayerfully look to God for his leadings and providences so that he may direct the issue for her highest spiritual welfare and to afford her relief, especially in a situation where children are involved. The Christian wife has an obligation to be respectful to her husband. However, depending on the severity of a situation, there may be circumstances where the spirit of a sound mind will indicate that the limits of endurance have been reached and a separation is necessary.

In all such cases where severe marriage difficulties may have arisen, the consecrated believer must take great care to be sure that he or she is acting within scriptural guidelines. Every effort should be made to rectify such circumstances to the mutual

benefit of both husband and wife, as well as children if such be involved, within the confines of Christian principles. Separation should only be considered as a very last resort, after all other methods have failed to resolve the situation. Above all, the guiding influence of God's Holy Spirit should be diligently sought in order that the Heavenly Father's will might be ascertained and decisions made in harmony with that will. Additionally, given the likelihood that all of the circumstances related to such matters are not known by others, and as previously noted, judgment is to be avoided.—Matt. 7:1,2

Conclusion

A consecrated child of God's first obligation is to strive to do the will of the Heavenly Father. Marriage is an institution divinely ordained, and when ordered along scriptural lines, it facilitates the spirit of oneness. Decisions related to marriage and the marriage arrangement are very personal, and often involve differing circumstances not known to all. Therefore, consecrated believers should avoid judging the decisions of others. Footstep followers of Christ who marry are advised to do so as to avoid the difficulties which often occur when believers are not properly matched. Since marriage is a picture of the union between Christ and the church, in our human marriages we should be guided by an application of scriptural principles that are manifested in this glorious spiritual arrangement. The hope of becoming a part of the Lamb's wife should serve to strengthen our resolve to be faithful in the doing of God's will, as revealed to us through his most precious and Holy Word. ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

AUGUST 6—"Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you."—James 4:7 (Z. '00-30 Hymn 149)

AUGUST 13—"We are ambassadors for Christ."—II Corinthians 5:20 (Z. '04-72 Hymn 118)

AUGUST 20—"Whom therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."—Acts 17:23 (Z. '03-29 Hymn 116)

AUGUST 27—"Henceforth know we no man after the flesh."—II Corinthians 5:16 (Z. '03-170 Hymn 165)

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Joan Palumbo, Chicago, IL—June 6. Age, 89

Brother Stanisław Blecharczyk, Wrocław, Poland—
June 24. Age, 99

*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
and his greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall praise thy works to another,
and shall declare thy mighty acts.
I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty,
and of thy wondrous works. ...
The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion;
slow to anger, and of great mercy.
The LORD is good to all:
and his tender mercies are over all his works.
All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD;
and thy saints shall bless thee.
They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom,
and talk of thy power;
To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts,
and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.
Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.
—Psalm 145:3-5,8-13*