

“Whereas I Was Blind, Now I See”

***“One thing I know,
that, whereas I was
blind, now I see.”
—John 9:25***

THE LEADERS OF THE world met in Copenhagen in March, 1995 and committed to eradicating poverty on our planet. A ten-year program was launched in 1996 for this purpose. We have not seen any data as to the success or failure of this

program, but the condition of the world today indicates that most people are in poverty. This particular program was considered as ambitious, and was analyzed in a “Dawn,” September 1996, Highlights article.

Last month the United Nations made another announcement from Geneva—a pledge to eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020. The announcement in the *Newark Star Ledger* said, under the caption, “U.N. Mounts Campaign to End Blindness:”

Associated Press, Geneva:—“The United Nations pledged yesterday to eliminate blindness by the year 2020.

“Cataracts, curable by surgery and accounting for almost half the world’s blindness, are a prime target of the World Health Organizations’ ‘Vision 2020: The Right to Sight’ initiative. Some 20 million people are blind from the condition.

“The plan identifies four other conditions, including trachoma and childhood blindness, as priorities.

“WHO (*World Health Organization*) will work with independent development organizations to redouble efforts against blindness, concentrating on disease prevention, training and transferring technology to developing countries.

“‘Up to 80 percent of the world’s blindness is avoidable’ said WHO Director-General Gro Harlem Brundtland. ‘It either results from the conditions that could have been prevented or can be successfully treated with the sight restored.’

“Trachoma, a painful infection that has blinded 6 million people in the world’s poorest countries, is the most widespread preventable disease to be targeted by the new program.”

MODERN TECHNOLOGY

This program also is a very ambitious undertaking, with a broader time for accomplishment. Unlike the poverty program that depends on economic conditions improving, this campaign depends on modern technology to effect a change and to make such skills available to the impoverished of third world countries. It is a laudable campaign; but it cannot compare with God’s program—to remove all physical blindness in the world.

One of the great blessings of life is our eyesight. Although perfection of body does not exist in this present evil world, and our eyes often need corrective lenses early in life, yet there is no comparison between being able to see under these circumstances and having to cope with total blindness. Blindness is a tragedy, and is recognized to be so by God, our Heavenly Father. It is for this reason that the removal of blindness is considered a definite sign of God’s favor. The Prophet Isaiah, in prophesying about the blessings of God’s kingdom, said: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.”—Isa. 35:5

JESUS OPENED BLIND EYES

During our Lord Jesus’ ministry, John the Baptist, when in prison, wanted to know if Jesus was the expected Messiah. He asked, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Matt. 11:3) Our Lord answered by calling attention to the sample works he performed then, compared with kingdom blessings which would be enjoyed by all during that kingdom. Leading the list was: “The blind receive their sight.” (vs. 5) Several who were blind had their sight restored. Among the first were two blind men who followed him asking for mercy. Jesus performed a miracle and said, “See that no man know it.” (Matt. 9:27-31) Instead, they spread abroad his fame in all that country, and many sought to be healed by him. For example, when he went to the temple in Jerusalem, we read: “The blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.”—Matt. 21:14

Probably the most meaningful and detailed account of healing blindness is found in the ninth chapter of John. Jesus encountered a young man who was blind from birth. The disciples asked Jesus if the blind man was born with this affliction because his parents had sinned, or because the man himself had sinned. Jesus said that this was not due to special sin either on the part of the parents or the blind man. Jesus was not here discussing the general condemnation of death which rested upon all mankind because of original sin, in which sense all sickness, imperfection, and death are due to sin.—John 9:1-3

What Jesus indicated was that this blind man had not been singled out for special punishment because of some particular sin. He explained, however, that in this instance the man's malady would be used as an opportunity for the works of God to be manifested; for Divine power was used to give the man his sight.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus added, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (vss. 4,5) Here daytime is used by Jesus to symbolize the productive period in one's life; this is in contrast to nighttime, which illustrates the time in which no man can work, especially after being overtaken by death. Jesus knew that he had a great work to perform in connection with his Father's plan, and that his 'day' would not be a very long one. Indeed, the entire period of his ministry was only three and one-half years.

Jesus did not always ask the cooperation of those whom he healed, but in the case of this blind man, he did. He anointed his eyes with clay, and asked the man to go to the pool of Siloam and wash the clay off. We are not to suppose that there was any restorative power in the clay, nor in the water of the pool. But by this act, the man was demonstrating his desire to cooperate with the Master—a desire which was based on faith.

The man returned from the pool able to see. But he fell into disrepute among some of the Pharisees who claimed that Jesus had violated the Law by working on the Sabbath Day by making the clay for the man's eyes, etc. In the controversy that ensued, the man was not sure of the cause of the great miracle by which he had gained his sight, but he gave

a wonderful testimony. He said, “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”—vs. 25

BELIEVING ON THE SON OF GOD

In due course Jesus came into contact again with the healed man and asked him, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” The man replied, “Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?” And Jesus said unto him, “Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.” The one who had been born blind then made a firm announcement of his faith. He said, “Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.”—vss. 35-38

Jesus then made a symbolic application of blindness and of sight, saying, “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.” Some of the Pharisees understood and asked, “Are we blind also?” Jesus then indicated that they had a measure of sight, and were therefore held responsible in their willful opposition to him and his message. (John 9:39-41) In our title verse, Jesus uses sight to illustrate one’s vision of God, and to show that those who do not walk in darkness enjoy “the light of life.”—John 8:12

DARKNESS COVERS THE EARTH

In this account of healing blindness from birth we are reminded that all the world is in a darkened condition because of inherited blindness. As Isaiah said, “The darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.” (Isa. 60:2) Ever since Father Adam transgressed God’s law there has been darkness. People are blind to the message of truth. The man was believed to be young—his parents were still living, and there was doubt as to his age. He represents all the Lord’s people of the Gospel Age whose eyes have been opened to see God’s beautiful character and his wonderful plan.

When our Lord’s disciples asked Jesus why he spoke to the people in parables, he quoted Isaiah 6:9 as part of his answer: “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”—Matt. 13:15,16

During the present Gospel Age, the Lord is seeking a people ‘for his name,’ to be associated with his Son and the kingdom work. This is why Jesus said that “neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents.” The answer to that question, i.e., the recovery of the world’s general blindness, was a different matter. Rather, “That the works of God should be made manifest in him.” (John 9:3) The works of God are made manifest during the Gospel Age in God’s chosen ones only.

A PICTURE OF GOD’S PEOPLE

The experiences of God’s people during the Gospel Age are similar to those of the blind man who was healed. He demonstrated his faith by washing in the pool of Siloam. When Jesus anointed his eyes with clay and spittle, he still could not see, although it may have felt good. Only when he washed in the pool was his eyesight given to him. This event could represent at first when a member of Adam’s family (clay) brought the message of salvation (the fruit of our Lord’s lips) to us.

However, only at consecration do we receive the Lord’s Holy Spirit and are able to see. Our neighbors are not sure that we are the same person. The Pharisees, opponents of the message of truth, interrogated this man and also his parents in an endeavor to suggest that the event never happened. So, too, the opponents of the New Creation try to dissuade our consecrated walk. As the man was excommunicated from the Temple, causing Jesus to reveal himself to him, so also, the opposition to our consecration serves to bring us closer to Jesus, conforming our lives to his image as we worship him.

GOD’S DAY OF JUDGMENT

The judgment that follows the Gospel Age is that of the Millennial Age, when everyone will be given an opportunity to see God’s Plan. (Jer. 31:31-34) When the Apostle Paul was persecuted by those who opposed his message, he cited Isaiah 49:6, which said, “I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the end of the earth.” (Acts 13:44-49) In that same prophecy in Isaiah, it is mentioned that those being selected in the Gospel Age will be used as an instrumentality to restore sight to all the world of mankind.

“Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation [the Gospel Age] have I helped thee: and I will preserve

thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people [to be ministers of the New Covenant (II Cor. 3:6)] to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages [waiting for Psalm 2:8 to be fulfilled].”—Isa. 49:8

“That thou mayest say to the prisoners [in the prisonhouse of death], Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. [No more darkness of the tomb or of God’s plan.] They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.” [The resurrection brings life to all mankind].—vs. 9

“They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way [obstacles removed, as in Isaiah 35:8], and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim [the uttermost parts of the earth].”—vss. 10-12

The great work of the Millennial kingdom by Jesus and his Church will be the restoration of all mankind from the darkness of death and the darkness of ignorance. All will then be able to say, ‘Whereas I was blind, now I see.’

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Follow Day by Day

Key Verse: *“The cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”*
—Exodus 40:38

Selected Scriptures:
Exodus 40:34-38;
Numbers 9:15-19,
22, 23

THE NATION OF ISRAEL HAD been especially blessed by God, as evidenced by the cloud which led them by day, and the pillar of fire which led them by night. This remarkable demonstration of God’s power on behalf of his chosen people serves to illustrate his providential care for them in all their sojourns.

These miracles of the Lord were associated with the Tabernacle and its various arrangements, where God, through their great leader, Moses, directed his people. When the cloud moved, they knew that the time had come for them to move also. When it stopped, they stopped, and set up their camp on the new location. They remained there until they had an indication that it was time for them to start

out again.

The glorious presence of God was always with the Israelites as illustrated by the cloud in our lesson. We read: “A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” (Exod. 40:34,35) The Tabernacle, sometimes called the ‘tent of the congregation,’ was the center of Jewish religious life. The children of Israel did not meet there as a congregation, but it was the distinct and holy place where God dwelt with his people.

God’s presence was also with the Israelites during the nighttime, as shown by the pillar of fire. We further read, “On the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were

the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was alway: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.” (Num 9:15,16) In this way the children of Israel were especially blessed with a continual manifestation of God’s protection over them.

The nation of Israel, along with its Tabernacle rituals and arrangements, serves as a typical reminder that God has been caring for and protecting his people throughout the present Gospel Age. He has taken up his abode with those Christians who have been enlightened with the truth, and have responded to the invitation to follow his leadings.

The Apostle addresses this in his first letter to the church at Corinth. He says: “Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”—I Cor. 10:1-4

The invitation to walk with our Lord during this time has been a special blessing to those who have responded to the call. Having received a measure of the Holy Spirit, we recognize God’s providence in our lives. We follow him wherever he may lead, even as the children of Israel followed the cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. The eventual goal for Israel was to reach Canaan. Our goal is heavenly Canaan.

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A Missed Opportunity

Key Verse: “If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us; fear them not.”
—Numbers 14:8, 9

Selected Scriptures:
Numbers 13:1-3, 32;
14:4, 20-24

THE ISRAELITES HAD been guided in all their affairs by God, with his providential cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. God’s care had been with them throughout their journeys, the setting up of their camp in various places, and the lengths of their stays. They had also been miraculously fed the manna.

Now the Israelites were camped in the wilderness of Paran, and it was from here that Moses would direct the children of Israel concerning the promised land of Canaan, and how they were to go about possessing it. The people, however, wanted to send spies to investigate the nature of the country before entering it. “Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged. And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will

send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.”—Deut. 1:21,22

Knowing the Israelites’ reluctance to proceed directly to the promised land, God instructed Moses to send one spy from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to scout out the land. Forty days later, Joshua and Caleb brought back an encouraging description of what they had seen, but the other ten returned with an unfavorable report. These spies were more fearful, and

lacking faith in God. They claimed Israel could never defeat the powerful enemies they would encounter in the land of Canaan.

Joshua and Caleb tried to calm the people's fears concerning the report of the majority of the spies, and warned the children of Israel against rebellion. They, however, were unsuccessful. As a punishment for lack of faith, God let them wander in the wilderness for forty years. Most of those who began that journey, and who were of military age, died during that period of time. The Levites were excluded from military service, and Joshua and Caleb were the only ones of that group to enter the promised land.

Israel represents the experiences of the church class during the Gospel Age, and Canaan illustrates the condition of rest that the Lord's people enjoy during the present time, when Christians are brought into the greater rest of faith. The name Joshua means 'deliverer of the people.' It fittingly typifies our Lord Jesus, who leads his people into this rest.

When Israel entered Canaan, they fought many battles to overcome the inhabitants. The Christian also experiences trials and difficulties in overcoming the weakness of the flesh, the world, and the temptations of Satan. As these submit themselves to God's will, they are developed by God's providences.

Only a few of the many Israelites who began the journey were permitted to enter the promised land. Likewise, only the faithful class of Christians will receive the grand inheritance of entering the kingdom as the Bride of Christ.

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In the Wilderness

Key Verse: *“The LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing.”*
—Deuteronomy 2:7

Selected Scriptures:
Deuteronomy
1:41 - 2:8

ONLY TWO OF THE SPIES, Joshua and Caleb, returned to the camp of Israel with a good report of what they had seen in the promised land of Canaan. The children of Israel, however, were in a fearful and rebellious attitude.

Lacking faith in God’s power to deliver them from whatever enemies they might encounter in Canaan, God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Because of their disobedience and lack of faith, they wandered as nomads throughout the vast Sinai desert, where most of the original group died including Moses and Aaron, as well as the registered males twenty years old and upward.

God did not abandon his people, however, but continued to bless and guide them throughout their wilderness experiences. He protected them from their enemies, except when they rebelled against him, when they suffered the consequences of disobedience. The Lord provided all their needs. They were given manna to eat, water to drink, and their shoes did not wear out, even from all their wanderings.

But, in spite of such miraculous demonstrations of God’s loving care on their behalf, the Israelites continued to murmur and complain about their experiences. God found it necessary to discipline them harshly until they learned to trust him.

They were eager to fight the Amorites even though God had told them not to go against them. Moses related: “The Lord said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies. So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but

rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, and went presumptuously up into the hill. And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah. And ye returned and wept before the Lord; but the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you.”—Deut. 1:42-45

Later, Moses again relayed God’s instructions that the Israelites should not fight the descendants of Esau when they passed through their territory, but should pay them for whatever they needed for both food and drink. Similar instructions were also given concerning their peaceable passage through the territories of the Moabites and Ammonites.

The wilderness experiences of Israel served as typical lessons for Christians now living at the close of the Gospel Age. God has been directing the affairs of his people at this time also. All who have responded to his call must learn to trust him in the varied experiences of their consecrated walk—including the difficult, trying experiences we must endure before we can enter the heavenly Canaan, the Promised Land. Those who rebel against his providences are disciplined so they may learn to trust him wherever he may lead them.—Heb. 3:8-19

Crossing Jordan, and entering the land of Canaan represents entering the heavenly Promised Land.

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Teach Your Children Well

Key Verse: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” —Deuteronomy 6:4,5

***Selected Scriptures:
Deuteronomy
6:1-9, 20-24***

LAST WEEK’S LESSON focused on the miraculous manner in which God’s loving power was demonstrated on behalf of the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. This was a blessed relationship which they were privileged to enjoy. Our attention is now drawn to God’s commandments as they relate to his people, and how they should worship him with all of their heart, soul, and might.

It is recorded: “Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.”—Deut 6:1,2

The Israelites were responsible for teaching their children diligently concerning these directions from God. They were to instruct them in the ways of the Lord, whether in the home or during the daily pursuits of life. Additionally, they were to keep the statutes of the Lord ‘between their eyes’ which suggests the intellect and memory of the child of God. The reference to placing these commandments of God on the posts and gates to their homes (vss. 8,9) further indicates the necessity of having these statutes and judgments close at hand.

It is further recorded that “When thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us

out of Egypt with a mighty hand: And the Lord shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers.”—vss. 20-23

God had truly blessed his people, delivering them, and caring for them in so many remarkable ways. This was a rich legacy which the Jews were instructed to leave with their children. They were to be reminded of these things whenever they inquired into the directions of God. God dwelt with the Israelites for their good always, and so that, as a people, they would be preserved in righteousness and in the ways of the Lord God of Israel.

During the present Gospel Age, the Lord’s people have been called out of the world with instructions to love God with all their heart, soul and might. Those who have thus consecrated themselves to the doing of God’s service, consider this a great privilege. They willingly use their time, intellect and energy proclaiming the wonderful manner in which God has directed them, and consider it an honor and a blessing to teach their children to have faith in the marvelous promises of God, “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.”—I Pet. 1:14

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Don't Lose Perspective

Key Verse: “Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.”

—Deuteronomy 8:11

Selected Scriptures: Deuteronomy 8:7-20

IN THE PREVIOUS LESSON the Israelites were learning to appreciate their special relationship with God, and the meaning of true love and devotion due him. They were given his commandments, statutes, and judgments. And, as his chosen people, they were also taught the importance of teaching their children the true values of God.

Although Israel had received abundantly of God's rich blessings, the warning was clear. They must be on guard to prevent losing perspective of their extraordinary privileges. A heavy responsibility existed to continue in such a blessed relationship with God.

We are told that they had received much in every way. They had been brought into a plentiful land with bountiful springs and fountains of water. The wheat and barley harvests were abundant; and there were vines, fig trees, pomegranates, as well as olive trees and honey in the land.

It was a wonderful place where bread was plentiful, and a place where God had promised to abide with them. The record states that even the stones were rich in iron ore, and the hills were filled with brass (copper).—Deut. 8:7-9

The Lord had truly brought them into a land of milk and honey. But, as the record continues, there was the risk that the children of God would become complacent and careless. (vss. 14-16) They were warned that their hearts could be “lifted up” with pride because of the abundance which they had received, and that they would soon forget the remarkable manner in which they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt. The danger also existed that they would forget the way in which God had

especially guided and cared for them while in the wilderness among the fiery serpents, and scorpions. Furthermore, they could forget the way God had brought water out of the rock, and gave them manna which had been provided for their sustenance.

Pride and arrogance had overtaken the hearts of the children of Israel. We read: “Thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.” (vss. 17,18) The account warns the Israelites not to forget about God’s providences, and not to seek after other gods, or to worship them. To do so would end in disaster. God had fought for Israel in the past. He had destroyed their enemies. To disregard this protection would result in severe punishment.

In the present Gospel Age, God has also been calling Christians from the world, and blessing them as they strive to walk in the narrow way. It has been a difficult period for the Lord’s people during this time of the permission of evil, but he has promised to guide and care for them even as he did with the Israelites of old. Christians have also learned to abide in his blessed Word, and to overcome the many obstacles along the way. Let us learn the lessons from the Israelites, whose experiences serve as a type, that we, too, must be faithful to the loving Heavenly Father who has been directing us.

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A New Creation

“If any one be in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold! they have become new.”

—II Corinthians 5:17, Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott

HOW DOES ONE BECOME a part of the ‘new creation’? We become a ‘new creation’ through the begetting of the Holy Spirit, and for those who receive this begetting, all things ‘become new.’

They have new hopes, new aims, new ambitions. They have a new vocation in life, which is to serve the Lord rather than self. They set their affections on things above, rather than on the things of the earth; and they run diligently for the prize of the High Calling of God in

Christ Jesus, rather than for worldly glory, honor, and riches.

The Apostle Paul appeals to anyone who would come to Christ, saying: “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

Paul assures us that if we present ourselves a living sacrifice, our offering will be acceptable to God. Such a consecration implies the surrender of our wills and the acceptance of the will of God as it is expressed through Christ. Paul uses the human body to illustrate this point, likening Jesus to the head and his consecrated people to the other members of the body. Figuratively speaking, then, the surrender of our wills means that Christ becomes our Head, and we become members of his body. Thus it is that we are inducted into the body of Christ—or ‘baptized’ into his body, as Paul explains it.—Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 12:13

WAS OUR CONSECRATION ACCEPTED?

How may we be sure that, having made a full consecration to the Lord, he has accepted us and has begotten us by his Spirit, and we have thus become his children? Our assurance of this must depend upon our

confidence in the promises of God. There are doubtless many who think themselves to be true Christians who are not thus recognized by God. But if we have taken the necessary steps of obedience to the Divine will as outlined in the Scriptures, we may know with certainty that God has accepted us.

Have we repented of our sins, and is our hope of life based upon the redemptive work of Christ? Have we made a full consecration to the Lord, and are we diligently seeking to carry it out day by day? Have we turned our backs upon the world, and have we set our faces heavenward; and are our greatest joys those which pertain to the things of the Spirit? If our hearts respond affirmatively to these questions, and we are looking to the Lord for his continued guidance and help as we walk in the narrow way of sacrifice, then we need have no doubts about our standing among the sons of God. God was well pleased with us when we echoed the sentiments expressed by Jesus: “Lo, I come: in the volume of the Book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”—Ps. 40:7,8

IS IT TOO LATE?

The prophecies of the Bible reveal that we have reached the closing years of the Gospel Age—that period of time in the Divine plan during which the body members of Christ would be selected. This is the age of the ‘heavenly calling,’ when those constrained by the love of Christ to make a consecration to the Lord are given the hope of joint-heirship with Christ, to live and reign with him in his kingdom. When this age shall have fully ended there will be no further opportunity to run for such a prize. With the opening of the new age now so near—the Millennial Age—perfect human life on the earth will be offered to those who obey the righteous laws of Christ’s kingdom.

In view of the shortness of the time now remaining in the Gospel Age—although we do not know exactly how long—some inquire as to whether or not the opportunity to run for the prize of the high calling to joint-heirship with Christ is still open. ‘Can we be sure,’ some ask, ‘that although we have consecrated ourselves to God and have a desire for heavenly things, that our consecration has been accepted, and that we have been inducted into the body of Christ?’

We believe so! Jesus said that no one could come to him unless drawn by his Heavenly Father. (John 6:44) Jesus also explained that those who come to the Father by or through him, he “will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37) The Scriptures reveal clearly that there is only one purpose for which the Father draws people to Christ during this age, and it is that they may have an opportunity to walk in the Master’s footsteps of sacrifice and, if faithful, live and reign with him in his kingdom. Remember, then, that you could not have come to Christ in the way you did, unless you had been drawn by God; and also remember the promise that having thus come to God through Christ, you will not be cast out or refused. Those who can exercise full faith in these two statements by the Master, need have no misgivings about their hope of the High Calling.

We have another assurance along this same line given to us by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. He explains that while some ‘plant’ and others ‘water’ the ‘seeds’ of truth, it is God that giveth the increase. One or more of the Lord’s people may have been instrumental in ‘planting,’ but if the truth has influenced us to devote our lives to him, and enlightened us with the prospect of the heavenly calling and given us the desire to run for such a prize, then it is of the Lord. He—not man—has given this increase. This being true, it means that there is a place for us in the heavenly phase of the kingdom if we but prove faithful unto death, joyfully sacrificing our all in Divine service.

A GOD OF ORDER

At the beginning of the Gospel Age, no one could enter the race for the heavenly prize until it was God’s due time. Jesus spoke of John the Baptist as being as great as anyone ever born, but he was not granted the privilege of the High Calling. The “least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he,” Jesus said. (Matt. 11:11) No one could be begotten by the Holy Spirit until it was given at Pentecost. Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, could not enter into the Gospel privileges of this age until God’s due time, and when that time came, Peter was miraculously directed to go to his home to present the Gospel to him. Even then it was necessary for God to give the increase, else Cornelius would not have been brought into the Church.

God’s dealings with his people are just as definite at this end of the age. We are not to suppose that he has relinquished his control over the

influence of his promises in the hearts of those who come in contact with them through the proclamation of the truth by his faithful people.

It is still true that he alone giveth the increase. We may witness the truth to millions of people, but only in the hearts of those whom God, by his providences, has specially prepared, and whom he wishes to draw to Christ, will there be a turning to him in full consecration to do his will.

The promises of the Bible are God's promises, and he is too just and too loving to permit a single individual to be led into a belief of his promises unless he could, by the provision of Christ's merit and his own faithfulness, realize their fulfillment.

God is still directing his work, and is allowing his people to promulgate the Gospel, and thereby engender hope in the hearts of those who are led to consecration only because he is prepared to make good those hopes. Otherwise there would be no 'increase,' no one would be 'drawn.'

THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS

Paul wrote that the Spirit of God bears "witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:16) Do we have this witness of the Spirit? Again, we cannot depend upon our feelings, but must be guided by the testimony of God's Word; for it is through the Word that the Spirit testifies to us. The Apostle John, for example, informs us that those who are begotten of God do not sin. (I John 5:18, *WED*) This does not mean that they are able to control their flesh perfectly, but rather, that they hate sin, and are striving against it. Do we find ourselves in this position? Is every inclination which is contrary to the principles of Divine righteousness displeasing to us? If so, we have this evidence that we have been begotten by the Spirit.

Jesus said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: ... but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:19) Has the Spirit of God operating through the truth made such a change in our outlook and habits of life that the world holds no allurements for us? Does the world recognize our aloofness from its selfish aims, ambitions, and pleasures? If so, then we have a further witness of the Spirit that we have been accepted into the Divine family.

The Apostle Paul advised that we should set our affections on things above, not on things of the earth. (Col. 3:1-4) Have the heavenly promises

of the Word taken such a hold upon our hearts and minds that the things of the earth have lost their attraction? Does the hope of being with Jesus in the ‘place’ which he promised to prepare mean more to us than the comforts of an earthly home? And would we be ready, should the Lord indicate it to be his will, to break every tender earthly tie, and give up all earthly comforts, in order to win the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus? If so, then we have a further witness of the Spirit assuring us of our heavenly calling, and an additional incentive to strain every nerve in our efforts to make our “calling and election sure” by faithfulness to its terms.—II Pet. 1:10

SUFFERING WITH CHRIST

Paul wrote that the Spirit witnesses to us of our acceptance into the Divine family, “If so be that we suffer” with Christ. (Rom. 8:17) This, perhaps, is the most direct of all the witnesses of the Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit inspired the Old Testament prophets to testify concerning the “sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (I Pet. 1:10,11) The body members of Christ participate in these foretold sufferings, which means that if we are sharing in them it is a direct evidence that the Spirit’s testimony through the prophets applies to us, that we are a part of ‘the Christ’ company.

Is this true in our experience? The degree of suffering is not the point at issue, neither the manner of suffering. No one in enlightened America today is burned at the stake for his faith, but all who are faithful to the terms of their calling by letting their light shine will suffer in some degree—even if it be only ostracism by their former friends. They will also suffer hardships and weariness in connection with their faithful service to the Lord; and they will be willing to suffer more—yea, to suffer even unto death, if it be the Lord’s will for them.

Do we, then, have this testimony? Has our faithfulness to the Lord and to the truth resulted in a measure of suffering which otherwise we would not have experienced? If so, then we have this important witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God, and “if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Rom. 8:17) This particular witness of the Spirit is especially vital now, for it reveals that the narrow way of sacrifice and suffering has not yet closed. When, in the next age, the “highway” (Isa. 35:8) is opened, over which mankind will have the

privilege of returning to perfection of human life, there will be no further opportunity of suffering with Christ. If we have that opportunity now, let us rejoice and endeavor faithfully to “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.”—Col. 1:24

GOD JUSTIFIES US

Satan, our Adversary, goes about as a “roaring lion” trying to frighten and discourage all who are running for the “prize of the high calling.” (I Pet. 5:8; Phil. 3:14) His attacks are many and varied. He may suggest that we are not good enough for such a High Calling; but our answer to this must be: “It is God that justifieth.” (Rom. 8:33) Of course, we are not good enough in our own righteousness, but in the righteousness of Christ we have the assurance of acceptance! Let us hold onto this assurance and not permit Satan to beat our courage down.

Another argument which may be presented to us is that now there is not enough time left in which to make our calling and election sure. In this also, our confidence must rest in the Lord. It was God who drew us to Christ, and through his promises begat within us the heavenly hope by which we are now inspired. Certainly, in doing this he knew better than do our discouraging ‘comforters,’ whether or not there would be time to “add to [our] faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love],” and by doing this become assured of an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:4-11

As we climb the Christian ladder outlined by the Apostle Peter (quoted above), we will reach the character required by God of his New Creation. We will demonstrate our love for God, and God will direct our experiences, because we are “the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28)—which is to have a family of Divine beings. The Apostle Paul further says: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”—vs. 29

What a great privilege awaits us if we can be faithful, for then we shall receive “a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

Jacob Seeks Food in Egypt

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

VERSES 1,2 “Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? “And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die.”

The detailed story of the manner in which Joseph was made food administrator in Egypt is recorded in the Bible, not to inform us as to how the Egyptians were kept from starving during the seven years of drought, but rather that we may know of God’s watch care over his own people—his chosen people—and the manner in which he preserved them. The account does not inform us how Jacob learned there was food in Egypt that could be bought. It simply says he ‘saw that there was corn’ there.

Jacob asked his sons a question, which reveals that in all the intervening centuries human nature has not changed. Usually when great trials come upon us we are at a loss to know what to do, or which way to turn. Jacob asked, ‘Why do ye look one upon another?’ How often it is that we look at one another as if hoping thus to find the solution to a problem with which we are confronted!

It is quite possible that Jacob was as much at a loss to know what to do as were his sons, until he learned that there was food in Egypt. But this was the answer. They need not starve if his sons were willing to make the necessary journey to buy food. Trials which come upon the Lord’s people are seldom lightened without some effort on their part. The Lord provides our needs, but not without our cooperation. God had provided food in Egypt in order that Jacob and his family might be kept alive, and the seed of Abraham be preserved. It was necessary that the sons go and get the food. However, it was a long and hazardous trip in those days.

VERSES 3-24 “And Joseph’s ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.

“But Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest peradventure mischief befall him.

“And the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came: for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

“And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph’s brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.

“And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

“And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.

“And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

“And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come.

“We are all one man’s sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.

“And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

“And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

“And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies:

“Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither.

“Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.

“And he put them all together into ward three days.

“And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God:

“If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses:

“But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so.

“And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our

brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.

“And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.

“And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.

“And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.”

Jacob had never fully recovered from the shock he received when his sons brought Joseph’s blood-smeared coat and spread it out before him with the implication that his boy had been slain by wild beasts. At that time he intimated that he would continue to mourn for Joseph until he himself died. His continued mourning is indicated in his decision not to let Benjamin accompany the other sons on their trip to Egypt, ‘lest peradventure mischief befall him.’ This shows clearly that Jacob had not forgotten the ‘mischief’ which had befallen Joseph, and that the incident was still a painful memory.

It may be significant that Jacob’s new name, Israel, is used in the narrative when it states that ‘the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came.’ The previous chapter shows that the famine was upon all the lands surrounding Egypt, and it seems possible that despite Joseph’s conservation program, Egypt could not supply food for all who needed it. This would mean that perhaps not all who sought food from Joseph would be successful. The name Israel means, ‘The prince that prevails with God.’ Israel’s sons were to secure food because their father had prevailed with God, and now God would favor him and his family in this, their great time of need.

The account indicates that Joseph decided personally who should be permitted to buy, and perhaps how much, of the precious food which he had stored during the seven years of plenty. Apparently he was not willing to trust these important decisions to his subordinates. And so it was that his brethren were brought directly into his presence. He recognized them, but they did not recognize him. He had been a mere lad when they sold him into Egypt, and doubtless had changed a great deal in his maturing years. Since they were more mature at the time, they

would not have changed so much. Besides, he was dressed in keeping with his position of honor, and this would tend to disguise his identity.

Although Joseph spoke roughly to his brethren, and caused them many anxious hours of worry, it was not because he held any bitterness toward them. He wanted to bring them to a keen sense of the wrong they had committed and to cause them to confess their guilt. Joseph remembered his dreams, which were prophetic of a time when his brethren would bow down before him and be at his mercy, and now he knew that the time for the fulfillment of these dreams had come.

This strengthened Joseph's faith in God still more, and because his heart was pure and humble it would enable him to realize more than ever that God's hand was overruling in his affairs, and therefore there was no cause for him to harbor ill will toward his brethren. As he expressed it later, he saw that it was really God who had sent him to Egypt, and that at the most his brethren—although they had aimed to do him harm—were, in reality, only the agency used by the Lord to accomplish this purpose. All of the Lord's people should endeavor to take this viewpoint of their trials, for it would help them to be kindly disposed toward their enemies.

Joseph's method of dealing with his brethren was unique. In questioning their identity as he did, and insisting that they were spies, they could not help but be reminded of their long-lost brother, and of the sin they had committed in selling him as a slave. First, they became convinced as never before of the wrong they had done their brother, and confessed it to one another. This may have been the first time they had admitted their wrong so freely among themselves.

However, it was still somewhat of a secret guilt—one which, as yet, they were willing to discuss only among themselves. Supposing Joseph to be an Egyptian and not able to understand their language, since he had purposely talked to them through an interpreter, they did not realize he understood what they were talking about. But he did; and he was moved deeply at this evidence that they recognized the wrong they had done to him. This caused Joseph to go into another room and to weep.

In the attitude displayed by Joseph in this matter we have an illustration of God's willingness and desire to forgive. The true spirit of forgiveness—of Godlike forgiveness—causes one to rejoice to know that

a wrongdoer is beginning to realize his sin and is moving toward repentance. This is God's attitude toward the entire human family, as shown in the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Here we learn of the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents—that one sinner being Adam and his race, all of whom lost life through him.

VERSES 25-28 “Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them.

“And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence.

“And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money; for, behold, it was in his sack's mouth.

“And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?”

One with a guilty conscience is prone to attribute evil motives even to the good deeds of others. Joseph, out of the goodness of his heart, returned the money his brethren had paid for the food they were taking back to Canaan. But, when one of them discovered it, they were afraid, and felt that God was in some way punishing them. It was an unusual experience, and since, as they believed, they were dealing with strangers who would not ordinarily be so benevolent, it would have been rather difficult for them to take any other view of the incident.

VERSES 29-34 “And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them; saying,

“The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.

“And we said unto him, We are true men; we are no spies:

“We be twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.

“And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone:

“And bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land.”

The nine brethren made the return journey to Canaan safely, but when they reached home they had a real problem in explaining to their father why Simeon was not with them, and that it would be necessary to take Benjamin the next time if they expected to obtain more food. They related their experiences in detail, which reminded them once more of their sin in selling Joseph and letting their father believe he was dead.

VERSES 35-38 “And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack: and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid. “And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

“And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again.

“And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

Previous to this, only one of the brethren had discovered that his money had been returned. But now they found that the purchase money for the sacks of food had been returned to all of them. Then they all became fearful, including Jacob. Jacob had never hinted that his sons had been directly responsible for his loss of Joseph, but on this occasion, nevertheless, he reminded them that both Joseph and Simeon had been with them, and that they returned to him without them. So, he said, ‘Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away.’

Without realizing it, Jacob was here expressing a truth, particularly concerning Joseph, which must have been very unpleasant for his sons to hear. Reuben assumed a noble position in the matter, offering his own two sons in sacrifice should they fail to bring Benjamin back to his father. At the time his brethren first decided to do away with Joseph, Reuben had opposed the plan. Apparently he possessed a more tender conscience than the others.

Jacob, up to this point, was determined that Benjamin should not be taken to Egypt, for he could not bear the thought of losing him as he supposed he had lost Joseph. Such a calamity, he said, ‘would bring down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.’ The Hebrew word translated ‘grave’ in this text is ‘*sheol*.’ It is the second time it appears in the Bible. Jacob also used it, on the first occasion, and in a similar connection.

‘*Sheol*’ is the only Hebrew word in the Old Testament that is translated ‘hell,’ but is usually translated in this way only when the text applies to a wicked person. Where the death of the righteous is indicated, the translators usually use the word ‘grave.’ This, of course, is misleading, for it gives the impression that the wicked go to a different place at death than do the righteous. It is especially unfortunate because to many minds the word ‘hell’ conveys the thought of torment in fire and brimstone.

It is interesting to note, however, that Jacob speaks of his gray hairs going down into ‘*sheol*’—the death condition. It would be difficult to understand how this could be, if *sheol* is indeed a place of fire. Certainly, gray hair would not last long in such a place. Actually, of course, Jacob refers to his gray hair as symbolic of his old age. He was already mourning over the loss of Joseph, and would continue to do so; and now, if his sorrow was to be increased through the loss of Benjamin also, his death would be hastened, being already old. In death he would rest unconsciously until the resurrection.

Dawn Bible Students Association

“Feed My Sheep”

“He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”
—John 21:16

“IF YE LOVE ME, KEEP MY commandments.” (John 14:15) It is a thought similar to this that Jesus emphasized in his dialogue with Peter on the occasion of one of the last of his appearances to his disciples before his ascension. The account of this revealing conversation between the two is recorded in John 21:15-17.

During the closing days of Jesus’ ministry, Peter had professed great love for him, although he had manifested it in ways which the Master did not approve.

It was his love for Jesus that prompted Peter to advise him not to enter Jerusalem, where his enemies were plotting to kill him. It was also his love for the Master that caused Peter to draw his sword and cut off the ear of one of the servants of the High Priest. Peter avowed that he would lay down his life for the Master, asserting that though all should forsake him, he would not.

ALL MAY FORSAKE THEE, BUT NOT I

Jesus knew that Peter was sincere in his love, but that he had gone through a great trial of his faith, so on this occasion by the lakeside Jesus questioned him about his love, and gave instructions as to the real way it should be demonstrated. He asked Peter, “Lovest thou me more than these?” It is not too clear just what Jesus meant by ‘these.’ ‘These’ are believed to refer to the other disciples. Peter had said, “Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.” (Matt. 26:33) Peter professed greater love for Jesus than all the other disciples. They might flee (and they did) but he would stand by to defend him. Before the day was over, he denied the Master three times! It is also thought by some that ‘these’ refers to the fishing business.

Jesus questioned Peter three times concerning his love, and each time, when the apostle confirmed the fact of his love, Jesus commissioned him to ‘feed’ his ‘sheep,’ or, as in the first instance, his ‘lambs.’ How wholly this is in keeping with what Jesus previously had said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Jesus knew that it would be only a little while till Peter would no longer be able to see him, and that there would be nothing he could do for him personally by which he could demonstrate his love. But here was something he could do; he could serve the Lord’s people by helping to supply them with needed spiritual food.

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

How wonderfully Peter carried out his commission, as is evidenced particularly in his two remarkable epistles. In his first epistle, he dwells at length on the subject of Christ’s suffering, and the fact that we are called to share in those sufferings. He explains that this is in keeping with the testimonies of the prophets, when they had foretold the “sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (I Pet. 1:11) He explains that this foretold suffering of the Christ (I Pet. 2:20,21) results not from doing evil, but from doing good. Discussing the subject still further, Peter wrote, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”—I Pet. 4:12,13

Christian suffering is related to one of the precious doctrines of the truth—that great fact of the church’s participation in the ‘better sacrifices’ of the Gospel Age. Some might be inclined to say that this doctrine is unimportant, and that it would be better simply to concentrate on our efforts to love Jesus. But apparently Peter did not feel this way about it, for it was in obedience to Jesus command, ‘Feed my sheep,’ that he wrote nearly an entire epistle for the purpose of strengthening the brethren in this great truth of the Divine plan. And he did it in demonstration of his love for Jesus.

AS LITTLE CHILDREN

“Be ye holy; for I am holy” (I Pet. 1:16), Peter quoted from the Old Testament. He recognized the importance of ‘holiness unto the Lord’ on the part of all those who have named the name of Christ, so in feeding

the ‘sheep’ he stressed this point. He admonished the ‘sheep’ also, to lay aside “all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.” He explained that in their innocence the Lord’s people should be as “newborn babes” desiring the “sincere milk of the Word” that they might “grow thereby.” (I Pet. 2:1,2) There is nothing in this admonition to indicate that a Christian should ever be anything else than childlike in his simplicity and sincerity. Perhaps in writing these words Peter remembered a statement by Jesus, “Suffer little children ... to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”—Matt. 19:14

One of Satan’s subtle sophistries is his teaching that Christians should get out of the babyhood stage and become spiritual giants in their ability to understand the ‘mysteries’ of the Bible. Many have been lured away from their simplicity in the truth by this appealing philosophy, and have become proud, conceited in their alleged superior knowledge. But let us remember that what the Lord is looking for in those who love him is purity of heart and childlike simplicity in their zeal to know and to do his will, for ‘of such is the kingdom of heaven.’

In demonstrating his love for the Good Shepherd by feeding his sheep, Peter explains that they are as stones in a building—“lively stones”—which form a spiritual house; that they are a holy priesthood to offer sacrifice, and that Jesus is the Head of this new spiritual house. Then he adds that they are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:5-9

In feeding the Lord’s sheep further, Peter explains that Jesus, by his example, preached to “spirits in prison”—spirits, or angels, who were disobedient at the time of the Flood—and that the salvation of Noah and his family in the Flood was typical of Christian baptism.—I Pet. 3:19-21

In obeying the commission, “Feed my sheep,” Peter warns us that our “adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour,” and then adds, “Whom resist stedfast in the faith.”—I Pet. 5:8,9

“THE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY”

In Peter’s second epistle, he feeds the Lord’s sheep by presenting the great truths pertaining to the kingdom and the Second Presence of Christ,

using these as an incentive to add to our faith, fortitude, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. He says that if we do these things an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (II Pet. 1:4-11) Peter explained that he wrote this second epistle in order that the brethren might have it as an encouragement after he died. Thus did he make sure that he was faithful to his Master’s commission.

He tells about the vision of transfiguration which he had witnessed, and that this had convinced him he had not followed cunningly devised fables in making known “the power and coming [*parousia*; presence] of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (II Pet. 1:15-18) He adds, however, that we have a more “sure Word of prophecy” unto which we should take heed, as “unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the Day Star arise.” (vs. 19) In other words, Peter recognized that the prophetic testimony of the Bible was very important spiritual food for the Lord’s sheep, and that it is essential for them to take heed thereto.

II Peter, chapter two, is devoted almost entirely to a warning against false teachers in the church, particularly those who were at one time seemingly sound in the truth, but who became like the dog which is turned to its vomit; and to the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire. These, he warns, would promise ‘liberty’ to the Lord’s sheep, yet they themselves are virtually in bondage to their own corruptions of the truth.—vs. 19

THE LORD’S PRESENCE

In the third chapter, Peter returns to the theme of the Lord’s Second Presence, and the establishment of the kingdom. He explains that in the last days there would come scoffers, saying, “Where is the promise of his coming [*parousia*, presence]?” (II Pet. 3:4) In answering these scoffers, Peter reminds us of our Lord’s use of the days of Noah as an illustration of the ‘days of the Son of Man.’ He speaks of the world which was before the Flood, the present ‘heavens and the earth’ and the ‘new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.’ Reminding us that the ‘present evil world’ would be destroyed as a result of the Lord’s presence, he adds, “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness ...?”—II Pet. 3:11

There can be no mistaking the implication of Peter's two epistles, written, as they were, to feed the Lord's sheep; for in them virtually every phase of the Divine plan is touched upon, either directly or indirectly, and throughout he draws heavily upon the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament as an important source of spiritual food.

And all of these spiritually nourishing truths are given to the church by Peter as evidence of his love for the Master and his desire to obey the commission, "Feed my sheep." Since this represents Peter's understanding of how one can demonstrate his love for Jesus, we can safely view the matter in the same way. What it means is that our love for Jesus, and, in fact, our love for the Heavenly Father also, is manifested by our appreciation of and loyalty to the great truths of the Divine plan given to us in the Word.

'IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS'

'If' we love our Master, then our love will be demonstrated by obeying his commandments, by our willingness to lay down our lives for the brethren, and by an appreciation of the truth and faithfully using it in building up the brethren in our most holy faith.

Thus, our love for Jesus and for our Heavenly Father is taken out of the abstract, visionary realm, and made a practical, understandable power in our lives. While we remain in the flesh, we cannot see God, nor can we see Jesus; but we can 'see' and appreciate the precious truths of the Word which reveal their characters to us; and we can see our brethren, and lay down our lives for them. And may this love fill and control our lives more and more each day! May it, indeed, become an all-possessing influence in our lives, impelling us to sacrifice everything in the service of him whom we love more than life itself.

Jesus summed up the thought for us beautifully, saying to his disciples, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (John 14:21) The Apostle John, who reported this wonderful promise, later wrote to the church saying, "This is love, that we walk after his commandments." And also, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."—II John 6,9