

Let God Rule

Key Verse: *“It was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.”*
—Judges 7:15

Selected Scripture:
Judges 6-8; 21:25

sight to help provide for his family. This caught the attention of God, who sent an angel to appear to him. The angel said to him, “The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.” (vs. 12) Gideon immediately questioned the angel as to why so much evil had befallen Israel and they now appeared forsaken. God, through the angel, responded, “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? . . . Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.”—vss. 14,16

Gideon desired signs that what the angel had said

FOLLOWING THE FAITHFUL
judgeship of Deborah and Barak, Israel once again “did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.” (Judg. 6:1) The Midianites were so many in number they quickly took all the land, pushing the Israelites to Gaza and leaving them without land to grow crops or sustain cattle. As had happened often before, Israel finally cried unto the LORD because of their desperate situation.—vs. 7

Gideon, a faithful young Israelite, was found to be threshing wheat out of the Midianites’

was true. The first of these was that he would present an offering to the LORD, requesting that a sign be shown that it was accepted. He killed a kid of the goats and made unleavened cakes and set them upon a rock under an oak tree. The angel touched the offering with his staff; fire came out of the rock, consuming the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel departed. Gideon responded, “Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.”—vs. 22

The next sign requested by Gideon was that he would put a fleece of wool outside on the ground, leaving the fleece there all night. In the morning, if dew was only on the fleece and not on the ground around it, Gideon said “then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so.” (vss. 37,38) Wanting to be absolutely sure, Gideon made one last request of God, simply reversing the previous sign. Once again, God favorably answered Gideon the next morning by causing dew to be on the ground, but with the fleece completely dry.—vss. 39,40

As Gideon prepared to battle against the Midianites, God informed him that the thirty-two thousand men he had gathered were too many. Any who were fearful were asked to return home. This reduced the number to ten thousand. These were then taken down to the water to drink. God observed those who lapped the water as a dog would do, and those who bowed face down to drink. Those who lapped the water were only three hundred, but these were the ones God wanted. Those who lapped the water were able to see everything going on around them as they drank, whereas those who bowed their faces down to the water and drank could not see their surroundings and were vulnerable. Thus Gideon, armed with only three hundred men, and following the instructions of God as to the use of trumpets, lamps, and pitchers as their “weapons” (see Judges 7:16-22), was used to deliver the Midianites into the hands of Israel. ■

Return to Obedience

Key Verse: *“They put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.”*
—Judges 10:16

Selected Scripture:
Judges 10:6–11:33;
21:25

but many, heathen gods. They served “Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD.”—Judg. 10:6

Not surprisingly, the account reads that “the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel” (vss. 7,8), and he gave them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites for eighteen years. This was particularly oppressive due to the fact that the Philistines, who resided to the west, and the Ammonites, who resided to the east, could effectively control the entire nation of Israel, its land and people, without there being any means of their escape. As a result, “Israel was sore distressed.”—vs. 9

This climax of trouble which had come upon the nation of Israel caused them, as it had in the past, to cry unto the

THIS MONTH’S SERIES OF lessons has focused on a few of the many times God delivered the nation of Israel from its enemies although, time after time, they slipped back into disobedience and the worship of the heathen gods around them. In today’s lesson, we have this cycle brought to a climax. Israel’s idolatry had progressed to the point where they were not just worshipping one or two,

LORD. This time, though, and for the first time during the period of the judges, their cry was accompanied by these words: “We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.” (vs. 10) God, however, did not merely take these words at face value. More proof of their sincerity was needed. He reminded them of how he had delivered them from the Egyptians, and from many other nations subsequent to that time; how that he had helped them every time they cried unto him. He reminded them that, in spite of all this, they continued to forsake him and go back to serving other gods. As a result, God said, “I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.”—vss. 11-14

By these words, God issued a heart-searching challenge to the Israelites. If, indeed, these other gods could deliver them from their trouble, then they would no longer have any need to serve him or to ask him for deliverance. If the other gods could not deliver them, then that would pose a serious question as to their legitimacy. It is clear from God’s statement that he wanted Israel to give serious consideration to their pattern of behavior—serving other gods, being subsequently punished by serving other nations, crying to the God of Israel for deliverance, gaining that deliverance, then going back to the worship of false gods. Such a pattern must needs be broken.

In at least this case, the Israelites took God’s soul-searching statement to heart. They responded again, “We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.” (vs. 15) They recognized not only that they had sinned, but also that any punishment God chose to inflict on them would be justified. Yet, they still expressed the desire to be delivered. Our Key Verse brings out the ultimate action God was looking for—the total putting away of the strange gods from among them, and serving only the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ■

The Great Deliverance

“When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.”

—Luke 21:28,

*Wilson’s Emphatic
Diaglott*

GOD’S PEOPLE OF ALL

ages have been aliens and strangers in the sinful world around them and have been persecuted by the devotees of false gods. However, the truly faithful have always been encouraged by God’s promise to care for them and to help them in their every

time of need. “God is our refuge,” wrote the psalmist, “a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”—Ps. 46:1-3

A FAITH CLASS

God has not promised to deliver his people from their troubles in this life, although he often does, but he has promised to give them strength to endure their trials while they learn the important

lesson of putting their trust in him. We should cast all our care upon the Lord, knowing that he will permit only those difficulties to come into our lives as will best serve to test our faith and confidence in him. Only those who learn this lesson of faith can be at peace and truly pleasing to the Lord. "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."—Heb. 11:6

Wonderful examples of faith are brought to our attention in both the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes in these examples, faith was openly and visibly rewarded by deliverance from trying situations, but at other times it was not. This was true of the Ancient Worthy class, and it is also true of the little flock class of the present Gospel Age. As individual servants of the Lord we can often see the hand of God in our affairs. We can sense his lifting of the burden of trial which, without his help, might well crush us. Yet at other times we do not have this rewarding experience and can hold onto the Lord only through faith in his promises. It is through these experiences that we need to be convinced that, while we may not be able to discern the providences of the Lord in our hands, he is still dealing with us. We must learn that his tender mercy is over all our affairs, even when all we can see are threatening and dark clouds of trouble.

It is important to realize that our loving Heavenly Father is the very light of our lives. In the final analysis, he will not permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Let us hold fast the profession of our

faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)." (Heb. 10:23) We know and trust that none of his promises will ever be unfulfilled. Paul also reminded the Hebrew brethren, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." (vs. 35) God rewards those who diligently seek him even though, at times, his rewards are not outwardly demonstrated.

EXAMPLES OF FAITH

Among the Israelites who had been taken captive to Babylon, there were many of God's faithful servants, such as Daniel and his three friends, as well as Ezekiel and others. To these, Jeremiah wrote, "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD."—Lam. 3:22-26

For a long period of time, the people of Israel, especially their kings, had been for the most part unfaithful to God. They had worshipped false gods and in many other ways they were disobedient to him. According to the Law they could have been justly put to death. As Jeremiah explains, however, God showed his compassion and mercy toward them. Instead of consuming them in death, he permitted them to be taken captives into Babylon.

While the nation as a whole had been disobedient unto the Lord, there were noble exceptions among

them—notably Daniel and his three companions. These remained loyal to God while in Babylon and even at the risk of their lives. Paul, when speaking of Daniel, said that he “stopped the mouths of lions.” (Heb. 11:33) Daniel was courageous in his loyalty to God and from this comes the expression, “Dare to be a Daniel.”

Because of the wonderful manner in which the Lord enabled Daniel to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great image, he was highly exalted in the government by the king. He continued thus to be honored by the rulers of Babylon, and was very highly placed in the kingdom of Darius. The scriptural record states, “It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.”—Dan. 6:1-4

DELIVERED FROM LIONS

Because of Daniel’s faithfulness in his devotion to God, those who were plotting against him said, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” (vs. 5) Surely this is a wonderful testimony

concerning Daniel's loyalty to the God of Israel. His enemies then prevailed upon King Darius to "establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions."—Dan. 6:7

The king was not aware that this was a plot against the life of Daniel whom he loved and trusted, so he made and signed the decree. Since the laws of the Medes and the Persians could not be changed, when he discovered the intent of his advisers it was too late to do anything about it. He could only hope that Daniel's God would deliver him. The king knew that Daniel would continue to worship his God even though it might result in his death.

Daniel continued openly to pray to God and was "discovered" by his enemies. Consequently, and much against the king's desire, he was cast into a den of lions. From the scriptural account, we read, "Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"—vss. 18-20

Daniel's reply to the king was, "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me;

and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.” (vss. 21,22) Concerning God’s angels the psalmist wrote, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) How wonderfully true this was with Daniel in the lions’ den. How Daniel must have rejoiced because of God’s protecting hand over him, and it was surely a wonderful witness concerning Daniel’s God.

DELIVERED FROM A FIERY FURNACE

Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego likewise had their loyalty to their Heavenly Father severely tested. It was demanded of them that they worship a great image which the king had ordered to be erected that he might impress his subjects with the greatness of his authority and power. The penalty for refusal to bow down to this image was death by being cast into a fiery furnace.

Because of their loyalty to God, Daniel’s three friends refused to obey the decree of the king. Thereupon the king summoned them before him and said, “Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?”—Dan. 3:15

The reply of these three courageous servants of God was direct and to the point. They said to the king, “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning” *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” (Dan. 3:17,18) The record continues, “Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.” (vs. 21) The fire had been made so hot that even those who threw the Hebrews into it were themselves burned to death.

God sent an angel and delivered the three Hebrews. “He [the king] answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” (vs. 25) The king was impressed and gave commandment that the people of the realm should worship only the God of the Hebrews. As for the three Hebrews themselves, their faith in the ability of their God to deliver them had been strengthened, although they would not have lost their faith had God’s providence for them been that they should perish in the fiery furnace.

There is a vitally important lesson in this well-known experience of the three Hebrews. While God is always abundantly able to deliver his people from physical harm, he does not always do so. His providential care over his people is not always manifest in the same manner in their individual experiences in the narrow way. He may permit some to suffer and die. Others he might deliver from suffering and permit them to continue in his service for a while longer, though perhaps under difficult circumstances.

WORTHIES OF OLD

This point is enlarged upon in chapter eleven of Paul's letter to the Hebrew brethren. Here he writes of the faithful lives of God's worthies of old. The apostle names many of them, such as Abraham, Moses, and David. He then tells of many others, "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection."—Heb. 11:33-35

It will be noted that all of the ancient people of faith in this listing had their faith visibly rewarded by the protection and deliverance which their Heavenly Father afforded them. Through faith they knew, as did the three Hebrews, that the God whom they served was able to deliver them, and in their case he did.

However, this was not true of all the Ancient Worthies. Paul continues, "Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword [unlike those who "escaped the edge of the sword"]: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”—vss. 36-40

These “others” were just as much the objects of God’s care as were those who were delivered from prison and from threatened death. These “others” were mocked and scourged, and God did not interfere. They suffered “bonds and imprisonments,” and God did not deliver them. They were “sawn asunder,” as Isaiah, by tradition, is reputed to have been. They were destitute and seemingly uncared for. It was by faith that they realized that the great God of heaven permitted their trying experiences for some good purpose although they could not always—perhaps seldom—understand what that purpose was.

They knew, although they may not have expressed it in these words, that their God was too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. They knew that their privilege and responsibility as his servants was to be loyal to him regardless of what the cost might be. They knew by faith that, in the end, God would give his very best to those who left the choice with him.

SPIRITUAL ISRAELITES

We who are now living in the closing years of this present Gospel Age are encouraged by our realization that our loving Heavenly Father is also dealing with us in much the same way as he did with his faithful people of old. His dealings we see exemplified in the life of Jesus and in the experiences of those in the Early Church. Jesus was delivered from a calamity near the beginning of his

ministry, but the Heavenly Father withdrew his protection at the end and allowed him to be crucified. We can understand God's workings in the case of Jesus, for his role was to give his flesh for the life of the world, but we may not always understand why God allows us, the followers of Jesus, to suffer.

The Apostle Peter addressed this very point, when he wrote, "Beloved, 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

JAMES KILLED

The Early Church was bitterly persecuted by the king. We read, "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword." (Acts 12:1,2) Herod also placed Peter in prison until after the Passover thinking that then he would also have him put to death, but the Lord in this case intervened by sending an angel to deliver him.—vss. 8-10

Peter was no doubt surprised at his miraculous release. He went immediately to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the brethren were holding a prayer meeting. They were so surprised by his arrival that at first they could not believe he was really there. (vss. 11-17) The question remains why God would deliver Peter from certain death at the hands of Herod while not delivering James. The brethren were no doubt praying for James as

well as for Peter. Although James had been killed, it is certain that the prayers for him gave him strength to bear up faithfully during his final hours of trial. Peter, by the same prayers, was able to sleep during the night even though he was chained to prison guards awaiting death.

This emphasizes a precious reality which has been true for all of the Lord's faithful people. God sustains them in their trials, even though he does not always deliver them. The Lord has promised to provide a way of escape when trials are too severe to bear. Many times that escape is through death. This was so for God's ancient people and it has been true throughout the present Gospel Age. Perhaps Stephen could not have endured being pelted with rocks for a great length of time, but God permitted him to fall asleep in death and thus escape the cruel torture being inflicted upon him by his enemies.

FAITH TESTED

The trials of the Lord's people are designed to test their faith in him, and be a witness for him. If, every time we suffered a bit of pain either of body or of mind, the Lord would at once deliver us from the distress, we would probably be very thankful, but our faith in his love, mercy, and compassion would not be completely tested. This would be walking by sight and not by faith. True faith is that which believes in God regardless of the circumstances with which we are surrounded, or the distresses which we suffer. Regardless of any and all circumstances, a true faith will continue to believe that God rewards those who diligently seek him.

True faith is that which will not permit us to shrink from the narrow path of sacrifice no matter how many, or how fierce, the foes we see ahead in that path. Through sickness or other difficult circumstances, we may realize that death may not be far away. However, such an experience of faith will firmly trust our loving Heavenly Father in the assurance that he knows what is best for us. We will not permit the pleasures of living, or the threat of dying, to separate us from him, and we will be able to say from our hearts, "Great is thy faithfulness."

We will know, by faith in the promises of God, that our ultimate and glorious deliverance from all enemies, and from all our distresses, will come through death, if indeed, we are faithful even unto death. It was this realization that enabled the ancient people of God to maintain their faith in him and loyalty to him. They endured their afflictions, refusing deliverance upon the terms of their enemies, "that they might obtain a better resurrection."—Heb. 11:35

It seems clear that those heroes of faith, the worthies of old, did have a hope of the resurrection. In a prayer, Moses said, "Thou [God] turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men." (Ps. 90:3) Job said, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait [in death], till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." (Job 14:14,15) Those ancient ones may not have known the details of the divine plan of salvation as we are privileged to know it today, but they testified to their faith, and "have hope toward God, which

they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”—Acts 24:15

The “just” as mentioned by Paul would surely include those who looked for the resurrection, the hope of which inspired the Ancient Worthy class to faithfulness. When Daniel was informed concerning the great Time of Trouble through which we are now passing, he was assured that then his people would be delivered. While Daniel’s people here referred to would include all of the Lord’s faithful servants in every age who have longed for deliverance, this promise must have been a great source of strength to Daniel himself. It was made plain to him how this great deliverance would be wrought. It would be through a resurrection of the dead: “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:2) Daniel was told, “Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest [in the sleep of death], and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”—vs.13

THE FIRST RESURRECTION

How real has been the hope of spiritual Israel in the resurrection, the “first resurrection” promised to those who are “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” (Rev. 20:4) This hope should be especially real to the Lord’s people now at the close of this present Gospel Age. We are living in the time when we see the signs described by Jesus relative to the time of his presence and the end of the age being fulfilled. Just as Jesus stated in our featured text, “When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your

heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.”—
Luke 21:28, *WED*

LIFT UP OUR HEADS

Let us raise ourselves, for it is no time to be prostrate and idle. We are to be active in our witness for Jesus and for the Word of God. It is a time also to lift up our heads with hope, courage, and rejoicing. The clouds of trouble are hanging low over the peoples of the earth. The world leaders are distressed and their hearts are filled with fear. We know that the troubles in the world may well bring additional hardships upon us, but this does not cause us to hang our heads in discouragement.

We know that God is in the midst of his prospective bride class. “GOD is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted

among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.”—Ps. 46:1-11

“When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads: for your deliverance is drawing near.”—Luke 21:28, *WED* ■

*When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise!
O, how can words with equal warmth
The gratitude declare
That glows within my inmost heart!
But thou canst read it there.
Through all eternity, to thee
A grateful song I'll raise.
And my eternal joy shall be
To herald wide thy praise.
—Hymns of Dawn*

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Purifying the Soul

*“Seeing ye have
purified your souls
in obeying the
truth through the
Spirit unto
unfeigned love of
the brethren, see
that ye love one
another with a
pure heart
fervently.”*
—I Peter 1:22

HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

is a most important essential of the Christian life. Without it no Christian endeavor can be truly acceptable to the Heavenly Father. The words “purity” and “holiness” as used in the Bible have much the same meaning. They describe that condition of heart which must characterize all who aspire to joint heirship with Jesus in the glorious kingdom soon to be established. To be pure means to be unadulterated. Applied to the Christian life, it means that one’s heart attitude before God must be that of full and complete submission to him, undivided in its affection and loyalty.

This purity of heart before the Lord means a complete separation from the world and its spirit, a full renouncing of the will of the flesh, and a constant effort to bring the flesh into subjection to the will of God. To maintain this purity requires a continued alertness with respect to the deceptive influences of the great deceiver, Satan, and by means

of the whole armor of God to give battle against him. To be successful in attaining and maintaining this condition of holiness, one must use the divinely provided means of purification, which in our text is declared to be the Truth.

To be pure, or holy, also means to be sanctified. Jesus, praying on behalf of his disciples, said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) By inspiration, the Apostle Paul reiterates the thought expressed by Jesus, saying, "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." (Eph. 5:25,26) From these scriptures, it is apparent that the Christian should esteem the Word of truth very highly and seek daily to become better acquainted with it. No wonder the Apostle Paul advised Timothy to study that he might show himself "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."—II Tim. 2:15

TRUE STANDARD OF HOLINESS

There are many false standards of holiness among the peoples of the earth. Frequently, the word "holiness" is erroneously used to convey the thought merely of moral uprightness. Yet, even the standard of moral uprightness varies much in different parts of the world. Some moralists of today would severely condemn Jesus for many things which he did, yet of him the Scriptures declare that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."—Heb. 7:26

The Bible sets forth a true code of morals for the Christian, and it is of utmost importance that every

Christian be guided by that code. Anyone who supposes, however, that the Christian life consists merely of living up to a high moral code will ultimately fail in his effort to be truly holy before the Lord, and his soul will be far from purified.

When Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17), he had far more in mind than the importance of moral uprightness. The various teachings of both Christendom and heathendom have produced a certain degree of moral integrity in those who have been brought under their influence, but the falsities in religion have not sanctified their followers. The fear of eternal torment in a creedal hell has frightened many into giving up certain earthly pleasures, but such a false conception of sanctity does not result in true holiness in the sight of the Lord. False teachings have never purified the souls of those who believed them from the standpoint that the word "purity" is used in our text.

The full thought of sanctification as taught in the Bible is that of a dedication, or setting apart, to the Lord's holy purpose. The word "purity" as used in our text has to do with the singleness of heart in living up to the terms of sanctification. It is for this reason that the truth of God's Word is our means of sanctification. The Truth is God's plan, and his plan reveals the will of God for his people who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. In order to do God's will, one must know his plan for salvation. For this purpose, God has given us his Word of truth, revealing his plan that we might become acquainted with the work he is doing in the earth. Thus we can understand how it applies to our moral conduct

and also as it touches upon our responsibility in the service of God and of his cause.

“OBEYING THE TRUTH”

A mere technical knowledge of the Truth, however, will not in itself produce a sanctifying effect on the heart. The apostle clearly shows that we are purified only by “obeying the truth through the Spirit.” (I Pet. 1:22) Jesus promised that he would send “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13), and that it would guide his disciples into all truth. Even this, though, does not complete the apostle’s formula for soul purification. There is still another qualification. The Truth must be obeyed “through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren.” Thus Peter concludes, “See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”

The Apostle John adds his testimony to the importance of brotherly love as the final step in soul purification, saying, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.” (I John 3:18,19) The importance of love as the final goal of the sanctified life is apparent when we remember that the plan of God itself—the Truth—is a revelation of how the love of God is operating for the redemption and restoration of a lost race. A knowledge of this plan is given to us in order that we, by co-operating in it, may become like God. It is evident that if God’s love is such as to prompt him to give the dearest treasure of his heart as a sacrifice on the cross in order that his enemies might ultimately be blessed, the one who has not

learned to love his brethren is far from the goal of Christian holiness.

The process of soul purification embraces the complete work of conversion from the service of Satan and selfishness to the service of God and being guided by the godly principle of love. This purification begins when the light of truth concerning God's love breaks in upon our hearts and minds, and under its influence we become constrained to give our all to him. Paul says, "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."—II Cor. 5:14,15

When the constraining love of God and of Christ brings one to the point of full consecration, and the work of sanctification begins, it will be found to divide itself into two major aspects. One aspect of the purifying work has to do more particularly with one's own personal conduct, and the other with activity in the service of him to whom all has been devoted. It is not possible to say which of these phases of sanctification is the more important because there could be no sanctification at all unless both were given their proper place in the Christian life.

PURE PERSONAL CONDUCT

The "personal conduct" aspect of sanctification has to do, in addition to one's strictly personal affairs, with our domestic life, our attitude toward our brethren in the church and how we should endeavor to deal with our brethren, and with our

relatives in the world. It has to do with the proper attitude toward the governments of this world and how we should deal with our enemies. In all these matters and others, the Bible gives us our instructions. In order for the work of soul purification to go on acceptably before God, the Christian will need to give careful attention to all these instructions and endeavor to obey them, not only in letter, but in spirit also. Any failure to adhere to the expressed will of God as found in his Word constitutes a measure of impurity or lack of holiness. Unwilling failures are covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness, but willful disobedience will be punished.

One may become free from all his impure habits and from the worldly viewpoint be a noble example of good citizenship. Yet, if he persists willfully in speaking evil of his brethren or others, he shows disobedience to the command, "Speak evil of no man." (Titus 3:2) He is unholy in the sight of God and is far from the point of being fully sanctified. One may never become intoxicated, steal, or use impure language. He may be a model husband and a loving father. He may be a good neighbor and highly respected in his community. If, however, in the spirit of carnality he is guilty of sowing discord among the brethren, he is unholy in the sight of God and has failed fully to purify his soul through obeying the Truth.

In Matthew's gospel (18:15-18), Jesus gives explicit directions as to the proper course to pursue when difficulties arise among the brethren. A failure or refusal to follow these directions constitutes, by default, an unholy act. One may spend hours in

prayer and meditation until he fancies himself very close to the Lord. Yet, if he disobeys this important command of the Lord, he is in that proportion unholy, and his soul has not been truly purified. If his failure to act as directed by Jesus causes any of his brethren to suffer through misunderstanding or misrepresentation, the sin is doubly reprehensible in God's sight.

Prayer is absolutely necessary for the Christian, but he must first obey the Lord's commands if he expects his prayers to be heard. The Christian is expected to forgive and love his enemies. Forgiveness of his enemies is the condition upon which his own sins may be forgiven by the Heavenly Father. If such forgiveness is not forthcoming on the part of the professed follower of the Master, the unforgiving one is unholy. Not only is such a one unholy because of his failure to obey the Lord's commands, but he is unholy also in the sense that his own sins are still charged against him because he has failed to meet the conditions of their forgiveness. Impure, indeed, is the heart that continues to harbor anger and malice toward others, and is unable to forgive the imperfection in them by which he is so afflicted himself.

Some make the mistake of supposing that Jesus meant we should forgive what merely appears to be a trespass. They believe that if the trespass is found to have been a real one—if wrong has actually been done—forgiveness should be withheld and punishment administered instead. This is not the case. Real trespasses are the kind which our Heavenly Father forgives in us, hence it is the real trespasses against us that we must forgive in others,

else we are unholy. That which appears to be a trespass, but turns out not to be, does not need to be forgiven, for there is nothing to forgive.

PURITY IN SERVICE

The soul that is purified by the Truth and sanctified to God is a soul that is devoted to a definite, active purpose. As the faithful soldier must do more than merely wear the uniform and obey military rules, so the good soldier of Jesus Christ must do more than properly govern his personal conduct. He must do more than forgive his enemies. He must bless them as well, and “do good” unto them that despitefully use him. (Matt. 5:44) Yes, to be sanctified by the Truth means more than to be guided by the abstract principles of right, important though this is. Even as there can be no true sanctification apart from a scripturally governed personal conduct, so also there can be no true holiness unless the soul purification continues to the point where the being is consumed in the service of God to whom it is consecrated.

Our service to the Lord cannot be of just any kind. The service must be in harmony with the divine plan and the expressed will of God. The Heavenly Father is very particular about this. When he commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle and gave him instructions concerning its services, he said, “See . . . that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.” (Heb. 8:5; Exod. 25:40) Death was the penalty for disobeying this command. The Tabernacle and its services were illustrations of better things to come. Many of these “better things” have to do with the Christian

life and service. Surely God would not be less particular about the reality than he was of the typical shadow.

It is obvious that Paul was expressing something more than a mere ideal when he said that we should study to rightly divide the Word of truth if we are to be workmen approved by God. (II Tim. 2:15) A workman on any project could not be approved by his employer if he did not follow the plans given to him. If the Truth is the sanctifying medium in our lives and through obedience to it we are purified, is it reasonable to suppose that there can be true sanctification where the Truth is ignored, minimized, or opposed? Is the preaching of eternal torture for nine-tenths of the human race a holy work? It would not seem so and for the reason that it is not God's work. This is an extreme illustration but it will help us to realize the importance of the true doctrines of God's plan in connection with the work of soul purification that is going on within us.

Let us remember that the Christian is not commissioned to engage in any work except that which has to do with his share in the fulfillment of God's plan. No work can be holy work that is out of harmony with the divine will. The reverse of this is also true. Any work that is in harmony with the divine plan is properly a part of the Christian's privilege and a holy work. It is a practice of true holiness to engage in that work. Nor is one part of God's work either more or less holy than another.

THE DIVINE COMMISSION

Specifically, then, what is the Christian's work and how is it to be accomplished? Many have supposed

that it was God's will that the Christian church should convert the whole world in this present age, making Christians of the entire human race. Thousands of lives have been sacrificed in this unauthorized work. True, many were "converted" in this way, and some might be inclined to say that this is evidence that God blessed the work. This is not necessarily so. Almost any kind of message preached in any part of the world will result in converts to the particular theory advanced. This is especially true with respect to religious teaching. If the theories advanced offer future salvation from eternal torture, the result in the number of converts is often outstanding.

The divine commission to the church was to engage in the work of making disciples. (Matt. 28:19,20) The Scriptures show that the entire group of disciples to be made, from Pentecost down to the very end of the Gospel Age, was to constitute the church of Christ, also styled the "bride" of Christ. The completion of this work is referred to in Revelation 19:7, where it is said that "his wife hath made herself ready." The method by which the bride of Christ makes herself ready is the proclamation of, and obedience to, the Truth. Since it is the Truth—the Gospel message—that sanctifies, it is obvious that it must be made known to those who are to come under its purifying influence.

Every consecrated Christian is anointed by the Holy Spirit to take part in this work. In the association of God's people as groups, God has arranged that some be chosen to serve in special ways. This does not relieve those not chosen of their responsibility in the general work. Every activity of the

Christian has to do with the work of making ready the bride. He attends meetings and conventions, he prays, he sings praises, he preaches, he witnesses, all in order that the making-ready process might go on in himself as well as in others. Thus, everything pertaining to one's Christian activity is a part of the holy work in which they are engaged.

So far as we are concerned the church, while still in the flesh, will always be made up of those in various stages of development. Hence it will always be necessary to promote all possible activities in the work of finding and making disciples. The Lord himself is the only one who can end this work. When he does stop it, no Christian will question the matter. However, until the Lord does stop the work, every Christian whose soul has been purified by obeying the Truth should continue on in the use of whatever opportunities of service the Lord may give. None are entirely without opportunities, as even a prayer on behalf of fellow members of the bride class is a privilege of service.

In the days of the Early Church, the opportunities of service were not as diversified as they are today. Now we have the printed page, radio, television, and an explosion of electronic media available. There is something for all willing hands to do either directly or in cooperation with others. Every activity of the Christian should be in the direction of the one goal, which is the full preparation of the bride. The complete adornment of the bride must be the adornment of love, hence the apostle says in our text, "unto unfeigned love of the brethren."

When the sanctifying work of the church is complete and the entire Christ company is brought

wholly under the influence of divine love, then this holy bride will become, with her heavenly Bridegroom, the pure source of blessing for mankind in general. It is for this future work that the church is now, through soul purification, being made ready.

The importance of loyalty to the Truth as the sanctifying medium in our lives cannot be overemphasized. God severely censured his typical people for compromising with the false gods of their heathen neighbors. To the Christian, Paul says, “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) Paul is here referring to heathen temples and heathen gods. Similarly “unclean” philosophies permeate many religions today and have done so for centuries. God has given his people the Truth in order that they might be sanctified by it—fully set apart to his holy will and purpose. Let us cherish that Truth, and through the full submission of our wills come wholly under its purifying influence. ■

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.

Brother Stewart Livermore, Israel—December 28, 2010. Age, 93

Sister Jessie Hill, Temecula, CA—May 8. Age, 89

Sister Rosca Zamfira, Cluj, Romania—May 13. Age, 88

Walking in Faith

*“My brethren,
count it all joy
when ye fall into
divers temptations;
Knowing this, that
the trying of your
faith worketh
patience.”
—James 1:2,3*

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, THE Apostle James admonishes us that whenever we are going through very difficult and trying experiences, we must keep in mind the promise that our Heavenly Father is directing our lives. He has a lesson for us in all of the trials of our consecrated life, even as he has in life's blessings.

Throughout this present Gospel Age, our trials are especially designed by our loving Heavenly Father as opportunities for us to grow in grace and knowledge. Sometimes this fact may become obscure, even as the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome. He told them, “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:18) Therefore, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit.”—I Thess. 5:18,19

PATIENCE

When we accept the terms of our consecration to God, we begin our walk in newness of life. However,

we must be faithful to our covenant of sacrifice if we are to receive the wonderful promises of being a part of “The Christ” in his future kingdom. Each of us must be rightly exercised by the trials that are permitted by God’s grace to develop in us the graces of the Holy Spirit. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

In his epistle, James spoke further concerning the development of our faith, and that it is a life-long work of patient endurance. He wrote, “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”—James 1:4-6

Further to this, he also stated, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”—vss. 12,13

CONSECRATION

Consecration applies to all of those who offer themselves as a willing sacrifice to God during this present Gospel Age. Paul thus admonishes, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

When we give our hearts to the Heavenly Father, and present our sacrificial life to him, our spiritual priorities must be established. We will then learn how to follow the Lord’s leadings, and how we may carry out our consecration even unto death. We will be continuously tested to determine whether we are truly committed to God.

In connection with God’s providence with the children of Israel, we may relate their experiences to our own. We read, “The LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deut. 13:3) We should not be surprised when we are faced with a trying experience which we do not fully understand. We are being lead by the Holy Spirit of God and do not always know what his ultimate purpose may be. God’s ways are higher than our ways. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”—Rom. 11:33

“MIND OF THE SPIRIT”

In Paul’s letter to the brethren at Rome, he explained to them, “We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with

groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:24-28

A human parent might withhold something his child wants because he knows that at this early stage of his life it would hurt the child’s development or character. The Heavenly Father may sometimes do the same thing concerning his children. He may deny us something that we want because he knows it might damage us at that particular point in our consecrated life and development as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

Our faith should realize God’s overruling providence even in life’s disappointments and trying circumstances. If we understood the divine working in every detail of our consecrated walk in newness of life, we would have no need for faith. When we cannot understand all of his ways, and yet try to live close to him and follow his commandments, we learn to trust him and to leave all matters in his loving hands.

A MAN OF FAITH

One of the most outstanding examples of faith recorded in the Scriptures is found in the life of Abraham, who has been called the father of the faithful. He walked with God for long periods of time when he could not understand everything that was happening to him. He was about seventy-five years old when the Covenant was ratified with

him at Haran, prior to his entering Canaan. He was promised that it would be through him that all the families of the earth would be blessed. It is recorded, "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."—Gen. 22:17,18

Abraham and his wife Sarah were of advanced age and must have wondered how this miracle would take place, but they learned that the judgments of God are unsearchable and his ways past finding out. However, as the father of the faithful, he kept his faith and followed God even when he could not trace him. Finally, God informed him that he was to become a father and that Sarah would be the mother. From the scriptural record, we read, "Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?"—Gen. 17:17

KEEPING THE FAITH

We, who are now living in the closing years of this present Gospel Age, must also keep our faith in God, even when the answers to perplexing problems are not apparent. We must remember that God is fitting the experiences and circumstances of our consecrated life into a complete picture which will only be fully seen when he is ready to reveal it.

If we have prayed and worried over our lack of understanding of what the Lord is accomplishing in our lives, we should not be discouraged if an answer to our prayer is not immediately forthcoming. Abraham had to wait twenty-five years from the time the promise was first made to him before he understood how God would fulfill it. Let us also trust that God is indeed working out great things in our lives in every experience of our consecrated walk.

“COUNT IT ALL JOY”

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”—James 1:2,3 ■