

Those Called Saints

***“Unto the assembly of
God which is in
Corinth, sanctified in
Christ Jesus, called
saints.”***

***—I Corinthians
1:2, Rotherham***

IN OCTOBER, 1998, the media reported that a Jewish nun by the name of Edith Stein was made a saint. The news article probes the question whether or not she was put to death because she was a nun, or because she was a Jewess. It was generally agreed that the nun was killed because the Nazis considered her a Jew.

This announcement provoked questions among many Christians as to what qualifies one to be called a saint. Who are they? Why are they called saints? What is to be their function in serving God? The words ‘saint’ and ‘saints’ appear in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. In the Old Testament there are three Hebrew words translated ‘saints’. These are: *qadosh*, *quodesh*, and *qaddiyah*, and they all have the meaning of ‘set apart, separate, and holy’. One other in Hebrew, *chasid*, has also been translated ‘saints’, and it means ‘pious, kind’. In the New Testament only one Greek word is translated saints, and that is *hagios*. It has the same meaning as the principal Hebrew words have; namely, ‘set apart, separate, and holy’.

SAINTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

When the Apostle Paul wrote letters of encouragement to congregations which he had established as part of the Early Church, he addressed them as ‘saints’. He reminded the brethren at Rome and Corinth that they were “called saints.” (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2, *Rotherham*) Considering the exact definition of the Greek word, it meant that they were called for the purpose of being set apart, separated from the world. In his other letters he addresses those who were saints living at that time, who had taken the step of devoting their lives to God and had separated themselves from the world.

In his second letter to Corinth, he addressed the Corinthian brethren as “saints which are in Achaia” (II Cor. 1:1), and the Ephesian brethren as

“the saints which are at Ephesus.” (Eph. 1:1) In his letter to the Philippians, Paul added another dimension to his greetings, calling them “all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.” (Phil. 1:1) We now know that the use of the term ‘saints’ was to define congregations of people who had accepted Jesus as their personal Redeemer, and had consecrated their lives to God.

From the Biblical viewpoint, the word ‘saints’ does not refer to a class selected by a church hierarchy, but rather, by God, the Father. Jesus plainly confirmed this when he said: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) Nor is this class appointed many years after death through a process of ‘canonization’. They are called saints while they are living because they have set themselves apart to serve God and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

PAUL’S EXPERIENCES IN THESSALONICA

The name ‘saints’ can be used to describe all consecrated believers in Christ. In particular it refers to those being selected as a “people for his [God’s] name.” (Acts 15:14) There are tests of faithfulness that must be met before they can be glorified with Christ. This is their ultimate goal, as the brethren of Thessalonica were reminded by the Apostle Paul.

Paul had been driven away from Thessalonica by rogues hired by the Jews. The persecution that these opposers would have liked to pour upon him was now directed toward the brethren in the congregation of Thessalonica. As Paul left to go to Athens—having been driven away from the province of Macedonia by these same Jews—he anxiously awaited word concerning the welfare of the Thessalonian brethren. He had sent Timothy to Thessalonica, and Silas to Berea to establish the brethren in each congregation. They were delayed in joining him, but finally caught up with him in Corinth. They brought the news that the Thessalonian brethren were doing well in understanding God’s Word, and in enduring persecution.

Paul immediately wrote the first epistle to the Thessalonians, commending them for their faith and witnessing in the heat of persecution by their fellow countrymen. He recounted his love for them, and his longing to see them. They also loved him and appreciated his ministry and loving care. In the middle of this letter, Paul pronounced a benediction upon them, to give them courage and hope as they walked as

saints in their country. He said, “Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus make straight our way unto you: And you may the Lord cause to abound and excel in your love one toward another and toward all, even as we do toward you: To the end he may confirm your hearts, faultless in holiness, before our God our Father, in the presence of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”—I Thess. 3:11-13, *Rotherham*

QUALIFICATIONS TO BE A SAINT

What are the qualifications for being a saint? In Paul’s letter we see some requirements mentioned in his benediction—one is: love for each other and all mankind; another: striving against sin to lead faultless lives as completely as is possible. Earlier in this epistle, Paul refers to their “work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess. 1:3); and their “election of God.” (vs. 4) He mentions them being followers of the Lord while enduring much affliction, with joy (I Thess. 1:6,8; 2:14), and their witnessing efforts. The apostle then tells them what a joy they were to him: “What shall be our hope, or joy, or crown of boasting? Shall not even ye, before our Lord Jesus in his presence? Ye in fact are our glory and joy.”—I Thess. 2:19,20, *Rotherham*

From these few scriptures we see that “the saints” are the congregations of God’s people—the churches of the saints (I Cor. 14:33) who have been called [of God] “according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28) and that the purpose God has for them is that they “be conformed to the image of his Son.” (vs. 29) They are the ordinary people on this earth (I Cor. 1:26-29) who are willing to suffer for “well doing” (I Pet. 3:17), and who “stand fast in the faith.” (I Cor. 16:13) These are called saints because they have set themselves apart from the world, and God, in turn, has set them apart, making them “God’s elect.” (Rom. 8:33) They have been separated for God’s purpose and are called holy. If they faithfully carry out their covenant by sacrifice they “shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:6

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES

This class of saints was foretold in the Old Testament. This is why there are so many references to saints in Old Testament prophecies. A few examples are: Psalm 89:5,7. This scripture tells how God would be

reverenced for his works and faithfulness by the “congregation of the saints.” Psalm 145:10: “All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee.” Another well-known text is: “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”—Ps. 50:5

We are told by these and other references in the Old Testament, that these saints belong to God; that they have made a covenant with God by sacrifice while they were living; and if they are faithful in keeping that covenant they will be glorified with their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. “Let the saints be joyful in glory.”—Ps. 149:5

The 149th Psalm, verses 7-9, then proceeds to tell us what work these gathered saints in glory will do. It will consist of tearing down the old order to make way for God’s kingdom. This is the function they are to perform with Jesus, their head. The experiences and works of these saints were prophesied by Daniel, who, as a captive in Babylon, foretold centuries of history yet to come and wrote so accurately of the fulfillment of prophecies.

THE KINGDOM OF THE SAINTS

In the 7th chapter of his book, Daniel wrote concerning a vision he saw of the universal empires which would arise and dominate the scene of the Gentiles for 2,500 years. All of these empires lost their dominion. But then, Daniel saw in a vision “one like the Son of man [Jesus] came with the clouds [trouble] of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days [God the Father], and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” (Dan. 7:13,14) This kingdom is to be shared by the saints as we further read: “The saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.”—vs. 18

Prior to the saints’ glorification and receiving of the kingdom, they endured persecution by one of the horns, or powers, of the Roman beast [the fourth beast] mentioned in Daniel 7:19. As Daniel reports, “I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them.” (vs. 21) This persecution would continue until the kingdom was given to

the saints. Speaking of this horn, Daniel says that it “shall wear out [trouble] the saints of the most High.”—vs. 25

All preparation for sainthood takes place in the interval of time called the Gospel Age. When the trials are over, then will be fulfilled the scripture which says, “The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”—Dan. 7:27

This, then, is the glory of the saints.

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Showing Honor, Living Honorably

Key Verse: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

—Romans 13:1

***Selected Scripture:
Romans 13:1-14***

THE CHRISTIAN TODAY is in a unique position. He is truly a citizen of heaven since he dedicated himself to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to serve God. As the Apostle Paul said, “Our citizenship is in heaven.” (Phil. 3:20, *New International Version*) At the same time he is also a citizen of the country in which he lives, and if he lives in an orderly society he is blessed and lives peaceably.

There are many countries today, where disorder prevails—in some cases bordering upon anarchy. Anarchy is defined as a state of lawlessness or political disorder due to the absence of governmental authority. This is contrary to God’s law because it promotes chaos, and God’s law promotes order. The Apostle Paul had obedience to the law in mind when he wrote to the brethren.

All governmental authority is permitted to rule by God. The Prophet Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar: “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” (Dan. 4:32) So also Paul said, “There is no power [authority] but of God.”—Rom. 13:1

Resistance to this authority is, in effect, resisting what God has authorized. (vs. 2) Jesus confirmed this when Pilate said to him, “Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.”—John 19:10,11

We should meet our obligations to governments such as obeying their laws, because they provide much needed services. “He is God’s servant

[ruler] for your good.” (Rom. 13:4, *Revised Standard Version*) This includes paying our taxes.—vss. 6,7

When Israel was subject to Rome, they hated Roman authority, and wanted to be free from the yoke of Rome. That is why the Pharisees and Herodians sought to trick Jesus by asking, “Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” (Matt. 22:17) A ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer would create a problem, so Jesus masterfully answered by requesting a Roman coin. He asked whose image and superscription were on it. His interrogaters replied, “Caesar’s.” Jesus then said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.”—vss. 16-22

At times there may seem to be conflicts in obeying God’s laws and those of earthly governments. We must be law-abiding citizens and use the principle of separating earthly obligations from our devotional obligations. Our obedience to God’s Law comes first, and in reviewing the Law given to Israel, the Apostle Paul partially summarizes it by the one commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”—Rom. 13:9

All laws of government should lead in this direction, but because we are still living in this present evil world there can be disorderly conduct, such as described in Romans 13:13. We should never participate in such conduct. Rather, we are to “walk honestly, as in the day,” or as if living in the Millennial kingdom, which is truly living honorably.

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Sharing Community

***Key Verse: “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.”
—I Corinthians***

11:28,29, New International Version

***Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 11:20-34***

OUR LESSON INVOLVES the Lord’s Supper, which is known in Christian circles by many names, such as Eucharist, Communion, or the Lord’s Table.

The selection of the title of this lesson, ‘Sharing Community’, was intended to have us focus on the word ‘communion’. The Greek word *koinonia* has the meaning of ‘sharing, or participation’, and was translated in I Corinthians 10:16,17 as ‘communion’.

The English word ‘communion’ does have the meaning of an act or instance of sharing. Also, it has been defined as intimate fellowship, and as a Christian body having a common faith and discipline. It is for this reason that the

word has been also divided into two words—‘common union’.

The Apostle Paul was not present with the apostles on the night that Jesus asked them to observe the Memorial of his death. Paul, however, was given many special revelations concerning God’s plan, including this one of instituting the Memorial. Therefore, his instructions are very clear, since they came from the Lord, even as Jesus had earlier given these to the other apostles. The Apostle Paul cites these in I Corinthians 11:23-26.

The emblems of unleavened bread and wine selected by Jesus that night were to represent his body, broken for us, and his blood shed for us. This is the primary significance of the emblems illustrating how we need the ransom merit of Christ to receive life. The Memorial of his death aids in the enhancement of our appreciation of his sacrifice. Another

significance of these emblems is based on Scriptures such as: “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:11,12

The Apostle Paul mentions this secondary significance of the emblems to the Corinthian brethren, saying, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [sharing or participation] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (I Cor. 10:16,17) Every follower of Jesus is shown by this illustration to lose his individuality and to die with him.

Some confusion existed in Corinth about keeping the Memorial as outlined by Jesus. He instituted the Memorial using unleavened bread and wine. He had just completed keeping the feast of the Passover Lamb which was not to be observed as part of the Memorial. In Corinth the disciples had made a regular feast of the occasion, causing Paul to write: “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s supper.” (I Cor. 11:20) The Lord’s Supper was to be observed at home. (vss. 21,22)

The proper observance of the Memorial was to use only the emblems, enabling brethren to acknowledge their need of Jesus as the ransom merit and their following of Christ. If we partake of the emblems with understanding, we shall not invite judgment.

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Reconciling the World

***Key Verse: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”
—II Corinthians 5:19***

***Selected Scripture:
II Corinthians 5:11-21***

THE BASIC WORK TO effect a reconciliation of the world to God was performed by Jesus when he willingly gave his life for the world. As the Apostle John wrote of Jesus, “He is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:2) At the present time, God is selecting a special “people for his name” (Acts 15:14), and these receive the merit of Christ’s blood to cover their sins. They are being developed and trained to be ministers of reconciliation.—II Cor. 5:18

It was the harsh letter Paul had written before to the church at Corinth (first epistle) that may have prompted Paul to write on this subject. He was critical of their failure to deal with problems in that church, and now he was concerned that he might have been too harsh, causing some in Corinth to leave the church. For this reason, he sent Titus with this second epistle, and waited pensively to learn how they had received his letters. He wanted to be reconciled with them. This explains the words of verses 11 to 13, as he introduces the reconciliation work God has planned.

Foremost in that work is the love of Christ which compels us to consecration in his service. Because of this great love, we no longer live to ourselves, but instead to Christ. The great transforming work that occurs in us is for the purpose of developing the New Creation, or as Paul writes, “If any one be in Christ, he is a New Creation; the old things have passed away; behold! they have become new.”—II Cor. 5:17 (*Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*)

Those who are ‘in Christ’ during the Gospel Age are the first from the world of mankind to be reconciled to God. These hold forth the word of

reconciliation to any who will hear, and are in training to be reconcilers of the world for God.

In Corinth there were some who needed to be reconciled to God, and this became a first work with Paul. He calls himself an “ambassador for Christ,” as though God was making this appeal to them for reconciliation through him. On behalf of Christ, he implored them to be reconciled to God.—vs. 20

What Paul wanted to impress on the minds of his Corinthian brethren was that God’s plan would bring the reconciliation of the world through those being called and chosen now. All of this was made possible by Jesus becoming ‘a sin offering’ for us. We read: “He [God] hath made him to be sin [sin offering] for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”—vs. 21

The development of the character necessary to serve as ministers of reconciliation can only be done through the ransom merit of Jesus. Once the called, chosen, and faithful have completed this task, then the work of reconciling the world with God can proceed. The church, having received the word of reconciliation, will use it to help lift mankind to perfection and to become reconciled to God.

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Confident Hope

***Key Verse: “Looking
for that blessed hope,
and the glorious
appearing of the great
God and our Saviour
Jesus Christ.”
—Titus 2:13***

***Selected Scriptures:
Titus 2:11-14;
Hebrews 12:18-29;
Revelation 1:14-20;
11:15-19***

THE HOPE THAT ALL have, who are walking in the footsteps of Jesus, is to be with their Lord and Master, and to reign with him in God’s kingdom. This was the hope expressed by the Apostle Paul to Titus and to all who have “the faith of God’s elect.” (Titus 2:13; 1:1) Paul encouraged Titus to faithfully continue the work he had begun as an assistant to Paul because this hope was sure. It was promised by God as written in this epistle, “Hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”—Titus 1:2

The development of the Christ class was a part of God’s plan from the beginning. Jesus had been sent into the world to provide salvation for this class, as Paul reminded Titus—“Who gave himself for us.” (Titus 2:14) These will assist our Lord in blessing the rest of mankind in his kingdom. (vs. 11) Before that kingdom can be established, a prophesied great time of trouble must come upon the earth, to shake out of it the evil and the corrupt. (Heb. 12:26; Hag. 2:6) Using Israel’s experience at Mt. Sinai when Moses was to receive the Tables of the Law, Paul tells of the terrifying scene that Israel viewed, as an illustration of this trouble. (Heb. 12:18-21) Following that trouble will come the establishment of God’s kingdom.

Paul, in writing about this event, emphasized that we look forward not to the terror and shaking that precedes this kingdom, but rather to that “kingdom which cannot be moved.” (Heb. 12:28) We have been blessed in our knowledge of God’s plan which tells us of the “city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” the “church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,” (all called, chosen, and faithful with their Redeemer),

“God the Judge of all,” and of “Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant” (when the church is complete). Our hope involves all of these wonderful facets of God’s plan.—Heb. 12:22-24

First, however, God says: “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” to separate that which cannot endure his judgments from that which can. (Heb. 12:26,27) The knowledge of this hope should inspire us to lead godly lives so that we can receive this kingdom. The details of how God accomplishes this shaking can be found recorded in the Book of Revelation. The Apostle John here describes how Jesus appeared to him as a glorious spirit being. He appeared to help John understand the many symbols used to describe these events. (Rev. 1:14-20) Jesus had messages to the definite periods of the church, his people, waiting with confidence for the realization of their hopes. His messages served as encouragement, promises, as well as warnings, for those who would be faithful through all the periods of the Gospel Age.

The one big event awaited by all the faithful is recorded in Revelation. When the seventh angel blows the trumpet accompanied by “loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15, *RSV*) Thus will be fulfilled the “blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”—Titus 2:13

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The Observance of Lent

BEGINNING WITH ‘Ash Wednesday’, and continuing until Easter Sunday—which this year will be April 4—millions of professed Christians will observe what is known as ‘Lent’. The word means ‘spring fast’, and this period of time is supposedly in commemoration of the forty days during which Jesus fasted in the wilderness immediately following his baptism. Forty days of actual fasting is not possible for most people, so the observance of Lent is largely in giving up meat and perhaps also various delicacies of food, such as cake and candy; and often the practice of self-denial along other lines.

There is no scriptural authority for the observance of Lent. In this respect it is in the same category as Christmas and Easter. There is only one yearly rite scripturally enjoined upon Christians, and that is the commemoration of the death of Jesus. He instituted this memorial himself, on the night before his crucifixion, and Paul explains that as often as we observe it we show forth the Master’s death. All other special days and observances, regardless of how firmly they may have become entrenched in the customs of Christendom, and of any merit they may have, are without authority in the Word of God.

The principle, however, of self-denial as practiced in the observance of Lent is very prominently taught in the Bible, although it strikes much deeper into the life of the Christian than is generally supposed or practiced. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me [be my disciple], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matt. 16:24) Many, in reading these words, have failed to notice that Jesus does not say that we should deny ourselves meat, or candy, or some trivial pleasure of life, but rather, we should deny *ourselves*.

What does this mean? The Greek word used by Jesus, and translated ‘deny’, is the same one the Scriptures use in relating Peter’s denial of his Master. What Peter did was to renounce the fact that he was one of Jesus’ disciples, or even that he knew him. *Strong’s Concordance* defines the word ‘deny’ as ‘disown’. This is a strong word, yet Jesus said that one of the terms of discipleship was that of denying, or disowning, self. This

simply means the renouncing of our own wills, and the acceptance instead of the will of God to be the ruling factor in our lives.

As Christians, we also disown ourselves by recognition of the fact, as stated by Paul, that since Christ died for us we should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us. (II Cor. 5:15) Paul states the same thought in other words, saying, “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (I Cor. 6:20) The natural desire of every human being is to be well thought of and respected by his friends and neighbors, but when we disown self in recognition of the fact that we belong to God, it becomes our chief concern to glorify him. Self might say, What will the neighbors think? But we deny the right of self to decide our course in life, so we ask, ‘What is the will of God’; ‘what will he think’; ‘what will glorify his name?’

In I Corinthians 7:23, Paul wrote, “Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.” It would be quite possible to renounce self, and yet become a servant of men. We might consecrate ourselves to some special work; or to a human leader; or a denomination, or an organization. This would not be in keeping with Jesus’ requirement of self-denial; for, as he stated the matter, we are not only to renounce self and self-will, but we are also to follow him; that is, accept and humbly obey God’s will as expressed through Christ.

We see that Christian self-denial means a great deal more than temporarily giving up a few nonessential things in life which we especially enjoy. In the first place it is not a temporary measure to be practiced for a few weeks prior to Easter, or at any other special time of the year. It is a permanent dedication of ourselves to the Lord. True consecration is unto death. “Be thou faithful unto death,” Jesus promised, “and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

One who is thus dedicated to the Lord and to his service will not, however, be unmindful of his privilege of foregoing those things in life which might in any way hinder his devotion to God. We all need to be watchful along this line, lest we permit self-will to steal away time, or strength, or means, which we have disowned, by giving them to the Lord, and which should be used in his service. Jesus gives us a general

description of these, referring to them as “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches.”—Matt. 13:22

Life can easily become very complicated, and the mere matter of existing can consume practically all of our time. But when we are dedicated to the Lord, the deciding factor in all that we do will be whether or not his name will be glorified. The monastic viewpoint is that anything that is pleasant, or pleasurable to the senses, is contrary to God’s will. This is wrong. God does not expect his people to inflict punishment upon themselves. The deciding factor in each detail of a Christian’s life should not be, is it pleasant or unpleasant, but what would the Lord have us do to best glorify his name. In other words, the interests of self are set aside in a life that is fully consecrated to God; not for a day, a month or a year, but for all time—true self-denial.

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Trusting Our God

***“In God I have
put my trust.”
—Psalm 56:4***

ONE OF THE SECRETS of a happy Christian life is to have confidence and trust in the Lord, a faith in him that is so unfailing and all-comprehensive that no matter what experiences may come we will be able from the

heart to say with the Prophet Job, “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10) It is not a case, however, of blindly trusting in the Lord in the sense of not knowing the ultimate purpose of the experiences which he permits to come into our lives. To the Christian he has revealed that purpose, which is that in us the image of the Master may be developed in preparation for the blessed privilege of living and reigning with him during the thousand years of his kingdom, and of being associated with him in Divine glory throughout the endless ages of eternity.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

But even though we rejoice in this knowledge of the Divine purpose which is being worked out in our lives, and are assured beyond doubt that to this end all things are working together for our good, we still are not walking by sight. Faith and trust are essential, because with our limited comprehension and our shortsighted viewpoints, it is impossible to understand how our experiences, whether of joy or of sorrow, may be best at the time. If we were masters of our own destinies so far as our daily walk in life were concerned, we would probably change a lot of things, but in so doing would be quite liable to create circumstances and conditions which may be detrimental to ourselves as New Creatures.

How essential it is, then, to develop complete confidence in the Heavenly Father’s care, to learn that his way is best, and that, although it is often difficult, the end will be glorious, because in every experience his wisdom is choosing that which will be the very best for us. Happy are we, then, if by learning this, we can always leave the choice with him! If we can do this, we will not think strange the fiery trials which our loving

Heavenly Father permits, but will accept them in quietness and confidence knowing that he is too wise to err, and too loving to be unkind.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

We can learn many helpful lessons pertaining to God's watch-care over his people by noting the manner in which he dealt with his servants of old. One of these is brought to our attention in Exodus 14:14; "The Lord shall fight for you," and in it is emphasized the fact that the Lord is the strength of his people and that our part is largely that of implicitly trusting in him, and letting him fight for us. This does not mean that we should assume a listless, indifferent attitude toward the Lord, his service, and the good fight of faith in which we are engaged as soldiers of Jesus Christ; because, while he fights for us, the Lord has given us a part to perform. But in doing our part faithfully, it should be with a peace of heart and mind, a tranquillity of soul born of the assurance that victory is not based upon what we can do, but what he has promised to do, and will do, if we but let him fight for us.

When Moses said to the Israelites, "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace," they were in a very precarious situation from the standpoint of human ability. In their march from Egypt they had reached the Red Sea. The way before them was blocked—or so it seemed. The Egyptian army had closed in on them from the rear. Losing faith in the ability of their God to care for them, they became 'sore afraid'. They chided Moses for leading them out of Egypt. Apparently even before they left the land of bondage many of them had remonstrated with Moses, claiming that it would be an ill-fated effort. Many have done the same since.

THE SALVATION OF THE LORD

But Moses was not disturbed. He said to the people, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." (Exod. 14:13) The expression, 'stand still', simply meant that they were quietly to rest in the Lord. Their faith was weak. They had become fearful, nervous, and agitated, and in that condition could not properly cooperate with the Lord. Centuries later, when Israel again was failing to place confidence in the Lord, and as a result failing to enjoy the richness of his blessings, the Prophet Isaiah said

to them, “In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.”—Isa. 30:15

It was just as true in Isaiah’s time as it was when Moses spoke to the Israelites that if they were to see the salvation of God it was necessary for them to ‘stand still’, to be at peace, to rest quietly in him and in his ability to deliver and bless. The same is true with the Lord’s people today. As individuals and as a people we are constantly being faced with ‘Red Sea’ experiences which try our faith; and if in these we are to be victorious, we must learn to put our full confidence in the Lord. Never should we take matters into our own hands, but should always wait on the Lord for a clear indication of his will. Those who do this shall “renew their strength” and thus be prepared for whatever experiences the Lord may choose for them.—Isa. 40:31

GO FORWARD

The Lord told the Israelites at the Red Sea that they should “go forward.” From the human standpoint it seemed utterly impossible to obey this command, yet this was the Lord’s will. When they obeyed, the sea opened up before them and they crossed safely. In this instance, as always, the deliverance of the Lord’s people depended upon trust in the Lord and obedience to his instructions. They were to ‘stand still’ and at the same time to ‘go forward’ in order to ‘see the salvation of the Lord’.

So it is in the Christian life. It is one of confidently trusting in the Lord regardless of the apparently insurmountable difficulties with which we may be confronted, and no matter how fierce the storms of life may be raging around us; but it is not a life of listlessness and inactivity. The Lord has work to be done. There are loads to lift and seas to be crossed; and true faith will find expression in our obedience in going forward in the narrow way as the Lord directs and putting our hands energetically to the tasks which he assigns.

Nor should we expect the Lord to clear the way before we enter it, for he does not always indicate his will in this manner. There are certain things which we know from his Word that the Lord wants us to do. We are to be light-bearers in the world. He wants us to assemble with his people when it is at all possible. He wants us to study his Word that we may show ourselves approved unto him. He wants us to love our enemies and to do good to those who spitefully use us and persecute us.

The Lord may permit many obstacles to stand in the way of our doing these things, removing them only when, by confidently obeying him, we 'go forward' to do his will.

We may be concerned about evildoers hindering our progress, but if we trust in the Lord, he assures us that "all things [will] work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28) Psalm 37:1-5 states the matter very well:

"Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

"For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

"Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."

We must trust the Lord in this evil day.

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Seed Protected

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

VERSES 1-31 “And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. “And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her. “And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel. “And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife. “And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come. “And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him. “And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob’s daughter; which thing ought not to be done. “And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife. “And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you. “And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein. “And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. “Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife. “And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister: “And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to

one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us: “But in this will we consent unto you: If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised; “Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.

“But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone. “And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor’s son. “And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob’s daughter: and he was more honourable than all the house of his

father. “And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying, “These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters.

“Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised.

“Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us.

“And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city. “And it came to pass on the third day, when

they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. “And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and went out. “The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. “They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in

the city, and that which was in the field. “And all their wealth, and of their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house. “And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the

Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.

“And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?”

This chapter records an episode in the life of Jacob and his sons which reveals the overruling providence of God in preventing his chosen people from intermarrying with others. To have done so would have prevented the fulfillment of the Divine promise pertaining to the seed through which all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

In this circumstance both virtue and deceit are manifested. Shechem, the son of Hamor, the Hivite, saw Dinah, daughter of Jacob, fell in love with her, and defiled her. We can understand the animosity this incident created in the minds of her brothers.

Hamor, Shechem’s father, made overtures to Jacob concerning the matter, suggesting a general practice of intermarrying, since, as he supposed, they were all to dwell in the land together.

The account does not indicate what Jacob’s reaction to this may have been. His sons took the matter in hand to settle it their own way. Seemingly they consented to Hamor’s proposal, but on condition that all the males among his people be circumcised. Since Hamor made a definite proposal that his son take their sister as his legal wife in keeping with the customs of the day, her brothers’ conception of defilement was evidently based on the idea that Shechem was uncircumcised, hence their proposition that the Hivites be circumcised.

While this proposal was accepted, and acted upon in good faith, it was not carried out, and this certainly must go down to the discredit of Jacob’s sons. It was their strategy in rendering the males of the tribe incapable of self-defense in order that they might be able to destroy them.

Jacob was greatly agitated over the incident, for he realized that it would bring down upon them the wrath of the people throughout that whole area. Perhaps he recalled his own experience with Esau, and of how he felt the necessity at that time of fleeing from the wrath of his brother. Jacob was not a warrior, and now again his fears were aroused, and not without justification.

The Heavenly Vision

***“I was not
disobedient unto the
heavenly vision.”***

—Acts 26:19

DURING THE TIME when the Bible was in course of preparation, many of God’s instructions and warnings to his people, as well as the revelation of his plans and purposes, were imparted by means of ‘visions’. These were frequently, if not

always, of a miraculous nature, and so impressive that they left no doubt in the minds of those to whom they were given that the Lord had spoken to them. Visions were not given to satisfy curiosity, but in order that those receiving them might be equipped to cooperate with the Lord in the outworking of his plans, either for themselves or for others, or both.

OLD TESTAMENT VISIONS

In many instances visions are referred to in the Scriptures as the ‘voice’ of the Lord speaking to his people, and a glance through a concordance is sufficient to impress one with the importance the Lord placed upon obedience to his voice, and the dire consequences that should result from disobedience. God spoke to Noah, not merely that he might know of the coming Flood, but in order that he might warn the people and make preparation for the salvation of himself and his family.

God also spoke to Abram of Ur, told him of his purpose to bless all the families of the earth, and gave him instructions to leave his own people and his father’s house and go to a land which he would show him. The blessings to be derived from this contact with the Lord depended upon Abram’s obedience to these instructions.

God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush and commissioned him to be the great deliverer of his people. Even the ground where Moses was standing when this vision was given to him, became holy, or sanctified, for God was using it at the time as the place where he was imparting information to his servant as to what he wanted him to do. If Moses from then on was to enjoy the continued favor of the Lord he had no alternative; he must obey the vision.

When Joshua entered the Promised Land and was confronted with the task of dispersing the Canaanites, an angel appeared to him as “the captain of the host of the Lord.” (Josh. 5:14) It was from this angelic army captain that Joshua received instructions as to how he should proceed to capture Jericho. Had he gone contrary to these instructions the city would not have been captured.

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

In every age of the Divine plan there are certain things which the Lord desires accomplished which can be done—with his help—by human hands; messages which can be given by human tongues; errands that can be run by human feet, and happy are those to whom he gives these opportunities and who are faithful to the responsibilities he entrusts to them—who, when God reveals his will to them are like Isaiah, and respond ‘Here am I; send me’.

NEW TESTAMENT VISIONS

The most notable vision mentioned in the New Testament was the one given to Jesus at the time of his baptism, when the heavens were opened to him. Here, at the age of thirty, Jesus was beginning his earthly ministry. He had come to perform the will of his Heavenly Father—all that had been written in the “volume of the book”—the Old Testament. (Ps. 40:6-8; Heb. 10:5-9) All the instructions recorded in the Old Testament for the guidance of the Master were given under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There had been no one to interpret their meaning, and even for the perfect mind of Jesus to comprehend their import, it was necessary that he be given a special revelation, a vision, and it was this with which he was blessed when the heavens were opened to him.

Jesus had come to ‘do’ the things which had been written concerning him and, when their meaning was revealed, he unhesitatingly entered upon the task of performing it. And at what great cost did Jesus obey the heavenly vision! The period of his ministry was short, but every day was

a tiring one. He was rebuffed by his enemies, misunderstood by his friends, and the great “contradiction of sinners” finally resulted in his arrest, mock trial, and cruel crucifixion. (Heb. 12:3) But this was the meaning of the vision. He was to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. He was to give his flesh for the life of the world. He was to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and he was obedient. He learned the cost of obedience through suffering.—Heb. 2:10; 5:8

But to offset the cost of obedience, the Master also experienced a rich reward even while he was laying down his life. His heritage of peace and joy more than compensated for the sacrifice he was making. Indeed, it was this that enabled him to obey—“for the joy that was set before him,” he “endured the cross, despising the shame.” (Heb. 12:2) True, this was a future joy, but the anticipation of it, and his complete confidence that it would be his, gave him a present peace and joy which the world could neither give nor take away. So while he was a “man of sorrows,” he was undoubtedly also the happiest man on earth; and for him, the scripture applied: “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”—Neh. 8:10

PAUL’S VISION

Saul of Tarsus had always been a zealous servant of God, although he had been wrong in his understanding of what the Lord wanted him to do. It was on an errand of misdirected service that he was favored with that revealing vision of our theme text, and to which he had not been disobedient. It was this vision which halted Saul in the wrong course he was taking, and revealed to him the position he was to occupy as a fellow sufferer with Christ, and the task he was to perform as the apostle to the Gentiles.

So far as Paul’s earthly service of Christ was concerned, perhaps the briefest summary we are given of what it was to mean to him by way of experience is in the statement made to Ananias when the Lord commissioned him to tell Saul what great things he was to suffer for his name’s sake. (Acts 9:16) Obedience to the heavenly vision meant much suffering for Paul, and in this he rejoiced; for the vision had revealed that he had the privilege of filling up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ.—Col. 1:24

These sufferings came as a result of his obedience to the vision revealed to him, and by making it known to others. After declaring to

Agrippa that he had not been disobedient to the heavenly vision, he added, “But [I] shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” (Acts 26:20) It was for these causes, Paul explained to the king, that he was accused by his fellow Jews, and it was for these causes that he continued to be persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles until he finished his course with joy. He was later executed at Rome.

Because he had implicit confidence in the Lord and knew that nothing would be permitted to come into his life that was not for his highest spiritual welfare, Paul enjoyed rest of heart and mind; but he had no rest from the impelling urgency of laying down his life in obedience to the heavenly vision—that Jesus was the Christ and that the hope of both the church and the world centered in him as the Redeemer, and the one who was to reign until all enemies were put under his feet, even the great enemy death.

Paul’s faithfulness to the heavenly vision involved a great deal more than bearing witness to the Gospel of Christ. On one occasion he said that he had not shunned to declare “all the counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27) In doing this he encouraged, comforted, warned, and corrected the brethren, thus helping to build them up in the most holy faith, and to grow up to the full stature of manhood in Christ Jesus.

A FALLING AWAY

Paul also prophesied that there would come a great falling away from the faith, that “grievous wolves” would enter in among the sheep not sparing the flock, that a great antichrist system would develop and flourish through much of the age, continuing until destroyed by the brightshining of the Master’s second presence at the end of the age. (II Thess. 2:3-8; Acts 20:29) He also foretold that in the Day of the Lord at the end of the age, sudden and unexpected destruction would come upon “them [the world],” while “ye brethren” would not be in darkness “that that day should overtake you as a thief.”—I Thess. 5:1-4

The Apostle Peter also prophesied that at the end of the age—the ‘last days’—only scoffers would say, “Where is the promise of his coming [Greek *parousia*—‘presence’]?” The ‘scoffers’ would fail to understand the significance of the time in which they were living.—II Pet. 3:3,4

The Book of Revelation reveals unmistakably, and in greater detail, the facts of the great falling away, the apostasy which developed in the church subsequent to the death of the apostles. This prophetic vision, which was given to John on Patmos, also makes it clear that at the end of the age the Lord's own people, his faithful followers—the ones who would be taking heed to the 'sure Word of prophecy'—would be blessed with increased light on the Word appropriate and needful for the time. (II Pet. 1:19) Indeed, we are assured during this time that the "mystery of God" would be finished.—Rev. 1:1; 10:7

These prophecies by Paul, Peter, and John, all assure us that the Lord's people at the end of the age were to be blessed with a brilliance of light with respect to the plans and purposes of God. The Master's own testimony is to the same effect. In describing the manner of his return and second presence he said that it was to be as a brightshining coming out of the east and shining even unto the west. While this is an assurance that ultimately, and as a result of his presence, the knowledge of the glory of God shall fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea, the Master's own disciples are the first to be illuminated by the light of his presence.—Luke 21:31

Using a different illustration of the truth that would be given to the household of faith at the end of the age, Jesus explained that when he returned he would sit down with his people and would serve them "meat in due season." (Matt. 24:45-47; Luke 12:37) Explaining the manner in which this would be done, he said that he would appoint a steward, a servant, whom he would use to dispense the 'meat', the spiritual food, the truth, which would be given to the 'household' at the time of his return.

The combined testimony of Jesus and the apostles, with many confirmations in the Old Testament, leave no doubt that the Lord's people at this time should expect to be blessed with another outstanding vision of truth. The Scriptures do not indicate that this latter day vision would be given by God in a miraculous manner as in the past, when he illuminated the minds of his holy prophets and apostles and our Lord Jesus. Further visions of this character are not now necessary, for all the plans and purposes of God were then revealed and recorded in his Word.

A special understanding of the Word of God has been given to his people in this end of the age, and in the manner indicated by the prophecies, particularly by the prophecy of Jesus concerning the “meat in due season.” (Matt. 24:45) The method which should be used to serve this food to the household of faith would be through “that servant.” The message received through him is therefore God’s vision of truth for this end of the age.

GOD’S PLAN—MAN’S FAILURE

When it comes to the understanding of the entire plan of God for human salvation, we cannot properly judge truth from error simply by examining one, or even several, individual points of doctrine. We must identify the central theme of the Divine plan, and the great objective to which every detail of the plan is leading. That which comes to light as we look into the promises and prophecies of the Word of God is the fact that God purposes to establish a kingdom here on this earth. This will quell the rebellion of fallen man by his acceptance of God’s provision of life through Christ, so that he may be restored to perfection and live forever.

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

Translating into our own language this great theme which permeates the Word of God, it simply means that the Divine plan is the outline of what God will do for man, and not what man tries to do for God. This vision of truth which has come in God’s appointed time, and in which so many are rejoicing, is complete and all-comprehensive. It embraces the meaning of all the great visions God gave to his people in ancient times. It was a blessed thing for Noah to be informed about the coming Flood and the privilege of service which was to be his in connection with it; but Noah did not know, as we understand today, that his experiences and the ending of that world prefigured the ‘days of the Son of Man’ in which we are now living, and the end of ‘this present evil world’.

Abraham must have rejoiced when God informed him of his purpose to bless all the families of the earth through his seed, but he did not know that the real ‘seed’ of promise was to be a ‘faith seed’ made up of Jesus and his body members who suffer and die with him that they might live and reign with him.

Moses was awed when he saw the burning bush and heard the voice of God instructing him to take off his shoes, for the place on which he stood was holy ground. He learned that he was to be the deliverer of his people from Egypt, and to be their lawgiver; but he was given little conception of the greater deliverance that was to come to all mankind, and of the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile to God under the terms of the New Covenant. True, he prophesied that one greater than he was to come, but like the other prophets of the Old Testament, it is doubtful if he understood very clearly the implication of this and others of his prophecies.

Isaiah saw the Lord ‘high and lifted up’, and he was inspired with the sight to do the bidding of such an exalted and holy one. His vision of God did not reveal the glories of the Divine character, and he did not understand the marvelous harmony of Jehovah’s attributes—his wisdom, justice, love, and power.

When the heavens were opened to Jesus he had revealed to him the meaning of the Old Testament instructions concerning the purpose of his earthly ministry, that he was to suffer and to die for the world. It was not possible then to impart that knowledge to his disciples, for they were not able to ‘bear it’. When later he did open up the Scriptures to them concerning the meaning of his death, their hearts burned within them. (Luke 24:32) But even so, it was not until after Pentecost, when the meaning of the vision was enlarged to include the church, that they learned of their privilege to suffer and die with the Master, thus to share in the “better sacrifices” (Heb. 9:23) of this age—the sin-offering feature of the Divine plan. This precious truth was also lost sight of as the apostasy developed, but is a part of the ‘vision’ with which we have been blessed.

The vision to which Paul was obedient was glorious in all of its implications. In it he saw that the plan of God had progressed to include the Gentiles, and the offering to them of the opportunity to become fellow

heirs with the Jews in the kingdom promises. Later, Paul was given other visions. He was “caught up” to the “third heaven” and to “paradise” and saw things he was not permitted to utter, because it was not then the due time. (II Cor. 12:1-7) Today we too can see the ‘third heaven’ and know what Paul saw in ‘paradise’—that he saw God’s purpose of restitution accomplished, and the entire human race living in a worldwide Eden of perfection of life and peace. We are bidden by our ‘vision’ to tell the whole world these blessed tidings.

We are living when the seventh trumpet is about to sound, and the time for the mystery of God to be finished. We can rejoice in a vision of truth which comprehends the whole plan of God. In Daniel 12:12, a reference is made to the blessedness of the people of God who would be living at this end of the age, when the meaning of the vision would be unfolded to them, and how blessed indeed we have been!

THOSE COMING BLESSINGS

One of the greatest causes for rejoicing by those servants who are blessed by the ‘meat in due season’ being served by our returned Lord, is the knowledge of the restitution blessings which, in God’s due time, will be showered upon the sin-sick and dying world of mankind. The reign of sin and death has been a long and painful one, and we rejoice that soon the Sun of the new day will appear above the horizon. It will dispel the sorrow that has gripped mankind in its cruel clutches since our first parents transgressed God’s law and were driven out of their garden home into the unfinished earth to die. When the “Sun of righteousness” begins to shine “with healing in his wings” (Mal. 4:2), then the heavenly vision shall have become a reality for all of God’s creation.

Our Warfare

***“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”
—II Corinthians 10:4,5***

THE APOSTLE PAUL makes reference in this text to a glorious warfare in which he was wholeheartedly engaged. Guided, instructed, and blessed by the Lord, he was indeed “a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”—II Tim. 2:3

There was a time, when he, as Saul of Tarsus, was not so employed, having been directed in life by his own human ideas. He then zealously used carnal or fleshly methods, and in his ignorance, was fighting against God. In persecuting the members of the Early Church he was, in effect, persecuting the Lord Jesus. He then formed his judgments, and directed his way of life, not upon truth, but upon

his own human imaginations and ideas.

Today, mankind in general is still forming judgments, not upon truth or facts, but upon human ideas and imaginations, promoting ideological warfare. This war of ideas is worldwide. In political, social, and religious thought there have been, and still are, very disturbing conflicts respecting ideas. How true it is that instead of wisdom prevailing, there is mental unsoundness. As a result of the fall of the human race into sin, and its condemnation—death—the whole world is unsound mentally as well as physically, but in varying degrees, according to circumstances and heredity. The Scriptures declare, “There is none righteous [none perfect, sound, either in mind or body], no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”—Rom. 3:10,11

Satan, the god of this world, has certainly been very busy with his deceptions throughout the history of man. He has blinded the minds of

them which believe not. (II Cor. 4:4) But the Scriptures reveal that in God's due time Satan will deceive men and nations no more, and eventually he will be destroyed.

For the humble and the meek, God has provided true wisdom in Christ, who said, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart," with the result that we accept him as our personal Lord and Savior. (Matt. 11:29) Being justified by faith, and fully consecrating ourselves to God, we are begotten by his Holy Spirit, and by the inspired Word of truth.

We receive the spirit of a sound mind, and experience, as it is written: "Ye [are] in Christ Jesus who hath been made wisdom unto us, from God." (I Cor. 1:30, *Rotherham*) In all this "we have received, not the spirit of the world, but that Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things graciously given to us by God; and which things we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but by the teachings of the Spirit; unfolding spiritual things to spiritual persons."—I Cor. 2:12,13, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

Our concern now is the mind and the will of God. We have devoted our lives to study and obey this will, and are glad to be exercised in experiences mostly opposite to our own human will. This includes our imaginations and ideas. We trample courageously upon our own will to deaden it, and deny self utterly. We exclaim with the apostle, "I severely discipline my body, and make it subservient [I lead it captive]." (I Cor. 9:27, *WED*) The apostle was waging a war within himself.

OUR WARFARE AND OUR WEAPONS

To consider first the question of weapons, the Scriptures assure us they are not to be carnal or fleshly—not swords, guns, bombs, or anger, malice, hatred, strife. Whenever these are used in defense of the Lord's glorious cause, they do it injury instead of good.

Those who fight carnally with anger, malice, bitterness, resentment, strife, misrepresent our Captain. Like our Master, we must love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us, hoping for Divine mercy upon them, in the opening of the eyes of their understanding—if not now, at a later date.

The weapons we are to use are mighty through God. In Hebrews we read, “The Word of God is living, energetic, and more cutting than any two-edged sword, cutting through even to a separation of life and breath, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12, *WED*) This weapon, ‘the Word of God’, is described elsewhere in the Scriptures as “the sword of the Spirit,” and is a vital part of the whole Christian armor which God supplies.—Eph. 6:11-18

Our weapons are divinely powerful for the pulling down of strongholds, demolishing imaginations and every high thing rearing itself up against the knowledge of God. A fighting spirit we must have, but this combativeness must be rightly directed. The Lord is seeking and calling out a fighting class who are to be conquerors, victors, overcomers; and from the moment we enlist as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, our combativeness is to be directed into particular channels.

We are to learn, first of all, that our combativeness is not to be exercised against the Lord in resisting his will. On the contrary, we are to make a full surrender to him of our thoughts, words, and conduct. We are to remember also that our fighting spirit is not to be used against the brethren, because to fight against them is to fight against God, and against the truth. Nor is our combativeness to be exercised either against our friends, our neighbors, or mankind in general.

Our fighting spirit is to be turned against sin, error, and the power of darkness, and its first exercise must begin with ourselves. “He that ruleth his spirit [his own mind, will]” is better “than he that taketh a city.” (Prov. 16:32) There are strongholds in ourselves that are to be demolished. Pride, selfishness, and various other kinds of sins are entrenched in our minds, in our imaginations, resulting from the long centuries of the downward tendencies of the human race. These sins in us have dug deeply into our system; they are firmly fastened there, but sin is not to have dominion over our mortal bodies. Their stronghold is to be destroyed, and our entire being brought into subjection to the will of God.

Our combativeness, which is now directed by God’s Word and the Holy Spirit, is used first on oneself, continually keeping the body under, conquering self. This includes contention with sin and self-will, mortifying it, killing its depraved affections and desires. It is a real fight

to demolish through the Spirit and the Word the entrenched strongholds, and casting down imaginations.

Our imaginations may be of different kinds—various false doctrines and superstitions that have come down to us from past ages, including hell torment; the immortality of the soul; the mystery of the trinity. The sword of the Spirit, which is God’s Word, can effectively cast down these imaginations, and enable us to see God’s real character, his glorious purposes, and his gracious promises to the church and to the world.

The Word of the Lord, illuminating our minds by the Holy Spirit, is the ‘sword’ that will demolish ignorance, superstition, pride, idle speculation, and every form of thought that would lead us astray, and hinder the work of grace in our hearts and minds.

It is after we have had considerable experience in battling with sin, selfishness and error in ourselves, in casting the beam out of our own eyes, and in subduing anger, malice, hatred, and strife in our own heart and the flesh, that we can become useful to God. By means of this severe battle and experience we will be prepared to assist others in their difficulties, helping them to overcome their besetments and weaknesses, and assisting them to wage a good warfare.

Whoever starts out by fighting the sins of others, before he has made a vigorous campaign against his own weaknesses and errors, is making a mistake. He needs humility and sympathy. He needs to be defeated on occasion in some of his battles with self, in order to have a clear appreciation of his own personal inability to overcome, and to force him to go to the throne of heavenly grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

All the remaining energies that we can spare from the severe disciplining of self, will find ample opportunity for usefulness in battling for the Lord and for the brethren. Such energy can be used for earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered to the saints, being steadfast in the conflict against sin, error, and darkness, courageously opposing all the wiles, or crafty ways of the Devil, being aware that we wrestle against not merely flesh and blood “but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”—Eph. 6:12

As the poet has written:

*My soul, weigh not thy life
Against thy heav'nly crown;
Nor suffer Satan's deadliest strife
To beat thy courage down.*

*The battle soon will yield
If thou thy part fulfil;
For strong as is the hostile shield,
Thy sword is stronger still.*

*Thine armor is Divine,
Thy feet with promise shod;
And on thy head, 'ere long, shall shine,
The diadem of God.*

The great conflict still continues throughout the world between righteousness and sin, light and darkness, truth and error. The true church is valiantly to hold high the light of truth—the true Gospel, as declared in the inspired Word. “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless [*Margin*, ‘sincere’], the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the Word of life.”—Phil. 2:14-16

Seeing that our fight includes our defense of the Word of God, and also of our Father's character, we must be willing to stand for the truth at any cost, and also we must fight against any number of assailants, against the creeds and theories and imaginations of men, which would misrepresent the “good tidings of great joy,” (Luke 2:10) which shall be unto all people during the Millennial reign of Christ and his glorified church.

Meanwhile, as in the case of the Apostle Paul who said, “I am set for the defence of the Gospel” (Phil. 1:17), we should be alert to defend the truth. And so long as the opportunity is ours, we are to courageously use the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Experiencing his guidance, strength, and blessing, we are to assist in “the destruction of the enemy's strongholds. Our battle is to bring down every deceptive fantasy and every imposing defense that men erect against the true knowledge of God. We even fight to capture every thought until it acknowledges the authority of Christ.”—II Cor. 10:4,5, *J. B. Phillips*

Dawn Bible Students Association

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