

“Be Ye Clean”

***“Be ye clean, that
bear the vessels of
the LORD.”***

—Isaiah 52:11

IN THE PRESENT EVIL world (Gal. 1:4) wherein we live, there are varying standards of morality. These are influenced mainly by religious beliefs. There are many religions in the world, and these fashion their congregations according to laws and

precepts adopted as part of their creeds. Then there are those who have no religious background and who may be atheists or agnostics, patterning their conduct after the 18th century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, whose “*Categorical Imperative*” says that whatever is good or benefits society is moral. Sad to say, there are also those who have no moral principles of any kind.

MORALITY IN THE PRESENT EVIL WORLD

In this present evil world, the heads of nations, or leaders of the people, because of their high visibility are often scrutinized for their espousal of moral principles. Again, as in religiously-based morals, there is a wide variation among the leaders in holding high moral standards. Islamic leaders have very strict standards of conduct but are not prevented by these in approving acts of terrorism. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the news media reported an announcement by Islamic fundamentalists of a feeling of justification for terrorism against the United States, branding it Satan’s Empire because of questionable moral leadership. They are unaware that Satan is the prince and god of a world which includes them.—John 12:31; II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2

The rank and file members of a nation can be influenced by their leaders. If the leadership is good, the people may do well also. If the leadership is bad, or immoral, a bad example is set for the people, and they may adopt wrong principles. The Apostle Paul said, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (Gal. 6:7) Judgment by God awaits every individual as it does their leaders.—Acts 17:31

An article from a New Jersey newspaper, *Newark Star Ledger* (May 1998), told of moral decay in America. A report had issued from a twenty-four member nonpartisan Council on Civil Society (taking two years to draft, and 30 pages long). The panel issuing the report was composed of politicians, clergy, academics, and activists, and these “urged religious institutions to reassert themselves into American life, and cited the Supreme Court for trying to create a society sanitized of public religious influence.”

Christians know that the basis for individual and national morality is the Bible. The Bible contains the laws and precepts of God. If all people were to apply these principles in their lives successfully, we would approach a perfect society. As a nation, we would profit by observing proper moral codes. As the Bible plainly says: “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Prov. 14:34) The nation that is God-fearing and worshipping—worshipping the Jehovah of the Bible—is blessed. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.”—Ps. 33:12

BLESSED IS THE NATION

Throughout history, there have been few nations who could qualify for this blessing. Originally only Israel could satisfy the requirements because they alone were known by God “of all the families of the earth.” (Amos 3:2) With the advent of Christianity, the gentile nations that espoused Christianity came under an influence eventually that did not stress God’s precepts. After the reformation began, religious freedom was found in the newly-formed nation, the United States of America. This nation was blessed as they sought God’s leadership, and opened their doors to the oppressed.

As we review our history, we can see that the Lord’s blessing was upon this nation, and it was an appropriate place for the harvest work of the Gospel Age to begin. Thus, ‘the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance’ also were blessed as the message of truth went forth from here to all parts of the world.

What a blessing there would be for this nation if they would practice the precepts of God. The ‘chosen’ found within its borders and in other parts of the world are given specific instructions to be ‘clean’ if they are to be used of the Lord. At the end of this age, a separating work takes

place as expected in the harvest. When the enemy sowed seeds of tares (imitation wheat) in the wheat field to grow alongside the true wheat, or children of the kingdom, God let them grow together, both true and imitation Christians. As explained in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30,36-43) they were to “grow together until the harvest” (vs. 30), and then a separation would take place.

SEPARATE THE UNCLEAN

This is the separation prophesied by Isaiah when God said through him to this wheat class, “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her.” (Isa. 52:11) We are approaching rapidly the time when imitation Christians will not be able to deceive the world into thinking that they are true Christians. In Matthew 13, they—as tares—are separated and destroyed, losing their identity as imitation wheat. The true wheat class is told by the Lord in Isaiah’s prophecy ‘to be clean’ if they are to have the privilege of bearing the vessels of the Lord—the truths concerning his plan of salvation. They are to leave behind false religious concepts.

In another sense, this prophecy relates to those who are first called and then chosen. (Matt. 20:16) Those ‘called’ have accepted Jesus as their redeemer, and if they are willing to leave the world and its uncleanness by consecrating their lives to God, they become ‘the chosen’ who are admonished to be clean. (Ps. 33:12; Isa. 52:11) God will not have it be otherwise. He says to the wicked, “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.”—Ps. 50:16,17

The privilege of understanding and publishing God’s Word requires that those so privileged be clean; but being clean does not mean being perfect. By accepting Jesus as our Redeemer and making a consecration to God, we are covered with the robe of Christ’s righteousness. (Isa. 61:10; Rom. 3:22-24) If successful, we shall be blessed of the Lord. As it is written: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (Ps. 24:3-5) What a blessing that will be!

HELPS ALONG THE WAY

In our journey on earth toward God's kingdom, the Lord has provided faithful leaders who, as "apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" are to be used for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:11,12) How fortunate we are to have leaders who are clean and examples of the believers. What a tragedy it is to have the wrong leaders doing the directing. Soon the dark night of sin will be over, and joy, in God's kingdom, will come in the morning of the new day.

How wonderful it will be to see those ancient, faithful men and women who endured difficult trials come back from the dead and have positions of responsibility in that kingdom. (Heb. 11; Ps. 116) These will be respected for their characters and understanding. They will be guided and directed by the Christ—Jesus, the head; and the church, his body—lifting them up to perfection. By faithful obedience to the Bible's moral standards, the world of mankind will demonstrate their worthiness of everlasting life. What a grand and righteous administration will direct the affairs of men.

Praise be to God for his marvelous plan!

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Accepting God's Provisions

Key Verse: “*God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*”
—*Genesis 1:31*

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 1:1, 2, 20-25, 29-31

THE BOOK OF GENESIS begins with the record of God's Creative works, most particularly those relating to and for the earth. After all, this earth is where God intended that man would dwell, and so it would seem logical that the account of Creation would focus its attention more particularly upon that which would be man's intended eternal environment. Indeed, as the Scriptures say, “God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited.”—Isa. 45:18

God most likely incorporated the assistance of the previously created holy angels to accomplish the tremendous work at hand, and, in fact, delegated the primary portion of this great project to his own Son, Jesus, in his prehuman existence. The Apostle John refers to him in this prehuman existence as the Word of God, or *Logos*. (John 1:1, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) That is, he was God's ‘mouthpiece,’ his chief instrument to carry out his plans on the earth.

The *Logos* was not God himself, but was the expression of him, as shown by his character attributes and purpose. John says concerning the Word, “This was in a beginning with the God.” (John 1:2, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott, Interlinear*) “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (vs. 3) It was God's own Son who was the chief instrument used in the Creative work described in our lesson, with God as the master architect.

There was much work to be done. The earth had no form and was void of any life. (Gen. 1:2) It took the mighty power of God, his Spirit, to bring about the necessary changes to the rudimentary elements that would

change them into a form fit for man's eventual habitation. God's Spirit, or power, was used by the Son to accomplish this transformation. It is well for us to note the necessity for these three—God, his Spirit or power, and his Son, the Word—to all work in harmony together, though they were separate and distinct. Here we see the first example of teamwork and mutual cooperation recorded for our benefit.

As the Creative works continued to move forward according to God's orderly arrangement, there came a time, during the fifth and sixth Creative 'days' (an epoch or space of time), in which all the fowl of the air, creatures of the sea, and beasts of the land were created. "God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. ... God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good."—Gen. 1:22,25

These Creative works were for the benefit of man. To sustain life, "God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed ... and every tree ... to you it shall be for meat." Likewise, to all other creatures he gave "every green herb for meat."—Gen. 1:29-31

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Beginnings

Key Verse: “The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

—Genesis 2:7

***Selected Scripture:
Genesis 2:7-9, 15-25***

THE CLIMAX OF GOD’S Creative work described in the Book of Genesis is that of the Creation of man. As described in Genesis 1:26, God states, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” The ‘likeness’ spoken of was one of mental and moral character, and as a king over the earthly creation. The mental image included the ability to reason, formulate ideas and act upon them. Man was superior to all others of God’s earthly Creative works. None of the lower animals were created in the image of God.

The Key Verse states that man was formed in a very reasonable and simple fashion, made out of those elements of the earth that were already in existence at that time. Every intricate part of the human body, from the complex internal organs and tissues, to the outwardly visible skin and fleshly features, was created from “the dust of the ground.” (Gen. 2:7) Yet, if left only in this form, the created body was lifeless, only a mass of elements which, if left as is, would quickly revert back to the dust from which it was made.

Our Key Verse further states that God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” It was only after God had given this ‘spark’ of the breath of life to the created being that it became a live creature. We should notice that it is only after the breath of life entered man that he is spoken of as a ‘living soul.’ Conversely, when the breath is taken away, and a man dies, the soul ceases to exist. This important truth gives us a correct understanding, according to the Scriptures, of what happens when human beings die; i.e., they are actually dead.

The wise man, Solomon, speaks of the condition of death in this way, “Then shall the *dust return to the earth* as it was: and the *spirit [breath]* shall return unto God who gave it.” (Eccles. 12:7) Notwithstanding the reality of death, God has not left man without hope of life beyond the present. The same God from whence this breath of life came and, in the case of death, returned, will eventually demonstrate even a greater power in the resurrection and restoration of man to the condition of perfection here on earth. The Apostle Paul says, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. ... For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”—I Cor. 15:22,25,26

In verses 8 and 9 of our lesson, we see the ample provisions God made for his human creation, planting a garden paradise filled with everything pleasant for man to enjoy, and to use for his sustenance. Man was given instructions to dress and keep the garden. (Gen. 2:15) He had only one restriction placed upon him as to what he could use for food, that being “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (vs. 17) He was not to eat of that tree, or else he would “surely die.” Our lesson concludes with an example of God’s care over his creation. He saw that the man was alone, and needed a mate or “help meet for him” (vs. 18), who would share his life’s experiences, and work together with him in the garden in which he had been placed. When Eve was created, “Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.”—Gen. 2:23

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Shattered Relationships

Key Verse: “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”
—***Genesis 4:7, Revised Standard Version***

Selected Scripture: Genesis 4:1-16

CAIN WAS THE FIRSTBORN son of Adam and Eve, followed by a brother, Abel. As they grew up together in the abode of their parents, we can imagine they had many happy and joyous times together as a family, even as the effects of sin slowly began to take effect. As is so often the case among families, these two brothers began to think in different directions and to steer their attentions accordingly as they grew into manhood. Cain was a man of the earth—a farmer—or, as the scripture says, “a tiller of the ground.” (Gen. 4:2) Abel, on the other hand, was

“a keeper of sheep.” Both occupations were certainly admirable and necessary to the survival of their family. On the surface it seems wise that they had entered upon different fields of endeavor.

Cain and Abel both recognized the privilege of rendering thanks to God for the bounties of their respective vocations. They both brought offerings before the Lord. “Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.” (vss. 3,4) The account states that God “had respect,” or gave consideration or regard to Abel and his offering, but not to Cain’s. (vss. 4,5) Why was this? Was not Cain’s offering just as acceptable as Abel’s?

God made a distinction between the acceptableness of the two offerings because of what they represented. Abel’s was more pleasing because he offered an animal sacrifice, which required the shedding of blood. This act was used by God to be a type of the need for the shedding of blood in order to accomplish man’s salvation. Abel’s offering pointed to Jesus, who said, “This is my blood ... which is shed for many for the

remission of sins.” (Matt. 26:28) Cain’s offering, as pleasing as it may have been in every other way, did not carry the significance God desired to illustrate to mankind.

Cain’s reaction to God’s statement was swift and violent. “It came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.” (Gen. 4:8) Was it possible that Cain could be driven to such a terrible act simply because God did not show him favor for his offering? Although perhaps he used this as an excuse, it is obvious that there was a much more significant cause for Cain’s act; namely, a long-standing hatred for his brother.

This is made evident by the Apostle John, when he gives us an all-important lesson concerning brotherly love. He says, “This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.” (I John 3:11,12) John said truly, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” (vs. 15)

For Cain to be pleasing to God he needed to bring an offering acceptable to God. His character needed to be changed from hatred to love. If he had done this, he would, indeed, have been pleasing to God.

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From Disaster to Hope

Key Verse: “I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and everyliving creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.”

—Genesis 9:15

***Selected Scripture:
Genesis 6:5-8; 7:1-4;
9:12-17***

BY THE TIME NOAH CAME upon the scene, mankind had fallen deep into the depths of sin, long since removed from the perfection Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. They were even mixing with some of the angels who came and dwelt in the earth, producing a hybrid race of giants. (Gen. 6:2-4) We read, “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”—vs. 5

Man had fallen so far into sin that God was grieved in his heart (vs. 6), and he determined it was necessary to destroy man from the face of the earth. Only Noah and his family were not contaminated with the hybrid stock and

were worthy to be spared. “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.”—vs. 9

God instructed Noah to make an ark which would be used to house him, his family, and a representative number of every animal that dwelt on the earth. This was necessary since there was a flood of waters coming soon which would destroy every living creature, human and animal, that was not so protected.

God’s method of accomplishing his purpose was very orderly. He instructed Noah to take seven pairs of the clean beasts, male and female, or a total of fourteen of each kind. Of the unclean beasts, Noah was to take only two pairs of male and female animals. The fowls of the air were to be taken in the same number as the clean beasts—seven pairs of males and females of each kind. (Gen. 7:2,3) God’s intention to save a certain number of the various kinds of animals was “to keep seed alive upon the

face of all the earth.” (vs. 3) Here we see the great economy of God. Under such an arrangement it would not be necessary to create again all the various species of animals as had been done during the Creative days, or epochs.—Gen. 1:1-31

God further states in Genesis 6:4 that the impending destruction of all earth’s inhabitants would take place as the result of forty days’ and forty nights’ continual downpour of rain. Obediently, Noah followed God’s instructions without question, while, no doubt, enduring ridicule and mocking from onlookers soon to be destroyed in the flood.

Paul wrote: “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” (Heb. 11:7) Noah was a true example of faith under very difficult circumstances. We would do well to emulate his obedient character demonstrated to a wicked generation.

The rains came, as God said, wreaking panic, death and destruction in all the earth. But Noah and his family escaped the judgments of God. Finally, the rain stopped, the waters receded, and dry land appeared. Lastly, the ark rested, and God instructed Noah to go out from it. (Gen. 8:15,16) Then God made his everlasting covenant with mankind and animals, signifying by a beautiful rainbow that he would never again destroy all flesh with the waters of a flood.

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The Keeping Power of God

GOD SPOKE TO Moses at the burning bush, as recorded in Exodus 3:12, saying, “Certainly I will be with thee.” Those words are an inspiration to us today as we continue to do the will of God—in trial, in difficulty, and in seasons of blessing. He says to us, ‘Certainly I will be with thee,’ and if God be with us, who can prevail against us? Moses left the burning bush to endure difficulties, trials, vexations and disappointments. But on those occasions of distress and grief he would recall the words of God, ‘Certainly I will be with thee,’ and because God was with him, he prevailed against all obstacles, some seemingly insurmountable, and led the people of God to liberty and freedom.

Who shall say what the future holds for us? Trials and difficulties, disappointments, discouragements, even bereavements—they are bound to come. In such experiences our privilege, our duty, is to turn our eyes toward our Father in heaven and claim his promise, ‘Certainly I will be with thee.’ This will mean eventual victory, eventual entrance into the promised land of our blessed hope. Without the Lord we can do nothing, but, with him beside us, we can overcome every difficulty of life that presents itself. We “can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth” us.—Phil. 4:13

MOSES’ FAITH ESTABLISHED

God established the faith of Moses. He gave Moses a realization of his presence by various signs and providences. When he spoke to him from the burning bush, the burning bush itself became a sign of God’s presence and of God’s power in his life. Moses left the burning bush with the words of God ringing in his ears. These words gave him assurance. He realized that God was directing his affairs, and that assurance made him strong. ‘Certainly I will be with thee’ was God’s promise to Moses. May these words send us forth with strength, strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. The psalmist David says, “As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried [*Margin*, ‘refined’]: he is a buckler

to all those that trust in him. For who is God save the Lord? or who is a rock save our God?”—Ps. 18:30,31

In Psalm 73:23,24, it says: “I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” What a wonderful thought, that our Heavenly Father holds us by the hand! He guides us through the difficulties of life, and afterward receives us to himself.

One of life’s most important lessons is to learn of our own insufficiency, lack of wisdom, and our need. In childhood we may have sought counsel of our parents. In adulthood we have sought counsel of our friends. Some of it has been good and some not so good. Certainly none of it has been perfect, for all human counsel is biased by imperfections of the counselor.

After learning of the grace of God and his provision through Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, and his plan for reconciling us to himself, we must be made acceptable, righteous, justified before God through the merit of Christ’s blood being imputed to us. We find that much more is to be learned. This happens when we make a consecration and become sons of God. Now we need good and reliable counsel. No one in the world can give us this counsel, because the world, with its wisdom and spirit, is opposed to the Christian walk of faith. But what a wonderful assurance we have that our Heavenly Father will guide us by his counsel, and afterward receive us to glory!

INSPIRED COUNSEL

We have found such counsel in his Word—given by “inspiration of God” and useful for doctrine, reproof, correction from error, instruction in right living—that we might be mature, completely equipped for every good work. (II Tim. 3:16,17) To follow this counsel will bring comfort and joy. We are not forced to follow his counsel if we do not feel a need. We are in danger if we become self-sufficient in knowledge and understanding and feel we can depend upon our own wisdom. Israel fell into that condition and her house was left desolate, and we can be turned aside too. Through stumbling, blundering, and disappointments, we learn the need of the counsel provided in God’s Word.

All of God’s wise counsel, if followed, is most helpful. Some examples are: “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up

anger.” (Prov. 15:1) Again: “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” (Ps. 141:3) Jesus said, “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.” This is because “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”—Matt. 12:34,35

TEACHABLE

God tells us, “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.” (Ps. 25:9) All of us want sanctified judgment, and to know God’s way for us. To receive these we must be meek, teachable. Of course, if we have pride of self or of knowledge, we will never submit to the Lord’s guidance. Some people never learn because they think they understand everything already, so why should they bother to listen? If we are ‘holier than thou’ in language or demeanor, the beauty and wealth of this counsel will likely escape us. But if we are meek, humble, lowly of mind, God has promised to guide us in judgment. He has promised to teach us his ways.

Our counsel continues with Hebrews 10:24,25: “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” The Lord’s people should heed this counsel and determine to make full use of the grace of the Lord as provided for his people. The privilege of assembling with those of like precious faith to enjoy spiritual fellowship is important. All should, therefore, enjoy the fellowship of God and of his Son. Let us enjoy to the full the fellowship of those of our own ecclesia. They are not perfect, but neither are we. It is worth all the effort we can give to obey this counsel of God.

Our great ‘Counselor’ has given us hundreds of such admonitions. They are full of wisdom, blessings, and good advice. Meekness and patience bring to full development the spirit of love which is the bond of completeness, for love binds everything together completely. (Col. 3:14) Love represents the condition of heart acceptable to God and says, I delight to do thy will. It is love which says, “Show me the way which I take.” Can we say this? Let us remember the assurance, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” (Ps. 73:24) The psalmist David says, “I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel:

... I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.”—Ps. 16:7,8

THE PEACE OF GOD

In Hebrews 13:20,21 it is written: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight.” May the God of peace indeed be with us!

There are two kinds of peace in a Christian’s life; both come from God. First there is the peace of reconciliation. We were born at enmity with God, but through obedience to the invitation, “My son, give me thine heart” (Prov. 23:26), by consecration, and through the merit of our Master’s sacrifice, we have been made acceptable to God. Robed in the Master’s righteousness, we are righteous before God, justified, reconciled to him, and at peace with him. He has begotten us by his Spirit, and made us the sons of God.

Second, God gives us tranquility, calmness, peace and rest. The God of peace is never disturbed, perplexed, or confused. This is not because there is no disorder in his domain, or no rebellion, for Satan has been in open, defiant rebellion against God for six thousand years. Nor is God’s peace based on indifference to human problems, for if it were, he would not have sent his Son.

God has peace because he knows his plans will not falter or fail, and because he knows the end from the beginning. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (I John 1:5) From the vast resources and the perfect balance of justice, wisdom, love and power spring the peace which God possesses.

God has promised us his peace. Are there disorders in our small domain? Is there disharmony, discord? Do some misjudge our motives? Do some think our sincerity will bear watching? We are to remember that God has promised to exercise his power for us. Through faith we realize the power of his peace and shall have peace, and rest. May the God of peace ever abide in our hearts—during every day of every year still remaining in our pilgrimage.

WALKING WITH GOD

Jesus walked with Cleopas and another disciple on the way to Emmaus; so our Heavenly Father walks along life's way with us! And as the hearts of those two 'burned' when our Master spoke to them, may our hearts burn within us as the Father walks with us. The privilege of prayer is a great blessing. While we walk with God he reminds us of his promises, including that he will never leave us nor forsake us—that his grace will always be sufficient. Likewise, besides these assurances we are told that God has given us some apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers; "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."—Eph. 4:11-13

Concerning our temptations, there may come a desire to have ideas of our own, but truth must be in harmony with the inspired Word. We may be tempted to lean on man, to worship idols, or to lean on the traditions of the elders as did so many in Israel. But thus the verity of thought so necessary for growth in grace and knowledge may be lost. So we suggest that we each request a 'Thus saith the Lord' for what we hold dear. "To the Law and to the testimony," God says through the prophet, "if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them."—Isa. 8:20

LABORERS WITH GOD

We are fellow laborers with God. This is an unselfish service. Paul said, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." (I Cor. 3:6) And then he added, "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Working together with God is a high and honorable commission. It is given to every child of God. We have all seen much lost effort, wasted energy, in the preaching of error. But here the word 'together' becomes meaningful—laborers together with God, with all the results, all the increase, dependent not on us, but on our partner in the service. It is 'God that giveth the increase.'

Spiritual fellowship and service are the basis of much of the joy and satisfaction of a Christian life. To be efficient 'laborers together with God' it is well to study how Christ, as the Master workman, went about

it. First of all he wanted to do what the Father wanted done. “Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God.” (Ps. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7) This must also be the keynote of our service. The doing of God’s will is the first consideration. The work may not always be to our taste. But doing the sweet will of God should be to our taste always.

Sometimes the Lord may let us do some reaping, and that is pleasant work because we see results from our labor. But the principal work we are asked to do is, “I delight to do thy will, O my God.” (Ps. 40:8) The Master went from town to town preaching the good news: “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom.” (Matt. 9:35) We have the same privilege. Let us unitedly labor with God.

One secret of our strength is the realization of our need. It is when we feel our own inadequacy and need that God can work in us to do his will. When we reach the point of helplessness, what do we do? Do we give up? Do we let self-pity take over? Or do we open the door through prayer, and let our Lord take over and exert his power in handling our affairs? “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11

May God be with us in our trials and victories, in our times of need, and of joy. May he be with us through every experience of life, until we see him face to face. May he uphold us by his counsel, and with his sheep may he securely fold us. May he securely hide us beneath his wings, and provide us with daily manna. When we are threatened by the perils of life may he put his arms unfailing around us. And may we keep his banner of love floating over us until we have fought the last battle of faith, and, through his grace, have gained the victory!

Dawn Bible Students Association

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“The Deep Things of God”

*“Since the beginning
of the world men have
not heard, nor
perceived by the ear,
neither hath the eye
seen a God beside
thee, which doeth so
for him that waiteth
for him.”*

*—Isaiah
64:4 Marginal
Translation*

A FEW HOURS BEFORE Jesus was crucified, he said to his Heavenly Father, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3) This makes a proper understanding of God and of Jesus very essential to those who are hoping to gain life eternal through the provision of the Father in the gift of his beloved Son. Since we cannot actually see God, our knowledge of him depends upon the revelation he has made of himself through his Word. Thus a diligent study of his Word is fundamentally important to all who want to know the true God and to be in harmony with him.

The statement such as is sometimes made, “There is enough in the fifth chapter of Matthew to save any man,” is not in harmony with the many declarations of the Bible. Those declarations encourage the Christian to ‘study’ and to ‘search’ the Word in order that he might acquire that knowledge of God which is essential in order to be pleasing to him. (II Tim. 2:15; John 5:39) There is too great a tendency to emphasize merely the blessings which are awaiting sinners who come to the foot of the cross. The followers of Christ are encouraged to go on from there to acquire a deeper knowledge of God which results from a more comprehensive understanding of his plan of salvation.

It is also important, however, to avoid the extreme viewpoints of those who place knowledge on a pedestal, as though *it* were important enough to be worshiped. Knowledge in its true light is important as the channel through which God reveals himself and inspires our devotion to him, but knowledge itself should not be the chief aim of our lives. The search for

it could lead to an assumption of spiritual superiority on the part of those who make knowledge a matter of the head rather than the heart.

Texts of the Bible which speak of the ‘deep things of God,’ ‘strong meat,’ and the ‘mysteries’ of God, have at times been misinterpreted, even though those who have done so have probably been sincere in their viewpoints.—I Cor. 2:10; Heb. 5:14; Col. 2:2; 1:27,28

Some claim that devotional truths are the ‘deep things of God,’ the ‘strong meat’ of the Word. God IS love, and the wonderful provision he has made through Christ inspires us to love him and to devote our lives to his service. Faith in God and his promises is essential in order to live such a life of devotion, and the Scriptures encourage us to add to our faith other qualities of character. These truths of the Bible are fundamental and can only be understood and appreciated by those who have discernment of the true doctrines of the Divine plan.

TYPES AND SHADOWS

Writing about the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the services associated with it, the Apostle Paul speaks of them as a “shadow of good things to come.” (Heb. 8:5; 10:1) In these ‘shadows’ certain clearly outlined truths of the Divine plan are prefigured. When these are understood they help us to appreciate the beauty and simplicity of the truth more than we did before. It is possible, however, to become so absorbed in trying to ascertain the meaning of all the intricacies of the Tabernacle and its services, that one could lose sight of the intended purpose of the ‘shadows.’ Some, indeed, have mistakenly concluded that only those who are able to explain the meaning of every board, hook, skin, and color in the Tabernacle really understand ‘the deep things of God.’

Some Christians seek a better understanding of the chronology of the Divine plan. Others specialize in the prophecies of the Bible, particularly the book of Revelation. They put forth efforts to understand and explain the significance of every detail of these prophecies. There could be an inclination on the part of some of these to feel that those who do not share their enthusiasm for Tabernacle types, chronology, or prophecy lack appreciation of the ‘strong meat’ of the Word.

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL

There is no suggestion in the Bible that only mental giants can comprehend the essential truths of God's plan of salvation; nor does the Bible encourage us to think that special spiritual qualities are possessed by some which are beyond the reach of the rank and file of the Lord's people. The truth of the Divine plan, as well as the standards of righteousness and spirituality associated with it, are the same for all the consecrated. The 'deep things of God' are understandable by all who have been called by the Lord to run for the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus.—I Cor. 2:10

We should not discount the importance of any truth which is contained in the Word of God. The great truth of Divine love, and of the privilege of our development into the character likeness of God and of Christ, are certainly essential. The types and pictures of the Old Testament, when used to increase the clarity of the Divine plan doctrines, are especially valuable to our growth in knowledge. The prophecies also have been put into the Bible for our edification as New Creatures in Christ Jesus (II Cor. 5:17), as have also the chronology and other time features of the plan of salvation. Let us use all these for the strengthening of our faith, and for our growth in grace and knowledge. But let none of us become discouraged by the erroneous supposition that there are certain 'deep' things of the Word which are quite beyond general comprehension, and that God intends these profound truths to be understood only by a spiritual hierarchy among his people.

The great truths mentioned in the Bible as being the most profound are, as a rule, the simplest facts of the Divine plan. And this is what we should expect, since God is the Author of the wonderful plan of salvation through which he has revealed his love and caused us to rejoice in the riches of his grace.

“WHICH PASSETH KNOWLEDGE”

There are several texts in the Bible which convey the thought of the profound knowledge, or understanding, needed to comprehend the Divine plan, and the love of God and of Christ revealed therein. In a beautiful benediction invoked upon the brethren at Ephesus, Paul wrote, “That he [God] would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in

love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Eph. 3:16-19) This passage gives a definite suggestion of profound understanding. But is Paul writing about some special truth which is so ‘deep’ that he knew only a few would be able to grasp it? Apparently not, for he speaks of being able to comprehend it with ‘all’ saints. In other words, that great truth which ‘passeth’ knowledge was, nevertheless, in his opinion, within the mental reach of ‘all’ the Lord’s people. And again we say, this is just what we should expect.

The Greek word translated ‘passeth’ in this text means, ‘beyond the usual.’ In other words, the point of truth which Paul is writing about is not incomprehensible, but simply ‘beyond usual’ knowledge, or that which is not generally understood. Just what is this unusual knowledge Paul had in mind, and which, in such a wonderful way, enables us to appreciate the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ? The answer to this question comes to light as we read the earlier portion of the chapter.

Beginning with Ephesians 3:2, let us notice the manner in which Paul emphasizes the great depth of understanding with which the Lord had favored him, that “by revelation he made known unto me the mystery.” (vs. 3) He indicates that he had previously explained this in order that the brethren at Ephesus “may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” (vs. 4) He then explains that this profound understanding of a particular part of the Divine plan as centered in Christ had not previously been made known, but “is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”—vs. 5

Just what is this vital truth, so profound, so deep, that a special revelation from the Lord was necessary to enable Paul and the other apostles to understand it? The next verse answers: “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.” (vs. 6) Surely this is a wonderfully simple truth of the Divine plan, yet it was treated by Paul as though it were a great mystery, as indeed it was in the days of the Early Church.

Throughout all the centuries during which God was dealing with his typical people, Israel, his prophets continued to make promises

concerning the coming Messiah, Christ. The entire nation of Israel was considered to be the messianic nation, to be associated with Christ in fulfilling the wonderful promises of worldwide blessings. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth,” the Lord told Israel through the Prophet Amos.—Amos 3:2

With this background of understanding, it must have been very difficult, especially for Jewish converts in the Early Church, to grasp the idea that gentiles could be ‘fellowheirs’ with them, and members of the same ‘body’ of Christ. To those who became aware of this great mystery, it served as a marvelous revelation of Divine love. It showed that the love of God was broad enough and deep enough to take in the gentiles, and make them heirs of the messianic promises.

There is much in the writings of the New Testament to indicate that this particular truth was considered by the Early Church as one of the very ‘deep things of God,’ and Paul was particularly desirous that the brethren in Ephesus comprehend it clearly and realize that it had been given as a special revelation of the Spirit, showing the extensiveness of the love of God and Christ. Here indeed was knowledge which went beyond the usual understanding of both Jews and gentiles, and yet today it is very simple to those who in their hearts are “no respecter of persons.” (Acts 10:34) Certainly there is no consecrated child of God now who is not able to grasp such a simple fact of the Divine plan, yet it is listed in the Scriptures as a truth which helps to reveal the “unsearchable riches of Christ.”—Eph 3:8

DEPTH OF RICHES

Closely associated with this doctrine which was such ‘strong meat’ to the Early Church, was the further truth that even those natural descendants of Abraham who had rejected the Messiah, and consequently were broken off from the ‘olive tree’ of promise, were ultimately to be reinstated into Divine favor, and have an opportunity to gain life. Paul discusses this point in Romans, chapter 11, saying that “God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.” He then adds, “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. 11:32,33

In the Greek text the word translated ‘depth’ in Paul’s ecstasy, ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!’ is the same one he uses in I Corinthians 2:10 where he speaks of the ‘deep’ things of God. His reference to God’s ‘judgments’ as being ‘unsearchable’ is a quotation from Psalm 36:6. The entire passage reads, “Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.”—vss. 5-7

How wonderfully this language assures us of God’s lovingkindness, of the riches of his grace, the abundance of his mercy, and the righteousness of his judgments! These glorious characteristics of our God are quite ‘unsearchable’ in so far as our ability to enter fully into their meaning is concerned. However, Paul cites a wonderful example of God’s mercy and righteous judgments, telling us that these loving qualities of our Heavenly Father will be manifested in the ultimate salvation of those who rejected Christ at his First Advent, and that he will exercise his mercy toward all of them.

This, too, is a wonderfully simple truth to those now who understand and accept the Divine plan of the ages, but to many in the Early Church it must have been “strong meat” (Heb. 5:12); that is, truth hard to assimilate. Even today there are many professing Christians who cannot take it, refusing to believe that God’s love is abundant enough to extend the opportunity of salvation to those who die in unbelief.

What a privilege to share the joys of this wonderful knowledge with others of ‘like precious faith’! We can help one another in our study of the Word. Regardless of how long we have been ‘in the truth,’ there are points that we can learn even from beginners, if we maintain a childlike simplicity and humility before the Lord and among our brethren. Above all, let us always look to the Lord for his help and guidance, that we may continue to grow in grace and in an ever-increasing knowledge of him.

A Link in Jesus' Genealogy

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

VERSES 1-11 “And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

“And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her.

“And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er.

“And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan.

“And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah; and he was at Chezib, when she bare him.

“And Judah took a wife for Er, his firstborn, whose name was Tamar.

“And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him.

“And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.

“And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother.

“And the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also.

“Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.”

A prophecy concerning Judah had not been made at the time of these incidents. Later Jacob, on his deathbed, gathered his sons and told each what would happen to him. Judah was told, “Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as

a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” (Gen. 49:8-10) Jesus is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5), and Jesus was to be the promised seed descended from Judah and David.

The reason Judah left his brethren to go to a town southwest of Jerusalem is speculative. But he married a woman of Canaan and had three sons with her: Er, Onan, and Selah. Er married Tamar, and being wicked, the Lord slew him. In those times a ‘levirate marriage’—levirate means ‘brother-in-law’—was practiced to perpetuate the seed of the deceased. So the next son was supposed to take Tamar for a wife and carry out this provision, but he did not do so. He also was slain of the Lord for his wickedness. The youngest son was to be given to Tamar when he had grown into manhood. But Judah was fearful of losing this son as he had the first two, and ignored the levirate rule.

VERSES 12-26 “And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah’s wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. “And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep.

“And she put her widow’s garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife.

“When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face.

“And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.) And she said, What wilt thou give me that thou mayest come in unto me?

“And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it?

“And he said What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand. And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him.

“And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood.

“And Judah sent the kid in the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman’s hand: but he found her not.

“Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And they said, that there was no harlot in this place.

“And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place.

“And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her.

“And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

“When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.

“And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.”

This led to a peculiar set of circumstances in which Tamar bore twin sons to Judah—Pharez and Zarah. Thus, eventually, seed was raised in the name of Er, Judah’s eldest son. Er, as the eldest son, would have been the heir of Judah’s estate. Instead, he died because of wickedness, as did Onan, the next in line. That left Shelah, who was not given to Tamar to raise seed to the eldest son. He built his own house, which is mentioned in I Chronicles 4:21,22, and is the last of Judah’s descendants in Judah’s genealogy recorded in I Chronicles 4:1-23.

VERSES 27-30 “And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb.

“And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first.

“And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez.

“And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.”

Er, however, finally did have a son, but not through his brothers, but rather through his father. When Tamar was giving birth to twin sons, one stuck his hand out, and the midwife put a scarlet thread around his wrist. This was Zarah. Instead of Zarah being born first, his brother, Pharez, was first, and automatically became the heir to Judah's estate. Even though Shelah was older than Pharez and a son of Judah, the levirate ruling made Pharez a son of Er and he preempted Shelah.

The nation of Israel was like the older twin, who, in the matter of 'time' had the first opportunity to become members of the Christ. Being only partially successful in their endeavors, God had to turn to the gentiles, who, as the 'second twin' are to be delivered first, and share with Jesus in the "first resurrection."—Rev. 20:5,6; I Cor. 15:23

In this chapter we have a detailed account leading up to the birth of Pharez, a son of Judah. The narrative breaks into the sequence of the story relating to Joseph, and we might wonder what useful purpose it serves since not even a good moral lesson is suggested by it. However, the purpose of the narrative is apparent when it is discovered that Pharez is one of the links in the genealogical chain from Abraham to the birth of Jesus. See Matthew 1:3.

In this connection, some interesting sidelights might be mentioned. For example, in the Book of Ruth we have an entire book of the Bible devoted to a story, the evident and chief purpose of which is to identify another link in the line of genealogy leading down to Jesus, namely, Obed. See Matthew 1:5.

In this narrative we also have an illustration of what is evidently the Lord's choice, that is Pharez, although an attempt was made to establish his twin brother as the firstborn. (vss. 28-30) We have something similar to this in connection with the birth of Jacob and Esau. God works in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.

The School of Christ

ALTHOUGH THE EXPRESSION, ‘the school of Christ,’ is not found in the Word of God, the thought is suggested in many places. For instance, Paul says, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.” (Gal. 3:24) The Greek word here translated ‘schoolmaster’ was the title applied to a servant kept in wealthy families among whose duties was that of leading his young master to and from school. Somewhat similarly the instructions and lessons provided for Israel under the Law Covenant were intended to lead those rightly exercised by them to receive the Messiah when he came, and to enter his school.

All who have come into Christ since that time have also entered this school to learn important lessons, and to have experiences profitable to their future life. Just as school prepares a child for the duties of life, so the lessons learned in the school of Christ prepare God’s children (1) for duties and services in the Lord’s vineyard, and (2) for service in the kingdom.

The members of the Early Church were known as disciples, which means ‘learners’ or ‘pupils.’ And our Lord represented himself as their Master or Teacher, saying, “Ye call me Master [Rabbi] and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.” (John 13:13) Again, Messiah is referred to as “that Prophet” (Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:22,23); that is, the great Teacher whom God had promised to raise up for the instruction of Israel and the world.

CONDITIONS FOR ENTERING

How do we enroll in the Lord’s school? These conditions are very clearly set forth in the New Testament: (1) repentance—a turning away from sin, and recognition of Jesus as our Redeemer; (2) a willingness to come to God by him, and to be taught of him.

Before a child can begin his schooling, the school fees have to be paid, either directly or indirectly. In the case of certain private schools, these fees are quite high. So it is with the school of Christ. This school is a very select one, and the fees are proportionately high. As the Headmaster, the Lord Jesus said on one occasion, “Whosoever ... forsaketh not all that he

hath, he cannot be my disciple,” cannot be my pupil, or scholar. (Luke 14:33) Full consecration is the cost of entrance into this school to become part of the church, the body of Christ.

Just as a scholar on entering school needs textbooks from which to learn his lessons, so the scholars in the school of Christ have been provided with a textbook, the Bible; or we might call it a library of sixty-six textbooks all bound under one cover.

LESSONS

There are two primary requirements in every school: (1) *Obedience* to the general rules of the school; (2) *Paying Attention* properly to the lessons given. Just as in some schools the scholars are poorly taught, and thus are handicapped when the time comes for them to enter a school of a higher grade, or to keep a job earning a living; so it has been with many of the Lord’s disciples. They have entered schools professing to be associated with the school of Christ, but some of their lessons have been taught improperly.

For instance, in connection with such important subjects as Spelling and the meaning of words, they have been taught that death is spelled ‘*Separation*’ from God, and means life away from God. But in the school of Christ we learn that death is spelled ‘*Death*,’ and means the opposite of life, the absence of life, even a condition of nonexistence until the resurrection.

We learn also that the *Soul* does not mean something that is ‘without exterior or interior, and without body, shape or parts, and that one could put a million of them into a nutshell’ as some schools teach. Actually, the soul, according to the Christian’s textbook, the Bible, means a person or being which results when the breath of life unites with a proper organism. (Gen. 2:7) Therefore, man *is* a soul and does not *possess* a soul. Adam, when the breath of life united with his perfect organism, ‘*became* a living soul.’

In Arithmetic some have been taught at these schools, that three multiplied by one equals *one*. But, in arithmetic we learn that three multiplied by one equals *three*.

GEOGRAPHY

Another subject in school curriculum is *Geography*, which means learning the location of places, and is the science of the Earth and its life. There is a kind of spiritual geography corresponding to this in the school of Christ about which many would-be pupils have been badly taught. For instance, the place called ‘paradise’ is said by false teachers claiming to be professors in the Lord’s school, to be a place to which a Christian goes at the moment of death which is an intermediate state between death and resurrection.

Our textbook, the Bible, tells us something very different from this. In Genesis 2:8 we read: “The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden.” The word ‘paradise’ is of Persian origin and signifies a park or a garden. We have another lesson in grammar with this subject. In Luke 23:42,43 we read: “He [the thief] said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

In the ancient Greek there was no punctuation. In translating the English Bible, punctuation was added by translators, and the comma was incorrectly placed after the word ‘thee.’ The comma should properly be positioned *after* the word ‘To day’: “Verily I say unto thee To day, thou shalt be with me in paradise.” The misplacement of the comma has led to much misunderstanding regarding Paradise—where and what it is.

Jesus did not say to the dying thief, “Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise,” for both he and Jesus died that day. Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day, while the thief still awaits a resurrection. But Jesus did say to the thief: “I say unto thee today, [this dark and gloomy day, when all hope of life seems lost] shalt thou be with me in paradise.” When Christ’s kingdom is set up, the curse of sin and death will be lifted, and the whole earth, in time, will become as the garden of the Lord—paradise. Both the repentant thief, and the other one as well, will be brought forth to enjoy the opportunity of receiving the blessings of that day, for the resurrection of the dead includes “every man in his own order.”—I Cor. 15:23

HISTORY

Another subject taught in the school of Christ is *History*, which might be described as a record of past events and information about the countries where they occurred. So our textbook, the Bible, gives us a

record of all the important events connected with the Divine plan, and when and where they take place. For instance, we are shown that God has not been selecting the church from the days of righteous Abel onward, but that the church, which enjoys “so great salvation,” was founded at Pentecost.—Heb. 2:3; Acts 2:1-4

The Scriptures tell us the history of the universal empires which succeeded one another since the overthrow of the typical kingdom of Israel, which ceased with the dethronement of King Zedekiah. (Ezek. 21:25-27) The first of these gentile empires was Babylon, coming into universal control in 606 B.C.

Prophecies show that the ‘lease’ of power given to the gentiles to rule, was to last for a period of 2,520 years, 606 B.C. - A.D. 1914. Following this, their ‘lease’ having run out, these empires have been disintegrating in a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation. (Dan. 12:1) “In the days of these kings [the last representatives of gentile power] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.” (Dan. 2:44) A mere statement of these scriptural truths shows how misinformed many are who profess to be teachers in the school of Christ. They tell us that God’s kingdom is to be set up through their gradual conversion of the world.

NEEDLEWORK

Another subject taught in the school of Christ is *Needlework*. This is suggested by the text, “She [the bride of Christ] shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework.” (Ps. 45:14) Spiritual needlework is one of the most important subjects in which the Lord’s disciples are instructed. It consists of the working into our robe the ‘needlework’ of the Lord’s imputed righteousness, the graces of character so perfectly illustrated in the character of our great Teacher and required of every one who would graduate from the school of Christ. The main lines of this pattern may be seen in II Peter 1:5-7.

DISCIPLINE

In every properly conducted school there must be *Discipline*. For the eternal well-being of the Lord’s pupils in his school, strict discipline is kept. Unruly ones are at times “delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.” (I Tim. 1:20) Those who neglect their covenant involving the sacrifice of the justified human nature may have to be

delivered over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh, that the Spirit [New Creature] may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”—I Cor. 5:5

The school of Christ, inaugurated at Pentecost, is not to remain open forever, but only until the close of the Gospel Age when the Headmaster of the house will rise up and close the door. At that time we are told that many will have a desire to enter this school. Some will seek to enter in, and “shall not be able.”—Luke 13:24

The question is asked, “What about the eternal destiny of these, as well as of all who have never heard of the school of Christ?” Further, “In view of the fact that one object of the Lord’s school is to prepare the pupils for eternal life, what about all those who have heard the Lord’s invitation, but who fail to take advantage of it?” The Bible answers that in the Millennial Age God has arranged to open another school into which all mankind (apart from the members of the true church) will come as pupils, that they may be prepared for the eternal earthly blessings of the kingdom of God.—Isa. 2:2-4

The price for being educated in the school of Christ is very costly. “Whosoever ... forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33) But for the Millennial Age school, there will be no cost. (Isa. 55:1) No sacrifice will be required in that day but obedience to the law of the New Covenant, according to ability. This will be required of each one. “What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”—Micah 6:8

Prior to the nineteenth century there was no compulsory education. During the present Gospel Age, when the Lord’s school is open, entrance into it is voluntary. But membership in the future Millennial Age school will be a compulsory one, even as schooling today is required for all children. But the same great Prophet will be the Teacher (Acts 3:22,23), and his assistants will be those who have graduated from his school of the Gospel Age.—I Cor. 6:2

SUCCESSFUL CURRICULUM

Just as a student when going from one school to another, is put into the first, second, third or fourth grade according to the progress he has previously made, even so it will be in the great school of the Millennial Age. Although the great majority of the world of humanity is not now in the school of Christ, all are registered in a school—the school of

experience. According to the way they have used their lives under present imperfect conditions, each one will be graded to a higher or lower placement in the new school which is intended to prepare them for eternal life.

Some who have practiced the principles of righteousness to the best of their ability at the present time, may quickly reach the top grade in the Millennial Age. Others, having been awakened to shame and contempt (Dan. 12:2), will have to begin in the very lowest grade of the school, having willfully refused to give heed to the textbook, the Bible. Others have never had an opportunity for instruction in righteousness provided in the Word of God, having been blinded by the Adversary.—II Cor. 4:4

Just as some students need very little discipline, while others have to be punished repeatedly, so it will be with mankind. Many stripes or few stripes will be the order of that day. (Luke 12:47,48) At school, examinations at the end of the term show which scholars have profited by the instruction received, and prizes are offered for those who pass well. Just so, at the end of the teaching of a thousand years, the day of final examination will come. Satan is to be loosed out of his prison to tempt mankind, and the great Teacher will then note how the world responds to these tests.—Rev. 20:3,7,8

Mankind will have to pass this examination so well that only those receiving 100% marks will gain the great prize of eternal life. The requirement of the great Teacher and Judge is nothing short of perfection, and perfect love will be the universal law.

The successful candidates will hear the Lord's cheering message, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34) Then the words of the wise man will have their complete and perfect fulfillment: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6) Never again will there be an outbreak of sin, and consequently death will be vanquished forever!—Rev. 21:4

Elihu says, "Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him?" (Job 36:22, *RSV*) Could any other teacher achieve such glorious results? May we show our gratitude for all that is being done for us by learning well the lessons of the present time. And let us never reach a condition where we think we have nothing more to learn.

“Be Ye Transformed”

“Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

—Romans 12:2

IN OUR TEXT, THE GREEK word rendered “transformed” is *metamorphoo*. It is closely related in meaning to our English word ‘metamorphosis,’ which is defined in “*Webster’s Dictionary*” in several ways. One is ‘a marked and more or less abrupt developmental change in the form or structure in an animal (as in a butterfly or frog) occurring subsequent to birth or hatching.’ In the insect world it is a transformation of the chrysalis into a winged insect. These changes, in the case of a butterfly, are first the egg, then the

caterpillar, from caterpillar to chrysalis, and finally into the butterfly.

METAMORPHOSIS

These changes are more complex than one might at first suppose. The caterpillar, for example, ravenously eats leaves, and its mouth and digestive system are adapted for this type of food. The butterfly, on the contrary, has a mouth which is suctorial in structure and function. This is located at the end of a small ‘trunk,’ and thus is well adapted to suck the nectar from flowers; and the digestive system of the butterfly is suitable for the assimilation, not of leaves, but of honey.

In the caterpillar there are scores of muscles, which in the butterfly are replaced by others of a form and structure entirely different. The caterpillar is earthbound, but when transformed into a butterfly, becomes an entirely different creature, for it can fly. This change from one form to another is not direct or instantaneous. There is that intermediate state, the chrysalis, the seeming death-like condition, which is a most remarkable phenomenon of insect metamorphosis in which the caterpillar is actually put to death. The process is remarkable, incapacitating the

caterpillar for a continuance of its previous way of living, while preparing for its future existence as a butterfly.

A NEW CREATION

We think that in this there is a good illustration of the manner in which we are being transformed as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. The basic condition upon which this may be successfully accomplished is that we be fully and completely consecrated to God—our bodies presented as a “living sacrifice.” (Rom. 12:1,2) Each faithful follower of Jesus is called out from a fallen, sinful race. The condition of the call is that the old creature be put to death, and that a New Creature—begotten by the Holy Spirit—be developed.

As in the case of the chrysalis, this is a remarkable process—‘incapacitating us for a continuance of our previous way of living, while at the same time preparing us for a future life.’ Day by day, through Divine assistance, we are transformed, growing in heavenly knowledge and the graces of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the “inward man” develops spiritually while the “outward man” perishes. (II Cor. 4:16) This process complete, we shall be exalted in the ‘first resurrection,’ to glorious heights, even of the Divine nature. We will then be privileged to reign with Christ in his glorious kingdom which is to bless all the families of the earth.

Mortal man cannot conceive of so marvelous a work and so great a glory, and we surely realize our own unworthiness of such stupendous Divine grace and mercy. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”—Eph. 2:4-

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IN CHRIST

Our present privileged position is being ‘in Christ’—“If any man be in Christ he is [not the same old creature but] a New Creature.” (II Cor. 5:17) We are being transformed by the renewing of our minds. A new

mind is being formed, begotten not of the will of man, but of God—"Of his own will begat he us with the Word of truth."—James 1:18

A special spiritual treasure is being developed in our earthen vessel, and the earthbound, grub-like tendencies are to be put to death. We are to "put off," according to the former course of life, that "old man" which is corrupted by deceitful desires, and we are to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."—Eph. 4:22-24

During the chrysalis metamorphosis state the caterpillar existence is put to death, and at the same time there is a preparation for a new, and quite different, future existence. In this connection, how forceful are the apostle's words, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify [put to death] the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. 8:13) Repression, mortification, death, must be going on all the time with respect to the fleshly mind, the earth-bound tendencies, that the new mind may be made manifest.

FULL SURRENDER

Our Heavenly Father asks from us a full surrender, full consecration, a nonconformity to this world, and a transforming to the kingdom requirements. Only then can God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, fully shine into our hearts by the Gospel, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. This knowledge is not comprehended by the natural mind. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."—I Cor. 2:14

The veil of human-mindedness in the natural man hangs between him and the sacred and spiritual truths of God. The only way to set it aside is to make a full consecration to do God's will, which is to sacrifice the flesh and its interests. It is in the glorious and privileged condition typified by the Holy of the Tabernacle that the consecrated children of God enjoy their real inner life, and walk with God. This is quite beyond the sight of the world and of the worldly.

In the 'Holy' we are experiencing 'metamorphosis,' or transformation. It is during this process that we are learning more and more that we 'may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.' This 'proving' the will of God is a great privilege. The Greek word in our text which is translated 'prove' was much used in olden times in connection

with the testing of metals. It means ‘to investigate, discern, examine.’ By careful tests, under close examination and observation, the metal was proved. So it is that we prove the will of God.

HIS WORD TRANSFORMS

But just how are we to do this? One way is through the study of His Word, individually and with others. We all know the joyful experiences of gathering around God’s holy Word collectively. On such occasions we meditate upon the Scriptures, endeavoring to “rightly” divide “the Word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) With sentiments of prayer, praise, and worship in our hearts we wait upon the Lord, and he speaks to us through his Word.

As a result of our study we become assured of the wonderful truths concerning his will for us, for we have proved and tested to our complete satisfaction the good pleasure of God as he reveals himself through a great and glorious Divine plan. In that plan we find his provision for our being “justified by faith,” and how we received this standing of life before God as a result of our full consecration to him.—Rom. 5:1

We learn also that the church is “the temple of the living God” (II Cor. 6:16), and that the Lord Jesus is the “chief cornerstone” of this “temple.”—Eph. 2:20-22

We also come to realize more fully that the basis of hope for both the church and the world is in the fact that Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man—a “ransom for all.”—Heb. 2:9; I Tim. 2:4-6

OUR GLORIOUS HOPE

We learn that the glorious hope of the church is to be like her Lord, to see him as he is, to become partakers of the Divine nature, and, with Jesus in glory, to assist in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

In the daily experiences of life we are to discern, try, and test the will of God. Our Father wills to be a God of love. “The Father himself loveth you.” (John 16:27) Surely we are daily proving this to be true. Have we not also proved the verity of the testimony, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee”?—Isa. 26:3

Then there is that wonderful promise, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (Prov. 3:6) All these promises are

very precious, and in actual experience are ‘proved’ by those who are being transformed. So we continue to “walk as children of light: ... proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.”—Eph. 5:8-10

The chrysalis metamorphosis is a complete mystery so far as human understanding is concerned. So is our transforming process as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Paul speaks of “the riches of the glory of this mystery, ... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27) Christ is being formed in us. We are “transformed into the same likeness, from glory to glory, as from the Lord, the Spirit.”—II Cor. 3:18, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

Just as the butterfly must use its own muscles and energy in order to emerge in due course from the chrysalis state, so during our transformation we must also strive, struggle, as directed by the Scriptures. While God is working in us both to will and to do his good pleasure, we also have to work out our own salvation. We must do this with great carefulness lest we fail of the great favor of God to which we have been called.—Phil. 2:12

May we then faithfully and humbly let our steps be guided by the truths we have learned, and by the Lord’s help press on to full victory. We know that this victory will only be attained by the complete death of the flesh. But let us have confidence that the Lord, who has called us to glory, will give us strength to be “faithful unto death,” and that he will fulfill his promise to give us “a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

Dawn Bible Students Association