

Preview of Anarchy

*“There is no fear in
love; but perfect
love casteth out
fear: because fear
hath torment.”*
—*I John 4:18*

THE AFRICAN CONTINENT has become a backdrop for anarchy. During the 1990’s Rwanda was torn apart by civil war that resembled anarchy, as no law or order prevailed and millions of people lost their lives. The two tribes of that nation, the Tutsi and the Hutus took turns prevailing in the land and trying to commit genocide

by slaughtering the others.

The same type of attitudes and activities have shifted into the African nations of Liberia, the Ivory Coast, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. *The World Press Review* ran a feature article entitled “Congo’s Nightmare” in its August, 2003 issue, composed of different news articles. The first was entitled “In Hell’s Waiting Room,” and came from a German liberal newsmagazine called *Der Spiegel*, issuing May 26, 2003 in Hamburg, Germany. It said:

“Missionary Jan Mol is afraid he may be losing his faith. When the pastor makes his way past the shell craters to his parish house in the burned-out center of Bunia, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.), he has to run a humiliating gantlet. Already, at midday, drunken 7-year-olds wearing women’s high heels flock around the 67-year-old, flaunting their Kalashnikovs, disrespectfully blowing cigarette smoke in his face, and threatening this mzungu from Holland with bread knives and hand grenades.

FAITH-SHAKING EXPERIENCES

“These children are the new lords of the street. They ‘kill and loot and obey the rule of violence, not the rules of the Lord,’ Mol says, and he feels that he is already in hell’s waiting room. ‘If United Nations soldiers don’t come soon to separate them, we are going to experience a real catastrophe,’ the minister says. He watches incredulously as a Blue Helmet [U.N. peacekeeper] from Uruguay stands on the Boulevard de la

Libération and allows himself to be harassed by a heavily armed boy wearing a wig, with a pack on his back and beer bottles stuck into his belt. The Dutchman is convinced: ‘We are witnessing genocide, and the U.N. is standing by, doing nothing.’

“At least two weeks ago, child soldiers from the Union of Congolese Patriots, belonging to the Hema tribe, took control of Bunia, a city of 300,000. They drove out their opponents from the Lendu tribe, hacking them with machetes or shooting them. Butchered bodies lay on the streets here for days. Mol, who has lived here since 1971, sees a disaster like that in Bosnia or Rwanda coming, where hundreds of thousands were beaten, shot, or slashed as the world looked on.

“When the battle for the capital of the Ituri region of the D.R.C. began, the pastor tried, again and again, to get the commander of the 750 or so Uruguayan Blue Helmets who are stationed here to intervene. But by the time a few U.N. soldiers, armed to the teeth, finally moved out into the streets, Mol’s colleagues, Father Aimé Ndjabu and Father Francois Mateso, were already dead. One had his throat slit, the other had been riddled with machine-gun fire.”

The article went on to describe more killings in graphic detail and the ineffectiveness of UN peacekeepers. How many had died, no one knows. The region of Ituri had 2.4 million people. Now one million are refugees. As one man said, “What is happening in the hills of Ituri is pure terror.”

AFRICA’S WORST NIGHTMARE

Another article from a *World Press Review*, written in Paris, France on June 1, 2003, said:

“A remote province named Ituri, which borders Uganda and the Sudan in the Northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.), has become the scene of Africa’s worst nightmare. Tribal armies, including child soldiers, have killed thousands of people. There are reports of rape, mutilation, and cannibalism.

“Ntumba Luaba, human-rights minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, describes Ituri as ‘a cemetery.’ In an emotional statement to the Foreign Press Association in Paris in May, he appealed for United Nations intervention. ‘If the multinational force does not arrive soon,’ he said, ‘there will be nothing left to save but the trees and the rocks.’

“Luaba has been to Ituri twice in the past year in an effort to negotiate peace between the province’s warring Hema and Lendu peoples. His first mission to Bunia ended in humiliation when he was taken hostage by Hema militia. During a second visit, in May, his plane made a forced landing after being hit by a rebel missile.

“The International Rescue Committee puts the death toll in the D.R.C. at between 3.1 million and 4.7 million people since August 1998, making it the deadliest conflict on the globe since World War II. Of those who have died in the conflict, the majority are civilians who perished from starvation and disease after being driven from their homes. Several hundred thousand were murdered.

“Undisciplined government forces have contributed to the chaos. (The government of the D.R.C., headed by President Joseph Kabila, controls around half of the country with support from Angola.) Their abuses include summary executions, rape, looting, and other violent acts. Luaba admitted that there has been ‘killing, too much killing.’ But he insisted that the army’s conduct would be subject to an international commission of inquiry and said he has warned commanding officers that they would be held responsible for the death of civilians.”

COVETOUSNESS AND GREED

Luaba was interviewed in Paris by a host of interviewers. A representative of Ivory Coast Radio asked whether the world was viewing the same days as when more powerful countries were undermining the Democratic Republic of Congo’s sovereignty so that they could control the nation’s resources? His answer was:

“The great natural resources of the D.R.C. are a blessing but also the reason for the country’s malaise. They are coveted by foreign powers and by some of its neighbors. But no amount of wealth will compensate for the loss of human life. We can’t just watch the population of Ituri being massacred while we look on, helpless. It is already very, very late. There are various armed factions in Congo, particularly in Ituri, who rejoice in the chance to massacre its population every time there is a new shift in alliances. These alliances involve the participation of certain neighboring countries—above all, Uganda and Rwanda—and the complicity of others.”

France 3 (French TV station) asked, Why can't MONUC (the UN observation force in Ituri) put an end to this situation?

His answer was, "The actions of the U.N. observers are limited by their mandate. They are observers, that's all. During the massacre at Kisangani, the Congolese began to refer to them as the 'U.N. mission to observe Congolese cadavers' because the only thing they did was to count the dead. It's necessary to change the mandate of MONUC, above all to reinforce it, and to deploy an international force."

FOREIGN INTERVENTION

Another question asked was, "What could the United States do to stop the killings?" Again his answer was that he believed that the United States could stop the killing if they could be properly motivated to do so. Other news articles printed didn't agree with this latter view. One, in particular, entitled "Congo's Unwelcome Visitors" published in *The Monitor*, an independent Ugandan paper, on June 5, 2003, said that the D.R.C.'s troubles can be traced back to its relationship with outsiders. It explained in the article that the United States would not be a welcome visitor because historically they have helped to promote the present situation. The article says in part:

"The war in Congo has its genes from two mutually reinforcing factors: wealth and foreign intervention. Study the historical epoch in which the Congo Free State was born, and the whole problem becomes self-explanatory. The Congo Free State was born in an era when Africa was parceled out like a birthday cake by the imperial European powers. Congo was scrambled for and 'won' by Belgium's King Leopold, who beat the other powers in a cutthroat, winner-take-all contest dubbed, 'The Scramble for Africa.'

"That was not only the birth of the Congo Free State, but also the beginning of its problems. From the outset, King Leopold was ruthless in plundering the vast resources of Congo. He enslaved the Congolese in their homeland, subjecting them to forced labor, and meting out inhuman treatment on those who dared to defy him.

"Studies show that by the end of Belgian colonization, about 10 million Congolese had been killed. Note the pattern between the two mutually reinforcing factors that explain the plight of the Congolese. You

have the vast wealth of Congo beckoning foreign intervention, and the Congolese bearing the brunt of it.

“At the end of Belgian colonization enter Patrice Lumumba, the first and only democratically elected leader of the Congo. Sadly, democracy was killed in its infancy when Lumumba was assassinated (before even serving two years as prime minister) with the help of America’s Central Intelligence Agency. He died because in the Cold War, Lumumba was thought to be leaning to the Soviet Union and not the United States. Big mistake!

“Enter Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wazabanga, a true client of the U.S. White House. Mobutu’s despotic leadership in Congo (then renamed Zaire) was significant for ensuring that Congo did not ‘fall into the hands’ of the Soviets (remember the revolutionary Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara had tried to help Laurent-Désiré Kabila liberate Congo after Lumumba’s death). Mobutu’s (mis)rule also served the West by making sure it had a free rein in plundering Congo and acting as a conduit for arming Jonas Savimbi’s UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). By the end of the Cold War, Mobutu had outlived his usefulness to the Western block but had set the stage for continuing conflict.”

Another news article from the African paper *L’Avenir* (French language), published in the Democratic Republic of Congo, June 2, 2003, reported on the multinational peacekeeping force that is to be formed as a consequence of a resolution passed in the UN. The article entitled “A Scary Pair” told of the assignment of Rwanda and Uganda as UN observers in the D.R.C. when the UN appointed these nations to be the UN Mission to Congo. The article expressed the hope that the new resolution would not see England and the United States assigned to support Rwanda and Uganda.

FRENCH PARTICIPATION

Two other articles concerned France. One by the Britains, *The Observer*, a liberal weekly paper, published an article entitled “Where are the French?” told of 1,000 French soldiers being airlifted from Uganda to the Congo under a UN mandated effort to restore peace in the Congo. The article told of the battle in Bunia, the province of Ituri’s capital. To explain the UN’s latest failure to quell the bitter war, the commander of

the French troops said, “Our mandate has not changed. We are trying to impede the fighting through negotiations.” The article ended by saying:

“The French-led intervention force represents the first serious effort to end Congo’s war, which has claimed around 4.7 million lives—the highest death toll in any conflict since World War II. Over the coming weeks, 1,400 European soldiers are expected in Bunia from Sweden, Norway, Germany, Britain, and France. The force has been given a stiffer mandate than the existing peacekeepers. Yet its mission is limited to the town of Bunia and is scheduled to last only three months.”

The other article about France appeared in the conservative French paper *Le Figaro*, published June 1, 2003, entitled “Africa’s New Policeman?” and told of France’s involvement in all of the three recent strifes in Africa—The Ivory Coast, Liberia, and the Congo. After telling about France’s recent attempts to bring peace to the African continent the article ended by saying:

“Despite these initiatives, France denies any ambition of becoming the new ‘policeman’ in Africa and notes that it is intervening in a multilateral context. The dispatch of French troops to Ituri is presented as the ‘first large-scale, independent European military operation.’ Carried out jointly with Britain, the operation, known as ‘Mamba,’ marks a reconciliation between London and Paris after the disagreement over Iraq. Within Africa, Operation Mamba has the support of Congo itself, a large French-speaking country, but also of Uganda, the logistical base for the deployment, and through an odd twist in history, the tacit consent of Rwanda.”

THE LAST DAYS

Although there is hope of bringing peace to the area, the events in Africa demonstrate how quickly and devastating can be such outbursts of anarchy. What can we glean from all of this as Bible students? One thing is to see the fulfillment of prophecies spoken by the Lord concerning the last days of this present evil world. We note in particular the involvement of children in the anarchistic uprisings, and we are reminded of the Apostle Paul’s description of the last days of this present evil world given in II Timothy 3:1-5, and that portion that describes men as “disobedient to parents.” The *Phillips translation* phrases this portion of the prophecy as “without any regard for what their parents taught them.” These are

times described by different translators as “perilous,” “times of stress,” “full of danger,” and “a time of trouble.” The terrible condition of mankind in our day is aptly described by the Apostle Paul.

Also, as Bible students look at the prophecy of Jacob’s trouble, as described by the Prophet Ezekiel in the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth chapters of his book, we note that the way God fights against the hordes that come against Israel (Gog and Magog) is described in Ezekiel 38:21, which says:

“I will call for a sword against him [Gog] throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man’s sword shall be against his brother.” Bible students have long believed that the end of the Gospel Age and this present evil world will be a period of anarchy. This text is one of the strongest we have to support that point. The events in Africa could well be a prelude to the fulfillment of that prophecy. It reveals the terrible conditions that can arise in the earth quickly and devastatingly. This is God’s way of bringing an end to a threatening situation quickly. It was used as a figure or type on several occasions.

EXAMPLES OF ANARCHY

The first occurred when Gideon was assembling an army to fight against the Midianites who had been harassing Israel for some time. This army was pared down from thousands of Israelites to three hundred men. (Judg. 7) The Midianites and Amalekites were described in the following terms, “The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.” (vs. 12) Gideon spread the three hundred men around this camp and at the proper signal, they broke pitchers concealing the torches, and blew their trumpets, and shouted, “The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.” (vs. 21) The Midianites thought they were surrounded by thousands of Israelites. In the confusion the account says, “The Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled.” (vs. 22) Those that weren’t killed by their own fellows fled and were pursued by Israel, and Gideon and his band, who slew them.

The same thing occurred to the Philistines in the early years of Saul’s reign over Israel. Israel had been so badly harassed by the Philistines that they went into hiding. Saul with six hundred men attempted to fight them.

However, it was his son, Jonathan, who, with “his armourbearer” (I Sam. 14:12), challenged the garrison of the Philistines separately from Saul. He asked the Lord for a sign as to go up against them, which was that they would call to him to go out to them, instead of them coming to him. (vss. 9,10) The Lord was with him and he slew twenty men before the Lord caused an earthquake to occur and great confusion occurred in the garrison of the Philistines, so that again “every man’s sword was against his fellow, and there was a very great discomfiture.” (vs. 20) Then all the Hebrews in hiding came out, along with those captured by the Philistines, and as the Philistines fled they were pursued and slain by Israel, and as the scripture says, “The Lord saved Israel that day.”—vs. 23

The Lord used this method a third time when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah. He was a good king as the scripture testifies of him, “The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim.” (II Chron. 17:3) During his reign “the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.” (chap. 20:1) Jehoshaphat had great fear and gathered Israel to pray to the Lord. As all Israel gathered and prayed to the Lord, a prophet—a Levite—prophesied and said to Israel, “To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you.”—vss. 16,17

Jehoshaphat and Israel did as they were instructed and went out early in the morning into the wilderness of Tekoa and they sang as they went. In response the Scriptures say, “The Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, ... and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.” (vss. 22,23) Instead of warfare, Israel came upon dead bodies. They gave thanks to the Lord for their deliverance.

As we review the method of the Lord in dealing with the enemies of his people, and as we see the present-day events giving us a preview of coming disasters, we can respond to our Lord's words in Luke 21:28, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." May God be praised forevermore.

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Enjoy Fellowship

Key Verse: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin.”
—I John 1:7

Lesson Scriptures:
I John 1:5-2:6,
15-17, 29 – 3:1

THE KEY VERSE IN THIS week’s lesson establishes the importance of walking in the light of our Lord Jesus with others of like precious faith. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (I John 1:5) Truth and righteousness are symbolized by light, whereas in the Scriptures sin and death are by darkness.

Jesus was a bright light in the world during his earthly ministry. He served to enlighten all who heard his wonderful words, or witnessed his remarkable works and deeds. Those who desire to now walk with him respond more directly to his message and purpose, and become participants in that marvelous light. The Apostle John also wrote, “Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.”—John 12:35,36

John calls attention to the cleansing effect of the Master’s blood which has been imputed for us. He said, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9) Blood represents the sacrificed life of our Lord Jesus which he shed on our behalf.

John points out that, during the present Gospel Age, the Lord’s people have a special relationship with our risen Lord. He is now our Advocate, or the one who stands alongside us and intercedes on our behalf before God. We require an advocate because we have this wonderful treasure of

Truth in imperfect earthly bodies. We cannot have this special relationship with the Heavenly Father without Jesus' merit being applied on our behalf.

He says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (chap. 2:1,2) When Jesus ascended up on high he appeared in the presence of God for us, the church class. The Greek word which has been translated 'propitiation' in this scripture signifies 'that which satisfies, or propitiates.' Jesus' death constituted that satisfaction price.

During the Gospel Age only the consecrated followers of our Lord have received of the merit of his sacrifice, which has been applied on their behalf. In the future Kingdom Age—the times of restitution—the whole human family will be given opportunity to receive of the merit of that sacrifice.

As we walk in the light of present Truth, and enjoy the fellowship of others who are striving to know the will of our loving Heavenly Father, we endeavor to be faithful to our covenant of sacrifice. As the Apostle John looks forward from his day, he further says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: ... it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—I John 3:1,2

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Love One Another

Key Verse: “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”
—I John 4:11

Lesson Scripture:
I John 3:11,14-16;
4:7-16

IN THIS TEXT WE NOTE that the Apostle John uses the Greek word *agape*, which has been translated into our English word ‘love.’ He does not use another Greek word, *phileo*, which is found in many other scriptures in the New Testament. The word *phileo* carries the thought of brotherly love, or affection, on a personal or emotional level. *Agape*, on the other hand, embraces a wider and more powerful meaning of love which is governed by principle.

John consistently uses this word *agape* throughout this week’s scriptural lesson as shown in each of these passages: “This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” (I John 3:11) “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” (vs. 14) “Hereby perceive we the love ...” (vs. 16) “Let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born [begotten] of God, and knoweth God.” (chap. 4:7) “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” (vs. 8) “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (vs. 10) “If God so loved us, we ought also to love on another.” (vs. 11) “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.”—vs. 12

God’s wonderful character is manifested by his unspeakable love for his people in each of the above scriptures. Love is the central theme of this week’s lesson, and is one of the most beautiful evidences of a footstep follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever among the Lord’s people thus finds his heart full of love and devotion to our loving Heavenly Father, as well as to our brethren, may be assured that they are New Creatures walking in the way of Truth and righteousness. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.

He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” (chap. 3:14) As emphasized by the apostle, whoever may have sentiments lacking in this grace needs to address the matter seriously.

All of the Lord’s consecrated people, who have evidence of being begotten of the Holy Spirit, are thus walking in that Spirit. “By one spirit are we all baptized into one body.” (I Cor. 12:13) As prospective members of the body of Christ we are walking in newness of life and purpose, striving to be faithful and acceptable sacrifices to God. The development of love, as well as other graces of the Spirit, is a mark of growth in Christian character.

Exercising love toward our brethren in Christ Jesus suggests that we would do them neither wrong nor injustice, and that we would not speak improperly concerning them. Wisdom dictates that in proportion as we come into harmony with these true principles of love and Christian character we shall be at peace one with another. Where love abounds, peace will also abound.

As the days grow more evil, as the end of the Gospel Age harvest draws near, let each of the Lord’s people diligently strive to exercise greater faith in making their calling and election sure. May we all abide by the principles of love which have been so firmly established in the Word of God.

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Live with Confidence

Key Verse: “*This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*”
—*I John 5:11*

Lesson Scripture:
I John 5:1-15

THE APOSTLE JOHN IS here addressing the Lord’s people who are living during the present Gospel Age and who have a special hope and relationship with God. They have been especially blessed because they rest with confidence in the provisions of grace that have been made available to them by their faith in our Lord Jesus.

This week’s lesson begins with the apostle’s reference to the special blessing the Lord’s people receive when they have been begotten by God’s Spirit because of their faith in Jesus. John writes, “Every one who believes that Jesus is the anointed one, has been begotten by God; and every one who loves the begetter, loves the one begotten by him.”—*I John 5:1, Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott has been used in this scriptural reference because the translators of our common version *King James Bible* have been inconsistent in translating the Greek word *gennao*. The word *gennao*, which has been used three times in this verse, has been variously translated ‘born,’ ‘begat,’ and ‘begotten.’ The one word is translated ‘begotten’ or ‘born’ depending on whether the father or mother is involved. It should be translated ‘begotten’ in all three instances. The apostle here employs the human conception process to illustrate what happens when God calls someone. He first enlightens them with the Holy Spirit, which is the begotten state. As that spiritual life develops and continues to grow, spiritual birth will one day take place when the New Creature is eventually ‘born’ in the Spirit.

John uses the word *gennao* again to describe this begetting process of the Holy Spirit. We follow the less confusing *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott* translation which reads, “All that has been begotten by God overcomes the world; and this is that victory which overcomes the world,—our faith.” (vs. 4, *WED*) John is not using the word *gennao* to

describe the act of being born. He is speaking to those who have been begotten of the Spirit, and are striving diligently towards the spiritual birth which will follow a life of faithfulness even unto death.

The third occurrence of the Greek word *gennaō* in this lesson is found in verse eighteen where John writes, “We know that every one who has been begotten by God does not sin; but the one begotten by God guards himself and the evil one does not lay hold of him.” (vs. 18, *WED*) This describes the walk of the spirit-begotten child of God. Thus it is the New Creature in Christ Jesus that is not in sympathy with sin. The Apostle Paul explains that the New Creature does not walk “after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:4) The spiritual birth does not take place until the end of our consecrated life.

We are also reminded that prayer is essential to spiritual growth and progress. We read, “This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” (I John 5:14,15) With this wonderful assurance of our Heavenly Father’s provisions for our spiritual growth let us continue to live in full confidence of faith.

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Remain Loyal

Key Verse: “Follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.”
—III John 11

*Lesson Scriptures:
II John 4-9; III John*

IN THE APOSTLE JOHN’S third epistle, from which this lesson’s Key Verse has been taken, he warns the Lord’s people to seriously evaluate the course of their Christian walk, because we are living in an evil world, and the forces of Truth and error must be clearly distinguished. He had addressed the importance of this admonition previously also, where he said, “Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we

lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.” (II John 7-9) He stressed that it is essential that we remain loyal to Truth and righteousness.

False teachers were openly plaguing the Early Church; one of their main heresies being the denial that our Lord Jesus had come into the world and had been made flesh. This was a very serious error to which John replied, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”—II John 10,11

The apostle has used the word ‘truth’ on several occasions in the opening passage of his second epistle. He writes that he, and other Truth people, love the elect lady to which the letter is addressed, and her children, because they are also in the Truth, and that the Truth was a special bond that would unite them forever. (II John 1,2) He further writes, “Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” (vs.

3) Continuing, he emphasizes further the special joy he has for the lady's children who are also "walking" in the ways of Truth.—vs. 4

John reveals the extent of Christian love that had existed between the elect lady and himself since the beginning of their walk together in the Truth. "I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it." (vss. 5,6) The bonds of love and Truth are manifested.

His third letter was also addressed to one he especially loved in the bonds of Truth, whose name was Gaius. (III John 1) He said to him, "I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth."—vss. 2,3

In his last epistle the Apostle John concludes by saying, "I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name." (vss. 13,14) He ends his letter with the exhortation that the Lord's people remain loyal to Truth in the bonds of Christian love.

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Maintain Steadfast Faith

Key Verse: “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference.”
—*Jude 21, 22*

Lesson Scriptures:
Jude 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16-23

IN THIS TEXT JUDE IS encouraging the Lord’s people towards stronger ties in the bond of God’s love, as well as a greater appreciation for our Lord Jesus’ mercy toward us. This can only be accomplished by walking closely after the Spirit. We should also have compassion towards the weaker ones in Christ who were being assailed by the Devil.

The Key Verse is in harmony with his purpose in writing this epistle. He began by saying, “When I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly

contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) To ‘contend for the faith’ meant to persevere and struggle for what we know to be the Truth.

Jude wrote his epistle at a time in the Early Church’s history that was already threatened with heresies and division among the Lord’s people. He appealed to them to keep the faith and to fight for what they had been taught. “There are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (vs. 4) This was a warning to beware of false teachers. Other New Testament writers also recognized the threat, and warned about it.

To earnestly contend for the faith centered on the fundamental fact that our Lord Jesus had indeed come in the flesh to suffer and to die for the sins of the whole human family. The work of the Gospel Age was to select from the world a class of people who would willingly suffer and

die with our Lord, and who, if found faithful, would live and reign with him during the Kingdom. At that time they would share in the great uplifting work for all mankind.

Throughout his epistle, Jude condemns those who would defile the Word of God. The enemies of the Truth continued their attacks. Eventually the ‘faith which was once delivered unto the saints’ became so polluted that it was nearly lost sight of. Instead of being inspired by the hope that all mankind were to be blessed in a future kingdom under our Lord and his faithful followers, there was adopted the view that the kingdom had already been established. Civil governments enforced the man-made decrees which were claimed to be the new laws of that kingdom.

Jude recognized that among the Lord’s people were some who were being ensnared by Satan and were not willfully opposing the Truth. It was his intention to reach those Christians whose hearts were still loyal to the faith established under trustworthy teachers.

The epistle closes with a wonderful exhortation which says, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (vss. 24,25) Let each of us strive to maintain steadfast faith, that faith which was given to us as a promise from our Heavenly Father, and made possible by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Early Days of Creation

“God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”

“And the evening and the morning were the third day.”
—Genesis 1:31,13

IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH, chapter fifty-five, verse nine, the great God and Creator of the universe says, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” A moment’s reflection emphasizes the truthfulness of this statement. Indeed, when we consider the wisdom manifested in the works of God with which we are surrounded, and as demonstrated in all the far-flung reaches of

the universe, we realize that his thoughts must be higher than ours. In his infinite wisdom, and by his great ability, he is able to convey to our earthly minds at least some of his high thoughts relating to his human creation.

God speaks to us in our own language, for how else could we understand what he says? Speaking of the writers of the Old Testament books, the Apostle Peter explains that they wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit—that is, the power of God. (II Pet. 1:21) Just how the power of the Almighty conveyed to the prophets what he wished recorded is beyond the comprehension of our finite minds. This is one evidence of God’s wisdom and ability that is as far above the capacity of our minds to understand as the heavens are higher than the earth.

We open this lesson with these thoughts because it will deal with a chapter in the Bible which, in its thirty-one short verses, reveals a sequence of steps in which the Creator prepared the earth for plant and animal life, carrying forward the work of establishing the earth until it became a fit habitation for man. Geologists and astronomers have written countless pages on the same subject, and basically have told us nothing that is not contained in these thirty-one verses. Instead, they have done

much to confuse and distort the facts as they are now becoming more and more recognized.

Our contention is, then, that only God, who understood all the facts of Creation because he was the Master Workman, could have caused them to be written in so few, yet meaningful, words.

A well-known geologist asserted with great emphasis that the wisdom displayed in this chapter cannot be accounted for in any other way than to have been inspired by God, the great Architect of Creation, whose work it describes.

THE BEGINNING

The opening verse of the chapter is a simple statement of fact, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Few will deny that ‘the heaven and the earth’ did have a beginning, and here we are told that the Creator was responsible for it. It does not attempt to tell us how. The creative forces put into motion by God that brought into being the countless millions of worlds, and set them spinning through space under orderly control, would be quite beyond our comprehension in any case. Nor has man, of this so-called brain age, discovered any further information concerning Creation than the few simple words set forth in this verse. There are many theories of Creation, but they are only theories. Astronomers now think that the universe is continually expanding, but they are not sure. What seems to be an expanding universe, may be merely the astronomers’ expanding ability to see more of it.

Modern man has acquired a great deal of information. He even knows how to split an atom, but since he does not know how to make an atom, or how atoms were made, he has nothing whereof to boast. Atoms, we are told, are the building blocks of nature. This is doubtless true, but to know this does not take us beyond the simple statement of Genesis 1:1— ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.’

God could have had that text read, “In the beginning, by the use of atoms, the heaven and the earth were created.” But then, how much more would we have known? We would have to ask, “What is an atom?” and the real answer to this question would have been beyond our ability to understand, so the Lord knew it was better not to fill our minds with details which we could never comprehend.

From this simple statement of Genesis 1:1, we learn that the heaven and the earth were already in existence when the work of the six creative days, described in the remainder of the chapter, began. “The earth was without form, and void,” or empty. (vs. 2) Its fixed contour, as designed by God, had not been reached. There were no mountains or valleys, trees or shrubs, rivers or oceans. It was ‘void,’ or empty of all forms of life.

“The spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” (vs. 2) The word ‘spirit’ used here translates a Hebrew word the basic meaning of which is ‘wind.’ Its broader meaning is ‘invisible power,’ and the ancients used it to describe the unseen and inexplicable power of God. The Lord tells us, then, that the shapeless, empty earth was prepared for human habitation through the exercise of his power. More than this we could not understand.

By reasoning from the known to the unknown we reach the conclusion that there are invisible forces beyond the reach of human understanding and control. While in our modern world we believe we know more about power than did the ancients, it would perhaps be more correct to say that man has now learned just a little in the way of harnessing power. Beginning with the steam engine, and then on to the electric dynamo and motor, gasoline engines, electronics, and nuclear power, we have witnessed the exercise of power millions of times greater than is contained in our own brawn and muscle.

Yes, we see railroad trains a mile long hauled along the tracks at sixty to ninety miles an hour, powered by diesel engines running electric generators to run electric motors. We see giant jet planes rise from the ground carrying hundreds of passengers and tons of freight and force themselves through the air at from three hundred to five hundred miles an hour; and supersonic planes fly at a thousand miles per hour. Seeing these, and the many other modern uses of power, we say to ourselves, “How wonderful is man, and how marvelous are his creative works!”

But just what has man created? Basically, nothing. He has simply learned how to use—in many instances, misuse—some of the materials which God had already created. He has learned how, in a very limited way, to use these materials without really understanding what they are, or how they were created. Some molecules, they say, are held together

by magnetism. But what is magnetism? Oh, magnetism is an electrical energy. But what is electricity? No answer!

So on down the line to the simplest element like hydrogen, which, when put into a form to make nuclear bombs, might well destroy the world. Should we ask our most brilliant scientists just why, basically, these substances behave as they do, and if they replied at all it would be to say they do not know, or else admit the truth, which is that they are creations of God and contain in various forms the invisible and unexplainable power of God. After all, how limited is man's control of Divine energy which has been bottled up in the things which he has created! How helpless is man, with his inventions, in the face of a tornado, a flood, or an electrical storm!

The Spirit, the power of God, moved upon the face of the waters; and the creative work continued, as it had begun, by the use of Divine power. When we consider the amount of power that is stored up in a single atom, and realize that the Creator produced all the power of all the atoms in the countless worlds which he had created, our faith can readily lay hold upon the fact that such a God could easily accomplish his design in preparing this planet for the habitation of man.

“God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” (vs. 3) This is in sequence to the statement that darkness was upon the face of the waters. God's power was exercised. At his command light emerged from darkness. We know today that light is energy. Where did it come from, and where did the darkness go when the light took its place? Job was asked this question but could not answer, nor can our scientists of today. (Job 38:18-21) Beyond the fact that light thus appeared at this very early stage in the earth's preparation for man, we know little.

“God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” (Genesis 1:4,5) Since nothing in this account has yet been said about the sun, which provides the measuring line of our twenty-four hour days, it is apparent that the Lord is here using the word ‘Day’ in its broader scriptural application, to denote a period of time, or era, during which certain things came about. We speak, for example, of Washington's day, and Lincoln's day. The first ‘day’ of creation was the period of time

during which the developments described in verses two through five took place.

Some have mistakenly concluded that because the beginning and closing of the creative days are described as ‘the evening and the morning’ the reference must be to twenty-four hour sun days, but the Scriptures do not restrict us to such an interpretation. The Prophet David speaks of the entire period when sin and death reign in the earth as a “night,” saying, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5

The ‘eve’ of an event looks toward its beginning, so appropriately, the beginning of each creative day is referred to as the evening. To us the evening introduces the night, which is a time of darkness, and each of the creative days did begin in a measure of obscurity and darkness. Not until the developments designed for each period were nearing completion did the light of the morning reveal the purpose of the mysterious workings of Divine power during that day.

The first creative period is properly described as azoic, meaning lifeless. The main development of this day was the appearance of light (or energy), how and from whence, our minds cannot comprehend. We know that God is light (I John 1:5), and is the Father of lights. (James 1:17) The simple statement that it was accomplished by the power of God is all that we can grasp. A dog can be taught certain things, but it cannot understand all that its master does. But the fact that the dog is so limited in understanding does not prove that the things which are beyond its mental grasp are not real, or do not exist.

THE SECOND “DAY”

“God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.” (Gen. 1:6-8) Here is described the creation of the atmosphere surrounding the earth.

Neither animate nor inanimate life on earth can exist without air. Logically, therefore, the creative work on this day must precede the creation of life. And this marvelous arrangement of the water ‘under the

firmament' and the waters 'above the firmament' contributes to life, through direct use of water and oxygen by plants and animals. We see God's wisdom and economy again displayed in the creative work of this day in the arrangement for the cycles of life-giving waters from the oceans to the clouds, back to earth into the oceans, and again to the clouds, that the land might be kept properly moistened to produce the needed food for man and beast. See Job 38:25-28.

THE THIRD "DAY"

"God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. ... and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day."—vss. 9-13

The Bible account of the work of preparing the earth for human habitation as it progressed during the third creative epoch is corroborated by geologists. The waters under the heaven were 'gathered together' into oceans, seemingly by the buckling of the earth's surface, forming deep depressions and hills. In a sense this is easily understood, but not actually so. The earth is a spheroid. We speak of countries on the other side of the globe as being 'down under.' But really, which side of the earth is down and which side is up? Actually we accommodate these terms to a situation which we cannot otherwise describe.

The fact that gravity draws objects to the earth from down under as well as up above, so down is toward the center of the earth from wherever one's location on the planet may be. But what is gravity? Newton discovered the laws of gravity, but did not find out how these laws are made to function. Again we must revert to the information which God has given us; namely, that his Spirit, his power, accomplished all the creative works. Call it gravity if we wish, but actually it was the power of God that caused the surface of the earth to buckle, thus bringing about a separation of the sea and the land. See Job 38:8-11.

On the land left dry by the water draining off into the sea, the power of God was further exercised, and vegetation sprang forth. Findings of

geologists indicate that in this early period vegetation was extremely rank and, compared with later times, grew much larger. It is reasonable to conclude, as geologists claim, that during this period the coal beds of earth were formed, the carbon-laden vegetation being buried as the earth's surface continued to buckle and tumble.

The 'herb yielding seed,' and the 'tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself,' are both said to have been created 'after his kind.' This is a statement of fact. It has never been proved wrong. In both the vegetable and animal kingdoms there are endless varieties of every species of plant and animal, with new varieties continually being developed; but no new species have appeared since God limited them with his Word, after his kind. That this fact is stated in the first chapter of the Bible helps to establish the entire Book as being what it claims to be—that is, the inspired Word of God.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Sober and Thankful Christians

“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”
—*I Thessalonians 5:18*

IN THE UNITED STATES, Thursday, November 27 this year, is set aside as a day of national thanksgiving. It is eminently proper that all the people should give thanks to the Lord for the bounties which he showers upon them.

Jesus reminded us that the Creator causes the rain to fall, and the sun to shine, upon “the just” and upon “the unjust.” (Matt. 5:45) It is true that due to man’s fall into sin and death the generous provisions of the Lord are not always equally distributed, resulting in hardship to some and an overabundance to others; but, properly speaking, the Lord cannot be blamed for this.

Christians, even more than others, have reason to be thankful to the Lord for his bounteous provisions. Together with the world they share and enjoy the temporal good things which daily come to them. In addition to this, and of greater importance, are the rich spiritual blessings which our present Lord Jesus is so abundantly supplying us. To us, every day is one of thanksgiving and praise to the Giver of “every good gift and every perfect gift.”—James 1:17

‘In every thing give thanks,’ wrote Paul in our text, and he adds, ‘This is the will of God ... concerning you.’ A consecrated follower of the Master who gives serious consideration to all that the Lord is doing for him from day to day should spontaneously give thanks for all the blessings of Divine grace. The fact that Paul admonishes the giving of thanks might indicate that in his experience and observation the Lord’s people are not as appreciative of the Lord’s goodness to them as they should be.

The context in which Paul’s admonition to thankfulness is found is very interesting and revealing, and suggests a special application at this end of the age, the time in which we are now living. The first four verses of the chapter contain a prophecy concerning the “day of the Lord,” explaining that it would come upon the unbelieving world “as a thief in

the night.” “But ye, brethren,” Paul writes, “are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” Paul continues, “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” (vss. 5,6) In the eighth verse the apostle writes further, “Let us, who are of the day, be sober.”

Twice in these admonitions Paul uses the word ‘sober.’ The thought in the Greek text is to be discreet and watchful, spiritually on the alert. There has probably never been a time throughout the entire age when this admonition was more needed. Jesus said to the first disciples, “I have chosen you out of the world,” and we are admonished to keep separate from the world and its spirit. This is more difficult today than ever before.—John 15:19

The intoxicating spirit of worldliness is rampant everywhere, and today it is manifested in ways unthought of and unknown earlier in the age. Many characteristics of the world now are the same as they were in the days of the Early Church. However, there have doubtless been worldly characteristics peculiar to each part of the age, allurements and temptations with which the brethren in each part of the age had to contend.

It is so now! One aspect of the ‘world’ today is a pleasure madness in which the masses endeavor to bury their fears and troubles. This frenzied rush for pleasure is in most cases an endeavor to escape the hard realities of life by losing one’s self in a whirl of excitement and fun. While the Lord’s people may not be in grave danger of becoming ensnared by this intoxicating spirit of the twenty-first century world, they are surrounded by these influences, and can almost imperceptibly be affected by what nearly everyone else is doing.

FALSE LIBERTY

We are acquainted with the manner in which the prophetic increase of knowledge of these last days, which eventually will lead to rich blessings for the world, is first of all making possible “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1,4) From another standpoint this increase of knowledge is awakening the people to their rights, real and fancied. This is contributing to the “distress of nations, with perplexity.”—Luke 21:25,26

As Christians, we rejoice in the liberty which will eventually come to mankind as a whole, particularly that promised liberty from the bondage of sin and death. But the spirit of liberty now abroad in the world, which as yet is distorted and misused, should not be permitted to taint our thinking, causing us to be more independent and self-assertive than the expressed will of God allows. This is one of the modern characteristics of the world against which every Christian must give battle in his own heart and life.

Carrying this thought further, we are reminded of Paul's prophecy of the "last days," in which he says that men shall be "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God," adding that they would be "heady," and "highminded." He also states that in these last days children would be "disobedient to parents." (II Tim. 3:1-4) In outlining this prophecy to Timothy, Paul must have reasoned that it would be of assistance to the Lord's people when the 'last days' actually arrived.

Paul's graphic description of conditions which we see all about us in the world today strengthens our faith concerning the importance of the time in which we are living, but even more than this, it should put us on guard against the spirit of lawlessness which he describes. Some years ago, it will be remembered, parents quite generally throughout many parts of the world adopted and practiced the idea of allowing their children to do just about as they pleased. The theory was that the children should be allowed to express themselves, and should not be restricted or disciplined.

Today the horrible harvest of this mistaken notion is being reaped, not only in the maddening increase of juvenile delinquency, but in the general attitude of the younger generation that they are more brilliant and more capable than their seniors. Here is another characteristic of the modern world against which all the Lord's people need to be on guard.

"One is your Master, even Christ," Jesus said, "and all ye are brethren." (Matt. 23:8) As brethren, awake and sober, Paul admonishes us, "Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another." (I Thess. 5:11) That this might be done effectively, orderly, and to the glory of the Lord, the Scriptures reveal a certain order and law for the New Creation, by the formation of '*ekklesias*' (English: 'ecclesias').

In these ecclesias various servants are elected who are spoken of as elders and deacons—the elders serving the spiritual interests of the group, and the deacons caring for the various material needs. Our observation is that the brethren everywhere who adhere to these simple arrangements are being richly blessed by the Lord. But even here, we suggest, it is possible that the spirit of anarchy which is abroad in the world could, to some extent, influence our thinking and lead to something less than the full peace and tranquility which should be enjoyed by every group of the Lord's consecrated people.

Possibly it is this danger that Paul had in mind in his further exhortation to be awake and sober, saying, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men."—vss. 12-15

OTHER PRIVILEGES

In giving us a summary of what constitutes a sober and watchful Christian, Paul exhorts that we "Rejoice evermore." (vs. 16) At no time in the experience of the Christian church has there been more reason to rejoice than now. Despite this, however, there is need to be on guard lest the fretful, bickering, fault-finding spirit of the present unbalanced world take possession of us and we lose sight of all the causes for rejoicing with which the Lord daily strews our pathway.

"Pray without ceasing," Paul continues. (vs. 17) Prayer properly belongs in every aspect of the Christian life. To 'pray without ceasing' means to have a continuous habit of prayer, a habitual inclination to go to the Lord in prayer in every time of need. The lesson Jesus drew from his parable of the Importunate Widow was that "men [the disciples to whom he was speaking] ought always to pray, and not to faint." (Luke 18:1) Frequently we find ourselves in situations which might well cause us to 'faint,' but we should always pray rather than faint—'pray without ceasing.'

It is immediately following this admonition to pray without ceasing that we have the words in our text, ‘In every’thing give thanks,’ as though to emphasize that in large measure our prayers should be those of thanksgiving. To give thanks for everything means that we will recognize the value of our trials as well as our joys and therefore will thank him for the sunshine and the rain, and also for the sorrow and the pain.

THANKFUL FOR PRESENT TRUTH

Above all, we should be thankful for the Truth—thankful that we are “not in darkness,” and therefore that the “day” of the Lord has not overtaken us as a “thief” in the night. (I Thess. 5:4) Having been favored by the Lord as “children of light” (vs. 5), our appreciation should be manifested by our faithfulness in the use of all the provisions of grace by which the Lord keeps us from falling. This means that we will watch and be sober, that we will keep our hearts and minds fixed upon the Lord and upon the “exceeding great and precious promises” whereby we are being made “partakers of the divine nature.”—II Pet. 1:4

Those who do not watch, and therefore are not sober are referred to by Paul as those who “sleep.” (II Thess. 5:6,7) If we are spiritually asleep it means that we are not appreciative of the Truth, and the blessings of the Truth, which the Lord has so graciously permitted us to enjoy. If we are asleep, we are not thankful. Those most widely awake spiritually will spontaneously be giving thanks in all things, and will be praying without ceasing.

In verse eight of the chapter, Paul writes, “Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” Paul also admonishes us to “Put on the whole armour of God.” (Eph. 6:11) He identifies the various parts of the armor, and then adds, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”—vss. 13-18

The truth of God’s Word constitutes the various parts of the Christian’s ‘armour’ of protection against all the “wiles of the devil” (vs. 11), as well as against the flesh and the world. Prayers of supplication and thanksgiving keep our armor bright, and enable us to use it properly, and to the glory of the Lord.

The Scriptures also say, “Quench not the Spirit.” (I Thess. 5:19) To whatever extent we permit worldliness of any sort to influence our thoughts, words, and actions, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is proportionately quenched and our spiritual growth thereby retarded. Let us make sure, then, that we are thankful for God’s grace so abundantly manifested toward us through present Truth, and that we do not in any way resist its sanctifying power in our lives.

“Despise not prophesyings,” continues Paul. (vs. 20) Here the thought is of public speaking, as in exhortations and instructions. This ministry of the Truth is designed by God to keep our pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance. It is one of the ways by which we comfort ourselves “together, and edify one another.” (vs. 11) If we are spiritually sober, we will gladly avail ourselves of all the means of Divine grace which have been so abundantly provided, and be thankful for them. Paul further wrote, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (vs. 21) This is a lesson which we should learn and apply very early in our Christian experience. Regardless of how much confidence we may have in those whom the Lord uses as teachers in the church, our faith will continue to rest on an insecure foundation until we have proved it by the Word of God. One of our greatest causes for thankfulness should be the conviction that our faith in present Truth does not rest upon the shifting sands of human theory and speculation.

“Abstain from all appearance of evil.” (vs. 22) The thought here is, “every form of evil.” (*Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) In some instances it would be proper to abstain from the ‘appearance of evil,’ but in other cases, it would not be proper. Every form of evil is to be avoided, including worldliness, spiritual intoxication, headiness, bickerings—everything, in fact, which would ‘quench’ the free operation of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Then Paul expresses a prayer for the brethren—“The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body [of the church, not individuals] be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (vs. 23) Jesus prayed for his church, and here Paul does the same. What strength it should give us to realize that both these two faithful servants of God prayed for us; and how thankful we should be that they did!

Concluding, Paul writes, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” (vs. 24) It is because we have been called by God that we are no longer children of the night, but of the day, therefore, that the day of the Lord has not overtaken us as a thief in the night. He who called us is abundantly able to accomplish the work of sanctification in our hearts and lives which he has designed, if we continue to yield ourselves fully to him.

If we allow ourselves to become intoxicated with the spirit of the world, wanting our own way, deciding that the arrangements the Lord has made for us are not the best, he will not continue to work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. However, if in the spirit of thankfulness, we accept his appointments, and recognize the value of his providences in our lives, we can be assured that no evil shall befall us. Through Christ, our Heavenly Father will bring us off more than conquerors, giving us an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:11

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