

Choose Life and Live

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.”

—*Deuteronomy 30:15*

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

—*Deuteronomy 30:19*

AMONG THE LAST words spoken by Moses to the nation of Israel were those of our key texts. He was a spokesman for God and was reiterating the words of the Law Covenant given to this nation. They had been given a perfect law but they could not keep it. If they had been able, they would have received life. The only one who was able to keep that Law was Jesus Christ, and he gave his life as a ransom so that Israel could be redeemed not only from the sentence of death, but also from the condemnation of the Law. Moses was aware that Israel would need help to keep the Law and foretold the coming of Jesus saying, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like

unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.”—Deut. 18:15

THE PROMISE OF THE KINGDOM

Eventually all mankind will benefit from the ransom and be given an opportunity to live. The Scriptures promise “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (I Cor. 15:22) The only way to life will be through Jesus Christ. God will have all men to come to a knowledge of the Truth, and it is only through obedience to that knowledge that man will be able to keep the terms of the New Covenant and attain life. (I Tim. 2:4) The attainment of secular knowledge will also require obedience to God’s commandments to continue this life.

INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE

The twentieth century saw a fulfillment of God's wonderful promise that knowledge would increase in the time of the end. (Dan.12:4) Never in man's history has there been such an outburst of knowledge as we have witnessed during this time. Much of it has been applied even though we have only seen the beginnings. Now that we have entered the twenty-first century, we can expect still more knowledge increasing and more applications made. Mankind in his egotism thinks it is all his doing, and believes that science knows all and will accomplish all good. In this vein of thought, a scientist who is in the mainstream of these applications issued a solemn warning in an article he wrote for *Wired.Com*. It was published by the "*Washington Post*" in early July, 2000, under the title "*Technology Check*". The writer, cofounder and chief scientist of Sun Microsystems, said,

"In the midst of amazing and rapidly accelerating technological progress, with all the benefits it confers, it's time to stop and ask where this explosion of science is taking us. For most of a career devoted to solving problems with technology, I gave too little thought to the ultimate consequences of the power that we are beginning to unleash.

"In fact, most of the warnings we have heard have been either in science fiction or have come from Luddites who bring to the debate little more than an anti-technology rant. But this is no excuse for ignoring these questions. Increasingly, I have deep misgivings about the path we are on.

"As terrible as the nuclear, biological and chemical weapons threats—the weapons of mass destruction—were in the twentieth century, the underlying technologies behind them were largely of military use and held closely by a small number of nation states. We have been lucky enough to have avoided large incidents involving weapons of mass destruction for more than fifty years.

"Today we face another, graver, challenge to our survival. Our most powerful twenty-first century technologies—genetic engineering, nanotechnology and robotics (GNR for short)—carry a hidden risk of huge dimensions. They possess two characteristics that make them different from previous technologies: They are self-replicating, and they are "knowledge-enabled"—that is, they are capable of being used by the many individuals and small groups that will know how to operate them,

some of whom may be out to cause catastrophic damage. Unless we take strong action, we are liable to find ourselves living with a whole new category of massively destructive technologies, all capable of being put into action by widely available commercial devices.”

THE THREAT OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

The author is saying that, unlike nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, some aspects of the new technology could be used by any individual, whereas previous weapons of destruction are controlled by heads of state and governments. Although it depends on an evil mind to devise some destructive use of the new technology, it appears that there are already several potential adverse applications possible in the new fields of technology. The author suggests three, saying:

“The nearest-term danger is the release of a deadly pathogen: a bio-engineered ‘white plague’ that could be highly infectious, have a long incubation period and be targeted on specific groups.

“Nanotechnology poses the threat of a ‘gray goo,’ perhaps no more interesting than crabgrass, engineered from materials foreign to the environment, which would outcompete the existing biosphere. In both cases, recall of these menaces would be impossible; a global disaster could occur in weeks.

“The robotic threat is farther out, but as Hans Moravec has suggested, ‘biological species rarely survive encounters with superior competitors.’ If we use technology to create robotic intelligences that are superior to ours they might come to view us as expendable.”

THE NEED FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Much of this borders on science fiction and will appear so to many, but in the eyes of this scientist these are real threats to mankind’s existence. As long as selfishness and greed motivate mankind it appears that such will indeed be real threats to man’s existence. To Bible Students the absolute necessity to subdue these basic traits in man because of his fallen condition is a ‘must’ situation. Scientists as a rule do not look to any higher power to assist them in this matter. Many do not believe in the existence of a supreme intelligent Creator. Therefore, they look to solutions to such problems from within man’s society. To avoid these potential dangers the author suggested the following, saying,

“Like those who have grappled with the problems of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, we who are involved in advancing the new technologies must devote our best efforts to heading off disaster. I offer here a list of first steps suggested by our history with weapons of mass destruction:

“(1) Have scientists and technologists (and corporate leaders as well) take a vow, along the lines of the Hippocratic Oath, to avoid work on potential and actual weapons of mass destruction. Hans Bethe, a Nobel laureate, has called for such a step.

“(2) Create an international body to publicly examine the dangers and ethical issues of new technology. Joshua Lederberg, a Nobel laureate who has worked on biological and chemical weapons containment, points out that this kind of work was previously partially done, in the United States, by the Office of Technology Assessment, which unfortunately was abolished in the 1990s.

“(3) Use stricter notions of liability, forcing companies to take responsibility for consequences through a private-sector mechanism—insurance. A company might use the published opinion of a new, perhaps international and nongovernmental Office of Technological Assessment to argue for lower insurance rates.

“(4) Internationalize control of knowledge and technologies that have great potential but are judged too dangerous to be made commercially available. This was proposed for military uses of atomic energy in the Acheson-Lilienthal report at the dawn of the atomic age as a way of avoiding the nuclear arms race.

“(5) Relinquish pursuit of that knowledge and development of those technologies so dangerous that we judge it better that they never be available. I, too, believe in the pursuit of knowledge and development of technologies; yet, we already have seen cases, such as biological weapons, where relinquishment is the obvious wise choice.

“We must begin a collective international effort to come up with effective and practical safeguards. The GNR technologies are being pursued commercially, driven forward by intense competition and the accelerating power of computers. It is clear that, left unchecked, they can enable genocide or result in the extinction of the species. Fortunately, we seem to have some time to properly consider and act on the ethical issues,

but that time is limited. I believe it would be immoral to do nothing and just take whatever comes. We can do better.”

THE FRAILTY OF HUMAN WISDOM

As we look at these suggestions, we see the frailty of these without the capability of a higher power to enforce their adoption. Concerning number one suggestion, the Hippocratic Oath taken by doctors, does not prevent malpractice or deceitfulness among them. On items 2 and 4, the United Nations tried to do this relative to the control of nuclear power and failed, reporting an impasse had been reached on creating an international agency in 1948 after two years of unsuccessful effort. How items 3 and 5 could be implemented and how they would work as true preventives to disaster is questionable.

The only solution to the problems raised by this scientist is that presented in the establishment of the authority of God’s kingdom. That authority is prophesied to come through the house of Jesse and David. Isaiah says of Jesus that “there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” (Isa. 11:1) The Apostle Paul makes clear that this genealogy is referring to Jesus when he gave a historical sketch of God’s favor to Israel in Antioch of Pisidia saying, “They [Israel] desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man’s seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.”—Acts 13:21-23

THE NEED FOR ENFORCING RIGHTEOUSNESS

Isaiah then speaks of Jesus, “The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear [reverence] of the Lord.” (Isa. 11:2) With the Spirit of the great supreme Creator of the universe directing him, how could earth have a better or more qualified ruler to take control of earth’s affairs. The prophecy continues, “And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity

for the meek of the earth.” (Isa. 11:3,4) For the first time true justice shall prevail. Our Lord’s capability of reading the intents of the heart will not rely on sight and hearing of a case brought to justice as is necessary now. (Matt. 10:26) Instead, evil thoughts intent on causing injury will be intercepted before the evil can be practiced. For this reason Isaiah continues and says, “He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”—Isa. 11:4,5

Such mighty authority prevailing in the earth will make the earth a safe place for all mankind. If the scientists of our day who can foresee the mishandling of the new technology as wreaking havoc in the earth would only accept the promises made by God through his prophets, how relieved they would be. It is because the authority and true equity brought by the new rulers in God’s kingdom will be so mighty and all-inclusive that the prophet says of that time, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.”—Isa. 11:9

MAN, A FREE MORAL AGENT

Likewise, the people being brought back from the grave in God’s kingdom must learn to love righteousness, because only by obedience to God’s righteous laws will they be able to live without fear or hazard upon earth. As was the choice for Israel, so it will be for them. God gives them the choice, obedience and life or disobedience and death. But in order to receive life they must develop the fruits of the Spirit.

In the Gospel Age, God has been selecting a ‘people for his name.’ These have learned that the works of the flesh must be subdued and eliminated. In their place the fruits of the Spirit must be developed. A list of both are presented by the Apostle Paul in Gal. 5:19-23. He says, “He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” (Gal. 6:8) The church in their present experiences is learning the meaning of Proverbs 16:18 which says, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” They are learning to put away lying and are to “Speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more:

but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.”—Eph. 4:25-31

These requirements for the Church in the Gospel Age will be the same for those in the Millennial Age. The difference will be that under current conditions the Church must develop these fruits of the Spirit while struggling with an imperfect body and the wiles of the Adversary. Whereas in the Millennial Age, each one will have a perfect body and the Adversary will be bound. It will be their choice. “Choose life” says our wonderful Heavenly Father and live! We believe that the great majority of mankind will do so.

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Discovering Your Mission

Key Verse: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

—Luke 4:18, 19

***Selected Scripture:
Luke 4:16-26, 28-30***

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness he was led by the Spirit into Galilee and “there went out a fame of him through all the region” ... as “he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.” (Luke 4:14,15) Then “he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.”—vs. 16

When the book of the Prophet Isaiah was delivered to him he began to read, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.’ “He closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the

eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him,” and Jesus said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”—vss. 18-21

All who were present spoke well of him and were amazed. “All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” (Luke 4:22) Others said, “Never man spake like this man.” (John 7:46) How can this be, they asked? “Is not this Joseph’s son?” “He said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.”—Luke 4:22-24

While this prophecy announcing Jesus' commission was primarily fulfilled in Jesus, we understand also that it applies to every member of the body of Christ likewise anointed with the Spirit of the Lord. Each is commissioned a preacher of the Gospel, to serve the Lord, and is to lay down his life for the brethren.

Christ Jesus, as the head of the church which is his body, was anointed "with the oil of gladness," the Holy Spirit. (Heb. 1:9) It was poured upon him, and "of his fulness have all we received." (John 1:16) It is a great privilege to be joint-heirs and have our consecration "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13), under the anointing of our Head.

David gave us a typical picture of Jesus anointing. (Ps. 133:1-3; Luke 4:18) This holy anointing oil represented the Holy Spirit, giving enlightenment to all those whom God accepts as probationary members of the Royal Priesthood. All thus marked by the Holy Spirit as prospective members of the New Creation are assured by the Lord, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:16) "I have chosen you, and ordained you, [for your mission] that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."—John 15:16

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Counting the Cost

Key Verse:
***“Whosoever doth not
bear his cross, and
come after me, cannot
be my disciple.”***
—Luke 14:27

Selected Scripture:
Luke 9:57-62;
14:25-33

A DISCIPLE IS A PUPIL, one who follows a teacher or leader. The Lord has promised his disciples certain great blessings. If they are obedient, they shall be greatly blessed with everlasting life, shall sit with him in his throne, and be with him where he is. It becomes, therefore, an important question as to what is involved in discipleship. Is it an easy or a difficult matter? First of all, one must see what discipleship is and what the cross is. How can we enter the school

of Christ? The Lord here and elsewhere tells us the terms.

Jesus said, ‘Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.’ (Luke 14:27) Those who faithfully bear the cross are the ‘little flock,’ the ‘elect.’ Respecting these Jesus says, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14) Our Lord said that it would be better not to take up the cross unless we have the determination to go on unto the end. He illustrates this in saying, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”—Luke 9:62

The Lord very distinctly told what the cross would imply to those who become his disciples. He said that whosoever would be his disciple would suffer persecution. He warned us that carrying the cross would be a serious matter. If, therefore, you determine that you would like to be his disciple, sit down and count the cost. If you take up the cross, it is to be not merely lifted, but carried faithfully unto death.

Our Lord said, “When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.” (Matt. 10:23) Therefore, to be without opposition is proof, not that we are being favored of God, but that he is not dealing with us as sons. The Apostle Paul tells us, “If you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” (Heb. 12:8, *New American Standard*) Only those whom he deals

with as sons will become of the Royal Priesthood and participate in his glorious kingdom.

The bearing of the cross is the way of growth in character for the consecrated child of God. If no trials or difficulties come to us, if our earthly appetites or desires are never interfered with in our service to the Lord and the Truth, we may be sure that we are making some mistake. We have not become his disciples. But if we should have these trials, the apostle says that we are to consider them only as light afflictions and but for a moment; and that these are working out “for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” We are looking at the present time, not for the things that are seen—the earthly applause and glory—but for the heavenly glory—for the things that the Lord has promised to those that love him. (II Cor. 4:17,18) The Lord will truly bless those who, having put their hand to the plow, and not looking back, have endured hardness, rejoicing in the privilege of service and sacrifice. These will be rewarded with the Divine nature, to which no cost could ever be attached.

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Celebrating Reconciliation

Key Verse: “*This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.*”

—*Luke 15:24*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 15:1, 2, 11-24

TODAY’S LESSON, based on Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, has been regarded by many as one of the masterpieces of the great Teacher. In the parable, the father who had two sons represents God. The elder son represented those who remained loyal to God in their outward profession, at least, and outwardly kept his law. The younger son represented those not so religiously strict as to their ideals. This class misused their privileges and opportunities as members of the nation of Israel, beneficiaries of the Divine promises who wasted their opportunities in self-gratification, not attempting to live godly lives.

Relating this parable, Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he [the man] divided his property between them [his two sons].” (Luke 15:11,12, *New International Version*) After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property, left home with the money and went to a country far away, where he wasted it all in reckless living. He spent everything he had. When a severe famine spread over that country, he was left without a thing. So he went to work for a citizen of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods which the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. At last he came to his senses and said, “How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.”—vss. 17-19, *NIV*

So he got up and started back to his father. He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. “Father,” the son said, “I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer

worthy to be called your son.” But the father called to his servants. “Quick!” he said. “Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.”—Luke 15:20-23, *NIV*

How grandly this illustrates to us the love of God—the best robe, the fattened calf and the other attentions given to the repentant son well illustrate the provision God has made for all who return to him from the ways of sin. The robe and all the blessings are provided through Christ—covering for all the imperfections of the fallen nature.

While our Lord was known to be friendly toward sinners, he was never known to condone sin. From this standpoint the feast of fat things provided for the sinners in Israel corresponds to the feast to be opened ultimately to the whole world of mankind. Thus under the kingdom arrangement (Isa. 25:6), all may return to the Father’s house and all who do return will be received of God through Christ.

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Preparing for the Future

Key Verse: “*No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*”
—*Luke 16:13*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 16:1-13

THIS PARABLE OF the unjust steward was spoken by Jesus as a rebuke to the spirit of the Pharisees, who bound heavy burdens upon others, but shirked them themselves, while pretending hearty obedience to the law.

In days of old, more than now, it was the custom for rich men to appoint stewards. Such a steward had absolute control of his master's goods as the master himself; he had what is known today as the power of attorney. Some stewards were faithful, others extravagant. The one mentioned in our Lord's parable was extravagant, unsatisfactory. His master decided to dispense with the steward's services, and asked him to render up his accounts. (Luke

16:2) On his books were the accounts of certain debtors who apparently had no chance of being able to meet their obligations. The steward concluded that if he reduced the amount of these debts, the debtors probably could make payment before he turned over his office to his successor.

One owing a hundred measures of oil was told that he might decrease the debt to fifty. Another owing a hundred measures of wheat (500 to 1400 bushels) was told that he might scale it down twenty percent. (vs. 7) So he went down the list. Such a use of his authority made him friends amongst those whom he had favored; and his lord complimented him upon the wisdom he had displayed.—vs. 8

Applying this parable, Jesus proportionately condemned the Pharisees for taking an opposite course. They bound heavy burdens upon the people and discouraged them. All this on their part was hypocrisy; for they could not help knowing that they themselves were unable to comply with the requirements of the Law, which is the full measure of a perfect man's

ability. Their proper attitude would have been to confess their own shortcomings, to strive to do their best, to appeal to God for mercy and to teach the common people to do the same.

With the followers of Jesus, all our things of the present time belong to God, because we have consecrated them to him. All things of the future life, however, will belong to us because God has promised them to us if we are faithful stewards today, in handling all these things we have devoted to God. Now comes a period of trial and testing.

Jesus, in our key verse, tells us we cannot serve both God and mammon (riches, treasure). He said, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. ... And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”—Luke 16:10-13

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“After the Order of Melchisedec”

CHAPTER 7

VERSES 1,2 “This Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.”

It is in chapter 5, verses 6, 10 and 11, that Paul first mentions Melchisedec as a type of Christ, and there he wrote that he had “many things” to say about him, things which to the Hebrews would seem “hard to be uttered” because, as the apostle explains, they were “dull of hearing.” Again, in the last verse of chapter 6, Jesus is referred to as “an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” In the seventh chapter, Paul itemizes the ‘many things’ about Melchisedec which prove him to be a type of Christ, the reigning priest of the Millennial Age. This entire chapter is devoted to showing how much greater in every way, typical and antitypical, was the Melchisedec priesthood than the Aaronic order.

Melchisedec was both a king and a priest, and from God’s standpoint a very highly honored priest. Abraham, a friend of God upon the basis of his faith, was highly honored by Jehovah, but Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec—giving to him a tenth of all the spoils of battle on the occasion when he slaughtered the kings who had taken Lot, his nephew, into captivity.—Gen. 14:18-20

The title Melchisedec is a very significant one, being made up of *melek*, meaning ‘king,’ and *tsedeq*, meaning ‘righteousness.’ He actually was King of Salem. Salem means ‘peace,’ so Melchisedec was ‘King of peace.’ What a clearly defined type Melchisedec was, therefore, of the one concerning whom the Prophet Isaiah wrote that “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”—Isa. 9:7

VERSE 3 “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.”

The evident thought of this text is that Melchisedec was without father or mother in the priesthood—he did not inherit the office from his parents. It was given to him directly by God. Paul emphasizes this point in order to offset the doubts some might have concerning Jesus, that not being of the Levitical tribe he could not therefore be a priest. In the Jewish Age arrangement, it was God who constituted the Levitical tribe the one from which priests were to be taken; so God had the authority and power to exalt others to the priesthood. This he did in the case of Melchisedec, and also Christ, the antitypical Melchisedec.

In the Aaronic order of priesthood there was an arrangement of succession, but not so in the higher, or Melchisedec order. Melchisedec had neither predecessor nor successor in the priesthood. In this respect he was like ‘the Son of God,’ who similarly is the only one in this highest of all priestly orders. Paul explains that the typical significance of this is that Christ ‘abideth a priest continually.’

VERSES 4-10 “Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the Law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.”

Paul’s reasoning in these verses is irrefutable. Abraham is counted one of the greatest, if not the greatest, hero of faith mentioned in the Bible. In Romans 4:13, he is designated the “heir of the world.” Yet he paid tithes to Melchisedec, and, as Paul states, ‘The less is blessed of the better.’ (vs. 7) The head of Israel’s priestly tribe, that is, Levi, himself paid tithes to Melchisedec while still in the loins of Abraham. None of the Levitical tribe, not even the priests could, therefore, be as great as Melchisedec.

‘Of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.’ There is no record of the birth or death of Melchisedec. All we know is that he lived. This makes him a fitting type of the perpetual priestly office of Christ, of whom it is prophetically stated, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6) In this statement Paul may also have been alluding to the testimony of the “two men” at the tomb of the antitypical Melchisedec, when they asked the women who were looking for Jesus’ body, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” or, as the marginal translation states, why seek “him that liveth.”—Luke 24:4,5

VERSE 11 “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the Law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?”

In this verse Paul presents still another argument as to why believers should expect that the Aaronic priesthood would be succeeded by another and higher priestly order. It was the fact that the Levitical, or Aaronic, priesthood did not bring perfection to those who were served by it. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners” (Heb. 1:1) had spoken to the Jewish fathers by the prophets had foretold that there would be another priesthood established, one after the order of Melchisedec, and now the inspired Paul is pointing out another reason why this was necessary.

VERSES 12-17 “The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the Law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Hebrews who had accepted Christ would not find it easy to understand why changes needed to be made in the Law in order for Jesus to serve as a priest, so in these verses Paul’s reasoning is to show why this change was the logical thing to expect, and quite in harmony with God’s arrangement. Priests of the Levitical order served by hereditary rights. One could not begin service until he was thirty years of age.

Jesus, however, was not of the tribe of Levi, so according to this hereditary arrangement of the Law, he could never be eligible for the priesthood. In the Divine plan a higher priestly order was designed for him. By the hereditary arrangement one could become a priest regardless of whether or not he was worthy of the office, but under the Melchisedec order this could not be. So far as his priestly service was concerned, Melchisedec was ‘without beginning of days, nor end of life.’ His genealogy is not recorded. None of his qualifications for the priesthood are recorded. His was simply a case of being chosen by God. It is this great fact that stands out in the case of Jesus, the antitype of Melchisedec.

The fact that priests of the Aaronic order inherited their positions was an evidence of the temporary nature of their service. But with the Melchisedec order the reverse is true. No time element entered into this arrangement. Thus Melchisedec is a suitable type of the endless life and continuing priesthood of Jesus. As Paul presents it, the ‘power’ or authority for Christ’s appointment as a priest was that of ‘an endless life,’ this being in harmony with the prophecy which foretold his appointment.

VERSES 18,19 “There is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the Law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.”

The “Law ... was weak through the flesh,” Paul wrote. (Rom. 8:3) The reason the Law failed was not because there was something wrong with it, but because of the imperfections of those who attempted to obtain life under its provisions. Since the Israelites proved by their own failure under the Law that its arrangements were not adequate to bring perfection and life to fallen human beings, it was automatically disannulled and the way opened for a new arrangement.

Since the Law made nothing perfect, this was additional reason for the appointment of another priesthood, and it is in connection with this that we have been given a ‘better hope,’ a hope which, when it matures, will result in perfection. It is a hope which includes the prospect of serving and reigning with Christ in the future work of blessing the obedient of mankind with ‘restitution’ to perfection. Christ is not now a reigning priest, but we have the assurance that he “ever liveth to make intercession” for us, and that through the merit of his shed blood we are

‘reckoned’ perfect by God. (Heb. 7:25) Thus, being “justified by faith, we have peace with God,” and can “draw nigh” unto him, going “boldly unto the throne of grace.”—Rom. 5:1; James 4:8; Heb. 4:16

VERSES 20,21 “Inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.)”

Jesus was not only appointed by God to be a priest, but his appointment was confirmed by a Divine oath. Surely, then there should be no question in anyone’s mind concerning his right to be a priest, a greater right than those who became priests merely by heredity.

VERSE 22 “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.”

‘By so much’—this refers to the great authority of Jesus’ appointment to the priesthood as indicated by the fact that it was confirmed by God’s oath. God’s original covenant of blessing, which embraces the hope of both the church and the world, was confirmed by Divine oath. This was the covenant made to Abraham. This is probably why Paul associates the ‘better covenant’ with the assurance of the Divine oath.

The expression ‘better covenant,’ is in contrast with the Law Covenant. The covenant principally referred to is doubtless the promised “new covenant.” (Jer. 31:31) By his death and resurrection Jesus became the ‘surety’ for this covenant. By the same token he also made sure of our acceptance under the terms of the Sarah feature of the original Abrahamic Covenant—that part of the covenant which calls for the development of the “seed” which is to bless all the families of the earth. See Galatians 3:27-29; 4:19-31.

VERSES 23-25 “They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

Who could fail to see this advantage of the Melchisedec order of priesthood? Christ ‘ever liveth to make intercession’—a priest ‘for ever.’ We can well imagine the case of an earnest Israelite under the Law Covenant seeking to live close to God, and leaning heavily upon a certain

high priest for counsel and encouragement. He would become acquainted with the priest, and the priest would get to understand him and be able thus to better serve him. But suddenly this high priest dies. What a tragedy this would be for the one who depended so largely upon him.

This is not true of our High Priest, Jesus, for he ‘ever liveth,’ and is ready at all times to make intercession for us. He understands us, too—knows our every weakness, yet loves us with an everlasting love. No wonder he is able to save ‘to the uttermost’ those who ‘come unto God by him.’ Those who desire to return to God and to his fellowship and blessing are helped and shown the way. Christ’s merit is imputed to them to cover their defects; and his intercession is able to make their earnest efforts successful. What a Savior! What a Priest!

VERSES 26-28 “Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the Law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the Law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated [margin, ‘perfected’] for evermore.”

‘For such an High Priest became us’ or ours. He was ‘holy’—entirely devoted to his Heavenly Father, with a devotion prompted by love and based upon knowledge. He was ‘harmless’—his every influence was beneficial. He was ‘undefiled’—not only from the standpoint of the Law, but morally pure as well. He was ‘separate from sinners’—he did not derive his life from Adam, but merely his physical makeup, nor was he in any way tainted with human imperfections, as typified by the Levitical priesthood being separated from every contact with the dead or with impurity. He is now ‘higher than the heavens’—a reference to Jesus’ high exaltation when he was raised from the dead, “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.” (Eph. 1:20,21) It was because Jesus was thus exalted that he is now able to appear in the presence of God for us.

The contrast between the sacrificial work of the Levitical priesthood and the sacrifice of Jesus is in the fact that they needed to keep repeating their work, but Jesus offered himself only once. The typical priests offered sacrifice, first for their own sins, and ‘then for the people’s,’ Paul

states. Then he explains concerning Jesus that ‘this he did’ when he offered up himself; that is, he offered sacrifice for the sins of his body members, the church, and also for the people’s sins. Paul has just explained that Jesus, personally, was holy, and separate from sinners. He had heard Jesus inquire, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4) Jesus thus acknowledged his footstep followers as a part of himself, and it was for these that he offered himself in sacrifice, and also for the people of the whole world. The Apostle John says of Jesus that he became the “propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”—I John 2:2

Jesus was perfect as a man, and the experiences through which he passed while offering himself in sacrifice perfected him as a New Creature; in the sense, that is, of being developed, or made complete. Thus he became fully qualified to serve as our High Priest now, and for the world in the age to come. In that future work his church will serve with him.

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The Greatest Thing

***“Now abideth faith,
hope, charity, these
three; but the greatest
of these is charity.”
—I Corinthians 13:13***

IN THE HISTORY OF the world, many millions of people have died of starvation. Having exhausted every particle of food available to them, having sacrificed every material possession to obtain enough food to sustain even a semblance of life in their

bodies, and having no resource left they have lost the struggle to survive and have died. A Chinese proverb says, “If you have two pennies, buy bread with one and a flower with the other.” The significance is that though bread is necessary to the body’s welfare, the spirit of man is revived by beauty. Both are important.

GIVING ALL

Our Lord Jesus used another illustration found in Luke, chapter 21, in which he tells of a poor widow whose last physical resource was two “mites,” (vs. 2) the smallest coin of that realm. It would be like two pennies with us. She put them into the Temple poor box, and Jesus, noticing it, drew a comparison with the magnificent gifts of the wealthy, saying that the poor widow had cast in more than they, for she had given “all the living that she had.” (vs. 4) She had not bought bread and beauty; she had done a more excellent thing; for, giving all, she was utterly dependent upon God for even her next meal.

God has set the example of complete giving for “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16) that men might have life. With him this was the supreme gift. Jesus Christ also sets the example of complete giving, for he gave himself to purchase the human race and show them a way to life.

CHARITY

Giving is constantly urged upon Christian brethren throughout the Gospels and the Epistles, and such giving is by no means confined to material things, though such is also enjoined. Giving of this nature has been designated ‘charity,’ and this word has been used as the English

equivalent of a word in the original Greek text which contained no concept of our modern word charity. But then again, even the English word charity has very largely changed its meaning from what was implied by it in the seventeenth century, for it is the English of that century which is used in the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Certainly the Apostle Paul did not confuse the meaning when he desired his Christian brethren to excel in things well pleasing to their Lord and Master. Helping the poor was urged by the apostle, but he left no doubt as to how it was to be done, and what the scope of such help should be. Jesus had no idea that virtually the sum total of Christian effort could be comprehended in our present understanding of charitable works; for his instructions concerning ‘almsgiving’ are clear and to the point, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward.” (Matt. 6:1) And in his condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, he makes a telling point of their outward holiness and inward impurity, and advises them to be compassionate toward the poor. He also tells them that although they make long prayers in the streets, in private they “devour widows’ houses.”—Matt. 23:14

Several times Paul mentions that the churches throughout Asia Minor were engaged in taking up a collection of money to help the brethren in Jerusalem defray the increasing costs of caring for the widows and fatherless, and that he had offered to carry the sum so raised back with him when he returned to Palestine. These gifts he referred to as “alms.” (Acts 24:17) On arrival at Jerusalem he was in the Temple making an offering in regard to a vow when Jewish enemies stirred up the people and Paul was arrested. It was this arrest and his demand for a fair trial by Caesar which resulted in his being taken to Rome, where he died a martyr.

AGAPE LOVE

Charity, with Paul, was properly love, and every use of the English word charity in the New Testament is a translation of a Greek word *agape*, which means a widely embracing love which benefits all. It is this type of love which is referred to in John 3:16, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

It was this understanding of the proper meaning of ‘charity’ that provoked Paul into writing his marvelous exposition of comparative virtues recorded in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, commencing, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

In modern speech translations of the New Testament, the correct word ‘love’ is used throughout the passage, and the words take on new beauty and greater significance when this correct interpretation is used. The argument and comparisons contained in it have a deeper, more compelling message, where love becomes the essence in place of the modern idea of charity.

How insignificant become our individual attainments as Christians, when we read, “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”—I Cor. 13:4-7, *Revised Standard Version*

Paul closes his admonition with the well-known phrase, “So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (vs. 13, *RSV*) Those who originally subdivided the Bible into chapters, and verses, closed the thirteenth chapter on those words, whereas the proper close of Paul’s argument would seem to include the verse with which the fourteenth chapter opens, “Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” the good news of the hope of the world in Christ.—I Cor. 14:1, *RSV*

CHRISTIAN DUTY

Paul’s philosophy of Christian duty took no notice of what some mean when they speak of “going to church” or “going to the meeting.” Paul’s idea of a Christian was concerned not with getting, but with giving. To him one went to church, or to a meeting, not merely to sit and listen to a sermon, be it ever so eloquent, but to do something with oneself which would benefit other people. “He who prophesies [preaches] speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” and “edifies the church.” (vs. 3,4, *RSV*) Thus was the preacher’s responsibility properly fulfilled. But Paul continues, “When you come

together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” (vs. 26, *RSV*) All should go to the meeting to give a blessing as well as to receive one.

What is this love of which Paul makes such a point—of which he says, ‘Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts’? We have mentioned the word in the original Greek manuscripts from which the New Testament was translated as *agape*, and this word describes a particular kind of love, the broad, all-inclusive social love which can enfold all mankind; a love induced by the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle and not of emotion.

It was this *agape* which turned Paul from a persecuting Pharisee into a Christian missionary; that sent him across seas and deserts into hostile lands preaching a message of salvation for all who would accept it through faith in Christ. He was not desirous of spending his time merely enjoying the hospitality of friendly church groups, or going through life calmly discussing difficult points of Scripture, or of being flattered and catered to by groups who admired his eloquence or curried his favor. Nor did he spend his time and energy preaching soothing messages on subjects which could arouse no controversy. Rather he encouraged his hearers to investigate every word he had to say, and to prove his exposition of truth by careful searching of the Scriptures.

On the subject of his attitude to the churches he served, he writes to the Corinthians, “I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, ... and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter.” Paul was ready to spend time with a congregation when journeying became impossible by land and sea, but, he continues, “I do not want to see you now just in passing; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”—I Cor. 16:5-9, *RSV*

PAUL’S LOVE FOR PEOPLE

Paul loved people in the same manner as ‘God so loved the world.’ God gave his only begotten Son that the world might have a chance for life. Paul gave himself so that the Gentiles as far away as he could reach them might know of the hope of life. Paul withheld nothing in the service of his Lord and Master. In his second letter to the church at Corinth he lists a few of his experiences in Christ’s service.

“[I have been] often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, ... there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.”—II Cor. 11:23-28, *RSV*

Paul had exchanged honor among men, financial security, and his whole former concept of faith and worship, for such a life and that to which it led. Was it worth it? Paul believed so.—II Cor. 4:17

THE DISCIPLES LEARN LOVE

Was this *agape*, this broad all-embracing love, so different from the suspicious, insular, formalized religion of the Jews, of quick and easy growth in the early church? It would seem not, for Luke tells us of the occasion (Luke 22:24) when the disciples did not seem to have absorbed the spirit of love from their Master, “And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.”

The first effects of the dim vision of the powers of the new kingdom aroused not so much a desire in their hearts to bless others as to provide them with means to punish. Luke in 9:52-56 reports, “They went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.” But the people there would not receive him because he was evidently going to Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this they said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them? ... But he turned, and rebuked them, ... And they went to another village.”

Echoes of the same lack of understanding ring in the utterances of certain sects even today. These boldly proclaim that they have power to condemn to eternal death individuals and communities which refuse to accept their presentation and concept of God’s plan and purpose.

PETER LEARNS OF LOVE

The Apostle Peter, great leader of the disciples, could not at first conceive of love so all-embracing for all mankind. His view seemed to be that Israel was exclusively God's chosen people, the only recipients of his love and blessing, when God was ready to take the Truth to the Gentile centurion, Cornelius. He presented a vision to Peter. Peter was told to eat flesh which his Jewish views counted as unclean; he argued, calling God's attention to his ceremonial righteousness.

Peter was rebuked by the voice from heaven, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." (Acts 10:15) Peter then went to Cornelius, and telling the experience later, he said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. ... And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. ... And they ... were astonished, ... because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit."—Acts 10:34-45

It nearly required a miracle to beget in Peter the true *agape*—the love that ruled out personal opinion and national prejudice, and opened his heart to welcome those of whom the prophets had spoken—those who, coming to Jesus Christ through faith in him became heirs of the promise made to Abraham, namely, that all the families of the earth should be blessed.

GRACE OF GOD

It is a matter of grace, of special favor, that anyone today is received into the family of God. No one can claim a right to eternal life. All lost life through Adam's sin, and it is only because of the mercy and compassion of God who gave, and Jesus who suffered and died, that the sin of Adam has been wiped clean by the substitution of the life of the man Jesus, in the hands of Divine justice.

From justice, fallen humanity can demand nothing; from love—God's love for his human creation—man may humbly accept those favors which are offered him, but only on God's terms. Obedience of the creature to the Creator is always a requisite, and one which will never cease, for the creature's life will always depend on God.

The church, the bride of Christ, is richly blessed. The special favor of God toward them, because of conditions under which the members of Christ endeavor to serve him while here on earth, is expressed in his offer of immortality—life inherent, the Divine nature—as a reward to them that diligently seek it.

One of the requirements laid on all who so seek is that they shall have God's viewpoint of the world of mankind in general. They also must so love the world as gladly to lay down their lives, after the pattern set for them by Jesus, and carried out so wholeheartedly by Paul, without counting any sacrifice demanded of them as too great a price to pay to make their calling and election sure.

THE NEED TO DEVELOP LOVE

With all their strength, however it may be expressed—in personal service, in the use of their financial power, in their daily contact with the world, in their personal acts and speech, in their everlasting watchfulness for opportunities to say even the least word about the great plan of God for man's emancipation from sin and death—every consecrated believer must give all in the service of his Lord and Head.

The development of love, *agape*, is essential to spiritual well-being. When we see that responsibility, and do it, and not before, we are beginning to run the race for the “prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) This love is essential to the attainment of the goal. The goal, the end of the race, is the acquisition of that power to bless all mankind. This is the hope of the church during its earthly progress. Through Christ and the church love will find its fulfillment, its great manifestation, in the tremendous restitution, restoration work, which is the crowning glory of Christ's ransom sacrifice. “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?”—I Cor. 6:2

Paul placed emphasis on the fact that there continue in the heart of the church, faith, hope, and love—the greatest of these being love. But he was wise to enjoin upon us, who claim the name of Christ as our own, that while desiring spiritual gifts, we should earnestly desire that gift of prophecy in its broadest meaning, that of teaching, of preaching, of practicing the Spirit of Christ, so that all with whom we come in contact may know of the “[only] name under heaven given among men” whereby men may receive salvation—the name of Jesus.—Acts 4:12

We offered ourselves in consecration to God. We dedicated our lives to his service. We counted the cost of the sacrifice. We believed the promises of God to reward us with eternal life if we continued through every minute of our earthly life to “so run, that ye may obtain.” (I Cor. 9:24) We accepted the responsibility of demonstrating in every waking moment that we were developing in ourselves the “mind of Christ,” (I Cor. 2:16) which was to “do the will of him that sent me,” as Jesus stated. (John 4:34) Let us, then, realize to the full the implication of the need to acquire, as our motive in all we do, say, and think, this *agape*, this all-embracing love, which the wise apostle tells us is the greatest thing!

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Take Up Your Cross

*“If any man will
come after me, let him
deny himself, and
take up his cross, and
follow me.”*

—*Matthew 16:24*

OUR LORD MADE IT plain that discipleship requires a willingness to take up a cross to follow him, as well as self-denial. This did not mean that actual crucifixion was necessary for all of his disciples. Rather, the cross was symbolic.

MEANING OF CROSSBEARING

What does ‘bearing the cross’ mean for us? It involves our doing God’s will under unfavorable conditions. If everything within us and around us was in complete harmony with God’s kingdom, the doing of his will would not be a cross. But doing the Divine will against the oppositions of the world, the flesh, and the Adversary is indeed a cross.

In our Lord’s case, his doing of God’s will amidst evil brought to him envy, hatred, malice, abuse, persecution, crucifixion, death. Our crosses come to us also as a result of doing the Father’s will under unfavorable conditions—not merely by saying we approve of God’s will. We must do God’s will day by day. If others manifest toward us coldness, resentment, bitterness, malice, abuse, we must still bear the cross!

We are to persevere in doing the will of God, even though conditions are unfavorable, and are to take up our cross daily. Nor are we to take it up one day and put it down the next. Rather, we are to be faithful in crossbearing against all opposition, maintaining our willingness to stand firmly for the Lord, for the Truth, and for every principle of righteousness—meekly, humbly, yet firmly. Also, we are to let our light shine before men, and to speak the Truth in love, and thereby grow in Christlikeness, fulfilling the words of Philippians 2:15,16, shining as lights in the world and holding forth the Word of life.

We are to do our Father’s will no matter what the cost to us. Earthly friendships may be broken, or enmities enkindled, or evil words spoken against us falsely for Christ’s sake. We must continue self-denial, self-sacrifice, and to bear the cross, being fully conscious of our Lord’s words,

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”—Matt. 7:21

JOYFUL SERVICE

The Scriptures exhort us to be faithful. Indeed, we are to be faithful ambassadors of Jesus Christ in a most wonderful ministry. “All things are from that God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given to us the ministry of the reconciliation; namely, That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting to them their offences; and has deposited with us the word of the reconciliation. On behalf of Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors; as if God were inviting through us, we entreat, on behalf of Christ,—be you reconciled to God!”—II Cor. 5:18-20, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

This is a marvelous and joyful service. And our ambassadorship is to continue throughout our earthly pilgrimage. There is to be faithfulness unto death. Upon passing over into the glorious heavenly phase of the kingdom, and being actually partakers of the Divine nature with our glorified Lord and Head, we can be assured to rest from labors and that our “works do follow.”—Rev. 14:13

Whoever will now grow in Christlikeness, faithfully exercising his ambassadorship, not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God, will surely know something of the sufferings of Christ, and will be able to say, “The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” (Rom. 15:3) Jesus did faithfully bear witness unto the Truth, and he proved his loyalty in connection with it; and we are exhorted to do the same.

SUFFERING NEEDLESSLY

Let none of us suffer as busybodies. (I Pet. 4:15) If we do, that is not the cross to which Jesus refers. But suffering as a Christian, with Christ, because we are doing our Father’s will against all oppositions of the world, the flesh, and the Adversary, is bearing the cross.

“Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:27) We have a wonderful leader and it is a joyous privilege to follow him, “the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”—Heb. 12:2

CONSIDER HIM

We are exhorted to consider him attentively who endured such opposition from sinners, so that we may not be wearied and discouraged in our minds. (Heb. 12:3,4) Indeed, by comparison, we suffer very little.

Do we at times complain and become weary and discouraged? Consider Jesus. Study and meditate upon his course of action; how and what he overcame by the power of the Holy Spirit. Consider his sublime words of instruction to us—his gracious words of encouragement—and his wonderful promises to help.

We cannot, in our own strength, carry the cross; but with the Lord's help, we can. With renewed determination and zeal let us deny self utterly, take up our cross daily, and follow Jesus; demonstrating absolute loyalty of heart under extreme and severe tests, manifesting full self-renunciation, full consecration. We are to be completed as New Creatures through sufferings, even as Jesus was completed in the same manner.

Jesus, our faithful leader and victorious forerunner, now beyond the veil, awaits our arrival. Our beloved Lord and Head, also the greater part of his body members, have successfully finished their course—faithful unto death. The end of our pilgrim journey is almost in sight. “Be thou faithful unto death,” said Jesus, “and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

The consummation, if we are faithful, will mean joint-heirship with Jesus in glory. This is the greatest position in the whole universe that we could ever hope to attain. It will include sharing the glory of God with his dear Son forever, being made partakers of the Divine nature. It will mean having a share in that glorified ‘seed’ of Abraham—joint inheritors with Jesus in all that is comprehended in that great oathbound promise. It will include the raising of earth's dead billions, and the bringing in of blessing to all the families of the earth.

The Spirit of Good Will

“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.”
—II Timothy 2:24, 25

THE GREEK WORD translated “strive” in this passage is *machomai*. According to Young’s Analytical Concordance it means to ‘fight, quarrel, or be contentious.’ This admonition ‘must not strive’ reads just as positively as the Jewish Law when it said, “Thou shalt not.” Instead of thus being quarrelsome, the apostle indicates that those who endeavor to instruct others in the doctrines of the Divine plan should be

‘gentle,’ and in ‘meekness’ instruct those who oppose themselves, “If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” (vss. 25,26) In presenting the message of Truth gently and meekly there exists an opportunity of overcoming the blindness created by the Adversary to God’s message.

HOW TO STRIVE

While our text states that the servant of the Lord must not strive, verse 5 of the same chapter declares that we should “strive.” These two texts, however, are quite harmonious, for the Greek word rendered ‘strive’ in verse five is *athelo*, and means, according to Young’s Concordance, ‘to be a champion.’ It is the Greek original from which our English word ‘athletic’ is derived. In order to be a champion, or a victor, in the Christian warfare, one of the rules we must observe is not to be contentious, or given to strife in our presentation of the Truth to others.

We are living in days when wonderful prophecies of the Bible are being fulfilled and unfolded to the Lord’s people. Indeed, Divine secrets are now being more and more clearly revealed to them. It is the time of the Lord’s Second Presence, and there is every evidence that we are living during the greatest dispensational changes in the world’s history. We have been privileged to see more clearly that the movements and

destinies of nations are fulfilling Divine prophecy in a marvelous way. We can see that the Lord is doing a wonderful work preparatory to the outpouring of his kingdom blessings upon mankind.

But how are we being affected by these wonderful outworkings of the Divine plan, and by our knowledge of the glorious truths now due? What is their value to us? Certainly we are inspired by the Lord's Spirit to make known these glad tidings to others—to our brethren, and to all who have ears to hear. But are we striving lawfully in our efforts to do this? Are we manifesting the spirit of tolerance and good will to all? We should remember, as Paul has told us, that although we have knowledge, and although we have faith sufficient to remove mountains, if we have not love we are as “nothing.”—I Cor. 13:2

OUR PRIVILEGE

As God's children we should be able to converse freely and intelligently upon his Divine plan and purpose as revealed in the inspired Word. This is a great privilege which he has granted to us of representing him in the earth. In this, our Father has richly lavished upon us his wondrous grace. Yet, as the apostle declares, even though we “should speak in the languages of men and of angels, but have not love” we are but as “sounding brass or a noisy cymbal.”—I Cor. 13:1, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

Thus we see that a knowledge of the Scriptures, vital as it is, is really a means to an end. The end is that we may be acquainted with the Divine purposes so that we might serve the Lord intelligently and acceptably. And if we are to be pleasing to him we must comply with the rules, or conditions, governing the Christian racecourse.

As ambassadors of Christ, it is the Divine will that we be conformed to his character likeness. We are to speak as he spoke, and are to act as he acted. If we are thus conformed to his image now, we will be a part with him, beyond the veil, of that promised seed of Abraham, constituting that glorious spiritual government—God's great kingdom of promise in the earth.

As long as we are in this fleshly ‘tabernacle’ we shall be conscious of various weaknesses and imperfections. We can rejoice with great peace of mind, and complete assurance, in the knowledge and in the experience of Ephesians 1:6,7, that our Father has made us accepted in the Beloved.

In him we have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

TESTS OF FAITH

The Christian life is teaching us that every difficulty and disappointment are tests of our faith, and every unpleasant incident is a test of our goodwill and brotherly love. One of the earliest lessons we have to learn in the Christian life is that we should be sympathetic and kind, and willing to forgive. This may seem simple, yet in many instances it is very difficult to put into practice. But it is one of the ‘rules,’ for Jesus said, “If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”—Matt. 6:15

Jesus amplified this requirement of forgiveness, explaining that if we have enemies, we must love them. If there are those who curse us, we are to bless them. If we know of any who hate us, we are to do them good. And we are to pray for those who despitely use us and persecute us.—Matt. 6:44

The Apostle Paul was in prison at Rome when he wrote to encourage his brethren saying, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” (II Tim. 2:12) He prefaced his words with the reminder to all, “I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (vs. 10) The apostle surely did endure, but it was not merely for himself. It was also for the elect, the body of the Anointed.

Are we likewise enduring all things for the elect’s sake, for the body members of the Christ still in the flesh? Some of these we may know. Others we do not know, yet possibly some of these may be within our reach, and can be found and helped by our faithfulness. Are we, like Paul, doing all we can to assist our brethren to obtain the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus? Paul’s heart took in all of the elect, and we may be assured that the larger our hearts toward his own, the more Christlikeness we possess.

Our desire to help others see and appreciate the Truth in all its beauty should be inspired by the largeness of our hearts and by the spirit of love. We are not to be narrow or restricted, in our outlook for the welfare of others, but in the spirit of goodwill, should reach out to help as many as possible. Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren, “We have spoken freely

to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.”—II Cor. 6:11-13, *New International Version*

Dawn Bible Students Association