

Exposing Hidden Things

***“Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”
—I Corinthians 4:5***

DURING THE LAST FEW years, the media has been publishing an occasional story of Roman Catholic priests being accused of scandalous behavior. Suddenly the news media is filled with more and more accounts of these incidents, shocking many people. A well-known periodical, the “*U.S. News and World Report*,” in its April 1, 2002 issue, had a front cover title, “*Can The Church Save Its Soul?*” and a subtitle, “As the scandal widens, shocked Catholics search for solutions.” In this issue there was a feature article entitled “Catholics In Crisis,” with the subheading, “With continued revelations of sex abuse scandals and coverups, the faithful look to the church for change.” What follows is a detailed account of the latest findings on the scandal. We publish here a summation in the pages of this story called “*The Geography of Perversion.*”

PERVERSION IN THE UNITED STATES

“The issue of sex abuse by priests first came to the nation’s attention in 1985, and there has been a steady stream of charges against the church ever since. Some of the major cases around the country:

“LOUISIANA—In one of the first nationally publicized priest sex scandals, Lafayette, La., parish priest Gilbert Gauthe was convicted in 1985 of abusing 37 boys two years after parents confronted the diocese. Local church officials had known about problems with Gauthe since the mid-1970s; their solution was to move him to another parish. Gauthe was eventually sentenced to 20 years in prison. Many of the victims received settlements from the church running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, opening the way for victim lawsuits across the country.

“FLORIDA—Anthony J. O’Connell, the bishop of Palm Beach, resigned on March 8 after admitting he had sexually abused a teenage seminary student in Missouri in the 1970s. The seminary student said O’Connell took advantage of him sexually when he sought help after being molested by two other priests. The Missouri diocese settled a lawsuit for \$125,000 in 1996, two years before O’Connell had been selected to serve in Palm Beach. He had been assigned to that diocese to help it heal after the resignation of Bishop Joseph Keith Symons, who admitted he had sexually molested five boys earlier in his career.

“MASSACHUSETTS—In January the Boston Globe revealed that Cardinal Bernard Law had moved the Rev. John Geoghan to another parish in 1984, even though he had been accused of molesting children. Geoghan, now 66, was eventually accused of molesting more than 130 children over 30 years. In February he was sentenced to 9 to 10 years in prison, and the church has agreed to pay up to \$30 million to settle lawsuits.

“NEW MEXICO—Sexual-abuse settlements nearly drove the diocese of Santa Fe into bankruptcy in the early 1990s when a wave of cases resulted in payments of at least \$50 million. Twenty priests were removed from the ministry, and 165 cases were settled. Not until late last year did the diocese finally clear its debts.

“TEXAS—After Dallas priest Rudolph Kos was convicted on seven counts of child abuse in 1984, a massive civil lawsuit against the diocese of Dallas resulted in a \$31 million award to 11 plaintiffs, one of the largest in church history for an abuse case. The diocese had to sell and mortgage property to pay for the settlement.

“CONNECTICUT—The Hartford Courant published a report saying Cardinal Edward Egan reassigned priests accused of sexual abuse and did not report them to police when he was bishop of the diocese of Bridgeport, Conn. Today, Egan is archbishop of New York, one the most visible Catholic pulpits in America. The Bridgeport diocese settled a lawsuit against six priests and Cardinal Egan last year with a multimillion-dollar payout.

“CALIFORNIA—Former Santa Rosa youth minister Donald Kimball is currently on trial for allegedly raping a 14-year-old girl and molesting

a 14-year-old girl more than two decades ago. In 2000, the diocese paid \$1.6 million to four of Kimball's victims.

“WASHINGTON, D.C.—The archbishop of Washington suspended 54-year-old priest Russell Dillard last week over sexual-misconduct allegations involving two teenage girls about 18 years ago.”

THE POPE'S SILENCE

Another section in this feature article was entitled “*The Pope breaks his virtual silence. But will he act?*” It said:

“Cardinal Daro Castrilln Hoyos of Colombia was not pleased with the Vatican press corps. The stern, white-haired prelate had just read aloud the pope's annual pre-Easter letter, which referred obliquely to a widening scandal that had cast ‘a dark shadow of suspicion’ over the priesthood. But when he opened the floor to questions at the Vatican news conference last week, reporters had but one line of inquiry: What concrete action was the Vatican taking in the growing sex-abuse crisis in the American church?

“The cardinal listened silently, his lips in a tight smile. Then, ignoring the individual queries, he read a sharply worded statement reminding the reporters of the Vatican's policies and the pope's pronouncements over the years designed to condemn and root out clergy sex abuse of children. ‘The church has never neglected the problem of sexual abuse, especially not those against minors,’ Castrilln Hoyos declared.

“For some, these were signs that the Vatican is, indeed, confronting the widening crisis. But for others, it was yet another indication that the Vatican still has not taken the matter seriously enough, considers it largely an American problem, and would prefer to do as little as possible about it. ‘The Vatican still has a false idea that silence is dignified,’ observed one American priest in Rome.

BEYOND AMERICA

“Yet while the problem may once have been viewed by some as an American affliction, there's little doubt now that it has become international. In Canada, the church now faces thousands of sex-abuse-related lawsuits stemming from years of government-funded, Catholic and Anglican-run residential schools that could cost several billion Canadian dollars to settle. In Mexico, nine men went public in 1997 with

accusations that a prominent priest had sexually abused them when they were boys. In that case, the Vatican last year halted an official investigation into the charges against the Rev. Marcial Maciel Degollado, head of the Legion of Christ order, without explanation. The powerful priest had insisted that the men had conspired to defame him.

“In Europe, nearly 30 French priests have been convicted of youth sexual abuse in the past decade. In Ireland, the church agreed last month to contribute \$110 million to a settlement of about \$400 million for people abused as children enrolled in church-run, state-funded schools from the 1940s to the 1970s. The roughly 3,000 victims accepting the package would have to agree to take no more legal action. And in the pope’s own homeland, Juliusz Paetz, the archbishop of Poznan, Poland, stands accused of sexually abusing seminarians and priests in his archdiocese. Meanwhile, in Africa, an international campaign to end violence against women called on the Vatican last year to address widespread abuse of nuns by priests. The Call to Accountability Campaign cited reports from 23 countries.

“In his statement last week, Castrilln Hoyos cited a ‘climate of pansexualism and sexual libertinism’ pervasive in the world that, he said, has contributed to ‘some’ priests’ having ‘committed the extremely grave crime of sexual abuse.’ Yet the laws of the church, he said, are ‘serious and strict’ and were conceived ‘within the apostolic tradition of handling internal matters internally.’ He pointed to new rules introduced last year whereby the Vatican’s powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith now oversees all youth-sex-abuse investigations. That new policy, which was quietly disseminated among the bishops last spring but revealed publicly only in January, requires bishops to inform Rome and launch a local investigation at the first hint of such allegations involving a priest. But to protect the rights of the accused and the identities of victims, the rules provide for a secret ecclesiastical tribunal in Rome to handle these cases. Critics have charged that this is just another attempt to keep potential scandals under wraps. They note that American bishops asked the Vatican several years ago for greater authority to remove priests who refuse to step aside, without having to go through the church’s cumbersome canonical court system. So far, they have not received an answer.”

A summit meeting of two days during the week of April 22 was held by the Pope with the Cardinals. Nothing was decided. A summation of the meeting published by the Associated Press in Chicago on April 27, 2002, said:

“Cardinal Francis George returned home Saturday from an extraordinary meeting with the pope still unconvinced that a ‘zero-tolerance’ policy is the best way to deal with priests who have abused children.

“American cardinals returned from meetings at the Vatican with differing views of Pope John Paul II’s get-tough policy to deal with the church’s sex abuse scandal.

“‘If people want one strike and you’re out, we’ll have to do that,’ George, head of the Chicago archdiocese, said at O’Hare International Airport after stepping off a plane. ‘Personally, I don’t think we should do that without asking a few more questions.’”

“George and other cardinals had stopped in Philadelphia to attend a university fund-raiser on their way back from Rome.

“They plan to meet again in Dallas in June to map out a national policy to handle sex abuse cases.

“Before then, George said he will meet with various groups about this issue.

“At least two cardinals, Theodore McCarrick of Washington and Roger Mahony of Los Angeles, have said they believe the pope advocated a zero-tolerance policy—that any priest guilty of even one act of sexual abuse of a minor would be removed.

“But George and Cardinal Edward Egan of New York say they aren’t sure that’s what the pope intended.

“The Vatican meeting was called to address the scandal. At least 174 priests suspected of molesting minors have either resigned or been taken off duty in 28 states and the District of Columbia since January.”

A CHURCH SYSTEM IN PROPHECY

Bible Students have known that a respected religious church which would have much influence in world affairs, and would be involved with the heads (kings) of nations during the Gospel Age, would be mentioned

in prophecy. In Jeremiah there is prophesied the destruction of Babylon. This is not the literal city, or country, of Babylon but a title given to a church system. It says, "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence. Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies." (Jer. 51:6-9) We note that Babylon is 'suddenly fallen,' that she once was 'a golden cup' in the hand of the Lord, that she might be healed, that she made all nations drunken, and that she is not to be healed, but judged instead. Babylon is being used as a symbol of a system highly respected (a golden cup in the hand of the Lord), and what she offers to the nations may appear for that reason to come from the Lord. Instead, her wine (doctrines) makes the nations drunken.

When we see that same symbolism used in the Book of Revelation, and she is described in Revelation 17:1-5 as one who is involved with the kings of earth and makes the nations drunk with her wine, while holding a golden cup in her hand, we are not surprised to see her clearly labeled as Babylon. (vs. 5) In Revelation 18 her judgment is revealed, and as predicted by Jeremiah, the angel (messenger) of the Lord, says she "is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." (vs. 2) It is clear that honest, God-fearing believers in Christ are in her congregations because the prophecy plainly says "Come out of her, my people." (vs. 4) The revelation of unclean and hateful birds being there at the same time is now coming to light. The healing of the wrongs could be made by being decisive about the wrongs and immediate removal of perpetrators. The lack of decisiveness, however, is evident, and Babylon is not to be healed.

THE PROBLEM OF CELIBACY

Many in the church have made the observation that forced celibacy is a basic problem of the present crisis and should be eliminated. The clergy

in the early church were not celibate. The Apostle Paul was given revelations of many future events and wrote “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” (I Tim. 4:1-3, *New International Version*). How accurately this foreknowledge given to Paul was fulfilled can be seen in a short summary of how celibacy came to be a part of the church’s rules as published in the news media —*Idaho Statesman* on April 28, 2002, from the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*.

“Catholic priests weren’t always single men - not even in biblical times.

“Celibacy was enforced only around the twelfth century, which means it has been in effect for about half the history of the Roman Catholic Church.

“Before then, there were celibate priests, monks and monastic popes—but not as a rule across the church worldwide. Celibacy comes from a potent mix of spiritual, social and political forces.

“It’s the idea of being separate from the secular world,’ said theologian Ed Sunshine of Miami Shores, an associate professor of theology at Barry University. ‘A celibate clergy became the paradigm of separation from the sinful world.’

“The New Testament clearly indicates that Peter—known to Catholics as the first pope—was a married man. Other disciples are believed to have been married.

“In the Bible, celibacy sounds optional. Jesus said some men ‘have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.’

“Celibacy became an issue in a theological battle between early Christians and the Manicheans, whose metaphysical sect saw spiritual things as superior to the physical. That meant rejecting marriage, because bearing children amounted to ‘bringing material into the world,’ Sunshine said.

“The Christian response was that marriage was good, but celibacy was better. Spanish clerics called for ban on clerical marriage in 300, but it was rejected in the landmark Council of Nicea in 325, according to the *“HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism.”*”

“By the Middle Ages, several situations converged to make celibacy more attractive.

“Families politicked for control of the papacy. Priests started to bequeath church property to their children. Kings and nobles bankrolled parishes and rectories, trying to wield influence over clergy. Celibacy was one answer to these stresses, according to A.W. Richard Sipe, a psychotherapist and author of the 1995 book *“Sex, Priests and Power: The Anatomy of Crisis.”*”

“‘The question at the time was who is the final power—the king or the church,’ said Sipe, a former priest. ‘If (the church) could control a person’s sex life, it could control their money, their employment, their benefice.’”

“So in the eleventh century Pope Gregory VII banned clerical marriage, a reform that was set in stone a century later. The matter came up again during the Reformation, but the Council of Trent upheld celibacy.

“In today’s Catholic Church, celibacy is classified not as a dogma, but simply a ‘discipline’ or regulation. That means the pope could change it overnight if he wished. However, no one expects John Paul II to make celibacy optional, since he has more than once spoken out in favor of it.”

Again we note that the removal of celibacy as mandatory for the clergy could assist in healing Babylon but is not likely to come and Babylon cannot be healed. If it should come, it would be too late to be effective.

What is important to the Lord’s people is that another sign of our Lord’s presence is being revealed. The Apostle Paul plainly said in our text, ‘Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.’ (I Cor. 4:5) The widespread exposure of matters which the church’s hierarchy tried to cover up is a clear indication that our Lord has come. More important to us is that he has come to claim his bride and to rule in his kingdom for which we have been earnestly praying. Soon the prophetic words will be fulfilled, “Let us be glad and

rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”—Rev. 19:7

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Let Praise Continue

Key Verse: “O LORD,
*how manifold are thy
works! in wisdom hast
thou made them all:
the earth is full of thy
riches.”*

—*Psalm 104:24*

Lesson Scripture:

Psalm 104:24-35

Background Scripture:

Psalm 65; Psalm 104

NONE OF US ARE ABLE TO fully comprehend and appreciate the wonderful works of God, our beloved Supreme Creator, performed on our behalf. The author of the one-hundred-fourth Psalm is unknown, but the psalmist tried to convey to us the immensity of God’s glory and majesty as he said in the opening verses of this psalm, “Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain.”—Ps.

104:1,2

The other psalm suggested as a part of this lesson, the sixty-fifth, is a Psalm of David, who opens that psalm by saying, “Praise is due to thee, O God, in Zion; and to thee shall vows be performed.” (Ps. 65:1, *Revised Standard Version*) Most translations of this psalm say “Praise waiteth for thee.” (*King James Version*) The particular Hebrew word translated ‘waiteth’ (*duwmiyah*) has the thought of stillness and quietness. It appears that praise is not being sung to God as it should be. In fact, praise to God is overdue.

Both the sixty-fifth and one-hundred-fourth Psalms describe the wonderful works of God and the provisions he makes for our sustenance. The provisions he has made for all of his creatures are detailed, showing his power. Our key verse attributes these works to his wisdom as it also states that the earth is full of God’s riches. The Hebrew word translated ‘riches’ (*qulnyan*), also is used to translate works of creation, or creatures. Therefore, some translators have chosen to translate this word ‘creatures.’ Both thoughts are proper because the thought of the Hebrew

word is that of acquisition, as of wealth, but also of any possession such as his creatures.

In God's Creation, the crowning feature on earth was the creation of man in his image. Out of all God's creatures on earth, man is the one capable of giving praise to God in words and song. Such praise is given in the one-hundred-fourth Psalm, when it says, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord. Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the Lord, O my soul. Praise ye the Lord." (Ps. 104:33-35) Sinners in this present evil world are not praising God. In his kingdom, sinners and wicked ones will be no more, and then all men shall praise him!

At present, only God's people are likely to praise him. For that matter, only man has the capability of making music and voicing phrases of praise to God. The Psalms were the hymns of praise in the Old Testament times. In God's kingdom, all of his creation will rejoice. It is for that reason that the inanimate creation of God is described as joining in the singing of praise to God, "You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing."—Ps. 65:11-13, *New International Version*

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Responsible to Care

Key Verse: *“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”*

—*Psalms 8:4*

Lesson Scripture:

Psalms 8

Background Scripture:

Psalms 8; 100

THE CREATIVE WORKS OF God are beyond our understanding. They are so vast and spectacular that we wonder why he has paid any attention at all to planet Earth! Even as a planet, it is so small compared to the many suns shining as stars in the heavens. Yet earth was chosen to feature an important advancement in God’s work of Creation. It was selected to be the place where the *Logos* would be tested as well as those called to be associated with him. God could never risk granting immortality to any of his creatures

unless he was sure that they would not rebel against him as did Lucifer, who became Satan, the adversary of God.

The psalm begins by saying, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (vss. 3,4) The psalm tells of the wonderful creative works of God upon earth, and how he gave man dominion over them. Man was, in miniature, created to be like God—in God’s image—and was to rule over earth’s creation as God rules over the universe. He was to have responsible care over all earth creatures.

Man, however, has not cared for earth and its creatures as he should. For this reason we have pollution and wildlife refuge problems which endanger species of creation. Man is in a fallen condition and is not showing responsibility for the earth, its environment and wildlife. The Apostle Paul, in speaking of how we should appreciate the honor bestowed upon us to become sons of God in this present age, quotes from this eighth Psalm (vss. 4-6) in Hebrews 2:6-8. He says, “Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not

yet all things put under him.” (Heb. 2:8) Man has lost control of the dominion of earthly creation.

The apostle, however, gives us hope as he says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” (Heb. 2:9) By becoming the ransom sacrifice for father Adam (and his progeny), Jesus passed the test of obedience under very trying conditions, and received the Divine nature.

He also restored dominion to mankind which will be exercised after he walks up the “way of holiness” to perfection. (Isa. 35:8) It will then be possible for man to assume responsible care for all of God’s Creation upon earth. When that time comes, how fittingly does the eighth Psalm conclude with the words, “O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”—Ps. 8:9

It will be then that all men will be able to sing the words of the hundredth Psalm, “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.”—Ps. 100:1,2

Mankind will know, as expressed in this psalm, that the Lord is the one who has true dominion over the earth and they, as well as all creation, are his responsible care. “Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”—Ps. 100:3

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Joy in Forgiveness

Key Verse: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

—Psalm 32:1

***Lesson Scripture:
Psalm 32***

***Background Scripture:
Psalms 32; 51***

sentiments of our key verse, ‘Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.’

David saw Bath-Sheba, the wife of Uriah, bathing on the roof of her house, and desired to have her as a wife. Thus he arranged to have her come to his palace. He committed adultery with her, which was his first sin. When she was with child because of his adulterous affair, he brought Uriah back from the front lines of warfare. Israel was at war with Ammon, and Uriah was a faithful soldier fighting for Israel. Uriah did not understand this special leave of absence granted to him, so he did not go in unto his wife as long as Israel was at war.—II Sam. 11:2-11

David then committed his second sin by instructing the general of his army—Joab—to place Uriah in the forefront of the battle, where he was sure to be killed. His plan worked. Uriah was killed and David married the widow, Bath-Sheba. (II Sam. 11:14-27) He was blind to the enormity of his crimes, and God had to send Nathan, the prophet, to reveal it to him. Nathan did so by telling him how a rich man, who had everything, took a ewe lamb from a poor man. David was so incensed about the story that he demanded to know who was this man, and said he “shall surely die.” (II Sam. 12:5,6) When Nathan said to him, “Thou art the man.” (vs. 7), for the first time, David saw his sin.

IN THIS PRESENT EVIL world it is difficult to go through life’s experiences and be perfectly righteous, no matter how hard we try. As followers of Christ we have an endless battle against our three principal foes—the world, our flesh, and the Devil. How grateful we are to have the robe of Christ’s righteousness to cover our sinful flesh. David had an experience with his own fleshly shortcomings which caused him to utter the

David had written before that we should all seek the Lord's face. (Ps. 27:8) He had the courage to look into the Lord's face and when he saw the great displeasure there, he was smitten. David is described as "a man after mine [God's] own heart." (Acts 13:22) How then could he commit such a terrible crime? The weakness of his flesh overcame him, and he was subconsciously aware of his sin. Hence he wrote, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." (Ps. 32:3,4, *New International Version*) He said, as recorded in Psalm 51, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."—vss. 1-3

God was merciful to him. He spared his life (Ps. 51:1-3), but other punishments came to remind him of what he had done. Likewise, God is merciful to us when we sin. He also reminds us of our shortcomings, and makes us realize our dependency upon the atonement sacrifice of Jesus. We realize when we sin that God respects in us "a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."—Ps. 51:17

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Sing a New Song

Key Verse: “Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.”
—*Psalm 67:3*

Lesson Scriptures:
Psalms 67:1-5; 96:1-9
Background Scripture:
Psalms 67; 96

BOTH THE SIXTY-SEVENTH and ninety-sixth Psalms call for praise to God because of the establishment of his kingdom of righteousness. This is a time longed for by all mankind. It is in fulfillment of the Lord’s Prayer as recited by his people for centuries, wherein they said, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) Even those who are not of the Christian faith are unconsciously waiting for this blessed time as indicated by the Apostle Paul when he said, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed,” (Rom. 8:19, *New International Version*), for then God’s kingdom will come.

The fulfillment of the expectation of all the nations in the establishment of God’s kingdom will bring a new song to the lips of mankind, a song of praise to God. As Psalm 67 says, “O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.” (vs. 4) The sentiments of our key verse then are repeated, ‘Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.’ Everyone (all the people) will want to praise God because his goodness will be manifest. “Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear [reverence] him.” (vss. 6,7) This will be a very joyful time as people learn the Truth, see the blessings come to them from God’s hand, and reverence him.

This same song of praise is the one mentioned in the ninety-sixth Psalm, “O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth.” (vs. 1) This new song is sung unto Jehovah. It is at the time of God’s kingdom that the nations will realize that he indeed is the great Supreme Creator of the universe. So the psalm continues, “Declare his glory among the heathen [nations], his wonders among all people. For

the Lord is great.” (vss. 3,4) The people will learn then that what they were worshipping before were idols, made out of wood, stone, gold, silver, precious materials representative of the earth’s wealth. Materialism will give way to an appreciation of the Supreme Creator of all the universe, who “made the heavens.” (vs. 5) There will be a true appreciation for the honor, majesty, strength, beauty, and glory of the great Supreme Creator of the universe, Jehovah.—vss. 6-9

The glory of God is his goodness, which will be manifested in all the great works of that kingdom. The words of Jesus shall be fulfilled, “All that are in the graves ... shall come forth.” (John 5:28,29) In addition to the resurrection of the dead, there will be the restoration of health in their bodies. Perfect human life will be accompanied by a perfect environment. The joy of the new song that mankind will sing to acknowledge God’s glory, his goodness, will flow throughout all of the earth. It is expressed so well in the closing verses of this psalm, “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice Before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”—Ps. 96:11-13

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The Acts of the Apostles

THE FULL NAME of the fifth book in the New Testament is, “*The Acts of the Apostles*,” although it is usually referred to simply as “*The Acts*,” or “*Acts*.” As its name implies, it is, for the most part, a chronicle of activities in which the apostles of Christ played an active part. Like the four gospels, Acts is largely historical in character, but interwoven with its record of events in the early church are some of the most important doctrinal and devotional lessons to be found anywhere in the Bible.

This book was written by Luke, who wrote “The former treatise ... of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.” (Acts 1:1,2) The opening chapter of Acts is a transition from the life of Christ into the era of the apostles, for it records Jesus’ last appearance to them, and his commission for the service they were to render in his name after he left them.—vss. 4-11

In verse eight of the first chapter, Jesus is reported as promising that the Holy Spirit would come upon the apostles, and that in the power, and by the authority, of the Spirit they were to be his “witnesses ... in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

The second chapter records the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to send the Holy Spirit. In the *King James Version* the expression “Holy Ghost” is often used. This is a mistranslation. It was designed by the translators to give the impression that the Holy Spirit is a person, but this is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. The Holy Spirit is simply the holy power, or influence, of God, sent forth to accomplish whatever his purposes may be.

It came upon the waiting disciples at Jerusalem in a miraculous manner, to establish their faith and confidence in Jesus as the Messiah. He had left them, and even though they had been convinced of his resurrection from the dead, they would have been in a difficult position to represent him without this definite evidence of his return to the

heavenly courts, and that in fulfillment of his promise he had sent the Holy Spirit to rest upon them.

This wonderful experience occurred “when the day of Pentecost was fully come.” (Acts 2:1) Pentecost was one of the special feast and assembly days of the Jews, and many thousands of them visited Jerusalem each year for the occasion. This meant that there were Israelites in the city at the time from many countries, speaking the language of the country in which they lived.

This afforded a wonderful opportunity for the Lord to demonstrate that his favor was upon the disciples, by miraculously empowering them to speak to their kinsmen from the various countries in their own tongues. Thus one of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit at that time was the ability to “speak with tongues.” (Acts 10:44-48) It was a very practical demonstration of Divine power, and accomplished God’s design to give all the scattered natural descendants of Abraham, a witness concerning the Messiahship of Jesus.

The enemies of Jesus now opposed his followers, and charged that they had become intoxicated. The Apostle Peter quickly and energetically refuted this charge, and in one of the most eloquent sermons ever preached he explained to his hearers the true significance of what was taking place. He established the fact of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, and showed it to be in fulfillment of Psalm 16:10, where Jesus is prophetically represented as saying to his God, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”—Acts 2:27

The account states that the people were “pricked in their heart” by Peter’s sermon, especially by the forthright manner in which he charged the nation with the crucifixion of Jesus. They asked what they could do under the circumstances, and he called upon them to repent, and to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”—vss. 36-38

Three thousand responded to Peter’s message that day, and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

“TIMES OF RESTITUTION”

The third chapter records another marvelous sermon by Peter, preached a short time after Pentecost. The setting was quite different from that in which he delivered his Pentecostal sermon. Together with John, Peter had gone to the Temple at the hour of prayer. At the gate of the Temple called “Beautiful” he saw a man who had been unable to walk from the time of his birth. In the name of Jesus, Peter healed the man, enabling him to walk, even to the point of “leaping.”—vss. 1-8

The crowd was curious, and Peter took advantage of the occasion to explain to them that this miracle had been performed in the name of, and by the power of, the resurrected Christ, the one whom they had crucified. Then he added, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—vss. 19-21

The lesson here is plain, being based upon the miracle of healing the man who had been unable to walk. Peter is saying, in effect, that following the Second Coming of Christ, miracles of this sort will become universal, that there are to be times of ‘restitution,’ or restoration, of all things. Then he adds that this glorious Gospel, or good news, had been spoken by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets.

Thus we have one of the key texts which helps to unlock the meaning of the entire Word of God. In our brief examination of the various books of the Bible thus far, we have called frequent attention to this theme of redemption and restoration, and now Peter confirms what has been said, for in this outstanding sermon he tells us that the ‘times of restitution’ was the theme of all God’s holy prophets.

PERSECUTION

Jesus had said to his disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) The apostles and others in the Early Church experienced this persecution. Unbelieving Jews and Gentiles alike were unfriendly to them, and in various ways, by intimidation and by imprisonment, endeavored to

hinder and, if possible, to destroy their work. One example of this is recorded in the fourth chapter of Acts.

Most people have heard something about Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, the infamous falsifiers of Biblical lore. The fifth chapter of Acts records the circumstances in which their falsehood was detected by the Apostle Peter, and they were instantly put to death.

Chapter seven presents the discourse which Stephen, the first Christian martyr, delivered before the Jewish Sanhedrin when called upon to defend himself against the accusations of his Jewish enemies. Saul of Tarsus was then a member of the Sanhedrin, and consented to the death of Stephen, and assisted in the slaying by guarding the clothing of those who stoned this young deacon to death.

Saul of Tarsus was later converted to Christianity. Verses one and two of chapter nine inform us that “Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”

Provided with this authority, Saul was on his way to Damascus when “suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Upon inquiry as to who it was that thus addressed him, Saul heard the explanation, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”—vss. 3-5

Paul was quick to discern that in persecuting the disciples of Christ he was in reality opposing God, for this experience revealed to him the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah. In answer to his question, “What wilt thou have me to do?” Paul was instructed to go to a certain home in Damascus, that there he would receive his instructions.—Acts 9:6

From being a bitter enemy of the church Saul, who was known afterward as Paul, became an enthusiastic follower of the Master, and devoted his life to the service of the Lord and the Gospel of Christ. By Divine appointment he became one of the leading apostles, his efforts being particularly toward the Gentiles.

Several chapters in the Book of Acts are utilized in relating the many interesting, and oftentimes trying, experiences of Paul as he traveled from

place to place in the ministry of the Gospel. He was persecuted in many cruel ways. One of his journeys had Jerusalem as its destination, and he was told by the Holy Spirit that bonds and imprisonments awaited him there, so the brethren endeavored to dissuade him from exposing himself to this danger. Paul's wonderful spirit of devotion to his Lord is displayed in his reply, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."—ch. 21:13

On one of his missionary journeys Paul visited Athens, and was taken by the learned men and philosophers to the Areopagus, the Supreme Court of Athens on Mars Hill. He was accused of introducing a new god. Facing his audience on the hillside below him to Paul's left, as he gave his defense, was a valley where numerous idols, ascribed to various gods, were located, among them being one to the "unknown god."

Towering above him to the right was a heathen temple, now known as the Acropolis. With this setting Paul called his hearers' attention to their idol, the 'unknown god,' and said, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." (ch. 17:23) Then he continued, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands [a statement prompted by the imposing heathen temple on the hilltop to his right]; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."—vss. 24-29

Then, referring to the Athenians' lack of knowledge of the true God, Paul continued, "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."—vss. 30,31

It is noteworthy that Paul uses the word ‘assurance’ in his reference to the coming Judgment Day. This indicates that the Judgment Day of the Scriptures is to be a blessing to mankind. If it were to be doomsday, it would have been a cause for rejoicing if Paul had given an assurance that it would not come. When we examine the great plan of God set forth in the Bible, we find that the Judgment Day is to be a thousand years in length, and will be a time in which all mankind will be given a true knowledge of God and of his laws, and have an opportunity to obey them and live.

JEWS AND GENTILES

In the Book of Acts we are also informed of the difficult situation that arose in the Early Church when Gentiles began to accept Christ and come in among the Jewish believers. When Jesus first sent his disciples into the ministry, he instructed them not to go to the Gentiles. (Matt. 10:5) Just before his ascension, he rescinded this restriction by telling them that they were to go into all the world. (Acts 1:8) But the apostles, especially Peter, found it difficult to become reconciled to this broader outlook.

Cornelius was the first Gentile convert, the Lord granting a special dispensation of grace, manifested in a vision to Cornelius and one also to Peter, to bring the two together so that the apostle could present the Gospel message to this devout Gentile. This information is recorded in chapter ten. It is one of the most interesting stories related in the Bible.

Peter fell asleep on the roof of Simon the Tanner. He had a dream in which he saw a “sheet,” also called a basket, let down from heaven, filled with all sorts of “fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.” He was bidden to rise, kill, and eat.—Acts 10:11-13

Peter recognized these animals and the fowls as being, according to the Jewish Law, unclean. So he refused to obey. Then the Lord said to him, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” (Acts 10:14,15) Later, when by a further providence of the Lord, Peter was brought into the house of the Gentile, Cornelius, and he and his household accepted Christ, the meaning of the dream became apparent to him. Peter realized then that God had been saying to him that the time had come when Gentiles, formerly considered outside the pale of God’s favor, were now to be accepted. Commenting on his impressions, Peter

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.”—vss. 34,35

This experience, wonderful as it was, did not entirely settle the issue for the whole church. Later, a conference of believers was held in Jerusalem at which the principal topic for discussion was the matter of Gentile believers, and how best to integrate them in local groups which were at the time predominately Jewish.

Peter was at that conference, and testified concerning his experience in connection with the conversion of Cornelius. Paul also was there and testified of the many Gentile conversions he had witnessed. James, who apparently was the chairman of the conference, summed up the findings as follows, “Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [that is, Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles [a reference to Peter’s testimony concerning Cornelius], to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”—Acts 15:13-18

This is a very enlightening presentation of the proper sequence of the Divine plan. The ‘tabernacle of David’ is the ruling house of David. It had been overthrown in 606 BC. The disciples believed that it was to be restored by Christ, but up to this time they did not have a clear idea of when this would be accomplished. The last time Jesus was with them they asked him, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus replied, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”—Acts 1:6,7

But the outlook of the apostles was now broadening, and in this conference James discerned that the tabernacle of David would not be rebuilt until after ‘a people for his name’ had been gathered out from among the Gentiles. The expression, people for his name, identifies these called ones as members of the Divine family. At first this “high calling”

was confined to the Jews, but now it was extended to the Gentiles.—Phil. 3:14

When this work of selecting from the world those who are to be joint-heirs with Jesus is completed, then will come the rebuilding of the tabernacle, or house, of David in the hands of Christ and his church. Then, as James further declares, ‘all the Gentiles’ will be given an opportunity to receive the blessings of the kingdom, as well as all Jews. This will be the work of the millennium.

NO DENOMINATIONS

Since the *Book of Acts* records the establishment of the church, beginning with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and under the guidance of the inspired apostles, it is interesting to note what did not take place. For example, there was no building of costly edifices in which to conduct religious services; there is nothing to indicate that a single meetinghouse was built under the direction of the apostles.

Several references are made to the ‘church’ which met in the home of one or another of the believers. Doubtless some of the congregations, such as the one at Jerusalem, were too large to meet in homes, and probably assembly rooms of various types were used. So far as the records indicate, those early believers did not deem it necessary to build meetinghouses.

Another interesting fact is that there is no evidence of denominational names having been used. We are informed believers were first called “Christians” at Antioch. (Acts 11:26) This name is only used twice in the Book of Acts, and once later in a letter written by Peter. (Acts 26:28; I Pet. 4:16) The single word church is almost the only name attached to the believers—the church of God, the church of Christ, the church at Jerusalem, at Ephesus, at Rome, in the home of Aquilla, and others.

What strange departures from this simplicity have developed among Christian believers since those early days! Would it not be wise for all those who are seeking the “old paths” (Jer. 6:16) to return to those simple ways and customs? We believe that rich spiritual blessings await those who are courageous enough to do this.*

Dawn Bible Students Association

The School of Christ

***“I will instruct thee
and teach thee in the
way which thou shalt
go: I will guide thee
with mine eye.”
—Psalm 32:8***

THE MAJORITY OF THE people in the United States have the opportunity to attend academic schools. They start out with elementary school, then high school, and, for some, on to college. Students in the United States today have tremendous opportunities for education. They have unlimited resources available. These

schools prepare them for the duties of life here on earth.

Christians can be enrolled in the ‘school of Christ.’ Those that enroll are in school every day. They will not graduate until they complete their course here on earth. They also have tremendous opportunities and resources available.

Among the opportunities available to them are conventions, congregational meetings, individual study and prayer. The textbook used is the Bible. They also have available the writings of other Bible students, studies in the scriptures, Bible concordances and dictionaries, and many books, monthly magazines, booklets, etc. The school of Christ prepares these for the duties and service useful not only at present, but also particularly for service in God’s kingdom. Enrollment in this school teaches us important lessons that will be profitable in life.

In this school we must be diligent students searching for the Truth with an open mind and a sincere heart. If we do not learn properly in the school of Christ, then we will fall backward, or fail. Each must make his own “calling and election sure.” (II Peter 1:10) The Apostle Paul tells us, “Continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.”—Col. 1:23

Those who are faithful grow in grace and knowledge. Through the understanding given by the Holy Spirit, they are able to appreciate the deep things, given freely by God. If they love and obey the Lord and

desire to grow in his favor, if his written Word becomes their daily meditation, then they will grow in knowledge.

THE SCHOOL'S FACULTY

In this school, we are the students, and our Lord Jesus is the teacher by appointment of the Heavenly Father, the great Master Teacher. Jesus declared this fact, saying his teachings were things he had learned from the Father. He said, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.”—John 7:16-18

What is doctrine? It is a teaching. Our Lord’s discourses were along the lines of Divine revelation, or about God’s law. He publicly declared that his teachings were of things he learned from the Father. He said, “The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” (John 14:24) He also said, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.”—John 17:6-8,14,18

There are other members of the faculty which Jesus appointed as special teachers under him. First there were the apostles. Later, others in the Church were instructed to be teachers and under-shepherds of the Lord’s flock, instructing them. As the Apostle Paul reminded the elders of Ephesus, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own [Son’s] blood.”—Acts 20:28, *Revised Standard Version*

This charge not only applied to the persons living at that time, but even until our time. Those who have opportunities to teach, also have a

responsibility to their brethren. They must recognize their accountability to the Lord and to the brethren.

None of these teachers were to teach doctrines of their own, which would only be the wisdom of this world. The people of God, as Jesus said in John 6:45 (quotation from Isaiah 54:13), “shall be all taught of God.” The people of God were all to be taught of Jehovah. None could be teachers except they presented to the students the words, the plan, and the character of God. These are the standards of truth and excellence. The Truth that they teach must be the expression of the Father’s grand and eternal law. Neither Jesus nor the apostles attempted, or claimed, originality. This is so unlike many who teach in the schools of the world today.

Educators know that if a school is to be a success it must have an educated, disciplined, competent faculty to take charge of the various departments of learning. If no fit faculty can be found, the learning cannot begin, nor its blessings be received.

As the children of God, we have been taken into our Heavenly Father’s confidence and have been shown his plan for the blessing of his entire family in heaven and on the earth. We have been privileged to become coworkers with him in carrying out his plan. This plan stretches into eternity, and is for the eternal blessing of all. Its foundations are broad and deep, and every step is accomplished with unerring wisdom.

To become members of this faculty, we must teach along the same lines as Jesus taught—the line of Divine revelation. We heed the Word of God, not human speculations and philosophies. As students and as teachers, we are daily tested in matters of our faith, our obedience, and our love. This love must be for God and his only begotten Son, Jesus, as well as for our brethren and the whole world of mankind. “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” (Heb. 6:10) The spirit manifested under these tests is most important.

THE SCHOOL'S BEHAVIOR CODE

Father Adam failed in the test of obedience, as also did the nation of Israel. Many have failed in their tests. We must not fail in our tests of obedience, faith, and love. Our school has a behavior code. It requires

obedience and discipline for the well-being of God's people. Each of us must make our own calling and election sure. We must complete the test of endurance as we progress in the narrow, but wonderful, way.

The school of Christ which started at Pentecost is not to remain open forever, but only until the end of the Gospel Age. Then the 'headmaster' will close the door for the graduation of the church. The church class will receive their diploma. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

God knows exactly what we need to qualify for receiving our diploma. We have received his Holy Spirit. He has called us out of darkness into this marvelous light. Each day we receive the opportunity to serve Him, his Son, and his children. All of the lessons in God's Word are written for those who are enrolled in the school of Christ.

We are tested as to our willingness to suffer with our Lord, practicing to live in harmony with his Word and his will. Those who suffer as Christians should rejoice in full assurance of faith because the Spirit of God rests on them.

We are admonished by the Apostle Paul, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; ... And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."—Heb. 10:22-25

The Heavenly Father foresaw these difficult times. He knew how much we need each other's encouragement and help. The nearer we come to the great Millennial Day, the more precious are our opportunities for fellowship with those of like precious faith. We need this influence in our lives to offset the increasing influence of the world and its affairs. We assemble together for instruction, Christian development, mutual edification, encouragement, strengthening, and mutual advancement in the school of Christ.

THE SCHOOL'S STUDENT BODY

The school of Christ is open to those invited by the Father, and following Jesus, the great teacher. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”—John 6:44,45

This school is a very select one, and the tuition fee is high. It is only for those who have counted the cost, and are willing to pay. It is for those who have given up their will to do God's will, and who love the Lord more than self, popularity, worldly prosperity, or honor of men. Hence, only those who become New Creatures, possessing a new mind, heart, and will, are now in the school of Christ. Paul said, “Christ suffered for you and left you a personal example, so that you might follow in his footsteps.” In this school, our teacher is the role model for all the pupils.—I Pet. 2:21, *Phillips Translation*

Jesus suffered even unto death, and we are to do the same. He learned what obedience meant by the things which he suffered. *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott* translates I Peter 2:21, “leaving you a copy.” He was perfect in his example, and our endeavor is to follow this perfect example. To follow in the Lord's steps of humiliation and sacrifice is no light undertaking, but it is the only means by which we can become partakers of the Divine nature with him. If we follow in the exact footsteps of Jesus we will arrive at the same destination. In so doing, we “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.”—Col. 1:24

We are in this school to be perfected, or to become a copy—a likeness—of Jesus. We are to learn of him and thus be prepared for joint-heirship in his kingdom. We are to learn at his feet the lessons necessary for our future service, and we are especially taught to have full faith in God. God desires that we grow in knowledge and grace, and is teaching us through his Word, and by various experiences we encounter. Each step of growth in knowledge brings a corresponding step of necessary duty and obedience, which will be followed by further growth in knowledge. It is a continuing education that will not end until we pass beyond the veil of death.

The Scriptures confirm our schooling along these lines, “You must keep on believing the things you have been taught. You know they are true for you know that you can trust those of us who have taught you. You know how, when you were a small child, you were taught the holy Scriptures; and it is these that make you wise to accept God’s salvation by trusting in Christ Jesus.” (II Tim. 3:14,15, *Living Bible*) “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”—Col. 3:16

THE SCHOOL’S TEXTBOOK

The Bible was written as a textbook for those in the school of Christ. Daily we should search the Word of God so that we may understand the Divine message and receive the Spirit of Truth, searching for real meanings in these lessons. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) We are to study to know what God would approve. We are to study his revelations, doctrines, courses of conduct, how to shield ourselves from error and our own shortcomings.

The knowledge of the will of God comes to us through this study of the Bible. This is not a casual or thoughtless reading, but a search of the Scriptures. In this manner we receive our education. It is through wholly studying the Truth and being led into all Truth by the Spirit of Truth. The study of God’s Word should lead us to become familiar with the fruits of the Spirit outlined in Galatians 5:22,23, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

The fruits of the Spirit are necessary developments of the New Creature. They do not come miraculously as gifts, but are developed over time, based upon the personality and the environment of each of the Spirit-begotten ones. As a result of continuous education in the school of Christ they become part of us, and are necessary to prepare us for the ‘hour of temptation.’ Finally, for entrance into the kingdom, we must graduate from this school of Christ.

GRADUATION

This progression of knowledge is described by the Apostle Peter in chapter one of II Peter, as the Christian ‘ladder.’ Peter exhorts the

brethren to patience, perseverance, virtue, faith, and concludes by saying, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:10,11

Our curriculum consists of the three R’s—Ransom, Resurrection, and Restitution. These are sound teachings—sound doctrines. In the great plan of God for human salvation, the ransom constitutes the very central feature, and from it radiates all the doctrines which end in the fullness, completeness, of that Divine plan. From whatever viewpoint we look at this subject, it is both beautiful and consistent. “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—I Cor. 15:21,22

This scripture verifies not only that there is a ransom, but that there will also be a resurrection when all will be made alive. The Scriptures also clearly teach that in Christ’s thousand-year kingdom there will be a restitution of all that was lost in Adam. This will include all those willing and obedient by the guidance of their Redeemer and his glorified church. “He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

This is the time of the millennial kingdom, the restitution age. It is the thousand-year reign of Christ; the period of time for the renewing of mankind and the earth; when our Redeemer shall take the dominion of the world out of the hand of the current “prince of this world,” Satan.—John 16:11; Eph. 2:2

Those in the school of Christ, who heed the instructions and teachings of God and Jesus, as quoted in our theme text, will graduate with high honors. They will be ready, and well prepared, to undertake the task of helping the world of mankind learn about God and his commandments. “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:6

Dawn Bible Students Association

A Good Soldier

UNDER THE SHADOW of the Roman power, the Apostle Paul writes, “Take your share of suffering, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him.” (II Tim. 2:3,4, *Revised Standard Version*) The apostle was fully aware, of course, that the Roman soldier concerned only in the military affairs of that great empire was absolutely engrossed in his service. He had no thought or matter which had priority over that soldierly profession of which he was so proud. For him it meant the entire suppression of every self-interest, for the advancement of the supreme cause he contracted to serve faithfully, and for which cause, if need be, he must die. Absolute, loyal obedience to his emperor, or king, was imperative.

“OF CHRIST JESUS”

Concerning the true Christian, he is indeed ‘a good soldier of Christ Jesus,’ the Captain (or chief leader) of our salvation. We are to render loyal obedience under his captaincy in the very service to which he devoted his life and all his energies, even unto death. We are to follow the Divine plan of his campaign, on behalf of the whole world of mankind.

The good soldier of Jesus Christ is to excel in his faithfulness and true allegiance to his Lord, ever ready to obey and willing to undergo discipline. But, is it not true that some may claim to be Christians, and yet positively refuse to give true allegiance to Jesus Christ? We, as good soldiers of Jesus, instructed by God’s Holy Word, must be loyal to him. We must be so obedient that we willingly, gladly, and courageously endure hardness under his leadership rather than let our love, loyalty, and zealous obedience diminish in the slightest degree.

Throughout history we find that many have joined an earthly king’s army, yet have never fought in a battle. They have never experienced warfare. With the soldiers of Christ it is necessary for each one to “fight the good fight of faith” (I Tim. 6:12), to endure afflictions and hardness as his soldiers, and prove faithful unto death.

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

Our Captain's plan of campaign is, of course, his Father's plan, because he lived, and ever lives, to do the will of his Father. What then is God's will in this connection? It is his good pleasure "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth."—Eph. 1:10

Jesus was actually appointed by God to be king over the earth, and the Scriptures show this office to be that of a priestly king, to undertake the blessing of all mankind. The Revelator speaks of him as "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Rev. 19:16) Paul says, "he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet."—I Cor. 15:25

We are reminded that the Heavenly Father sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. Mankind cannot solve the problem of the world's salvation. The world in general fails to realize that 'salvation' is to make, and keep, safe and sound from all harm. This costs infinitely more than they are able to pay or provide. The salvation of a sinful, dying world, the lifting up out of sin, darkness, and death, into loyalty, obedience, light, and life is a superhuman work, and when done, will be the miracle of eternity.

Jesus, who had a prehuman existence as the mighty *Logos*, a glorious spirit being next to his Father, made himself of no reputation (in harmony with God's will); was made flesh; and as a perfect man died for the sin of the world. He who was rich, for our sakes "became poor," that we "through his poverty might be rich."—II Cor. 8:9

This sacrifice of our Lord's perfect humanity was as a substitute for the forfeited life of father Adam, who sinned and brought condemnation and death to himself, and which continues upon all his descendants. As the Apostle Paul explains, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:22) Jesus "gave himself a ransom,"—a corresponding price for Adam on behalf of all mankind—"to be testified in due time."—I Tim. 2:6

Because of our Lord's faithfulness under supreme tests, even unto death upon a cross, he was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God, and was highly exalted, a glorious spirit being of the Divine, immortal nature. All authority has been given to him in heaven and on the earth. Satan is to be destroyed. There will also be the complete

destruction of all sin, all evil, and the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.—I Cor. 15:26

Before taking this power and exercising it by the overthrow of Satan, sin, and death, Jesus was to deal during the Gospel Age with God's servants. This is the selection and development of a church, variously described in the Scriptures as members of his body, his bride, and a royal priesthood under the great royal High Priest and King.

The Revelator pictures Jesus as highly exalted and standing on Mount Sion. In this "mount Sion" picture there are others with him—"an hundred forty and four thousand." "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." (Rev. 14:1-4) They are the true church, partakers of the Divine nature, members of his mystical body, good soldiers of his who have faithfully endured hardness and have victoriously finished their course this side of the veil.

OUR KING'S REGULATIONS

Concerning the ordinary, earthly military army of today there are, for the guidance and management of soldiers, carefully prepared instructions, which have been known to some as the 'King's Regulations.' The Holy Scriptures are our heavenly king's regulations, and the whole testimony of God's Word is to be our guide. These Divine regulations reveal to us that the 'good soldier of Jesus Christ' has been begotten anew as a spiritually-minded new creature. He has renounced his own carnal will to embrace the Divine will. It is for the doing of this will that he lives, and it is his life to study and obey it. "He no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."—I Pet. 4:2

FAITHFULNESS REQUIRED

Jesus said, "He who has my commandments, and observes them, that is he who loves me; and he who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (John 14:21, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) We indeed have a wonderful Captain, and how simply are his instructions stated for us! For example: Have you any enemies? Love them! Are there any who curse you? Bless them! Do you know of any who hate you? Do good to them! And what

about those who despitefully use you and persecute you? Pray for them!—Matt. 5:44

Jesus, “the light of the world” (John 8:12), has said concerning his true followers, “You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before men.” (Matt. 5:14,16, *WED*) Concerning truth, the world is still a dark place; but not so dark that no man can work. We are to “do all things without murmurings and disputings,” that we “may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation [generation, *WED*], among whom ye [are to] shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life.”—Phil. 2:14-16

These instructions to us are beautifully clear—‘Shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life.’ The Lord has given us this precious Word of Truth, not man, and we should see to it that on every suitable occasion, by our words and deeds, we give light before men.

AMBASSADORS

To use another figure of speech, as good soldiers we are to be faithful ‘ambassadors’ of Jesus Christ in a most wonderful ministry of reconciliation. “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, *WED*

We are ambassadors of Christ, and our ambassadorship is to continue throughout our earthly pilgrimage. Then, 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 may rest from our labors, yet our works will follow with us.—Rev. 14:13

Whoever will faithfully exercise his ambassadorship, and not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, will speedily know something of the sufferings of Christ and can say truly, “The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. —Rom. 15:3; Matt. 5:10-12; 10:22; Ps. 69:9

The Apostle Paul exhorts, “Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist [be a proclaimer of the glad tidings], make

full proof of thy ministry [fully accomplish thy service].” (II Tim. 4:5) In other words, demonstrate what you have professed, and what you know to be Truth. Be not ashamed that you are a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and are proclaiming the true Gospel. Concerning the abuse, ridicule, and persecution which comes to us for doing this, rejoice and be quite happy about it. “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye.”—I Pet. 4:14

ENDURE AFFLICTIONS

We are to endure, or bear up under, hardness, afflictions, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (I Pet. 4:16) The world, the flesh, and the Adversary continually oppose us.

In this conflict we must not overcome evil with evil, but with good. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds. Casting down, or demolishing imaginations, or reasonings, and every height rearing itself up against the knowledge of God. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is to be used against these imaginations and human reasonings which are contrary to the knowledge of God. Details of our armor are described in Ephesians 6:13-18, and the good soldiers of Jesus Christ are well practiced in the use of the whole armor which God supplies. They also watch and pray.

Each of these faithful good soldiers cheerfully endures hardness in the narrow way, and with joy can testify: In the world I shall have tribulation. I am to drink the cup that my Captain drank of, and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with. I have to immerse my will completely as Jesus did, into the will of God. To me it is graciously given, on behalf of my Captain, not only to believe into him, but also to suffer for his sake, and to suffer with him. And if I endure patiently, I shall also reign with him.

The Apostle Paul certainly did endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. To this end he shunned no dangers, shrank from no labor, reproach, or privation. He bravely, cheerfully, and joyfully endured, suffering the loss of all things (temporal), that he might be approved by him into whose service he had been enlisted. When Paul wrote his second epistle to Timothy, he was a lonely prisoner in Rome awaiting a

criminal's end. Yet he does not complain of his hardship, nor express his regret concerning the position or condition in which he found himself because of his loyalty to the Lord.

In this epistle Timothy and all the Lord's true people are urged on to faithfulness—bear affliction, endure hardness—do not run away from it. “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” (II Tim. 2:1) Fan the flame of zeal and courage. Be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, ever ready to obey, ever willing to undergo discipline.

We can hear the apostle saying to Timothy and to us, “Do you think of my chains and of my hardship in this cold prison? They are nothing—not worth a word or a thought. But you, be brave. Be not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Hold high the banner of Truth. We may be weak, and in the eyes of the world, defeated. Nevertheless, God's promises are sure. His purposes never fail. We are able to be strong in the Lord, and faithful unto death.”

Dawn Bible Students Association