

The Heavens Rolled Together As a Scroll

*“All the host of
heaven shall be
dissolved, and the
heavens shall be rolled
together as a scroll.”*

—Isaiah 34:4

*“The heaven departed
as a scroll when it is
rolled together.”*

—Revelation 6:14

DURING THE LAST ONE hundred years, many Bible students have thought of the illustration of a scroll as a sign. This illustration is found in the words of our theme text, Isaiah 34:4, and cited by the Apostle John in Revelation 6:14. This sign would indicate that the long-awaited kingdom of Christ was near, or as Jesus said, “nigh, even at the doors.” (Mark 13:29) The interpretation given to the scroll rolling together was that it involved Christian churches becoming unified. One end of the scroll represented Catholicism, and the other represented

Protestantism, with diverse views and teachings. By rolling together they would be unified.

WHY NOT UNITY?

The unity of all Christianity is an exciting and marvelous idea that all wish to see. In accordance with God’s exhortation, we read, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1) Such a desire on the part of Christianity is a good thing. Therefore, every attempt made by Christian groups to remove barriers that keep them apart is looked upon favorably by God, as long as truth principle is not violated. Many sincere efforts are being made in this direction, but none seem to be working. Lifetimes have been devoted to achieving this objective.

But is God interested in unity strictly for the sake of unity? The answer is ‘No!’ There can be unity for doing greater evil, in contrast to having unity for doing good. There can be unity in teaching error, in contrast to

unity for teaching truth. The unity which pleases God must be associated with truth and with God's principles. It is outlined by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4, where he says, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:3-6) Later in this same chapter he tells of the gifts God gave the church in the form of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God."—vss. 11-13

DOCTRINAL BELIEFS

The reasons for the many denominations in Christianity is the wide range of interpretation of the Scriptures, and beliefs. This becomes evident as we examine reports in the news media on Christian unity efforts. Talks for achieving unity were undertaken more than thirty years ago by the Church of England and the Vatican. Pope John Paul has declared Christian unity as one of his goals, and he visited with the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1982. In December 1996 the Archbishop of Canterbury visited the Pope at the Vatican and the *New York Times* reported on this visit as follows:

"As they prayed together this evening in a small chapel on one of Rome's hills, Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, head of the world's Anglican community, tried hard to cast a harmonious glow over one of the most contentious dialogues in the Christian world.

"Yet at the end of the Anglican leader's first official visit to the Vatican, there were new signs that the dialogue, under way for more than three decades, has stalled over the difficult, and so far unreconcilable issue of the ordination of women as priests."

In order to iron out the details, a commission was set up called the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), and in February, 1999, the news media reported as follows on their progress:

"Cardinal Edward Cassidy, who heads the Vatican's Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, likens the ecumenical dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics to climbing a mountain.

“In the early stages, he says, you are scaling the foothills, which is easy. But as time goes on you reach the final peaks, the steepest and most difficult part of the climb.

“At the final peak is where the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission stands today as it prepares to issue the conclusions of its talks on the key question of who is in charge: the pope or the bishops.”

MORE ATTEMPTS AT UNITY

During this period, in August 1997, the media reported on another ecumenical movement, this one between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) and Roman Catholics and also with the Episcopalians. The news media reported on Lutheran Convention proceedings in Philadelphia as follows:

“The nation’s largest Lutheran Church lifted Reformation-era condemnations against the Roman Catholic Church, and decided to try again to establish closer ties with the Episcopal Church.

“Delegates to the biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted 958 to 25 to approve a statement declaring that both Catholics and Lutherans agree all persons depend on the grace of God, and not human merit, for their salvation.

“Meanwhile, a day after leaving the Episcopal Church at the ecumenical altar, representatives of the 5.2 million-member ELCA also voted 995 to 15 to develop a new plan to share ministry with the Episcopal Church.

“Continuing to address the breaches from the great 16th-century divide in Christianity, the church overwhelmingly endorsed a Lutheran-Catholic declaration on justification by faith alone, the issue at the heart of the Reformation.”

While committees are set up to work out agreements to all concerned, an editorial on Ecumenism appeared in the *New York Times* shortly after this announcement saying in part:

“This week, the 72nd General Convention of the Episcopal Church meets in Philadelphia to vote on a Concordat, or cooperative agreement, with the Evangelical Lutheran Church that would bring the two into “full communion,” a compact that is short of a merger, but not by much. Lutherans will take action on the pact at their Churchwide Assembly on

August 17. Together these votes constitute a turning point for American Christianity and the future of the ecumenical movement.

“Ecumenism is the movement to reconcile divided Christian denominations. Though the aspiration for Christian unity can be traced from New Testament times, it has never been so potent as in the 20th century. The major Christian bodies have grown closer doctrinally, and the worship services of mainline denominations are now almost identical. But concrete changes in church structures have been rare.”

The writer later made the statement: “If these two churches cannot achieve a cooperative agreement, can any?”

Early in 1999, the media reported on yet another unity movement, one that has been ongoing for thirty-seven years. Under the heading “Protestants Renew Unity Effort,” the *Star-Ledger* of Newark reported:

“For four days, ecumenical officials from nine mainline Protestant denominations meeting here (St. Louis, MO) were agonized over the issues that separate them while looking forward to the day when Christianity will show a more united face to the world. Then, improbably, they found a way to keep moving ahead with the Consultation on Church Union, a 37-year-old dialogue that nearly everyone agrees is mired in yet another crisis.”

The article continued telling of the divisive views that hinder unity. Nevertheless, representatives from all nine denominations will continue to meet in an effort to sort out their differences.

THE SCROLL AS AN ILLUSTRATION

In noting these failures of trying to achieve unity in Christianity during the last fifty years, we might ask, “Is the illustration of the two ends of a scroll coming together a picture of unity, or is it something else?” The answer to that question requires examining the illustration. A scroll in ancient times was the book of today; it was opened by unrolling the scroll to the proper place for reading from it, and rolled together to close the book. The invention of movable type by Gutenberg, leading to modern printing, did not occur until A.D.1436.

During our Lord’s ministry we have a good example of the use of scrolls. Jesus went to a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth on a Sabbath, and they brought the book of Isaiah to him as he stood up to

read. The account in Luke 4:16-22 reads, “When he had opened the book.” (vs. 17) We should not think that a modern day book with pages was opened, and the place where Isaiah 61:1 is recorded was found. Rather, Jesus unrolled a scroll to the proper place and read from it. When he finished reading, Luke says, “He closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister.” (vs. 20) The two ends of the scroll were rolled together.

Rolling the two ends of the scroll together, then, is equivalent to closing the book. The word scroll, in Isaiah 34:4, is translated from the Hebrew word *kaleb*. It occurs only once as ‘scroll,’ and almost 150 times as ‘book.’ It literally means ‘a roll.’ Likewise, that one time the word ‘scroll’ appears in the New Testament (Rev. 6:14) it is a translation of the Greek word *biblion*, which means ‘roll, book, scroll, or writing.’ It is translated 29 times as ‘book.’

The rolling together of the ‘heavens’ as a scroll, is similar to the closing of a book. The word ‘heavens’ is used in many Biblical prophecies to illustrate spiritual ‘ruling powers.’ Some of these rulers are good, some are bad. Satan is one that is bad, and he is called “the prince of this world” (John 12:31); and “the prince of the power of the air.” (Eph. 2:2) The heavens are like a scroll open for people to read. On the scroll is written all the religious beliefs of Christianity and other religions as well. These would include Islam, Buddhism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Judaism and others. Some of these precepts include good moral principles; others misrepresent God’s character. The leaders of spiritual thought seek by these means to capture the minds of mankind.

CLOSING THE BOOK

What then might be the meaning of a scroll being rolled up? No one knows for certain what forces will be used to accomplish this, except to note that the old heavens must be removed to make room for the new heavens. When atheistic Communism had control of a large part of the world, and control of the minds of many men, atheism flourished; and it appeared the philosophy of atheism would be responsible for ‘closing the book’ on religion. Nowadays it is not a serious factor in world politics.

We note that Isaiah 34 is a prophecy concerning “the day of the Lord’s vengeance.” (vs. 8) The chapter speaks of much “slaughter” taking place because of Jehovah’s “indignation.” (vs. 2) Likewise, the Bible tells of this same day of the Lord’s wrath, and also of the wrath of

the Lamb. All the people “hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains (kingdoms),” when this wrath came.—Rev. 6:15-17

The time for ‘closing’ the book of heaven then is at the time of this wrath. Looking ahead to events yet to come, is it possible that the anarchistic forces unleashed as the old order comes to an end will bring about the rolling together of the scroll? Jesus called this event ‘a sign’ when he said, “The powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven.” (Matt. 24:29,30) There has been much speculation about this ‘sign of the Son of man in heaven!’ Some expect a huge cross to appear in the sky. Some talk of other spectacular manifestations in heaven. Since the ‘heavens’ are symbolic, so also must be this ‘sign.’

It appears that this sign spoken of by Jesus is the same sign dealing with the closing of the symbolic heavens. In Isaiah 34 this event is described as “all the host of heaven shall be dissolved.” In Revelation 6:14 we read, “the heaven departed.” The Apostle Peter uses symbolic fire to describe what happens to these same heavens when he speaks of the day of the Lord, and says, “The heavens ... reserved unto fire” (II Pet. 3:7); and “the heavens shall pass away.”—vs. 10

It seems clear that this sign of which Jesus spoke is the loss of religious power worldwide. This is why “all the tribes of the earth mourn” (Matt. 24:30) when religious support is removed, causing great fear on the part of the people who have lost their spiritual guidance.

Peter reminds us that we should look for this event, when he says: “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”—II Pet. 3:11,12

The ‘mourning’ of the people will be brief as they see a new scroll unrolled in the heavens, containing the commandments and instructions of God. Peter continues, saying, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (vs. 13) The closing and departing of the old book is followed by the opening and viewing of the new book, the new scroll, the new heavens. That will be a glorious day indeed!

Adventure in Faith

Key Verses: *“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.”*
—Genesis 12:1,2

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 11:27 – 12:9

ABRAM, OR ABRAHAM AS he was called after his name was changed, is known to students of the Bible as the “man of faith.” (Gal. 3:9, *New International Version*) There are many references in the New Testament to Abraham’s faith. For example, we read: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”—Heb. 11:8

In the Old Testament account (Gen. 11:31,32), it appears that the Lord was dealing with Terah, Abraham’s father, because it tells of Terah leading the entourage of Abram, Sarai, and Lot to the land of Canaan from Ur. They did not take the more difficult but direct desert route to Canaan, but rather, they took the easier way along the River Euphrates

which led away from Canaan, coming to the city of Haran where they all lived awhile until Terah died. The Lord had not instructed Terah to do this, but as our lesson says, ‘the Lord had said unto Abram.’—Gen. 12:1

Since Terah wanted to go with them, he joined the group, and as senior member, led the way. After Terah’s death, Abraham took a direct route from Haran to Canaan, and “passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh” (vs. 6), in the mountains of Ephraim. There the Lord appeared to him again, and Abraham built an altar to the Lord. At this appearance the Lord confirmed the promise he had made to Abraham when he asked him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and his father’s house, saying, “Unto thy seed will I give this land.” (Gen. 12:7)

Abraham demonstrated his faith by building another altar to the Lord. Later, when he left this area to travel southward in the mountains of Ephraim, Abraham built a third altar east of Bethel, where he settled for awhile.

The Apostle Paul says: “By faith Abraham ... obeyed.” (Heb. 11:8) The combination of faith and obedience are characteristic of the Christian footstep followers of Jesus. Of those who are called to follow Jesus, only a few are willing to give up everything they have in their father’s (Adam’s) house, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus by consecration of their all to God, thus becoming the “chosen.” (Matt. 22:14) As Abraham was a man of faith, so also are those ‘called and chosen’ in this Gospel Age. The Apostle Paul says of these, “Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”—Gal. 3:9, *NIV*

The Christian’s experience today is like that of Abraham’s as ‘a man of faith.’ Those invited to leave their present life to go to an unknown land are called to be joint-heirs with Christ. They have a “heavenly calling.” (Heb. 3:1) They have faith in God to obey the call, trusting him completely. In this Christian journey, they bring along their flesh, “the old man” (Eph. 4:22), which must die before they enter the promised land. (Gal. 5:24) Their obedience and faith shall gain them an entrance into the heavenly realms of God.

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Surprising Promises

***Key Verse: “God said,
Sarah thy wife shall
bear thee a son
indeed; and thou shalt
call his name Isaac:
and I will establish my
covenant with him for
an everlasting
covenant, and with his
seed after him.”
—Genesis 17:19***

***Selected Scripture:
Genesis 15:1-18;
17:17-21; 18:15; 21:1-
7***

GOD CALLED ABRAHAM to leave Ur and go to Canaan after he was married to Sarah, though they had no children. Yet the promise of God given to Abraham was that his seed would become a great nation, inherit the land of Canaan, and through this seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:2,3,7; 13:14-17) As time went on, and both Abraham and Sarah grew older, God appeared to Abraham again in a vision to give him words of encouragement: “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”—Gen. 15:1

This occurred about ten years after Abraham left Haran, and he expressed his concern about the promises made to him. These involved a seed, but since he was childless he proposed making Eliezer of Damascus his heir to solve the problem. Eliezer was Abraham’s steward, born in his house. God, however, said, “This shall not be thine heir.” (Gen. 15:1-6) Rather, the heir would be a true descendant of Abraham.

Despite Abraham’s continued childless condition, he still had faith in God. His wife, Sarah, suggested that they give God assistance in this matter. She offered Hagar, her handmaid, to Abraham as a wife, and Abraham accepted. Eventually Ishmael was born, who was, indeed, a true flesh and blood heir of Abraham.—Gen. 16:1-5,15,16

By supplying the seed in this manner, problems arose with Hagar, and later with her son, Ishmael. Abraham had thought that the main problem had been solved with the birth of Ishmael. He had accepted him as the promised seed.

When God appeared to Abraham, thirteen years later, he confirmed all the promises made to him, and said that Sarah would be blessed, and would give him a son. This seemed so unbelievable to Abraham, who would be 100 years old when the child arrived, and his wife would be 90, that Abraham laughed. He tried to present Ishmael to God, saying, “O that Ishmael might live before thee!”—Gen. 17:15-19

However impossible this promise may have appeared to Abraham and Sarah, God fulfilled his promise and Sarah bore Abraham a son named Isaac. Isaac was a true ‘miracle child.’ This situation was God’s way of preparing the world of mankind for the advent of a more important ‘miracle child.’ God as the Father implanted in the virgin, Mary, the life of the *Logos* (Jesus in his prehuman existence), who was born as the baby Jesus. All the Abrahamic promises in their entirety are to be fulfilled through the antitypical Isaac, our Lord Jesus.

Although Abraham and Isaac will be used in Christ’s kingdom as men of faith and administrators of righteousness, the true fulfillment of every facet of these beautiful promises is through Christ. The Apostle Paul reminds us that we “are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,” and also, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:26-29) The Abrahamic promise includes the origin of a great nation through Abraham, and also all the families of the world are to be blessed through him.

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Giving All

***Key Verse: “He said,
Lay not thine hand
upon the lad, neither
do thou any thing unto
him: for now I know
that thou fearest God,
seeing thou hast not
withheld thy son, thine
only son from me.”***

—Genesis 22:12

***Selected Scripture:
Genesis 22:1-19***

THE TEST OF ABRAHAM by God was most unusual and severe, not understood by many in the Christian world. After twenty-five agonizing years of waiting for the promised seed, the miracle child, Isaac, was born. Now God was asking Abraham (about twenty years later) to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering on Mt. Moriah. Although he must have been confused by such a request since Isaac was the seed of promise, again Abraham obeyed. This request by God was prefiguring another great offering to come in the future.

When the party organized by Abraham reached the mountain for this sacrifice, Abraham and Isaac climbed the rest of the way alone while the others waited below. An interesting conversation took place as father and son trudged up the mountain. Isaac asked, “Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” and Abraham replied, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” (Gen. 22:7,8) It is interesting that Isaac knew that an appropriate offering would be a lamb. Ever since the days of Abel, and all throughout Israel’s experiences and rituals, lambs were used to prefigure an important offering. This offering was identified by John the Baptist when he saw Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

Abraham was prompted to go ahead with this strange request to slay his son as a burnt offering. The Apostle Paul said Abraham expected God “to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead.” (Heb. 11:17-19) Instead, God stayed Abraham’s hand before he used the knife to kill Isaac, and “a ram caught in a thicket” (Gen. 22:13) was substituted for Isaac as a burnt

offering. We note that the sacrifice of Isaac was accomplished in God's eyes by seeing Abraham's willingness to slay Isaac, and Isaac's willingness to be slain. As a strapping twenty-year-old, able to carry the wood up the mountain (Gen. 22:6-9), if he had objected to being slain Isaac could have easily overcome his aged, 120-year-old father. When Abraham told Isaac, 'God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering,' he again spoke prophetically. He was pointing to the time when God would give "his only begotten Son" in sacrifice to remove not only our sins, but "the sins of the whole world." (John 3:16; I John 2:2) A lamb was recognized as an appropriate burnt offering. Now it was also clearly indicated that an important offering in the future was to be that of a beloved son.

Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) So it was with God, the Father, who 'so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son' that all might live. God did not die as part of a 'trinity'; he is immortal and cannot die. (I Tim. 6:16) But by giving his Son he gave all that was important to him.

His Son gave up his all that we might live. And we are asked to give our lives in the service of God. May we do so more willingly through understanding this beautiful picture: Abraham represents God the Father; and Isaac, represents Jesus, his Son.

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Deceit and Blessing

***Key Verses: “He said,
Thy brother came with
subtilty, and hath taken
away thy blessing. And
he said, Is not he
rightly named Jacob?
for he hath supplanted
me these two times: he
took away my
birthright; and, behold,
now he hath taken
away my blessing. And
he said, Hast thou not
reserved a blessing for
me?”***

—Genesis 27:35, 36

***Selected Scripture:
Genesis 25:19-34;
27:1-40***

ISAAC WAS FORTY YEARS old when Rebekah became his wife. She, like Sarah, Isaac’s mother, was barren. After twenty years had elapsed, Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife and she conceived, not knowing that she was carrying two sons within her. As she prayed to the Lord about the struggle of the children in her womb, the Lord answered: “Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.” (Gen. 25:23) Twins were born to Isaac and Rebekah; the older came forth “red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau” (hairy), later called “Edom” (red). The second twin came out “and his hand took hold on Esau’s heel,” as if to hold him back. He was named Jacob, which means ‘supplanter.’—vss. 25,26

Esau became Isaac’s favorite son because he was an outdoorsman and a hunter. The game he caught for meals pleased Isaac. On the other hand, Rebekah loved Jacob, who was more of a homebody. Both sons grew in the knowledge of their ancestors, such as Abraham, and in particular of the wonderful promises given to Abraham and now to their father, Isaac. Abraham died when the boys were fifteen years old.

According to the traditions of that time, the oldest son or heir of the family was to prepare a meal in honor of a patriarch; but he was also to

fast on that day. Possibly on some such special day, Jacob prepared a meal when Esau came from hunting and was famished. The birthright involved a double portion of the family's estate, and a blessing from God as a reward of faith, such as was found in Abraham and Isaac. So when Jacob suggested to Esau that he sell his birthright, Esau made light of it and said, "Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" (Gen. 25:32) Was he about to die: The answer is "No." The account clearly states that Esau "despised his birthright." (vs. 34) The Apostle Paul, in telling of this incident in Hebrews 12:16,17, calls Esau a "profane person."

There is no record in the Scriptures that Isaac learned of this transaction. We would, perhaps, expect Rebekah to know because of her close attachment to Jacob. However, there is indirect evidence that Isaac knew, but with time and old age, forgot. His love for Esau was so great that he wanted to bless him as the eldest son. Rebekah overheard the plan and sought to circumvent it by having Jacob bring to Isaac a meal that she prepared. She also dressed Jacob in Esau's clothes, and put hairy goatskins on his arms.

Isaac was bedridden and blind when Jacob arrived to get the eldest son's blessing, which now was rightfully his. Much has been written about this incident, saying that Rebekah and Jacob lied and were deceitful. The blame lay with Isaac. He never should have wanted to give Esau the eldest son's blessing. Jacob had rightfully supplanted Esau a second time.

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Joseph Honored and Imprisoned

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

VERSES 1-6 “Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.

“And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

“And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

“And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.

“And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.

“And he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand; and he knew not aught he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.”

‘The Lord was with Joseph’—this is the explanation of how it was possible for one who was brought into a country as a slave, ultimately to become its ruler, second only in authority to the powerful Pharaoh, who ruled as a dictator. Not for Joseph’s sake alone did the Lord bless him, but also, and principally, because of his family, the nucleus of the Hebrew nation—the natural seed of Abraham, the chosen people of God.

Arriving in Egypt, Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, ‘captain of the guard,’ or, as we would say today, the ‘Chief of Police.’ This officer of Pharaoh was evidently a wealthy man and had many servants, probably all of them slaves. Three times in this brief account it is emphasized that Potiphar was an Egyptian. Why should this be, since the whole scene is set in Egypt? Within recent years, discoveries in Egypt indicate that at the time of Potiphar, Egypt had come under the rulership of a new dynasty which apparently had ousted many of the former

Egyptian officers, hence emphasis is laid on the fact that here was one who had gained favor with the new rulers and was permitted to retain his position. Thus is the authenticity of the Bible further verified.

Joseph found favor in the sight of Potiphar, and the Lord blessed him and blessed the household of Potiphar because of him. Joseph's humility in giving all the credit for his success to the Lord was one of the chief reasons the Lord could use him so wonderfully in the outworking of his purposes. He undoubtedly also possessed ability as a manager and organizer—ability which was quickly recognized by Potiphar. But regardless of his talents, God could not have used him had he lacked the quality of humility.

Nor did the honor which came to Joseph 'go to his head' or cause him to forget the Lord. This sometimes occurs with those who are suddenly honored with weightier responsibilities in the Lord's service. While youth might be more subject to temptation along the lines of pride than those who are older, those long in the service of God have been known to stumble and fall when they found themselves occupying more prominent positions in the Lord's vineyard. All who serve the Lord can with profit observe the example of Joseph.

'Joseph was a goodly person, and well favored.' There is much meaning in the expression, 'goodly person.' It implies that Joseph was polite and kind, sympathetic, and just. We take it that he was the sort of person who got along well with everybody, that he did not stir up animosity among those with whom he associated, but created good feelings among all. He was also trustworthy. These qualities made him the sort of person Potiphar could use as a supervisor over his household, but Joseph gave the credit to the Lord. He was also 'well favored,' which suggests that he was good looking, perhaps even a handsome man.

VERSES 7-20 "And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. "But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; "There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

“And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

“And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.

“And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

“And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth,

“That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice:

“And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out.

“And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.

“And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou has brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me:

“And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.

“And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled.

“And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.”

His being ‘well favored’ led to a great trial for Joseph through the indiscretion and anger of Potiphar’s wife. But in this trial Joseph’s goodness and chastity were victorious. In this experience, no doubt, as in all his ways, Joseph looked to the Lord for guidance and strength, and the Lord did not fail him.

God permits evil, but always for a wise purpose. He permitted Joseph to be misrepresented by Potiphar’s wife, and as a result to be put into prison. Here again Joseph’s humility before the Lord is manifested. He did not complain nor charge the Lord with being unjust.

It is so easy to praise the Lord when everything is going pleasantly with us, yet we so often wonder why he permits this trial, or that calamity. We should learn to realize, as Joseph did, that all our ways are being directed by the Lord and that he sees the ultimate purpose he is

accomplishing in us. Therefore he knows what is best to permit in our day-by-day experiences, while we can see but one day at a time, hence are often unable to understand what possible benefit could be derived from the trials of today.

VERSES 21-23 “But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. “And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. “The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.”

Joseph was unjustly put into prison, but the Lord was with him. The Lord is with his people for their good, giving them strength to endure every hardship which his wisdom permits to come upon them, delivering them from trial when the needed lessons have been learned.

God does not deal with all of his people in the same way. He was with Jesus and blessed him during his trial and crucifixion, yet permitted him to die the cruel death of the cross. This was because the Divine purpose for Jesus was that he should be the Redeemer of the world. God could have prevented Joseph from being imprisoned. Indeed, he could have intervened and prevented him from being sold into Egypt, but he did not. God blessed Joseph in these experiences because he was working out a larger purpose through him.

The *Marginal Translation* of verse 21 states that God showed kindness to Joseph so he found favor in the sight of the prison keeper. Without this favor the life of a prisoner was not pleasant. We can surmise that when Joseph was made an overseer in the jail, his fellow prisoners were treated with much more consideration than before because of his understanding nature. Joseph’s inherent goodness would cause him to be gentle and understanding even with prisoners, especially when they were his companions in trouble.

The Power of God's Word

***“My thoughts are not
your thoughts,
neither are your ways
my ways, saith the
LORD. For as the
heavens are higher
than the earth, so are
my ways higher than
your ways, and my
thoughts than your
thoughts.”
—Isaiah 55:8, 9***

THE POWER OF WORDS is well known, and it is good to recognize the manner in which the Word of God accomplishes his purpose. It does so with great power, as we read: “The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—Heb. 4:12

The ancient people of God did not possess his complete Word as we enjoy it today, although the words of the Lord reached them in sufficient

measure to accomplish his purpose. It was “at sundry times and in divers manners” that God spoke to his prophets, and much of what he said to them, or caused them to record, was not especially for their benefit, but for ours upon whom the end of the age has come. (Heb. 1:1; I Cor. 10:11) Referring to the prophets, Peter wrote “that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.”—I Pet. 1:12

THE GOOD NEWS

Again Peter wrote, “The Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.” (I Pet. 1:25) The Word of God is the Gospel message. Paul explains that the Gospel was preached to Abraham. (Gal. 3:8) It was the good news that through the seed of Abraham all the families of the earth are to be blessed. There are many ramifications of this good news; in fact so many that in the

outworking of his plan God caused the prophets, the apostles, and our Lord Jesus to touch upon and emphasize its various facets.

It required hundreds of years for the entire Word of God to be provided for the Lord's people of the Gospel Age. In the Lord's providences, all of his important utterances to his ancient people have been preserved and recorded. To the extent that historical events of the world, and especially of the Lord's people, are crucial to help us understand God's purposes, these also have been recorded.

While we speak of the Book of Isaiah, Daniel, or Matthew, actually God directed the writing of these portions of his Word; so they all can be said to be his books. He did this by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the holy power of God which he exercises in the accomplishment of any and all of his purposes. It is beyond our finite minds to understand just how the power of God guided the writings of the Old Testament prophets. It is not necessary that we understand this. However, it is important to know and to believe that when we read the Bible we are reading the thoughts of God as he has caused his various servants to record them.

Since the Old Testament writers did not understand much of what they wrote, we could properly say that the Holy Spirit directed their writings in a mechanical manner. The Holy Spirit also operated to assure the accuracy of the historical portions of the Bible. However, those ancient servants of God did appreciate in part the messages they recorded for the benefit of those following in the footsteps of Jesus, spiritual Israel of the Gospel Age. David, for example, having been a shepherd, must have understood the lesson contained in those wonderful words, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."—Ps. 23:1

HEAVENS OPENED

Beginning with the coming of Jesus, the ministry of the Holy Spirit as it pertained to the Word of God was one of revelation, rather than merely a mechanical operation. This is indicated in the Heavenly Father's dealings with his beloved Son, Jesus. It was at the Jordan River, when Jesus was thirty years of age, that the Holy Spirit came upon him, and we are told that at that time "the heavens" were opened to him.—Matt. 3:16

This suggests a revealing to him of heavenly or spiritual things; the truths, that is, pertaining to the plans and purposes of his Heavenly

Father. It was at this point in his life that Jesus presented himself in consecration to his Father, fulfilling the prophecy concerning him recorded by the psalmist, which reads, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” (Ps. 40:7,8) Jesus, in this prophecy of dedication, said to his Father that he had come to do all that had been written of him in the volume of the book, that is, the Old Testament.

Having presented himself to the Heavenly Father, agreeing to do his will as foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures, the meaning of what had been written was then revealed to Jesus. This seems to be what is indicated by the ‘heavens’ being opened to him. This does not imply that instantly all the truths of the Old Testament were revealed to Jesus. It does mean that from then on, as he recalled the various things written by the prophets, he would understand them, and that they would serve to guide him as he laid down his life in sacrifice that the world might live.

TO HIS DISCIPLES

On every suitable occasion throughout the three and one-half years of his ministry, Jesus presented to his disciples the great truths that had been revealed to him. But much of what he said was quite beyond their ability to understand, because they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. They even refused to believe that he would be arrested and put to death, as he said he would be. This is particularly significant, for one of the important truths set forth in the Old Testament was that the Messiah would suffer and die for the sins of the people. It shows that the disciples understood these truths not much better than those who recorded them, until they received the Holy Spirit.

Jesus realized the difficulties his disciples had in understanding his teachings, and on the night before he was crucified he said to them, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”—John 16:12-14

Earlier, in another promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus explained that it would teach the disciples all things, and bring “all things to your

remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (John 14:26) While it was true that the disciples did not understand much of what Jesus said to them, yet, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, these truths were later remembered, and their meaning grasped. Thus Jesus prepared the minds of his disciples for the subsequent revelation to them of the plans and purposes of God.

PENTECOST

It was at Pentecost that Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled on behalf of his disciples. What a wonderful change that made in their ability to understand the Divine plan! We recall the zealous manner in which Peter opposed the idea of Jesus being put to death. To him this would be completely out of harmony with God’s will for the Master. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and how could a dead Messiah accomplish all the wonderful things which had been foretold in the Old Testament concerning God’s plan? But with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter saw things differently. In his Pentecostal sermon, asserting that Jesus had been raised from the dead, Peter quoted one of the prophecies relating to both the death and resurrection of the Lord. (Acts 2:24-28) This and other prophecies of Jesus’ death had always been in the Old Testament, but Peter had been blind to their meaning until he received the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Here the ministry of the power of God began with the followers of Jesus as it had with the Master, at Jordan.

For Jesus and his apostles, the Holy Spirit became not only a revealing power, but an inspirational one also. The teachings of Jesus and of the apostles are illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and therefore can be accepted as the absolute Word of God, the truth as it relates to his great plan of the ages. This is also true of the Old Testament writers, the difference being that they did not necessarily understand what they wrote.

THE INSPIRED BIBLE

This was the manner in which the inspired words of God were brought together for his people of the Gospel Age in a composite whole—the Bible. To us the writings of the Old Testament and the New Testament are of equal importance, for they all contribute toward the Lord’s purpose of instructing and encouraging his people—the people whom he is

preparing to be the spiritual rulers in the forthcoming Messianic kingdom. We can be certain that God's Word will not return unto him void. It will prosper in the purpose for which he sent it.—Isa. 55:11

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Soldiers of Jesus Christ

IN II TIMOTHY 2:3 Paul exhorts his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” The use of this illustration of a Christian being like ‘a good soldier of Jesus Christ’ suggests that there are some of the human family who have come over to the Lord’s side, and have been accepted into his army through justification, and the begetting of the Holy Spirit. The Christian soldier, having in this way passed from death to life, soon finds himself moving in a direction contrary to the majority of those around him. This results in a warfare of righteousness versus unrighteousness.

The result of being brought more and more fully into the light of the Gospel of Christ is a continual warfare of light against darkness, truth against error. This warfare is not only against false standards of truth and righteousness such as we see all around us, but the fight also is to be within ourselves, because we find that we have been indoctrinated in many of these imperfect standards, and it is against these that we are exhorted to fight a good warfare, against “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”—I John 2:16

The Christian’s warfare of light against darkness reminds him that “darkness” covers “the earth, and gross darkness the people.” (Isa. 60:2) A part of his Christian duty is to scatter light which will dispel some of this darkness, and assist those being drawn by the Father to come from darkness into the light of truth.

In the days of the Apostle Paul, a valiant soldier needed to be well armed, in addition to possessing other good qualities. A good soldier, in order to be successfully led to victory, needs a brave and capable leader, and this, God’s people are privileged to have in the great “captain of their salvation,” Christ Jesus.—Heb. 2:10

THE ARMOUR

This ‘armour’ of the Christian is brought to our attention by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:13-17. It is referred to as “the whole armour of God”; that is, the armor supplied by God that his battle might be fought

successfully. In Romans 13:12 it is referred to as “the armour of light”—in other words, the armor of truth.

The truth of the Word of God is a protection to the Lord’s people at practically every point at which the fiery darts of the wicked one could come against them. When these fiery darts came against Jesus, ‘our Captain,’ he defended himself by means of the armor of light. ‘It is written’ was his wondrous defense. And similarly, a ‘thus saith the Lord’ is the sure protection of the Lord’s people from errors of all kinds. In view of this, faith in God’s Holy Word is a very necessary part of our armor.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

When any of the fiery darts of the evil one come against our shield of faith—the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints”—they are instantly stopped from doing us any harm. (Jude 3) The “shield of the faith” (Eph. 6:16, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) is a knowledge of the Divine plan of the ages—a wonderful protection. It is the shield of a personal faith and confidence in God. His wisdom, justice, love, and power protects us from being overcome by the Adversary’s attacks.

THE HELMET

The Apostle Paul also speaks of the helmet of salvation as a part of the Christian’s armor. This suggests a protection for the head; in other words, an understanding of those features of the plan of salvation which serve as a protection for our confidence in the one hope of our calling. For example, an understanding of the philosophy of the ransom and other foundation truths enables us to give “a reason of the hope” that is in us to everyone that asks.—I Pet. 3:15

The Lord, through the Prophet Isaiah, says: “Come now, and let us reason together.” (Isa. 1:18) The context of this verse leads our thoughts to the sublime truth of I Timothy 2:5,6: “The man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom [a corresponding price] for all, to be testified in due time.” Paul also said, in I Corinthians 15:21, “Since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Christ Jesus] came also the resurrection of the dead.”

The popular false teaching of evolution which claims that all things, including man, have been moving ever upward to higher and higher levels from the beginning of the world, is a complete denial of the

‘ransom.’ This sublime doctrine of the ransom has forever been under constant attack from the Adversary, from every possible angle.

In I Thessalonians 5:8, Paul speaks of the helmet as representing “the hope of salvation.” This further emphasizes the thought that in order to wear the helmet we need constantly to study the Word of God that we may become very familiar with its teachings. If the Adversary can weaken our confidence in the Divine plan, the great hope of the Christian may speedily be lost, or measurably obscured. But a clear knowledge of the truth and an ability to give a ready reason for our hope will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

THE BREASTPLATE

Another part of the Christian’s armor to which the Apostle Paul calls our attention is the breastplate. (Eph. 6:14) This is a protection for the front of the body, particularly the life-sustaining organs, such as the heart and lungs—vital organs upon which life depends. The great truth upon which our very existence as New Creatures rests is a faithful holding fast to those features of the Divine plan which enable us to understand how God, after having justly condemned man to death, can be “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”—Rom. 3:26; 8:1

This piece of armor is also spoken of as “the breastplate of faith and love.” (I Thess. 5:8) This suggests that our receiving justification—the forgiveness and covering of all unintentional weakness and imperfections, is granted not merely on account of our faith in the ransom sacrifice of Christ, but that this knowledge of God’s love in the gift of his only begotten Son leads us to a full consecration of heart and life to the Lord. Only upon this basis are we justified. As water quenches fiery darts of a literal kind, so the apostle tells us that with the shield of faith we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one.—Eph. 6:16, *RSV*

FOR THE FEET

The Roman soldier of Paul’s day used ‘greaves’ as a protection for the front of the legs and feet. Corresponding to this piece of armor, as a protection in this evil day from the many dangers, difficulties, and temptations in our pathway, we need that our feet be shod “with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.” (Eph. 6:15) Wherever our feet go,

the Gospel of peace must go with us, upon our lips or on the printed page, to use as opportunity arises. Earnest endeavor to use every opportunity for giving a witness to the true Gospel is a wonderful protection from the many temptations which might otherwise beset us.

THE SWORD

The Christian's one and only offensive weapon is his sword—"the sword of the Spirit." This, as well as the rest of the armor, is associated with "the Word of God" in its various phases. (Eph. 6:17) If used wisely and faithfully, the Word of God will overthrow every error of the Wicked One, either of faith or of conduct, which may be presented to us. Our Master and great Exemplar used the same sword—"It is written" (Matt. 4:4-10)—to overthrow the errors and strong delusions brought against him.

We are to be ever mindful, as already noted, to wage a good warfare within ourselves, using the Word of God in an aggressive warfare against "the lust of the flesh [desires for the things of the flesh for the gratification of the old nature, which, although not necessarily evil, will seriously hinder us from running the race set before us in the Gospel], and the lust of the eyes [for example, temptations to entertain ambitions along earthly lines such as a follower of the Master should lay aside], and the pride [vainglory, *ASV*] of life [desires for earthly advantages that would give one a slight feeling of advantage or superiority over others]."—I John 2:16

UNITY IN WARFARE

This kind of warfare is a united or collective one, and as the Scriptures teach, there is not only to be the personal warfare in which all the Lord's followers are called to be engaged, but there is a warfare participated in by the church as a whole against all the entrenched foes of truth and righteousness which go to make up "this present evil world" of which Satan is the prince. (Gal. 1:4; John 12:31) Paul says, "We wrestle not [merely] against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness [spiritual hosts of wickedness, *RSV*] in high [or heavenly] places."—Eph. 6:12, *Marginal Translation*

This suggests a great warfare against every phase of the dominion of darkness of which the Adversary is in control, and this conflict began at our Lord's First Advent, when he, as the Captain of our salvation, began to lead his little army into battle.

The Revelator pictures our great Captain and Leader engaging in this conflict by means of the sword "out of his mouth." (Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15) This is a conflict, as Paul stated, "against principalities" and "powers" (Eph. 6:12) in the earth, built up by Satan to strengthen his position as "the god of this world."—II Cor. 4:4

As the Lord's people collectively, and as individuals, we are to "do all things without murmurings and disputings," in order, the apostle continues, "that ye may be blameless and sincere, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the Word of life." (Phil. 2:14-16, *Marginal Translation*) The same writer exhorts: "Stand fast in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel."—Phil. 1:27

The good soldiers of Jesus Christ, whether isolated under circumstances over which they have no control, or whether cooperating with others, are attentive to the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 24:14: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." In this connection much important work is still being accomplished by cooperating with others of "like precious faith,"—valuable services, indeed, which could not possibly be done by isolated brethren.—II Pet. 1:1

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“Who Shall Separate Us?”

*“Who shall
separate us from
the love of Christ?”*

—Romans 8:35

THE LOVE OF CHRIST, by which every true Christian is encircled, is described as being “the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:39) Failing to realize this, many have erroneously supposed that Christ is more loving than

God, that God is austere and unloving, ready to visit wrath upon his creatures at the slightest provocation. But this is not the correct view, for the Scriptures reveal that it was God’s love which provided the way of salvation through Christ, and that all Christ has done and will continue to do for us and for the human race as a whole is by the Heavenly Father’s design—therefore an expression of his love.—John 3:16

THE LOVE OF GOD

This does not mean that Jesus is not also loving, nor that he does not personally have our interests at heart. Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (John 14:9) All the glorious characteristics of the Creator are revealed through Christ, including his love, so we find in our study of the Word that Divine love is referred to interchangeably as being the love of God and the love of Christ. Or, for example, when the writers desire to be more specific they define it as the love of God “which is in Christ Jesus” our Lord.—I Tim. 1:14

It would not be proper to raise the question of being separated from the love of Christ unless we had first been brought within the circle of that love. Thus we are confronted with the necessity of determining whether or not we have actually been enfolded by his love. True, both God and Christ love all mankind. God loved us while we were yet sinners, the Scriptures declare.—Rom. 5:8

But when Paul raises the question, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?’ he implies that Divine love has brought us into a close relationship with God, as children in his family, and that this love will serve as a powerful tie to hold us in this position of special favor—so

powerful that nothing shall be able to separate us if we continue to trust and obey.

Have we, then, come into this position of special favor with the Lord in which he claims us for his own, and will protect us from all the forces of evil which may strive to sever our relationship with him? This question gives rise to many anxious thoughts on the part of those who do not clearly understand the steps of progress by which one is begotten into the Divine family. In a matter of this kind, it is quite unsatisfactory to depend upon feelings.

At the beginning of a Christian experience, one might feel very happy and close to the Lord because of this new relationship. Later, when trials come, and the winds of opposition blow, the same one may wonder what has happened, and inquire, “Where is the blessedness I knew when first I found the Lord?” On the other hand, to be properly informed on this question gives one a firm foundation of faith, and a conviction which remains unshaken regardless of how high may be the waves of opposition which surge boisterously around him.

CONSTRAINED BY LOVE

As already noted, Divine love has been manifested toward us while we were yet sinners. We learned about it and began to respond. Were we brought especially within the circle of that love? Paul wrote: “The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.” (II Cor. 5:14) The love of Christ could not constrain us until we learned about that love, and in order to receive this knowledge it was necessary that a messenger be sent to tell us about it. “How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?”—Rom. 10:14,15

The ‘witnesses of Jesus’ were sent into all the world to proclaim the Gospel of Divine love, as manifested through the redemptive work of Christ, and all his faithful disciples have been willing to sacrifice everything, even life itself, in obedience to this commission. (Acts 1:8) In this way the Gospel has been carried from one country to another, by word of mouth, by the printed page, and in these closing years of the age, by radio, television, and the internet.

This does not mean that there has been anything haphazard as to who have been reached and quickened by the power of the Gospel. God’s

providences have overshadowed this work of proclaiming the Gospel insofar as the individual responses to the message are concerned. Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) This means that if we have heard the Gospel of Divine love, and by it have been drawn to Christ, it has been by Divine appointment. This is not the work of man.

When Paul writes that we ‘judge’—that is, we ‘reason’—that if one died for all, then were all dead, he is saying, If *all* were dead, this means that we, too, were ‘dead’ and under condemnation to death because of sin. If we are actually being drawn to God by the power of the Gospel of Christ, this is one of the first important facts we will realize. This is a touchstone by which we can determine definitely whether or not we have been led of the Lord, or whether our desire to serve him results merely from feelings of emotion. Has the Lord, through the truth of the Gospel, revealed to us our true status as sinners, members of a condemned and dying race?

OUR REASONABLE SERVICE

In the recognition of our undone condition and that Christ died in order that we might be reconciled to God, there results a further constraining power of Divine love. First we recognize ourselves as sinners needing Divine mercy through Christ; we repent of our sins, and then, in the name of Christ, we present ourselves in full devotion to God, to do and be whatever he indicates as his will for us. In Romans 12:1, Paul describes this as presenting our bodies a “living sacrifice,” and he assures us that in so doing our offering will be “holy, acceptable” to God. Paul declares also that such a dedication of ourselves is but our “reasonable service.”

This is indeed the only reasonable thing one can do when he comes to an appreciation of the manner in which Divine love has been manifested toward him. Paul expresses this thought by the words, “because we thus judge” (II Cor. 5:14); that is, our reasoned conclusion is that in view of the circumstances we owe our all to the Lord, so we consecrate ourselves to do his will. To make this full consecration, and then faithfully devote our lives to him day by day until our sacrifice is wholly consumed and we have been faithful even unto death, is our part of a wonderful arrangement whereby we become sons of God to live and reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4) We can have assurance that nothing

can separate us from the love of Christ—nothing, that is, except unfaithfulness to the terms of our consecration.

Our foes, the world, our flesh, and the Devil, are determined that we should not succeed in fulfilling our consecration vows. We know, however, that both the Father and Jesus are determined to help us. The Apostle Peter, quoting Psalm 34:15,16, says, “The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.” (I Pet. 3:12) Likewise, the Apostle Paul tells us, quoting God, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5), which emboldens us to say, as in Psalm 118:6, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” (Heb. 13:6) We have been brought into the inner circle of his love, and if we do our part, nothing will be able to separate us from that love.

The reason that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ is because, greater is He who is for us than all who are against us. The world, the flesh, and the Devil will do all they can to discourage us, and thus cause us to give up the fight. But in every time of attack, let us claim the promises of God and renew our strength to continue on in the narrow way. We know that those whom the Lord has honored with his truth, and drawn to Christ in the spirit of full consecration to do his will, are precious to him. He will hold them in his own right hand, secure against all the assaults of the Adversary. Knowing this, we can say with the Apostle: “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Rom. 8:38,39

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“Guard that Intrusted to Thee”

*“Guard that intrusted
to thee, turning away
from the profane,
empty sounds, and
contradictions of that
falsely-named
knowledge, which
some, having
professed, erred
concerning the faith.”*

*—I Timothy 6:20,
21, Wilson’s Emphatic
Diaglott*

THE VERY EARNEST exhortations and careful instructions given in Paul’s two epistles to Timothy were applicable and profitable not only to this devoted disciple whom Paul affectionately spoke of as his ‘son,’ but with equal force to the entire Gospel Age church. As with Timothy, so the church today is charged to keep the blessed Gospel truth uncontaminated—“spotless.” (I Tim. 6:14, *WED*) We are to hold it in its glorious simplicity and purity, unmixed with human theories and false doctrines.

It is important to guard against encroaching errors; first, by maintaining a clear conscience ourselves, and also by a faithful personal study of the Holy

Scriptures. To study the Word of God with a clear conscience is to study it with the single and only purpose of knowing and doing God’s will. Paul tells us that some in his day did not do this. They had theories and plans of their own, and endeavored to wrest the Scriptures in a manner to give their errors seeming support. They made shipwreck of their own faith, and also turned others out of the way.

GUARD AGAINST ERROR

The apostle forecast that as the end of the age approached, these false teachers would multiply. He also said that they would gain great influence among the brethren, and would succeed in overthrowing the faith of some; that is, those who should not meekly and devoutly walk with God, trusting completely in the instructions of his Holy Word.

God has pledged his power to guide and support those who, in the spirit of full consecration, sincerely and humbly study to show themselves

approved unto him. (II Tim. 2:15) To these he has given the charge to help others to “stand fast” in the faith. (I Cor. 16:13) Together we are to earnestly “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) We are to do this by calling attention boldly and fearlessly to each pitfall, and lovingly placing the light of truth over it, that it may be clearly seen by those who are walking in the narrow way.

We are to preach the glorious and true Gospel. We are to contend against the errors which friends and enemies endeavor to engraft upon it. This important charge applies to the church now, even as it did at the beginning of the age. It is a charge which we are under obligation to keep “until the appearing [Greek, *epiphaneia*—full manifestation to the church] of our Lord Jesus Christ,” just prior to his *apokalupsis*, or revelation to the world.—I Tim. 6:14

Not only are we all obligated to help guard the truth against insidious and distorting errors, but we are also to help guard one another against the seducing temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Besides, and as stated by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Philippians, we are to “shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the Word of life.”—Phil. 2:15,16

USE PRAYER

Furthermore, it is essential that we pray for and use Divine strength in order to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ as we boldly and nobly “fight the good fight of faith.” (I Tim. 6:12) If we do this, we will be able to say with Paul, “I have maintained the good contest. I have finished the race, I have guarded the faith.”—II Tim. 4:7, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

Our charge is a very important one, and we must ‘hold the fort.’ We need to keep on the “whole armour,” which God supplies (Eph. 6:10-17), for only thus will we be able to stand. The honor of his name is to be vindicated. His glorious plan is to be published and broadcast worldwide—“preached in all the world for a witness,” a testimony, “unto all nations.”—Matt. 24:14

WITNESSING WORK

The witnessing work of the church throughout the long, dark centuries of the Gospel Age has not been in vain. The object of her mission was

not to convert the world before the Lord's return, but to develop her own character and prove her worthiness of the high exaltation, which she is invited to share with her Lord. This has been, and will continue to be, the greatest good to result from our efforts to make known the glad tidings to others. It is an essential blessing which the followers of the Master cannot obtain in any other way.

May we all prove faithful custodians of the truth, keeping it in its purity, and proclaiming it as widely as possible.

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