

“Brethren, Give Diligence”

“Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.”
—II Peter 1:10

ANOTHER YEAR IS DRAWING to a close, and despite the troubles, uncertainties and evil conditions in the earth, one thing remains constant.

It is the loving watch care of our Heavenly Father over his consecrated people. With joy we can testify that God has guided and directed us through another year. He has blessed us in countless ways, but he also has allowed trials for our development and testing. Our varied experiences during the past year should reinforce to our minds the words of Paul when he said, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” —Rom. 8:28

Our opening text reminds us of the necessity to “give diligence.” There is perhaps no better time to prompt ourselves to action in this vitally important responsibility than at the close of one year and the beginning of another. Indeed, the diligence required to make our “calling and election sure” will be just

as great in 2018 as it has been in 2017. One reason for this is the fact that the three great enemies of the footstep followers of Christ—the world, the flesh, and our adversary the devil—are still very active. They still seek to stumble and thwart us from our goal of being “faithful unto death.”—Rev. 2:10

THE WORLD

It is not the people of the world who constitute our enemy. Rather, the world is our enemy because its general spirit is one that will not help us make our calling and election sure. It is a spirit that will hinder us in our endeavors to overcome the things that are of little worth. This point is very plainly and strongly set forth in these words of the Apostle John: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”—I John 2:15-17

A proper appraisal of true values for the Lord’s followers emphasizes in our minds the reality of the Scripture that says, “The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (II Cor. 4:18) The importance of understanding this comparison of values is critical to the true Christian. The things which are “seen” are the things of the world. They are merely temporal, and do not last. Those things “not seen” are the things of God. They are eternal, and abide forever, just as God is “from everlasting to everlasting.”—Ps. 90:2

The general spirit of the world, particularly as we come in contact with it today, is far from righteousness. Toward matters pertaining to God it often displays the spirit of indifference. If that attitude should enter into our hearts and minds, and there reside, it will surely find its expression in a spirit of lethargy, complacency, of taking things for granted, and lukewarmness. (Rev. 3:14-17) Such a spirit would not only show indifference to God, but also manifest itself in a lack of diligence in battling against our enemies—the world, the flesh and the adversary.

In his parable of the sower, Jesus made this statement: “He . . . that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” (Matt. 13:22) Here the Master tells us of two very definite enemies which we meet in the world. The “care of this world” is a frontal attack from the enemy. Indeed, we each have the cares of our present life, but they are not inherently our enemy. The question is, how are we handling them, and with what spirit? Then there is the “deceitfulness of riches.” This can be a more subtle attack, because such deceitfulness can infect our character whether we possess the riches or not.

The cares of this life can be found in our homes, our activities, our neighborhoods, our jobs, and in many other aspects of daily living. These cares are to be properly met, whether they are to wives, husbands, children, neighbors, employers, or others to whom we have responsibilities. We are “worse than an infidel,” Paul says, if we do not meet these obligations.—I Tim. 5:8

In fulfilling these requirements, however, we must ensure that we are not depriving God of something that he has a legitimate right to expect. This is because we also owe him much, even life itself. Are we rendering “unto Caesar” more than is his due? Are we rendering “unto God” less than he should receive? (Matt. 22:21) These are sobering questions we must ask ourselves, as we fight against the tendency to let the cares of this life choke our heavenly aspirations.

In I Corinthians 2:12, Paul makes this statement: “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” If success in the affairs of this life, or success in the deceitfulness of riches to any extent seduces us from our consecration and devotion to God, then we are not properly valuing those spiritual things he has “freely given to us.” The world may consider us failures if we put greater value on the things God has given us than on what the world has to offer. If so, let us rejoice!

If we want to know how rich we really are, we should not base our answer on how much we might leave behind when we die. Rather, the much greater thought should concern how much we will take with us when we die, and of what sort these riches will be. That is of utmost importance. Jesus, in his sermon on the mount, counseled us along this line, saying we should be “rich toward God,” and lay up “treasure in the heavens that faileth not.”—Luke 12:21,33

Paul admonished, “Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a

crooked and perverse nation [Greek: generation], among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life.” (Phil. 2:15,16) If we are fighting the battle against the world’s spirit to the extent that we have become lights, holding forth God’s Word, then we are progressing as the Lord desires. Let us, therefore, always keep in view “the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”
—I John 5:4

THE FLESH

The flesh is a most formidable enemy because it is with us every moment of our life. Its ambitions, passions, human desires, and dreams are often at the center of our weaknesses and shortcomings. The flesh is subject to temptation from without and prone to weaknesses from within. Our battle, however, is not merely to control the urges of fleshly gratification. It is a battle of the human nature against the spiritual nature. The proper, wholesome aims and ambitions—to which human beings have a legitimate right—conflict with the aims, desires, hopes and prospects of the child of God. It is the battle of self-will against the doing of God’s will.

As with our fight against the world, the proper appraisal of values is key in battling against the flesh. The things of the flesh are temporal, while the things of God are eternal. Here are very familiar words to consecrated believers: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what

is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”
—Rom. 12:1,2

How can we stimulate the work of being transformed so that we may ascertain, and perform to the best of our ability, the good, acceptable and perfect will of God? The next verse helps us to answer this. It reads, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly.” (vs. 3) In verse 16 of the same chapter, the apostle adds, “Be not wise in your own conceits.” Then, in Galatians 6:7,8, Paul says, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

The foregoing passages remind us that the work of transformation involves a great battle against pride and catering to the flesh. Some may naturally love possessions. Consequently, they especially have to fight the flesh’s inordinate desire to gain possessions. Others may love themselves too highly, and must fight a great inward battle. To one extent or another, we all have to do battle against ourselves. We have to fight pride. We have to fight natural selfishness. We have to fight self-conceit.

Most people in the world do not have this fight. They want to be masters of their own destiny. That is based upon pride. As children of God, however, in humility we depend upon his providences in our life because we have faith that he knows what is best for us in every experience. (Isa. 26:3,4) We recall these words: “We . . . worship God in the Spirit,

and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Phil. 3:3) To have this mindset is to control the natural fleshly tendencies of pride and selfishness. Such humility and acquiescence to the Lord’s will is essential if we would win the battle against that enemy which we call our flesh.—Jer. 17:5,7

THE DEVIL, OUR GREAT ADVERSARY

The devil is a very sly foe and, in fact, often uses our fallen flesh and the spirit of the world to attack us. He has even convinced some people that he does not exist, or that, if he does, he is not really harmful. How deceitful such suggestions are! On the contrary, our great Adversary, Satan, is busy all the time. Peter wrote, “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith.” (I Pet. 5:8,9) This text of Scripture tells us that the way in which we must resist the devil, as he walks about seeking those he might devour, is to be “stedfast in the faith.” Just as the victory which overcomes the world is faith, so faith is likewise a very effective and necessary weapon against Satan and his ploys.

God’s Word, the faith “once delivered unto the saints,” is being assailed today more than ever before. (Jude 1:3) Truths that have separated us as a people of God, and have given us an understanding of the depths of his love, are constantly under attack. The Scriptures, which reveal the justice, wisdom, love, and power of God through his plan of the ages, are more and more cast aside as falsehoods. We are not ignorant, however, of Satan’s devices. Let us do as Paul said, “Put on the whole armour of God, that

ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (II Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11) Let us remain steadfast in the faith, and stand for the integrity and honor of the Gospel of the kingdom!

Our Master speaks of those who hear God’s Word, but “then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts.” (Luke 8:12) This has happened throughout the Gospel Age, both with individuals and even whole organizations. This can also happen to us if we do not remain steadfast in the faith. “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”—Heb. 2:1

We must fight the world, its spirit, the cares of this life, and the deceitfulness of earthly riches. We must also fight the flesh with its pride, selfishness, and its desire to honor self, more than honoring the Lord. Then, also, we must fight the devil with his attempts to confuse the issues of truth. We must stand by the Word of God, because if we do not, the adversary will seek to take it out of our hearts. In all these things, we must “fight the good fight of faith,” and “lay hold on eternal life,” to which we have been called.—I Tim. 6:12

NOT ALONE

It might seem that the battle against our enemies is too great, and victory unlikely. Indeed, if we were alone in this fight we would surely be defeated. However, we are not alone. We have many comrades in this warfare, those upon whom we can depend for help, support, and encouragement in every time of need—namely, the Lord, the Truth, and our brethren.

“With us is the LORD our God to help.” “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” (II Chron. 32:8; Heb. 13:6; Josh. 1:9) Is there not great consolation in these words? We realize that it is in God’s strength that we will win the conflict. Because the battle rages, decisions have to be made, and sometimes it seems that we fight alone, but it is not really so. We have never fought alone! Even though we may walk through the “valley of the shadow of death,” we need not fear any evil, for God is with us.—Ps. 23:4

“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,” the psalmist continues. God even prepares a table of spiritual food for us, as David testifies, “in the presence of mine enemies.” (vs. 5) Indeed, in this battle we are never alone, and it is because of our knowledge of this that it is a “good fight of faith.” It gives us courage to know that our warfare is under the banner of the Captain of our salvation, and to do his will and keep his commandments is the desire of our hearts.—Heb. 2:10

In the natural world, there is dew on one flower and not on another simply because one opens its petals to receive the dew and the refreshment that comes with it, while another keeps its petals closed, permitting the dew to fall away. For the child of God, if we open our hearts to the promises in his Word of help and strength for every time of need, and to his many providences, then we will be refreshed spiritually. We will go forth strong in the realization of the Lord’s goodness toward us; of his

understanding, of the assurances of his mercy and of his grace. We will also be reminded of the strength that these promises have given to all the people of God throughout past ages. With such knowledge, we are enabled to face the battle without shrinking.

TRUTH—BY WHICH WE ARE SANCTIFIED

We also are blessed with the Truth. Petitioning God, Jesus said, “Thy word is truth,” and prayed that his followers “might be sanctified through the truth.” (John 17:17,19) The Truth is a mighty sanctifying power in our life. It helps us not to be conformed to this world because it has given us an understanding of true values. It assists us in transforming ourselves into the likeness of God’s dear Son. The word of truth tells us what the will of God is, and what is good and well pleasing in his sight.

If Satan cannot take the Truth from us by injecting erroneous doctrines into our minds, he will try to do so by making us complacent. He will tempt us to forget that we are students of the Bible, and will try to plant seeds of indifference in our mind. The Heavenly Father has given us fundamental doctrines. These are the truths which have been handed down to us from the patriarchs of old, the prophets, our Lord Jesus, the apostles, and the many faithful servants God has used to show forth his loving plans and purposes. (Eph. 4:11,12) Let us not be complacent, nor look for something “new,” but continue to study and consider these wonderful features of God’s holy Word. By so doing, we will grow in grace and in knowledge, and will be prepared for the battles which lay before us.

BRETHREN OF “LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH”

We have our brethren to help us in this fight. The apostle chose his words well when he wrote, “to them that have obtained like precious faith.” (II Pet. 1:1) What a blessing it is to have fellowship with those of like precious faith. It is a source of encouragement to us that we have others who can share our fellowship and our mutual love for the Lord and for his truth. The brethren are often a source of stimulation when our zeal and faith may have lagged.

We know that there are often trials and testings amongst the brethren. This is permitted by God to the intent that we each examine ourselves—our words, actions, thoughts, and heart motives—to determine whether they are pure and holy. Let us who are in Christ bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ, which is the law of selfless love. (Gal. 6:2; John 13:34,35) Let us stand shoulder to shoulder encouraging one another as, together, we fight the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The Prophet Malachi wrote: “Then they that feared [reverenced] the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”—Mal. 3:16,17

This text of Scripture has special application to the consecrated followers of Jesus. We speak often one with another because we need the help and

encouragement it provides. We do not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together” because we need the fellowship of one another. (Heb. 10:25) Even when there are only two or three, we can rejoice because we know, as Jesus promised, that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”—Matt. 18:20

IMPORTANCE OF LITTLE THINGS

Our battle will be won or lost, not by the big things we may do, but by the little things. It is the little sacrifices, small expressions of sympathy, little acts of unselfishness, modest victories over small temptations, impromptu opportunities to witness, quiet works of service, and many other seemingly inconsequential words and actions by which the victory is achieved. If we are faithful in the little aspects of our fight, we will be properly prepared to win the larger battles. “He that is faithful in that which is least,” Jesus said, “is faithful also in much.”—Luke 16:10

As we review our experiences and progress during the year coming to a close, and look forward to the prospects of 2018—both the joys and the trials—let us dedicate ourselves once again to the sentiments of our opening text: “Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” With the support and help of the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren, may we continue to fight the “good fight of faith” and “lay hold on eternal life.” By such determination, and with God’s abounding grace, we shall gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. ■