

Set Apart— Daily—for the Divine Cause

“This is the will of God, even your sanctification.”
—*I Thessalonians 4:3*

EACH YEAR MILLIONS IN the professed Christian world commemorate the season called Lent. It is calculated to begin each year in February or early March and ends on Easter Sunday. This year it will include the period from February 14 to April 1. One of the characteristics of this season is the attempt on the part of many to live in an especially holy fashion, more than they might possibly do during the rest of the year. We commend all such endeavors to live in a holy manner, even if these efforts only encompass a certain annual season. True holiness, however, requires daily, full-time effort, and even then it can only be fully achieved with the assistance and guidance of our Heavenly Father and his son, Christ Jesus.

Consider this sampling of Scriptures which speak concerning the “daily” aspect of our walk with God.

From the Old Testament, we read: “So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.” “Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates.” (Ps. 61:8; Prov. 8:34) In the New Testament, we find this all-important instruction from Jesus, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Paul, speaking of his life of sacrifice and service for the Lord’s cause, said, “I die daily.” He also encouraged the followers of Christ, saying, “Exhort one another daily, ... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”—Luke 9:23; I Cor. 15:31; Heb. 3:13

SANCTIFICATION

In our opening text, the word “sanctification” is used. Sanctification is another word for holiness, and also denotes purity and consecration. In addition, it includes the thought of being set apart for God’s service. Hence, sanctification signifies holiness as a vocation in life. In our text, Paul says it is the “will of God” that we engage in this lifelong work of sanctification. The thought is well expressed by the inscription on the plate of gold worn on the forehead of the high priests of Israel, which read: “HOLINESS TO THE LORD.” The “Holy” and “Most Holy” of the Tabernacle were so called because they were dedicated, or set apart for the exclusive service of God. Moses, at the burning bush, was told that the place where he stood was “holy ground,” because for the time being God occupied it and was using it.—Exod. 28:36; 26:33; 3:5

The condition of sanctification, while truly being that of holiness, purity and consecration, is such

because it is a state of separation, or of being set apart from all else except the things of God. Referring again to our theme text, to be sanctified involves the process of being set apart for the purpose and work of doing God's will. God's will for the Christian is that he suffer and die with Christ, that he may live and reign with him. (Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:11,12) The purpose of the reign of Christ is the blessing of mankind with life and happiness. (Rev. 21:3-5) Viewed thus, sanctification means a dedication of our lives to full participation in God's great plan of reconciliation and rehabilitation. In addition, it necessitates a determination on our part to live daily in harmony with the precepts set forth in the Bible.

THE DIVINE PURPOSE

The origin of all human suffering became manifest when selfish ambition germinated in the mind of Lucifer. When the opportunity presented itself, he injected the poison of sin into the minds of our first parents, and they chose to disobey the divine law. (Gen. 3:1-6) Self-interest was the motive which led them into transgression. It is this same quality that has ruled to some degree in the hearts of all their offspring during the ages which have followed. Today, the degraded condition of humanity in general is a stark witness to the accumulated results of selfishness and self-interest.

However, the far-reaching and horrible results of unbridled selfishness were foreseen by God. As soon as its poison began to enter into the hearts and lives of his human creatures, he set in motion a program destined ultimately to defeat sin, undo its results, and provide recompense for the suffering

it has caused. That program is spoken of by Paul as “a plan of the ages.” (Eph. 3:11, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) That is to say, it is a plan embracing many ages for its accomplishment. Nevertheless, when complete, it shall find God’s will again enthroned supreme in the hearts of all mankind, and accomplish a full “restitution” for all those who hear “that prophet” and obey from the heart when they are given the opportunity to do so.—Acts 3:20-25

This divine program is God’s way of assuring the future and everlasting happiness of mankind. Throughout the various ages during which it has been moving forward to completion, he has invited members of the fallen human race to take part and cooperate with him in its execution. All the ancient heroes of faith had a part in that plan, and in the future, are to have a still greater part. We need only to read the apostle’s account of the faithfulness and suffering of some of these ancient worthies to realize what it cost them to be wholly devoted to God’s cause.—Heb. 11:1-40

They refused to accept any compromise arrangement with the enemies of God and of righteousness because they had faith that God’s long-range plan would be victorious. By appeasing their flesh through falling into line with the ways of those with whom they were surrounded and more or less associated, those ancient faithful ones could have had a measure of temporary peace and earthly prosperity. However, like Moses, who preferred the “reproach of Christ” rather than enjoying the “pleasures of sin for a season,” their hearts centered on the great divine objective. (Heb. 11:24-27) Hence their devotion to God’s will and cause was unshaken.

THE MESSIANIC CAUSE

God's great program centers in Christ, as the Redeemer and Messiah. All the promises of the Old Testament pertaining to it are predicated on God's purpose to send a Messiah who would free the world from sin and death. It is to this Messiah that God alludes in his early reference to the "seed" of the woman that would bruise the serpent's head. (Gen. 3:15) God's promise to Abraham of a "seed" through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed is likewise a reference to the coming and work of the Messiah. (Gal. 3:8,16,27-29) The Messiah is referred to in the prophecies in many ways, and by different names. He is "Shiloh," "a Prophet," "The Prince of Peace," a "king," "Michael," and "the messenger of the covenant," to give but a few examples.—Gen. 49:10; Deut. 18:15; Isa. 9:6; Ps. 2:6; Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:1

The Messianic program promised in the Old Testament, the cause of which inspired the ancient worthies, is still operative. After the coming of the Messiah nearly twenty centuries ago, when he willingly gave his life as a ransom for all, that program moved forward into a new phase, in which representatives of the human race are invited to participate. Previous to this time those whom God specially dealt with were given the privilege of co-laboring with him in his plan to a limited degree. However, since the First Advent of the Messiah, those whom God is calling are given the added opportunity of becoming a part of the Messiah. We here note that "Christ" is the Greek word equivalent to Messiah. Thus, Paul speaks of the called ones of the present Gospel Age as being part of the Christ—the Messiah—that is, his body members.—I Cor. 12:12-14,27

This is a very high honor indeed, but accompanied by very exacting conditions of discipleship. Jesus set forth conditions upon which any during this age may enlist in the divine cause for man's ultimate blessing and recovery. Paraphrasing, he stated that these must drink of his cup, be baptized with his baptism, take up their cross and follow him, and lose their life for his sake and that of the Gospel. (Matt. 20:22,23; Luke 9:23; Mark 8:35) Paul also used various expressions in describing this same blessed privilege of becoming part of the Christ class: "planted together in the likeness of his death"; suffering "with him"; presenting ourselves a "living sacrifice"; being "killed all the day long."—Rom. 6:5; 8:17,36; 12:1

Apostle Peter said, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you." (I Pet. 4:12) In his vision on the Isle of Patmos, the Apostle John saw those "that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God." (Rev. 20:4) However, the angel further said these "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Indeed, this is the great objective of it all—to live and to reign with the Messiah, Christ Jesus, for the purpose of consummating God's plan to bless all nations and peoples. Our dying with Christ would truly be in vain, but for that. If this future work on behalf of mankind is not to be consummated, even to the raising of the dead, surely, as Paul said, "We are of all men most miserable."—I Cor. 15:19

DEVOTION TO GOD'S PLAN

The divine, Messianic cause has much to do with the Christian's daily work of sanctification and

holiness. It means daily devotion to God's plan for the redemption and salvation of the human race. Down through the ages, many among mankind have demonstrated their willingness to suffer and to die in order that future generations might have a better world in which to live. How much more should God's cause be a matter of particular satisfaction and delight to the truth-enlightened Christian. To each one there is set before him a blessed opportunity to lay down his life for a purpose that is planned and sponsored by the Almighty, and which will bring not temporary, but everlasting peace and happiness to all mankind.

The divine cause cannot fail. We may fail, through unfaithfulness, to have a victorious part in God's plan, but the plan itself will not fail. The unlimited power and resources of the Creator will insure its success. There has been no defeat nor delay of that program down to this moment, and there will be none in the future. The enemies of God and of righteousness probably thought they had scored a victory when they were about to crucify Jesus, but the Master explained that if he wished to ask for it, the Father would give him "twelve legions of angels" for his protection. (Matt. 26:53) Jesus did not do this, for it was a part of the plan that he should die as man's Redeemer.

The angels that Jesus could have called upon, and many more divine resources of heaven and earth continue to work for God and his plan. Even the wrath of men and of devils can be used by God towards his plan's accomplishment. (Ps. 76:10) All of the divine resources are working for each individual who is devoting himself to that plan. No human being

has ever occupied such a strategic position of security, nor been given such clear assurance of success, as is given to the sanctified Christian.—Rom. 8:28; I Cor. 10:13; II Cor. 4:17

FULL DEDICATION

The true Christian's lot is a favored one, but to maintain that position we must be wholeheartedly dedicated to the Lord and his cause. The Scriptures declare that the Lord will "shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." (II Chron. 16:9) This is one of the unique features of God's plan. Half-hearted devotion to it is unacceptable to our Heavenly Father. God does not force us to serve him, but once we have volunteered, if there is any drawing back, the Lord will "have no pleasure" in us.—Heb. 10:38,39

Full dedication to God's cause calls for an energetic effort on our part to gain a knowledge of the divine will. God calls us to be coworkers with him, and he gives us the necessary knowledge of his plan to enable us to cooperate intelligently. It has only been because various church systems are unable to harmonize their conflicting creeds, and thus unable to properly extend their limited knowledge to others, that the idea has developed that knowledge is unimportant in God's dealing with us. Hence, the unscriptural conclusion has been reached that it really does not make any difference what one believes, so long as he lives right.

From the divine standpoint, however, a true Christian cannot live right unless he knows how God wants him to live. Righteous living is more than merely adhering to a certain moral code, although

that is certainly one of its very important elements. The Christian lives for God totally and in every aspect of his daily activities. If that life is to be devoted fully and acceptably to God, it must be “according to knowledge.” (Rom. 10:2) That knowledge is centered in an understanding of God’s plan, and his own part in that plan. Attaining to a high moral standard alone is not sanctification, but merely one of the necessary prerequisites to the sanctified life.

BELIEF OF THE TRUTH

Paul says that we are “chosen ... to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” (II Thess. 2:13) Sanctification of the Spirit is accomplished through “belief of the truth.” The Word of truth is a product of the Holy Spirit, and is where our minds meet the mind of God, and we are instructed by him. That is why the Holy Spirit, God’s invisible power and influence, in its guiding role in our lives, is described by Jesus as the “Spirit of truth.”—John 14:17

The poet has aptly said: “But ’tis one thing, friend, to read the Bible through; but another thing to read to learn and do.” Hence the importance of a genuine belief of the truth. We are admonished to “study” that we may show ourselves “approved unto God,” but we cannot hope to secure this approval unless we accept and believe the Word of truth without reservation. (II Tim. 2:15) Thus, only through our understanding of God’s Word will the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit effectively operate in our lives to set us wholly apart for his service.

The Apostle Peter emphasizes this thought, saying of the footstep followers of Jesus that they are

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience.” (I Pet. 1:2) “Unto obedience”—that is one of the secrets of a truly sanctified life. The apostle reminds us of the sort or quality of obedience required when he explains that our selection to this high station is in conformity with the “foreknowledge of God the Father.” The Apostle Paul also tells us how God’s foreknowledge affects our sanctification. He says that it was a predetermined requirement that we should be “conformed to the image of his Son.”—Rom. 8:29

This means, then, that our election according to the “foreknowledge of God” is based upon our being like Christ. Our obedience is to be like his obedience, and though we cannot render it perfectly as he could, his example of obedience, and nothing less, is the standard set before us. The night before his death, Jesus prayed for the sanctification of his followers, and explained that this sanctification was to be patterned after his own. “I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.” (John 17:17-19) Jesus was sanctified by “the truth” because he obeyed “every word” that came from God. (Matt. 4:4) We cannot strive to do less and be fully sanctified.

JESUS’ EXAMPLE

In Jesus’ life and ministry we are furnished a perfect example of daily holiness and sanctification, founded on devotion to God and his plan. If we are ever in doubt as to the meaning of any instruction given to us as followers of the Master, we need only to ascertain what he did under similar circumstances,

and we have the answer as to the course we should take. Notable among the examples of his life is the manner in which he turned down the three temptations that were presented to him by Satan. One was an appeal to his flesh, to satisfy his hunger by illegitimate means. Another was that he make good his claim of being the Son of God by putting himself in a position that would call for a miracle to save his life. The third was an offer to give him all the kingdoms of this world in return for a transfer of his devotion from God to Satan.—Matt. 4:1-11

The principles involved in all three of these temptations, and the manner in which the Master resisted them, serve as important guides to us. The offer of the kingdoms of this world was subtle indeed, and offered an opportunity for Jesus to be a benefactor of the human race. He had come into the world for this very purpose. He could have looked upon it as a favorable opportunity to carry out that purpose. However, there was a catch! “Fall down and worship me,” was the condition attached to the offer by Satan. Jesus knew full well that the success of the Messianic purpose to bless the world in due time with everlasting peace and happiness was dependent upon obedience to God. He also knew it was disobedience to God, instigated by Satan, which brought all the trouble in the first place. An act of disobedience on Jesus’ part could not rectify that trouble.

Jesus delighted to do God’s will, and although here was an opportunity to do good to his fellowman, he could not accept it because it was not God’s method of doing it, nor was it the proper time. One of the divine commands affecting our sanctification

is that we “do good unto all men,” but it is to be only “as we have ... opportunity.” (Gal. 6:10) We are not to transfer our allegiance from God with the thought of devoting our lives to moral uplift, or other good works, simply in order that we might “do good.” We should not lose sight of the grand objective of our calling, namely, that by it we have been enlisted to serve in the greatest humanitarian cause of all time. It is a cause which, when complete, will see the whole earth made a paradise, and the entire human race living everlastingly upon it in peace and happiness.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Our full and continued devotion to God and to his program will cost us our lives. This is the condition upon which God accepts us to be coworkers with him. Paul says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, ... 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) Here the apostle entreats us to present ourselves in full sacrifice to God, and states that such a response on our part is a “reasonable,” or logical, service.

God’s will for us involves a complete separation from the world and its spirit. It means a separation from its projects and delusive hopes. We will be glad to do good to “all men” whenever we have the opportunity, but we will not partake of the world’s general spirit of selfishness in order to do it. We will not be “conformed” to this world, nor labor with

its institutions to bring about their conception of a better world. Rather, we will be “transformed” by the renewing of our minds, filling them more and more with the instructions of God’s Word, with the objective of having those instructions become a complete guide in our lives.

By this transformation process we will ascertain what is the “good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God,” which is our sanctification, as stated in our theme text. Thus, as we are separated from the world and its aims, and, turning our backs also upon the will of the flesh, “all things ... become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) These new things are not new merely in the sense that they are different. They are new because they are the things of God. Having heard and accepted the call to enter his service, he entrusts us with the carrying out of a part of his project for the world’s eventual blessing. He commits unto us the “ministry of reconciliation.”—vs. 18

Surely, there is no better cause we can engage in, nor any greater purpose for which we can lay down our lives. Even now, before the victory of God’s cause is seen by the world, we can say to the perplexed, discouraged and mourning ones that a better day is soon coming. There will be a righteous government under which man will live. There will be lasting peace. There will be freedom from fear. Indeed, there will be freedom also from sickness and death. This is a real program—God’s program—and what a privilege to participate in it!

ACCEPTABLE THROUGH THE BLOOD

We may inquire as to how God can accept the services of such imperfect creatures, and beyond

this, how we can pass the test. Paul explains that “we have redemption through [Christ’s] blood.” He further states that Christ “gave himself” for the church, “That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” (Eph. 1:7; 5:25,26) Only by the blood of Christ Jesus are we made worthy. Through his blood our bodies are made acceptable for sacrifice. In addition, however, there must be the continual “washing of water by the word.” This cleansing brings about the alignment of our wills with the will of God.

Consecration is the act of presenting ourselves to God, and entering into a covenant with him to do his will. Sanctification is the lifelong, studied and prayerful effort to carry out more and more fully the terms of our consecration. Our consecration is acceptable through Christ’s blood, and our being clothed with his “robe of righteousness.” (Isa. 61:10) Nevertheless, the fact that there is this covering does not release us from the responsibility of steadfastly and resolutely continuing in the way of sacrifice, with an ever-increasing desire to be like our Master.

Therefore, let us “gird up the loins” of our minds and fix our hearts to know and to do the Lord’s will. (I Pet. 1:13) In a cause so worthy, and certain of ultimate success, no sacrifice is too great and no task too difficult to perform. The followers of the Master who are thus successful in laying down their lives will be crowned with “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) With their Head, Christ Jesus, they will share in the inestimable privilege of bestowing upon the world of mankind blessings of peace, joy and life forevermore—the great divine cause! ■