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The Christian Duty of Discrimination.

“Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; holdfast that which is good.”—(1 Thes. 5:20, 21.)

SINCE the word discrimination has more than one meaning, we should state at the outset in what sense we are using it now. Like some other words, discrimination is used in both a good sense and a bad. In the latter usage it means to make an unfair distinction. Needless to say, that sort of discrimination is no part of Christian duty. The dictionary gives another definition of this word, namely, “distinguishing accurately,” and it is in this sense that we use it in this article ; to distinguish accurately as the result of close, careful, competent scrutiny.

In the first part of our text we have this admonition : “Despise not prophesyings (or prophecies).” To what prophecies does St. Paul refer here? Were they the prophecies of the Old Testament, or perhaps the things foretold by our Lord and His Apostles, which they spoke by inspiration? We think not, for the connection shows that the “prophesyings” of our text were to be critically examined and sifted, and only what was found to be “good” in them was to be received and retained.

We understand that by prophesyings the Apostle is referring to the utterances of those in the Church who were endowed with that special, miraculous gift of “prophecy,” which is one of the nine so-called “spiritual gifts” enumerated by Paul in the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians. These special gifts (bestowed through the spirit) called in the Greek “charismata,” that is, grace-gifts, were a part of the heritage of the Apostolic Church, and passed away with it. But, you say, “why was it necessary to prove or test these prophesyings, since the holy spirit could not inspire any one to speak anything but what was right and true and good ?” The Apostle John (1 John 4:1) gives the answer to the question: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” This warning was especially needed at that time, for if we infer correctly from what we read in 1 Corinthians 12, all the seemingly spirit-inspired utterances heard in the Christian assemblies were not of God, and one might even be heard shouting, “Jesus anathema.”

The gift of prophecy was one of the most valuable to the Apostolic Church, but in view of what has just been said there were grave dangers connected with it. The Lord provided a safeguard for the Church in another of those spiritual gifts, called “the discerning of spirits.” Those endowed with this special power were able to test the spirits and to discriminate what was really from God, and what was dross, or worse. This seems to the writer the true application of our text to the Church of the Apostolic Age. But we are far removed from that Age and its miraculous spiritual gifts. The gift of prophecy is no longer with us; the corresponding gift of discerning of spirits also has departed. Has our text, then, no application to our times, and to conditions now existing in the Church? We believe the Apostle’s words are still important to us, a forceful reminder of our Christian duty of discrimination, and we shall attempt a present-day application of them for the benefit of our readers.

The first exhortation “despise not prophesyings,” or its lesson for us now, might be expressed thus : “Give, those who minister the Word a respectful hearing.” From ancient times “public teaching” was one of the meanings of the Greek word rendered “prophecy,” and in that sense, of course, prophecy has always been practised in the Church. Though preached in human weakness, the Word of God has been powerful to accomplish the will and purpose of Him who sent it forth. (Isa. 55:11; Act 15:14.) There are reasons why we ought to give a respectful audience to ministers of God’s Word. The Lord Himself instituted the ministry for the edification of His Church : “He gave some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints” (Eph. 4:11,12), and we must not “despise” (literally, set at nought) His provision. We know, too, that we are not yet perfected in knowledge, and therefore still have need of attending to teachers and can learn something of value from any who preach the Word in the spirit of its Author.

Now, the second admonition of our text: "But prove (or test) all things." Here the word "but" is inserted by most editors on good manuscript authority, and it connects up this statement with the preceding. The first exhortation told us to listen, but this one puts us to work, sifting and testing what we have heard. There are obvious reasons why it is necessary to test the teachings that are being promulgated. The Lord warned: "Take heed that no man deceive you," and added that many would be deceived. A second reason is that because of imperfect knowledge, or faulty judgment, many godly men, even outstanding teachers, have held and taught error, or have been mistaken in some of their reasonings and conclusions. The piety or position of a teacher is no guarantee that he is correct in everything that he teaches. The words of our text still apply: "Prove all things." This statement is to be taken in connection with the preceding. The "all things" do not, of course, include every line of teaching and every theory that may come to our attention. We are to prove those prophesyings (teachings) which commend themselves as worthy of our consideration and study, holding forth a promise of "good." The substance of these teachings may be "new," or it may be "old."— Matt. 13:52.

How are we to prove the teachings? The Apostle does not say. Our only infallible touchstone is the Bible; by it we must test every doctrine. While this might seem a rather simple matter, it is not always so in practice. It is true that often the Scriptures are so plain and definite that there is not room for two opinions. We could wish that it were always so. But it is evident that our Heavenly Father has not given us that kind of Bible. For it is true that sometimes teachings are based on *interpretations* of Scripture, rather than a simple "Thus saith the Lord." Now, an interpretation of a Scripture may be based on a number of things, for example, the meaning of a word where it may be taken in more than one sense. Or, it may rest upon a point of grammar, or the relation of the Scripture to its context, or perhaps to some other passage. The interpretation may rest on punctuation alone, for that is the simplest form of interpretation, as may be seen in Luke 23:43 (the position of a comma).

Interpretations of Scripture are to be tested with reference to certain generally accepted sound principles of hermeneutics — the science of interpretation. First, the interpretation must be grammatical, not violating any rule of grammar or syntax. Second, the meaning assigned to words must be in harmony with their usage at the time the Scripture was written. Third, there must be a sound discrimination between literal and figurative or parabolic uses of language. Fourth, a Scripture must be explained in harmony with its context, or the general teaching of the Bible on the subject. In the main it is by these four rules or principles that we are to "test all things" presented—not alone interpretations of Scripture, but sometimes translations of it also. Does this sound simple and easy? We think not. It is scarcely necessary to add that if two (or more) interpretations of a Scripture pass the tests, they must be considered equally possible.

It will be generally admitted that the most difficult things to prove or test are statements and arguments concerning the Scriptures in the original languages, which are (chiefly) Hebrew and Greek. And how much of that sort of discussion there is in these days, when almost every writer who has a different thought to offer, appeals to the Greek or Hebrew text in support of it! Among such interpretations there may be something of value to the student, but if he lacks a working knowledge of the original languages, how shall he separate the wheat from the chaff? He may turn to a good concordance for help (Strong's, Young's, or The Englishman's), and there find sufficient information (in many cases) to enable him to intelligently test the argument under consideration. In other cases this source of help will fail to provide the answer, for often in determining the true meaning of the original text it is not enough to know *what* word is used; it is important to know *how* that word is used—such grammatical details as case or tense or mood. These latter things belong to grammar and syntax, and are beyond the scope of a concordance like Dr. Strong's. Knowledge of the numerous idioms found in the original Scriptures, which is sometimes indispensable to the student, is to be obtained not from the concordance, but from standard works on the Greek and Hebrew languages—the larger lexicons and grammars, which presuppose some knowledge of those languages on the part of the student. "It is painful to reflect upon the slow progress which this qualification has made in public estimation. Judging from the conduct of many, they appear to deem it wholly unnecessary to aim at such an acquisition. And yet without it, they must acquiesce in received modes of interpretation or trite elucidations, without the ability to assign any reason except that they are held by a favorite commentator, or found in a certain system." (Samuel Davidson, LL.D., in his "Sacred Hermeneutics," page 18.) The words quoted above were written over a hundred years ago, and since then the acquisition of a working knowledge of the sacred languages has been made much less difficult by the abundance of excellent helps now available (particularly for beginners), and ignorance on the part of those who handle the Greek or Hebrew is less to be condoned.

Above we have pointed out the method to be followed in proving "prophesyings" which are based on particular applications of Greek and Hebrew words or phrases. It remains to illustrate it by an example. The Greek noun *Aion* (pronounced "I own") and its derivative adjective *Aionios* occur frequently in the New Testament, and are also of great importance from the standpoint of eschatology (doctrine of the last things). Moreover, there is found to be much difference of opinion even among prominent scholars and translators on the correct rendering of these Greek words into English. In the Common Version they are rendered mostly by such terms as "for ever," "eternal," and "everlasting."

Some other translators (and writers) deny that *aion* and *aionios* can be properly so rendered. They assert that *aion* properly means “an age” and that the adjective derived from it can mean only “age-lasting,” (not everlasting or eternal). Accordingly, Rotherham translates *aionios* “age-binding,”

Young renders it “age-during,” while the Emphatic Diaglott does not translate the word but merely transliterates it from the Greek. On the other hand several versions made in modern time (including the Revised Standard Version) retain “everlasting” or “eternal” and “for ever.” Whom is the student to follow? Which school of Bible translators appears to have the soundest approach to this moot question?

Now, this writer realises that any attempt on his part to answer these questions will appear presumptuous. More than once he himself has asked, “Where the best scholars cannot agree, what can the ordinary Bible student do?” Nevertheless, in what follows we shall endeavour to answer that question. At the outset we are impressed with two or three things. First, the scholars who disagreed regarding the proper rendering of *aion* and *aionios* all had before them the same information, the same important facts concerning the etymology of these words (so far as can be known), and their usage—in the *New Testament*, in the *Septuagint*, and in classical Greek. Second, from the same facts the various translators drew their own conclusions, having used their best judgment in the matter. It is quite apparent that sometimes translators have found difficulty in maintaining a truly objective attitude in their work ; whether any of those whose work we are trying to judge were influenced in their decision by doctrinal prejudice, we cannot know. Third, we are impressed with the thought that the information regarding *aion* and *aionios* to which our translators had access, is in a substantial way available to us also, in the large Greek and Hebrew lexicons, in the *New Testament* and *Septuagint* Greek, and in the original Hebrew of the *Old Testament*.

Now let us summarize the information which these generally reliable sources yield, bearing on the question under consideration. (1) Lexicographers are not agreed as to the primary meaning of *aion*, many of them following Aristotle, who derived the word from *aei*, which means forever, while some believe it comes from a word meaning to breathe, and it has in it the thought of life. (2) In the earliest of extant Greek writings, those of the poet Homer, *aion* does not denote an age or eternity, but the lifetime of a man. (3) In the classical period also the word is sometimes used of the duration of a human life, but it has taken on other, broader meanings as an indefinite period, an age, and eternity. (4)

In the *Septuagint* (where it is used mostly as a translation of the Hebrew word ‘*olam*) *aion* has in general the same meanings as in the Greek writers, the context indicating which meaning is intended. The first occurrence of *aion* in that ancient version is in Genesis 3:22 for ‘*olam*. Here the Greek phrase is usually rendered “for ever” ; for *I’olam*, Rotherham gives “to times age-abiding,” and Young has “to the age.” While such phrases are based on “age” as one of the meanings of *aion*, it is obvious that they are vague and raise questions in the mind of the reader, such as : “To what age?” Since in Genesis 3:22 and its context there is no thought that eating of “the tree of life” would enable man to live only to some particular period or age, we are compelled to give *aion* in this passage its broadcast significance : “forever.” And from a linguistic standpoint there can be no valid objection to that rendering, as we have shown above. That *aion* and *aionios* can denote everlasting or eternal (and often do) is proved beyond any question by their application to Jehovah and His attributes, for example, Genesis 21:33; Isaiah 40:28 ; Psalm 9:7; Psalm 119:142, etc. On the other hand, in many occurrences of these Greek words the context definitely limits their meaning to: the lifetime of a slave (Exod. 21:6), the duration of the Aaronic priesthood (Exod. 40:15), the keeping of the Passover (Exod. 12:14), etc. (5) The writers of the *New Testament* follow the usage of classical Greek and especially the *Septuagint*, using *aion* in a variety of phrases, often reduplicated for emphasis as “forever and ever.”

A study of those various phrases in the original reveals the difficulty of translating them literally. For if we render *aion*, by “age” (as some attempt to do in every instance) some of those phrases would literally be : “to the age” (1 Cor. 8:13), “to the ages” (Rom. 9:5), “to the ages of the ages” (Gal. 1:5), “to the age of the age” (Heb. 1:8), and “to a day of an age” (2 Pet. 3:18.) Most scholars agree that these and other similar phrases were not intended to be construed literally, but are idiomatic expressions—expressions peculiar to a language and having a meaning apart from their literal translation. It is evident, however, that in the *New Testament* *aion* is sometimes used of an age or dispensation (in many passages mis-translated “world”), for example, “this (Gospel) age” (Matt. 24:3), or “the age to come (Millennial)” (Matt. 12:32), and other ages to follow that one. (Eph. 2:7.) But this use of the word must be clearly distinguished from the idiomatic usage or confusion will result.

From the facts which our study has yielded, we form our conclusion concerning the true meaning of *aion* or *aionios*. In Biblical as in secular Greek those words have *more than one meaning*, and in each occurrence the sense in which the word is there used must be determined from the connection, and usually this is possible. The several diverse phrases with (don, which do not lend themselves to literal translation, are usually best rendered “forever” and “forever and ever,” as in our common English versions. The adjective *aionios* may denote “everlasting” or merely “lasting,” according to the context. In that important and much-discussed text, Matthew 25:46, the parallelism between *aionios* life and *aionios* punishment, apart from the teaching of other Scriptures, favors the rendering “everlasting.” The practice of

some who instead of making an attempt at translating *aion* and *aionios*, merely transliterate them in the Greek or

Latin spelling, would seem to have little to commend it. It may leave the reader with the erroneous impression that the Greek words are not translatable into English.

The third exhortation of our text, “Hold fast that which is good,” reminds us that in our hearing and sifting of teachings our interest is ever in the good they contain — “that which is good to the use of edifying.” (Eph. 4:29.) In this connection good is practically synonymous with truth, for it is only truth that edifies and sanctifies.—John 17:17,19.

He who seeks to prove all things by the Word learns that the Bible itself has suffered at the hands of men, and not always at the hands of its enemies. That priceless Book has been “wounded in the house of its friends” — by well-meaning but misguided Christians, who, due to doctrinal prejudices, have fallen into the error of “wresting the Scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:16) by mistranslating or misapplying them. The lesson of our text has been an important one for the Church even from its earliest days (2 Tim. 2:15-18), and is not less so now especially for those who as teachers occupy positions of greatest responsibility.

The writer would say in closing that the “all things” of our text include the thoughts set forth in this article. Conclusions based on judgment must of necessity have a tentative quality (even scholars have been known to change their minds) • it is otherwise with well-established facts. It is with the latter that we have been mainly concerned in preparing the present article.

“Truth how sacred is the treasure! Teach us, Lord, its worth to know....”
(By W. A. Eliason. Reprinted from “The Herald of Christ’s Kingdom.”)

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While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord’s Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported.

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Harvest, Winter, Sabbath.

THE harvest work of which our Lord speaks so fully in Matt. 24 is the culmination of the selection of His “Little flock” of consecrated followers, which began at His first advent in the calling of His little band of disciples. All down the Gospel Age numbers have been added to this “people for God’s name,” and in the time of harvest “the dead in Christ” are raised, and the remaining members on earth are gathered into the heavenly garner, in preparation for the reign of peace which is to follow.

It is important that the harvest work be clearly understood, and the Lord has given ample instruction for all who will prove their value as true “wheat” and be gathered into the garner within a certain period of time. As in the case of the Jewish harvest those who were in the religious systems of the day and failed to respond to the Lord’s message were burned up as “chaff” (Matt. 3:12), so in the close of the Gospel harvest, those in the religious systems who do not respond to the harvest message must go through “great tribulation,” a fiery time of trouble with which this age will end, and be revealed as “tares.”—Matt. 13:30; 24:21.

It is to this wheat class—“My people”—that the Lord has been calling through His Word and by His spirit for many years now, to flee from the present systems of Christianity, which have become worldly institutions and have been cast off from favor.—Rev. 3:14-22; 18:1-5. This “flight” from Babylon (mother and daughter systems) must be undertaken before the “four winds” are let loose (Rev. 7:1-3), by all worthy of the name “My people” —“that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

Flight is to be made not from one denomination to another, but the instruction is “flee into the mountain,” i.e., the kingdom of the Lord (Matt. 24:16), and being translated into the Kingdom of God’s dear Son, He has provided the harvest feast for all such—“For wheresoever the carcass (the food, meat in due season) is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”—Matt. 24:28. And so it is, God’s people are found gathered together in twos or threes or larger numbers rejoicing in the truths provided only for this class by their Lord who has returned, unseen by human eyes, to conduct this harvest work before the great time of trouble and later the bringing of peace to the earth. (Rev. 14:14-16.)

The importance of making flight from the systems of Babylon during the harvest of the Gospel Age is impressed again by the Lord in His exhortation—“But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day.” (Matt. 24:20.) These terms “winter” and “sabbath day” are not to be taken literally, but rather our Lord was referring to periods of time which would be very unfavourable, yea, impossible for flight from the systems He has cast off.

The “winter” would refer to the great time of trouble, when the “four winds” of Rev. 7, are let loose, bringing about a great tempest amongst the restless masses of mankind—“the sea and the waves roaring” (Luke 21:25)—resulting in “the heavens” (ecclesiastical systems) passing away with a great noise . . . the earth also (present order of society) and the works that are therein being burned up.” (2 Pet. 3:10.) No wonder the Lord exhorts His people to flee to Him, to His Kingdom, before the “winter.” During a literal harvest time there is plenty of food obtainable as the grain is gathered into the barn, but how different it is when winter sets in. So in the harvest of this Gospel Age there is abundant provision of spiritual food for the sustenance of all the Lord’s people who are courageous and answer His call to leave the lukewarm Laodicean systems of to-day, but with the coming of the winter period the opportunity of feasting on the harvest truths will be past. “The harvest is past, the summer (time of favourable opportunity) is ended, and we are not saved (as members of the Church)” is recorded by the prophet Jeremiah 8:20, as representing the Great Company, who, though unworthy to be of the Bride of Christ, receive a lower spiritual inheritance following the washing of their robes through great tribulation. See Rev. 7:9-17.

The term “sabbath day” would not refer to a twenty-four-hour, seventh day of the week, but rather to a period of time, typified by the Jewish sabbath day. This period is generally understood by Bible students as referring to the seventh millennium during which Israel and mankind as a whole will be blessed with lasting rest and peace, which the term “sabbath” signifies. How fitting, then, that our Lord should say—“Pray ye that your flight be . . . neither on the sabbath day,” implying that when this period is ushered in, flight from the Babylonian systems would be out of the question, inasmuch as Babylon will have been thrown down during the “winter” time, which precedes the “sabbath day.”—“Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.” (Rev. 18:21).

If this be the correct understanding of our Lord’s words (our readers are exhorted to prove all things for themselves from the Scriptures) it will be seen that the harvest, winter and sabbath day refer to three distinct periods of time.

The harvest is for the complete gathering of the Gospel Church during the “days of the Son of Man,” corresponding to “the days of Noah” prior to the Flood. There would seem no doubt that we are at present very near the close of this period, and how important, therefore, that any of the Lord’s people still in Babylon, in any of its forms, should act

quickly and flee from all such associations, ere the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21) cut off all opportunity of being gathered into the Gospel garner, as “The plowman overtakes the reaper.” (Amos 9:13.)

The winter time is for the purpose of ridding the world of everything out of accord with the Lord and His righteousness — the man-made systems, ecclesiastical, financial, political and social—”the removing of those things that may be shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” (Heb. 12:27.)

The sabbath day, following the severe winter time, is the period during which the elect Church shall be “priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6), bringing peace and happiness—”the desire of all nations”—to the chastened world of mankind, for their uplift and progress to perfect human life on the restored earth. Of this time the Apostle Peter says—”We, according to His promise, look for new heavens (Christ and His Church) and a new earth (new social order) wherein dwelleth righteousness.”-2 Pet. 3:13.

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The Spirit of the Stranger.

(Contributed Article).

IN Exodus 23:9 we read—”Thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart (soul) of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.” The reference to the heart would point to the matter of feelings, and it would seem that God is allowing us, through events, to feel the reality of our strangership. Every true believer is a stranger in this world; our destination is heavenly, so that the Christian does not belong to this scene and condition at all. Our eternal condition is different from this condition of mortality. As we know, this is a provisional condition in which we live, so that we are sojourners, in that sense, and yet it is right we should feel it.

David speaks of this condition in that wonderful address of praise and worship. He says in Psalm 69:7,8—”Because for thy sake I have borne reproach ; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children.” We know there is hope of life, and that we are part of this groaning creation, and “even we, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, we also groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” We are, of course, all strangers in this world. The Scripture in Exodus alludes to this; we are not only sojourners in relation to our mortal condition, but we are strangers and foreigners in this world, the Christian’s Egypt.

God consistently reminded His people that they were strangers in Egypt, hearing a language that they know not.

It was very real, this matter of strangership, being in a strange land, hearing a strange language, having to do with different customs and ways. It is a very real matter to us to realise that we are not only sojourners but aliens; that is, we do not belong here at all. It seems that the Lord is allowing associations and other matters that are causing exercise in our public relations to remind us that really this is not our resting place. We are only just passing through, and we cannot expect to settle down here, to be fitted into “Egypt’s” structure, because we are aliens; we do not belong to this world’s system.

The greatest delusion current is that Christianity fits in with the world system; that it is something devised to improve the world. There was no thought when Israel went down into Egypt that they were to improve Egypt. Think of those persons who went down to Egypt, Jacob and those with him, who had the promises of God. They went down into that strange land, and yet it was not purposed by God that they should settle there. When they prospered, Pharaoh soon became concerned and oppressed them, so that they felt their bondage, their strangership, the spirit and soul of the stranger. So we, as Christians, are to feel it.

The Lord, in circumstantial and other ways, is allowing us to feel that we do not belong in this world, and it is right that we should feel it; that is what is true of the Christian.

That is the spirit in which the Lord Jesus went about here. How strange men were to Him—their motives, their actions, being entirely foreign to His thoughts! Man was moved by selfishness, ambition, cruelty — everything opposite to what was in Jesus. He found everything strange; what a foreign place the world was to Him! Jesus said— ”The foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.” (Luke 9:58.) So we have to learn that we do not belong in Egypt, and God will challenge every attempt to hold us there.

God challenged every attempt of Pharaoh to hold the people. Pharaoh would gladly have mixed them in ; he destroyed the male children, but would have liked to have mixed the rest in Egypt and retain them there. The same applies now, for Satan would like to keep the believer. He is set against the true bearing of the Gospel; that is, that the believers are to be called out from the world to be with Christ in the future blessing of mankind. So, it is right that we should feel that we do not belong to this world, and men will soon allow us to feel it as we confess the name of Jesus. Our home, our destiny, is above, so it is impossible that we should, be fitted in here.

Joseph knew what strangership meant. He was not only separated from his brethren, but he was the object of his brethren’s enmity. He suffered because of his standing for the truth. Think of Joseph’s position when he went to his brethren ; how they hated him! He was hated first of all because he was loved by his father, and when he stated his dreams they hated him the more. So, as we seek to hold the truth, the truth of separation, the truth as to the claims of Christ, what comes about is this animosity, not just from the world, but from what is closer than the world.

Our Lord Jesus was hated by His brethren; think of what that meant to Him. The quotation in Psalm 69 was no doubt prophetic of Him—”I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s sons.” This Psalm is quoted in John’s Gospel, where the Lord Jesus went into the temple, and raised issues with the Jews as to what was going on there. He said—”Make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise.” (John 2:16). That is what Christendom has become; that kind of thing has come into the realm of what belongs to the Father—My Father’s house.

“And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up.”

That is the position now. It is the question of the zeal of God’s house—what is due to Him, the holiness of it. Issues that are being raised indicate that we are not only aliens in Egypt, but aliens, also, in Christendom. We are made to feel that we do not fit into the religious world, not only the Egyptian world, but the Babylonish world, for Israel was captive there. Israel knew what it was to be captive in Babylon. They said, “How should we sing a song of Jehovah’s upon a foreign soil.” It is right that we are to feel it in this setting, and it comes very close, as many of us know.

How testing it is! It is all part of this spirit of strangership that we are to feel, and yet it is because the Lord has indicated that path. It says of Joseph in Genesis 49:23 — “The archers have provoked him, and shot at, and hated him.” That is what is going on ; the truth is under attack, and if *we* defend it, we will come under attack. If you stand for the truth, you can expect to suffer for it. If we are to be strangers and aliens in relation to the earth and in relation to Christendom, and in relation to those who do not recognise the claims of Christ, then God is prepared to have us in His house. The compensation for strangership is to be in the Father’s house, and that will be our eternal portion.

If we are in this position we can count on the sympathetic support of Christ, because He has been in it. He has shown what it was because His Jewish brethren and His natural brethren did not believe on Him ; they were sarcastic and ridiculed Him. He was betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and forsaken by them all. He knew what it was in an outstanding way to be left alone. There is nothing so cutting as to be ignored, to be left alone. It is an awful thing to feel hated. We are to be ready to be outcasts, but we find in Isaiah 56 One who gathers the outcasts of Israel,—”The Lord Jehovah who gathereth the outcasts of Israel.” It is a wonderful service of God that He is gathering the outcasts.

In John 9 *we* read of a man who was an outcast. The Son of God took a personal interest in him; He was interested in that one man who was prepared to stand for the truth as he knew it. He said, “One thing I know.” He would not come down to the level of his accusers, but simply stated — “One thing I know, that being blind before, now I see,” and he was able to overthrow all the opposition.

Yet they cast him out, which was really admission of defeat. But if they cast him out, the Son of God sought him out. He was the gatherer of the outcasts, and He has been gathering others ever since. If we are prepared to be aliens in relation to the religious world that has been unfaithful respecting God’s truth, we can count on being gathered. If the world has no place for us religiously, or any other way, God has His place, and the best place for us.

Although Joseph was hated and cast out in a strange land, his was a fruitful bough. So the Lord Jesus is the fruitful bough; His branches have spread over the wall, as it were. As we read in Ephesians—”He has preached the glad tidings of peace to you who were afar off.” So, here we are, Gentiles, without any claim on the blessings, and yet God has brought us into the very best place. “Keep ye judgment and do righteousness,” and that is the basis for it all, with no compromise as to the truth.

In 2 Tim. 2:19-22 we read of withdrawing from iniquity, separating from vessels of dishonour, and doing righteousness. — “Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.” Again, in Ephesians we read—”That ye were at that time without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” That is where we have all been once. “But now in Christ Jesus ye (Gentile believers) who once were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” (Eph. 2:12,13.) The fact that Jesus was rejected by the Jews has meant our salvation for the heavenly calling;

we owe it all, in that sense, to the fact that the Lord Jesus came to His own and was not received—He was here as a stranger. However, “through him we both have access by one spirit to the Father.” That means we are quite at home, not only in the house, but we have all the liberties of the house. The Son has set us free ; we could not have any more profound sense of nearness and blessedness ; this is in contrast to the spirit of the stranger, that we now have access to the very presence of the Father.

Further, in Ephesians we read, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” This is to assure us that we belong to the family. We are not on a lower grade, so to speak, but fellowcitizens and of the household of God, “being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone.”

Then, we are not only in the house, but of it. The saints comprise the house, are built into it. “In whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord ; in whom ye also (Gentile believers, built into the structure) are builded together for a habitation of God in the spirit.” How wonderful it all is ! Instead of being strangers, now we are a dwelling place for God in the spirit, brought nigh by the blood of Christ, and having this wonderful access, “built together for a habitation of God in the spirit.”

“Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”—Acts 14:17.

The gentleness with which it (the rain) falls is one of the most perfect processes of nature. Even so God does not let loose His truth in overwhelming torrents upon our souls. It is here a little and there a little that His Word reaches our hearts. Each holy word falls softly on the spirit, and there is not a thought or emotion or hidden power in our being that does not drink in the refreshment. One after another, the revelations of His love, and power, and purpose, and of Himself, follow and follow, still sinking deeper and deeper as we eagerly receive them; and of very necessity, every grace is quickened from its deepest root into new vigour of life.—Sarah Smiley.

BOOKS WANTED.

Any of our friends having a New Testament with Tischendorf's notes for disposal are asked to communicate with this office.

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The Anvil and the Hammers.

Last eve I paused before a blacksmith's door,
And heard the anvil ring, the vesper chime,
And looking in I saw upon the floor
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.

“How many anvils have you had,” said I,
“To wear and batter all the hammers so.”
“Just one,” said he, and then with twinkling eye,
“The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.”

And so I thought, the anvil of God's Word
For ages sceptic blows have beat upon
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed, the hammers gone.

—Anon.