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Sowing and Reaping

“He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” (Gal. 6:8)

The thought of sowing is that of planting with a view to development or result. Some time the harvest will come. All of our thoughts, all of our actions, have an effect on future character. Little by little the character is made up. The sowing of today will bring the reaping of tomorrow. If our thoughts and our attention are given to earthly things, the result will be an increase of development along earthly lines; but if our thoughts and attention are given to heavenly things, the development will be along spiritual lines.

Sowing to the flesh, minding the things of the flesh, means gratification of the desires of the flesh, minding the things that are craved by our fallen nature. If yielded to, these cravings will grow stronger and stronger. It is a mistake to suppose, as some do, that a reasonable gratification of the flesh is proper. Every gratification of the fallen flesh satiates only the animal propensities. Those who continue to yield to these propensities will ultimately reach corruption, death—the second death. Those who mind spiritual things set their affections on things above, not on things of earth; those who seek to develop themselves along spiritual lines, will progress in spiritual attainment. In due time such will reap a character likeness to the Lord, and become copies of God's dear Son, sanctified more and more through the Truth. To such is promised the gift of life eternal.

The words of our text are addressed to the church, and relate, therefore, to “those who have made a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice.” If these live after the flesh, they shall die, as the Apostle says; for they have already surrendered their human life-rights. If by earnest endeavour they seek to lay down their lives and to develop the new life by mortifying the flesh, by putting it to death, by striving to overcome the weaknesses which they inherit, they shall shortly be rid of all the impediments and be clothed upon with the new body. Then they shall be like the Lord.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Comparatively few realize to what extent we form our own characters, to what extent our minds, our affections, are gardens in which we may plant either the thorns and thistles of sin, or the merely moral and practical qualities corresponding to the useful vegetables, or those seeds which produce the fragrant and beautiful flowers and fruits which more particularly represent the heavenly and spiritual graces. Whatsoever a man soweth he shall also reap, whether he sow to the flesh or to the spirit. Whoever, therefore, seeks for the heavenly things, joint-heirship in the kingdom, etc., must plant, or set out in his mind, in his affections, those qualities and graces which the Lord marks out as essential to the development of characters such as will be “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.”—Col. 1:12.

Thus the Father throws upon all those whom he calls to this “high-calling,” this “heavenly-calling,” and who accept the call and make a covenant thereunder, the responsibility for their success or their failure in attaining the prize. Through his Word he tells them of their own natural weaknesses and imperfections, and shows them how he has provided a full off-set or counterbalance for these imperfections in the merit and sacrifice of the Redeemer; he shows them also what are the fruits and graces of the Spirit which they must possess, in heart, at least, if they would be joint-heirs with Christ; he shows them also, in the Redeemer's life as well as in his teachings, the copy which all must follow who would reach the same glorious station and be his joint-heirs.

We might look at this matter merely from the standpoint of the responsibility which it throws upon us, and might well feel overawed thereby.

Rather, however, we should view it from the standpoint of divine grace, and consider what a blessed privilege has been granted us, of being transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may come more and

more to know and to strive for the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. In addition to all this, God has set before us the grandest reward imaginable for the doing of that which is merely our duty and our reasonable service—the doing of that which would bring us the largest measure of joy and peace, aside from a future reward.

PLANTING GOOD SEED

There is for all mankind a natural attraction toward earthly things; even though, during this reign of evil, the earthly things are blemished and in many respects distasteful to those who have learned to love righteousness and hate iniquity, there is still, nevertheless, a strong attraction toward the marred and blemished earthly things. Like weeds, earthly affections and desires spring spontaneously from seeds which come we know not whence. The Christian, therefore, who would keep his heart in the love of God, must not only keep planting good seeds, keep setting his affections on heavenly things, but he must keep rooting out the weeds of earthly desire and attraction.

Our new life is not manifest to all, nor upon all occasions to any. This the Apostle intimates when he says, “Your life is hid with Christ in God”; it is a life of new desires, new aims, new aspirations, which the world can neither see nor fully appreciate, though it sees some outward manifestations of the new life in our daily conduct. Even the “brethren” may not be able to appreciate the progress of the new life in us; and we ourselves may at times be perplexed respecting the rapidity and strength of its growth; and we may need to look back over the weeks or months, or perhaps years, in order to determine unquestionably that it is growing. Our new life, represented by our endeavours to follow the will of Christ, is hidden thus in Christ and in the Father.

In harmony with this thought the Apostle in one place declares that neither the world nor the brethren were capable of judging him—that only the Lord, who could read the heart and know all the conditions, testings and weaknesses to be striven against, could properly judge him. He even declares, “Yea, I judge not mine own self.” (1 Cor. 4:3.) It is an excellent plan neither to condemn others who claim to be walking conscientiously as children of the Lord, nor even to condemn ourselves if we are sincerely striving to do the Lord’s will. We should simply press along, day by day doing the best we can to cultivate the heavenly graces and to serve our Master, leaving all the results with the Lord. He careth for us, and so long as our hopes and aims and objects of life are centred in the heavenly things and our lives thus hid with Christ in God, we need fear no evil, present or future; for the Lord will be with us and bless us and keep us from falling and, ultimately, present us to the Heavenly Father both blameless and faultless.

PUTTING OFF AND PUTTING ON

Coming down to a particularization of the changes which take place in those who have consecrated themselves wholly to the Lord, the Apostle enumerates certain alterations of disposition which should be attempted and, so far as possible, accomplished, namely, the putting away of all the following: anger, wrath, malice, evil-speaking, impurity of language and falsehood in its every form. (Col. 3:8, 9.) The necessity for such correction of life might, at first thought, seem to be unnecessary to mention, such evil traits being too coarse and entirely opposed to every true Christian principle; but, as we scrutinize the matter we find that the Apostle has really taken into his list nearly all the weaknesses of the flesh which beset those who have become “new creatures in Christ.”

What is more common with Christian people than to become angry? How many there are who have named the name of Christ, but who have malicious or, at least, unkind thoughts respecting others, and who harbour these, permitting them at times to influence their conduct! How many are there who indulge in evil-speaking—that is, slander (here translated blasphemy)! This is often done in such a manner as to deceive, not only the hearer, but also the speaker as respects his real intention in speaking of others discreditably, unkindly.

If all evil and impure language were avoided, what a wonderful world this would be! Every Christian should see to it that, henceforth, every word which proceeds from his mouth shall be such as will minister grace to the hearers, such words as will do only good and be edifying.

Finally, how much need there is, not only of having good intentions in the heart, but also of expressing those good intentions truthfully one to another, without deception, without hypocrisy. But it requires that a heart be very pure and very full of love if it would be very truthful; otherwise it would lead to trouble continually. If the unloving, ungenerous, unkind hearts, full of evil surmising, malice, hatred and strife, were to express themselves frankly it would add immensely to the trouble of the world. The Apostle therefore urges, first the purifying of the heart, and then general candor.

With the thought before our minds of the oneness and equality of those who have been accepted into the body of Christ, the Apostle urges upon our attention the necessity not only of putting off the evil dispositions of our fallen flesh, but also of putting on, cultivating, the various graces of the Spirit exemplified in our Head, Christ Jesus.—Col. 3:12-14.

He specifies these: (1) Compassionate sentiments; a disposition of largeness and generosity of heart toward everybody and everything—toward the saints, toward our neighbours, friends and relatives, toward our enemies, and toward the brute creation. Amplifying, he continues, showing that it would imply (2) kindness toward all; (3) humbleness of mind, the reverse of boastfulness, headiness, arrogance; (4) meekness, or gentleness of disposition; (5) long-suffering, or patient endurance with the faults and weaknesses of others. It implies that we should bear with one another's peculiarities of temperament and disposition, freely forgiving one another, if there be found cause of offence in each other—learning the meanwhile to correct ourselves, as we see our own blemishes mirrored in others. And the standard for all this course of conduct is found in the Lord's course toward us; for he surely has been generous, kind, forbearing and forgiving.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CHURCH

The Apostle brings to the attention of the "holy and beloved," the elect, the fact that he is not attempting a reformation of the world along these lines, but merely a transformation of those who have entered into a special covenant with the Lord. All who have thus covenanted with the Lord and who hope to make their "calling and election sure" to membership in the glorified church, will not only seek to cultivate these fruits of the Spirit in their own lives, but also to assist in the cultivation of the same fruits, as they may have opportunity, in their Christian friends and neighbours; and above all, will seek to exercise so good an influence upon their own families that, as their children receive from them, as parents, the natural life and the necessary instructions and start therein, these may also, if possible, receive from them a start in the new life, and the necessary instructions and equipment for it.

But the Apostle, as the mouthpiece of the holy Spirit, is a thorough instructor. Not only does he tell us what dis-graces to put off and what graces to put on, but viewing the Lord's body arrayed in these qualities of heart—compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patient, endurance, forbearance and forgiveness, he adds. "And above all these put on love, which is the bond of perfectness." Love is thus pictured as the "girdle" which binds and holds in place the folds of the robes of Christ's righteousness with its various graces. In other words, the Apostle would have us see that forbearance, meekness, patience, etc., must not be matters merely of courtesy or merely of policy. However much they might partake of these qualities in the beginning, the wearers will not be perfected in heart, nor be fit for the kingdom, until they have reached the place where these various graces of their wills, or intentions, are bound to them by the cords of love—love for the Lord, love for righteousness, love for the "brethren," and sympathetic love for the whole groaning creation. Love is, indeed, "the bond of perfectness," the very Spirit of the Lord.

Each exercise of the new mind, of the new will, toward the things that are pure, the things that are noble, the things that are good, the things that are true, the things that are spiritual, is a sowing to the Spirit, which if persevered in, will ultimately bring the attainment of the Lord's gracious promises and arrangements - everlasting life and the kingdom.

But God

I know not, but God knows:

Oh, blessed rest from fear!

All my unfolding days

To Him are plain and clear.

I cannot, but God can:

Oh, balm for all my care!

The burden that I drop

His hand will lift and bear.

I see not, but God sees:

Oh, all-sufficient light!

My dark and hidden way

To Him is always bright.

(A J Flint)

Hymns and Spiritual Songs

(CONVENTION ADDRESS)

“Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Col. 3:16.

These words of the apostle Paul, and the companion verses in Eph, 5;18-20, are worth noting. From them, we learn something of the worship of the Lord’s people in the days of the apostles. The texts make it clear that congregational singing was a part of the worship of believers and briefly describes this as made up of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. If we trace this back through the Bible, we will find that we have a rich legacy of hymns from the past for us.

There are not many other references in the New Testament to the singing of hymns but in Matt. 26:30, it is recorded that, after the Memorial Supper instituted by the Lord, He and the disciples sang a hymn and then departed out into the Mount of Olives. The A.V. margin reference here is that it was a psalm. Bible Students today follow this example of our Lord in closing each memorial service with an appropriate hymn before departing.

In Acts 16, there is the record of Paul and Silas who, after being flogged, cast into prison and fastened into stocks in Philippi, sang praises to God. This is a most amazing account of praise being given to God under such cruel and painful circumstances. Verse 25 says that this was at midnight and that the other prisoners heard them. From the succeeding verses, we learn that as a result of their witness in song the keeper of the prison was so affected that he and his household became followers of the Lord. Furthermore, it is quite clear that God heard them, an indication that hymns sung from the hearts of the Lord’s people ascend to the heavenly realm.

Singing is also spoken of in James 5:13, “Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing psalms.” Psalms are included by the apostle in the text verse along with hymns and spiritual songs. The psalms have been described as “the cherished heritage of the Jewish church, the book of Psalms the inspired work of David” and in 2 Sam 23:1, David is referred to as “the sweet psalmist of Israel.”

The word “psalm” means a song of praise accompanied by music, and it is interesting to note in 1 Sam. 16:16-23 that Saul called upon David to play the harp for him when he was troubled and when an evil spirit was upon him; this refreshed Saul and the evil spirit departed from him at that time.

Songs are also referred to in the Old Testament, being written or composed for special occasions. One such was composed by Moses after the deliverance of Israel through the Red Sea. This is recorded in Exodus 15:1-19, the opening words being, “I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously the Lord is my strength and my song, and He is become my salvation. He is my God, and I will prepare Him a habitation, my fathers’ God and I will exalt Him.”

The Song of Solomon and Psalm 45 are songs to celebrate weddings. When clearly understood, Psalm 45 brings before us that momentous occasion when “the marriage of the Lamb has come and His wife has made herself ready; to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” Rev. 19:7,8.

In Isaiah 30:29, the prophet speaks of “a song, as in the night when a holy festival is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel.” And there are other instances of songs being composed in Old Testament times on occasions of national calamity or sorrow, victory or thanksgiving, and of breaking forth into songs of rejoicing in the Lord.

The first song in the New Testament would be that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in what is called the “Magnificat”, or hymn of Mary. “My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour; for He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden, for from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done great things and holy is His name.” Luke 1:46-49. The songs of Zacharias at the birth of John, and of the aged Simeon, when he took the infant Jesus in his arms, are also recorded by Luke.

The spiritual songs of the text may specially refer to those of the new age then beginning - the Gospel Age, and it seems reasonable to assume that it was common practice in the early church to sing all such forms of praise to God. In Rev. 15:3, the Lord’s people are spoken of as singing “the song of Moses and the Lamb” - the testimony of Moses pointing forward to the work of Jesus. God’s plan is indeed a harmonious song, as it were, in which all His people may rejoice.

It is interesting to note that when the papal system began to influence the church, this great privilege was taken away. A reliable source says - “the synod of Laodicea in the year AD 363 decreed that (1) psalms composed by private men must not be used in the church and (2) none but appointed singers shall sing in the

church. Eventually these two rules became virtually the law in both branches of the Catholic church.” This furthermore totally prevented the women from singing or taking any part in the great privilege of praise to God.

When the Reformation of the 16th century began, Martin Luther was one who first protested against the false doctrines and practices of the Catholic church. The book “Hymn Writers of the Christian Church” in reference to the life of Luther states that “during his lifetime, he started a movement that was to make his name practically synonymous with the Protestant Reformation. Though Luther is remembered primarily for this, he was a man of great culture and a devoted musician. He believed strongly in congregational singing, (including) women, and wrote more than 30 hymns.”

It is said that he gave as his authority for this the words of the apostle Paul as recorded in the text verse, where he admonished the Lord’s people to include in their services the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Other reformers joined him in this and included congregational hymn singing in their services. Here again, what great blessings have come to us with the removal of the dark ages teachings of men.

It is further notable that the majority of our best loved hymns of today were written during the 18th and 19th centuries. This was the time in church history often referred to as the Philadelphia period. The word “philadelphia” means brotherly love and it was a time when the light of the truth of God’s plan of salvation brought to His people a bond of brotherly love, as was evident in the early church. Among the many blessings of that time was the writing of those hymns and spiritual songs which so much add to the joy of fellowship.

Our hymnals have helped to keep alive this bond of brotherly love in our gatherings and in this context, it is good to note 1 Cora 14:26. Here Paul is counselling the church that when it meets together, all things should be done for the benefit of all the congregation. The verse reads - “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” It is notable that the hymn (A.V. psalm) is mentioned first and evidently has an important part in the service, preparing the mind to take in the lesson, presented to those gathered.

In Eph. 5:18, Paul exhorts his hearers - “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the spirit.... making melody in your hearts to the Lord” The apostle here makes it clear that there should be a very close relationship between heart and voice when offering praise to God. True praise and thanksgiving to God must spring from the inner desires of the heart. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Rom. 10:10.

Wine may have the effect of stirring the emotions but it brings only a temporary feeling of enjoyment which does not last. To be filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ is to have something that will not fade away. To be filled with the spirit has indeed quite a deep significance; it is said of Jesus that the spirit was given to Him without measure. (John 3:34), but because of our imperfection, we can only receive the spirit by (or in a) measure. Only as we are emptied of self and the old nature can we be filled with the spirit of Christ.

Emptied that He might fill me

As forth to His service I go;

Broken that so unhindered -

His life through me might flow.

In the opening words of the text (Col. 3:16), Paul says - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.” Some of our hymns have been modified so as to be free of doctrinal error and so that they can be used for teaching and admonishing and edifying one another, as we sing with thankfulness in our hearts to the Lord, uniting in prayer and praise and lifting up our voices in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Today we have a rich legacy in our hymn books, bequeathed to us by devoted men and women with the talent to write such lovely and scriptural hymns. In addition to our gratitude to these, we can also be thankful to those whose music so beautifully complements their words. There are hymns suitable for all occasions of Christian experience, designed for the furtherance of the ministry of the word of God and the development of Christian character.

By means of these, we too can, with the apostle, continually be “giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus.” (Eph. 5:20) (JBH:1994)

Baptised into Christ

(BAPTISM SERVICE ADDRESS)

It is always a privilege for others of the Lord's people to attend a service of water baptism, to rejoice with the brothers/sisters to be immersed in witness of their consecration to the Lord's service, to commend their decision and to encourage them in the carrying out of their consecration vows.

We remember always that water baptism is a symbol or sign of a deeper, inner truth. It is the divinely appointed means by which those to be baptised declare publicly their personal faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and their desire and determination, by God's grace, to follow Him as Lord of their lives henceforth.

But why should those who become Christians, that is, who recognise their need of a Saviour, who find that need met in Jesus and go on to pledge loyalty to Him, be baptised in water? If it is only a symbol, is it all that important, is it obligatory? From God's word, we see that it is first and foremost an act of obedience, but it is also a rich and blessed privilege for believers to confess their faith and commitment to their Lord in this way before others.

The related words in Greek for baptise, baptism, etc. occur many times in the New Testament. In three instances, they refer to ceremonial washing of hands or utensils (by dipping in water), practices which the Pharisees and other leaders were always very concerned about - to the detriment of many far more important issues. In other instances, however, the words refer (1) to the activities of John the Baptist and his mission to call Israel back to God in preparation for Messiah, (2) to the later rite of water baptism as practiced in the early church or (3) to the inner heart baptism which that pictures.

The circumstances of John's baptising in the waters of Jordan, the later baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch beside the road down into his own country, the basic meaning of the Greek words used, and perhaps above all, the significance of the act all point conclusively to immersion as the only appropriate form of baptism for Christians. In it, the candidate sinks beneath the water and then is raised up again out of it, illustrative of a death and resurrection. It is further clear from scripture that only those able to grasp the real significance of the act are to be baptised.

Baptisms in the sense that we are now considering do not seem to have been part of Jewish religious practice prior to the commencement of John the Baptist's ministry, though the scriptures speak of the Israelites being baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and of Noah and his family being a figure or picture of baptism. The thought of separation and obedience to the call of God is clear in both cases, and this is also the essence of Christian baptism.

The baptism of John was for those who responded to his call to the nation of Israel to repent of their sins against their God and their failure to honour the covenant which they had entered into with Him. This baptism was a demonstration of their repentance and their desire to wash away their sins. Here we note that this is not the meaning for Christians who are baptised - this is made clear from the account of Jesus' own baptism, for we read - "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptised by him, but John forbad Him, saying, I have need to be baptised by Thee, and comest Thou to me?" John had recognised the perfect, the righteous One who needed no repentance, but Jesus replied - "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." So John baptised Jesus in the Jordan river, near a place called Salim, because there was much water there, according to the apostle John's account.

Continuing, we read in Matthew's record - "And Jesus, when He was baptised, went up straightway out of the water, and lo, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Matt. 3:13-17) The dove was a sign given particularly for John's benefit, but here the Heavenly Father was acknowledging the life laid down in sacrifice, a sacrifice to be completed some three and a half years later at Calvary.

Later in His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples that - "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened (pressed) till it be accomplished." Jesus' baptism was an ongoing commitment, begun at Jordan and finished at Calvary. This is the pattern of Christian baptism, in all things Jesus being our perfect pattern.

But the question remains - why need Christians be baptised in water? Is the inner heart commitment not sufficient in itself? As we have seen the inner heart commitment must come first, but let us consider the scriptures for both instruction and example in this matter; they alone can be our true guide in this and all other matters of Christian doctrine and practice.

Firstly, we note our Master's own words to His disciples just prior to His ascension - "Go ye therefore and make disciples out of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." (Matt. 28: 19,20) The wording makes it evident that water baptism is here referred to, and indeed in the book of Acts we find that those who believed as a result of the apostles' preaching were baptised in water.

Secondly and most importantly, the apostle in Romans 6 explains clearly the real significance of the inner baptism of heart and mind. In verses 3 to 11, Paul uses the analogy or example of being buried and of being raised up from death to new life. He is speaking here of the reality, but how beautifully baptism by immersion in water pictures that reality.

Thirdly and perhaps most blessed of all to all who truly seek to follow Jesus is His own example. What a privilege it is to follow Him in the waters of baptism, to there declare before witnesses our firm desire and intention, by God's grace, to no longer serve self but to follow our Lord's example of daily obedience to the Father's will to our life's end. This act of consecration, the presentation of Our justified lives to God for His service now and for preparation for the work of the kingdom with our dear Lord, is at the heart of baptism.

In this we follow the Master, not just as a once only offering but daily. Our Lord's words speak to us of this in Luke 9:23 - "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." The apostle Paul also, writing to those at Rome who had already given their lives to the Lord, exhorted them to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1) Ours is a daily and lifelong calling.

Who then should be baptised? Into what or whom are they to be baptised? Some preach baptism for remission of sins but Paul in Rom. 10:9 & 13 makes it clear that our salvation from sin and death is alone by faith in Jesus - "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved ... for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This is God's gracious gift by faith; only those so justified can come to God in true consecration and witness to it in baptism.

Some baptise candidates into their group or organisation, but the scriptures by teaching and practice show that true baptism is into Christ, to be identified with Him in every facet of life. Here it is that new life in Christ begins; here is the Bible basis for real unity - one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Here in Christ is where alone we can find fellowship with others of like faith in Him.

As already stated, it is only when we have been justified or reckoned righteous by faith in Jesus that we can be acceptable in God's sight, only then have we anything to offer to Him. In baptism, we show forth that, having received God's gift of life through Christ, we henceforth wish to use that life to glorify Him, to bring honour to His name by living so as to please Him and to act towards others in the same spirit of love and goodwill. Paul rejoiced in His Lord and Saviour who "loved me and gave Himself for me." True love is shown in selflessness and sacrifice.

In the early church, the Lord added to the numbers such as should be saved (RSV. "were being saved") - Acts 2:47. These were then baptised into Christ, not into any organisation but into a person, even Christ, into union with Him. How much grander is the Bible concept of baptism than many human adaptations of it! The Bible standard, expressed in Gal. 3:26-29, is clear and beautiful - "you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Throughout it is all Christ - God's children by faith IN Christ, all baptised INTO Christ, all made one IN Christ, all heirs WITH Christ. This is the divine progression with faith always first. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:10)

By instruction and example, baptism in water is the will of God for all who have come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord, not instead of the true and vital inner baptism of heart and will, but as a sign and witness that it has occurred. This reality is explained by the apostle in Romans 6; verse 4 reads - therefore we are buried with Him (Christ) by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

How closely the apostle identifies each believer with our Lord Himself, especially when we follow Him in the waters of baptism. Just as Jesus' baptism was the sign of the laying down of His life to do the Father's will, so likewise ours. Speaking for our Lord, the Psalmist declares - "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." (Psa. 40:7, 8)

The new life which is pictured when the candidate is raised up from the water should have already begun in his or her heart. The apostle tells us - "in whom (Christ) you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. In whom, also, after you believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." (Eph. 1:13) How wonderful that when our hearts turn fully to God by faith, He seals us or marks us out as His children and begins His good work in us.

How completely the symbol pictures the change, the putting off of the old, so that Christ may come and dwell in our hearts by faith and the Holy Spirit begin God's handiwork in our lives. This is the "newness of

life” into which we enter by faith and in which we are to walk, moment by moment, day by day, while life shall last. All that might mar its purity or freshness is to be laid aside as we heed the apostle’s words - “Let us hold fast our profession, for we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:14-16)

And what, in practical terms, will the commitment symbolised in the waters of baptism entail? We have seen already that it means taking up the cross daily, that is laying down our lives daily in service and sacrifice. One precious promise for all who do so is found in John 15:10,11 - “If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” Truly, it is joy to do His will.

There will surely be times of testing and adversity as our Lord foretold, but the apostle Paul puts these into perspective - “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Cor. 10:13) “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Rom. 8:37)

So as we rejoice to see the witness of each new child of God, as they follow their Lord in the waters of baptism, we pray His continued guidance and blessing upon them, knowing that He who has called them by His grace and drawn them to Jesus is faithful; He is able to finish His work in them to His glory and their eternal blessing.
(DS:1993)

Pass it on

Have you had a kindness shown? Pass it on;
‘Twas not given for thee alone, Pass it on;
Let it travel down the years,
Let it wipe another’s tears,
Till in heaven the deed appears
Pass it on,

True Indeed

Thou must be true thyself,
If thou the truth would teach;
Thy soul must overflow, if thou
Another’s soul would reach.
It needs the overflow of heart
To give the lips full speech