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Fellowship One With Another

(Convention Address)

“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7.

The first few verses of John’s epistle introduce us to two separate but closely related aspects of the Christian life. In verses 3 and 4, the apostle is explaining the purpose of his letter and indeed of his ministry. “That we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. And these things we write unto you that your joy may be full.”

The basis of fellowship one with another is that joint fellowship which each one has with the Father and the Son. This basic fellowship or communion is intensely personal and individual, for each must come by faith to God through Christ to know His salvation. Even after each has personally confessed Him and committed his or her life to following the Saviour, there are still the personal experiences of life to be met up with.

We remember Jesus’ kindly words to Peter when he had just been told by Jesus what his lot would be in later life. Peter seeing John said to Jesus—“Lord and what shall this man do?” To this Jesus replied—“If I will that he tarry till I come what is that to thee? Follow thou me.” John 21:21,22. Jesus was not recommending a total lack of concern for the welfare of other followers, but gently teaching Peter the lesson of personal discipleship. For each individual Christian since Peter including ourselves at this end of the age are in constant fellowship with our loving Father and with His dear Son, so that even if we were deprived of all human association with others, we should still not be alone.

But the communion of each one with the Father and the Son should and surely does lead into that fellowship which the apostle John describes in our text. “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of His Son Jesus purifies from every sin.” (N.I.V.) This is certainly one of the greatest treasures and privileges of the Christian way, that fellowship one with another—the fellowship of kindred minds, like to that above. “That they all may be one, as Thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.” John 17:21. This was our Master’s prayer and the bonding agent of this unity, this fellowship, is love.

“A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” John 13:34,35.

What then is behind the thought of the fellowship that is so precious in Christian discipleship? The word so translated is elsewhere given as communion, contribution, communication, while related words are translated partaker, partner, companion. The basic thought in every case is of jointly sharing or jointly participating in some activity, experience or blessing. One commentator has written thus—“Fellowship is a specifically Christian word and denotes that common participation in the grace of God, the salvation of Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit which is the spiritual birthright of all Christian believers. It is their common possession of God which makes them one. Our fellowship with each other arises from and depends on our fellowship with God. This then is John’s objective—through proclamation of the message of life in Jesus Christ to bring each of his hearers and readers into relationship with the Father and hence to each other.”

It is not surprising therefore to find the New Testament writers encouraging believers of all ages to foster and develop the spirit of fellowship. This is best achieved by each one striving by God's grace and by faith to draw daily closer to the heavenly Father. For as we draw nearer to Him and become the more engrossed in His love and power and glory, then the human frailties from which none of us is free will fade and we will see more of God's workmanship and the likeness of our Saviour in each one instead.

Having seen that the basis of mutual fellowship is the personal relationship with God through Christ, we note that the apostle Paul in Eph. 4:46 lists those things which all true believers share and upon which real unity in the Spirit and productive fellowship rest. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." One body of His children, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one baptism, one loving Father—what a heritage is ours!

This oneness is particularly brought to our attention each time we remember our Saviour's death in the Memorial observance. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." 1 Cor. 10:16,17. These rich verses remind us not only of the common basis of our acceptance with God and the source of our new life in Christ, but also of our privilege of sharing with our Master and with each other in all the experiences and sacrifices of the Christian way, that way which our Saviour has already trodden before us.

Let us consider some of the aspects of this fellowship with one another which should be the gladly accepted and cherished lot of every child of God. In Eph. 4 after referring to the one body, the apostle next mentions the one Spirit and it is surely by that one Spirit that each one is begotten into the family of God. "In whom (Jesus) also after ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Eph. 1:13. "As many as are lead by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God." Rom. 8:14. Each one has been marked out as a child of God, a member of the one family, and the apostle writing to the Philippians challenges them and us to live out that family relationship.

"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Phil. 2:1,2.

This fellowship in the Spirit should be productive in each one of love for those things that are best in God's sight, that edify and build up. This communion should be developing in us each a greater love for God's word and a delight in the precious truths and promises which it contains.

The privilege of sharing in such riches is beautifully portrayed in Mal. 3:16. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name." The promise follows in verse 17. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." They that feared the Lord spake often one to another. We need not to be told what sort of things they spoke about, but we remember the much later record of the noble souls at Berea, who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so." Acts 17:11. The personal study of God's word is always important, but shared fellowship in its treasures is a rich experience which none should ever neglect. For just such reasons, the apostles and those who followed them set up, under God's leading, local churches—assemblies of believers, as soon as possible, wherever the gospel went. Today we are blessed that we can freely meet to praise God and meditate upon His word.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." Heb. 10:25. If these words of the apostle were so important in his day, how much more so now, when all the signs about us speak of the near and fast approach of that day. This assembling is a two-way matter, for each of us has something to give and something to receive from that gathering of ourselves together. In each case, this is of the Lord, who promised—"I am with you always, even to the end of the age," but by God's grace He can use anyone of His people to be a channel of His blessing.

In another lovely picture, the apostle represents the individual members of the church as parts of the one body, dependent on each other, but each under the headship of one, even Jesus Christ. "For by the one Spirit are we all baptised into one body and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member but many

and whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.” 1 Cor. 12:12-27.

In such an intimate relationship, the fellowship of shared experience will be a further bonding agent. The apostle Paul in all his ministry for his Lord was eager and thankful for the fellowship of the brethren far and near, for their prayers, for their material support, for their constant remembrance of him. How precious is this privilege and joy of all God’s people—to bear one another up before the throne of grace, to give the word of encouragement or gratitude, to extend the helping hand in time of need! Yet it is possible to neglect or overlook the privileges of this aspect of our fellowship in Christ. In Phil. 1:5, the apostle thanks the brethren for their “fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now” and still today we also can support those who labour for the Lord in the gospel. Like the Philippian of old who shared with Paul in the work of the gospel, and to whom therefore we also owe some debt, we can be partners, albeit in a small way, with those whom the Lord calls and enables to help spread the wonderful message of the gospel of the kingdom.

In 1 Pet. 4:13-16, we read further of the privilege of the fellowship in sufferings with Christ. “Rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you..... if any suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God on this behalf.” Here again, the individual believer’s fellowship, his participation or sharing in sufferings is first and foremost with Christ, for His name and His cause. But this is also a shared experience with all the Lord’s people and in the preceding verse, the apostle has had to remind his readers—”Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” In some form or other, this fellowship of suffering is the common lot of every Christian. We may not always know just what fiery troubles others are going through, but all have the assurance of Rom. 8:17—”if children, then heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.”

Nor can we always appreciate what chastisings, what afflictions, the Father may be allowing others to endure for their character development and faithfulness, nor can they ours, but we know that every true child of God must receive some share. We know also that it is in love and not in anger that all His chastenings will come. So we all have the opportunity to seek and strengthen and support and comfort one another in the fellowship of trial and difficult experience. James tells us to “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience.” Jas. 1:2,3. But he also stresses the need for practical expression of concern for the welfare of other brethren and Paul in writing to the Galatians urges them—”as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Gal. 6:10.

The fellowship of the Lord’s people provides scope for practical help as well as the ministry of comfort and of prayer. Furthermore, because of diversity of background, personal qualities and temperament, it provides a school in which we may learn and perfect the graces of kindness, long-suffering, forbearance, forgiveness and, above all, love—the bond of perfectness. Col. 3:12-14.

Then there is the ultimate glorious fellowship which all the faithful saints of the gospel age will enjoy together with Him whose prayer for them was— “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory.” John 17:24. “We know that when He (Jesus) shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” 1 John 3:2. What perfect fellowship will then be ours, first and foremost with our dear Saviour and with our loving Father in heaven, but also with each one of the Lord’s people! How important it is then that our present fellowship with all those who name the name of Christ in sincerity and truth be characterised by that selfless love which our Master commanded of us! How necessary it is that we remember that our real “citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body.” Phil. 3:20,21.

This glorious hope, these grand expectations, are the heritage of all the Lord’s people; how they should cheer and encourage us on as members of that one great communion of Christ’s brethren. By our words, by our actions, by the witness of our lives, we can help each other along the way. This is our privilege, indeed it is our duty, to be gladly and lovingly accepted by every child of God. He can bless this ministry of service through every passing year for each one of us, as long as we maintain that close fellowship with the Father and His dear Son, and walk in the light as He is in the light. This alone is the context, the climate, in which true fellowship can develop and bring mutual blessing to each one.

In summary, we might say that our fellowship one with another entails:

1. a fellowship in common loyalty—in allegiance to and loving communion with the one gracious Heavenly Father and His Son, our Saviour.
2. a fellowship in the same walk in light—in single-minded desire to think and speak and act as children of light, seeking only that which is true and pure and will stand the searching test of light.
3. a fellowship in mutual love—in willing obedience to our Lord's command and in recognition of His life manifest in each of His people.
4. a fellowship in shared experience—in readiness to accept from God's hand whatever He sees best for the honour of His name and for our growth and fruitfulness.
5. a fellowship in Christ's sufferings—in determination to follow Him whatever the cost, laying aside every weight and looking to Him.
6. a fellowship in the one hope and calling—rejoicing together in confident trust that what God has promised He can and will richly fulfil in and for us.
7. a fellowship in Christ's glory—seen only yet in prospect and experienced only in foretaste, but finally to be realised in all its fullness. "I go to prepare a place for you that where I am, there ye may be also."

“In Remembrance of Me.”

The Scriptures contain no request by our Lord that his followers should observe His birth but He made special request that all who would be His consecrated disciples should truly celebrate His death. As our Lord's sacrifice as "the Lamb of God" took the place of the annual Jewish Passover ceremony, it is reasonable that the observance of the Memorial of Christ's death be celebrated yearly also, on the anniversary of the institution of this observance "on the night in which he was betrayed."

The Apostle Peter presents the matter of our Lord's sacrifice as our Redeemer beautifully in 1 Pet. 1:18-20—"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conduct received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." The perfection of Christ as the Man Christ Jesus is clearly indicated in this passage, and it is just as clear that the Passover lamb which the people of Israel were instructed to sacrifice each year was a type of Christ, our Passover Lamb.

The sprinkled blood of the Passover Lamb was the means of saving Israel's firstborns from death in Egypt, as well as being the means of delivering all Israel out of Egyptian bondage on that special Passover night so long ago. That was a wonderful deliverance! What shall we think and say, however, about the saving of the spiritual firstborns unto God of this Gospel Age, and the ultimate deliverance of all the human race from the bondage of sin and death, because of the sacrifice of the antitypical Lamb of God, even Jesus Christ? Truly this wonderful prospect fills us with joy and thankfulness beyond description!

From Matthew's account of the Memorial, we read in chapter 26:26—"And as they were eating"—finishing the Jewish Passover supper—"Jesus took bread"—the unleavened bread of the Jewish supper, picturing His own perfect humanity—"and blessed it"—gave thanks to God for this fitting symbol—"and brake it"—picturing the breaking of His own body—"and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body." In other words, appropriate His perfect humanity, thus gaining justification by faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. As expressed by Paul in Rom. 5:1—"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The following verse, Matt. 26:27, reads—"And he took the cup"—the cup of the fruit of the vine—"and gave thanks"—thanked God for this symbol of His own blood—"and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it." Again, Jesus was saying, appropriate my blood, my life, my perfect humanity, thus also gaining justification by faith in the sight of God. It is the justified human life that true believers in Christ have the privilege of laying down in the steps of the Master.

A secondary and deeper meaning of our Lord's Memorial the Apostle Paul was used of God to explain so beautifully in 1 Cor 10:16,17—"The cup of blessing which we bless is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? for we being many are one bread, and one body for we are all partakers of that one bread." Here we see the oneness of Christ and His members beautifully revealed. So, in observing our Lord's Memorial we not only do so "in remembrance of Christ," but we also signify our own willingness to be broken with Him, and have our life poured out in sacrifice with Him.

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"—Phil. 3:10-14.

As we meet each year at the Memorial of our Lord's death, it is required that we do so with pure hearts, having sought forgiveness for all shortcomings through the merit of Christ, and thus acceptable in the sight of God. 1 Cor. 5:7,8—"Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover (Lamb) is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast...with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

A Purchased People

The Apostle Peter (1 Pet 2:9) speaks of the I consecrated followers of the Master as being a peculiar people. The Greek word used by him has the thought of a "purchased" people, or a people acquired by purchase. The thought is essentially the same as that outlined by Paul in Titus 2:14. This people is purchased at a great cost, even by Jesus' laying down His life for them. Acquired at so great a sacrifice they are precious in His sight, a very special treasure.

A Chosen Generation

Peter mentions other characteristics of these peculiar people. He says, for example, that they are a "chosen generation." In 1 Peter 1:2 we are told that these people are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience." Paul explains the manner in which God's foreknowledge operates in connection with this elect people, saying, "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son."—Rom. 8:29.

Here again we are reminded of the condition requisite to being the peculiar people of God, that condition being zeal for good works. God has predestinated that each one of this class must be conformed to the image of Christ. The zeal of God's house consumed the Master, and if we are like Him, then the same zeal will consume us. The Master's zeal was for the good work, of God, and our zeal must also be for God's work. It will not do merely to be zealous. Our zeal must be controlled by the will of God, then it will result in blessings to others and to the glory of the Lord.

God wants us to "give diligence to make our calling and election sure," and if we do, we will become more and more conformed to the likeness of His beloved Son. (2 Pet. 1:10.) To be like Jesus we need to get acquainted with Him. We can do this through the Word. As we note the details of His consecrated life we are at once impressed with the full extent to which he sought to know and to do His Father's will at all times and under all circumstances. In the most trying moment of His earthly career He lifted up His heart to God and said, "not My will, but Thine, be done."—Luke 22:42.

Jesus was faithful in prayer, and could say to His Father, "I knew that Thou hearest Me always." (John 11:42.) Jesus let His light shine so faithfully that it finally cost Him His life. Jesus was ever on the alert to bless others, even the little children. Such is the portrait of the Master and God has predestinated that if we are to be a part of the "chosen generation" of this age, we must be conformed to the Master's image.

A Royal Priesthood

"Ye are a royal priesthood," the apostle asserts. Here again the language God employed to describe his typical people is applied to spiritual Israel. Israel was designated "a kingdom of priests," but in order to make good that

title continued zeal for the doing of God's will was necessary. (Exod. 19:5,6.) This zeal was lacking, and now the title is transferred "to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."—Matt. 21:43.

The priests of Israel represented God among the people. Their work was twofold. They offered sacrifice, and they dispensed the blessings of God to the people vouchsafed by the sacrifices. All Israel was to be a nation of priests in representing God before the rest of the world, but failed to actually attain this high position of divine favor. Now the title and privilege goes to God's peculiar people of the Gospel age. In 1 Peter 2:5 the apostle explains that the consecrated are "an holy priesthood" to "offer up sacrifices." Peter also says that we are built up a "spiritual house." This is a reference to the symbolism of the temple as the meeting place between God and Israel. The people came to the temple to receive God's blessings. So God's peculiar people are to be the channel of divine blessings to the whole world when the work of sacrifice is complete. What wondrous grace is thus bestowed upon those who are "zealous of good works."

A Holy Nation

To be holy means to be pure, unadulterated, and God expects that His peculiar people will be undivided in their devotion to Him. He does not want us to be "double minded." There may be little danger today that we will worship Moloch or other heathen deities, but there are, nevertheless, many "idols" which our wayward hearts may set up, and through the worship of which we would become unholy in our devotion to God. There is the god of pleasure; the god of wealth; the god of ease; the god of pride and ambition; and there is the "self" god. To qualify as a part of God's holy nation of today the divine will must reign supreme in our hearts and lives.

God wants us to be "obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts. "But as He which hath called you is holy," says the apostle, "so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." Then the apostle quotes from the Old Testament, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:14-16; Lev. 11:45.) The entire text in Leviticus from which Peter quoted, reads, "For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, *to be your God*; ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."

God is there reminding Israel that He was exclusively their God. Later, through Amos, God declared, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2.) God is pure and sinless from whatever standpoint we may view Him, but in these passages he seems to be emphasising the point that He had not been a God to any other nation except Israel. It is upon the basis of this holiness toward them, that He asks them to be holy toward Him. He had no other people; they were to have no other gods.

The same thing is true today. God loves all nations, and has provided blessings for them but He considers the "holy nation" only as being His peculiar people. To these he becomes Father, Helper, and Friend. He engraves them upon the palms of His hands; they are as dear to Him as the apple of His eye. His name is written in their foreheads. He provides for all their needs; gives them strength when they are weak; comforts when they are sorrowful. In the end, He will exalt them to His own nature and glory. They are a peculiar treasure unto Him, and no good thing will he withhold from them.

God's Praises

After applying these various symbolically descriptive titles to the followers of the Master the apostle explains the practical significance of what they all imply, saying, "that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9.) This, after all, is the objective of the "good works" for which God's peculiar people should be zealous. All that is done by them, both in this age and in the next, shows forth the praises of God.

The Millennial age work of healing the sick and raising the dead will certainly show forth God's praises. When the knowledge of God's glory fills the earth as the waters cover the sea, all mankind will praise the Lord. Then every creature in heaven and in earth will be praising Him that sitteth upon the throne, and will also give glory to the Lamb that was slain. (Rev. 5:13.) But those who are privileged to share in that future work of filling the earth with the glory of God will be those only who previously have zealously sacrificed all their earthly interests in showing forth the praises of the Lord in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom—now this side of the veil—they shine as lights.

The extent to which the light of the Gospel penetrates the darkness of this world is not the responsibility of the

Christian; but we are responsible for letting the light shine. Whether men hear or not does not affect the responsibility imposed upon us by divine grace to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. We are a royal priesthood to this end; we are a holy nation for this purpose; we are a chosen generation to be the light of the world. A consuming zeal for carrying on this good work as God directs in His Word, and recognition of the fact that it is all by grace that the privilege is extended to us, will mean that God will continue to encircle us with His love as His peculiar people.

This does not mean that we can earn our way into the Kingdom. It does not mean that salvation is of works, and not of grace. It *does* mean that we will be demonstrating our faith by our works; and that, realizing we have been bought with a price, we do not belong to ourselves, but to Him, and are to be His servants forever. It means that we qualify to be God's peculiar treasure by showing our appreciation of what He has done for us. If we really appreciate His love, we will want to tell it and live it out, and by doing this, to show forth His praises.

Matthew the Publican

"I am not come to call the righteous but sinners. "Luke 5:32.

It has been truly said that "the story of Matthew X is an emphatic witness to the truth that the Gospel is no respecter of persons, and that even in the selection of His more immediate followers Jesus thought not of anything in their outward surroundings, but simply and solely of their spiritual fitness for their new task." Surely the Saviour made no mistake in calling Matthew to be one of twelve Apostles. His life subsequent to his call gives evidence of having been most fruitful, and to him was assigned the honor of giving to the followers of Christ a most inspiring account of the life and ministry of our blessed Redeemer.

It was in or near the city of Capernaum that Matthew received the call from the Master. This city where our Lord had been teaching and healing, was situated on the sea of Galilee. It was a city of considerable commercial importance, and undoubtedly the lake-shore in that vicinity was quite populous. The tense of the Greek would seem to indicate that our Lord kept going by the sea-shore, stopping here and there to discourse to the people, multitudes of whom flocked to hear Him. It was during this journey that He passed Matthew, formerly known as Levi, a custom-house agent of the Roman government — a revenue collector, who was attending to his business, and whom our Lord addressed, saying, "Follow Me," and who obeyed the call to discipleship.

Many get a false thought from the brevity of the narrative, and infer that Levi (Matthew) had never heard of Jesus before, and that our Lord, as He passed him, cast upon him some kind of a spell which led him to instantly drop his business. On the contrary, the Lord and His disciples were well known in that vicinity and probably Matthew had not only knowledge of our Lord, but also faith in Him, as the Messiah. Not until then, however, had Jesus invited him to become one of His immediate disciples; not until then, therefore, could Matthew essay to become such. There evidently were many who heard the Lord discourse time and again, and who were to be reckoned as amongst His friends, but who were by no means invited to become special followers, companions and associates in the ministry of the Gospel, as were the Twelve.

Nor are we to suppose that Matthew left his money-drawer open, and his accounts with the Roman government unsettled, to immediately follow the Master. Rather, we may assume that it may have taken days, or possibly weeks, to straighten his affairs and to enable him to respond to the Lord's call to apostleship. We should remember that the history of several years, and many discourses, conversations and incidents, are crowded in the gospel narrative into very brief space.

Publicans Despised

The office of a publican offered many opportunities for dishonesty and extortion, bribery, etc., but we cannot suppose that Levi was one of these dishonest publicans, for had he been so we may be sure he would not have been called to the apostleship and would not have responded to the call, for we are not to forget that it is written, "No man can come to Me except the Father which sent Me draw him."—John 6:44.

Quoting Peloubet's Notes as to the general character of the publicans: "To become a publican in Palestine nineteen centuries ago a man had first of all to sell his country. The publican was the embodiment and representative of the foreign government. And to become a publican, in the second place, a man had to sell his conscience. The publican's trade was a dishonest trade. Taxes today are fixed by responsible and representative bodies, and the tax-gatherer, as a result, can never exact more than is due. But taxes long ago were 'farmed'. The taxes of a town or

district or province would be sold to the highest bidder, and that highest bidder would then be allowed to squeeze out of the people of his district what money he could. It was a system that encouraged corruption and extortion.

Matthew was a man of influence, and as soon as he accepted the Lord's call, and responded by consecrating himself and his all, he set about to use his influence in drawing others to the Savior. He would announce his own devotion to the cause in such a manner and under such favorable circumstances as if possible would win some. To these ends he arranged a banquet for the Lord and His disciples at his house, and invited many of his friends and business associates. These are called "Many publicans and sinners."

We have seen why the publicans were ostracized by the scribes and Pharisees—not always because they were wicked, but because their business was disesteemed: and being thus cut off socially from the ultra-religious, the publicans were forced to have most of their social intercourse with the non-religious, by way of contrast called "sinners." By the term sinners we are not necessarily to understand vile persons and evil-doers, but rather persons who did not profess nor attempt the holiness claimed by the Pharisees—persons who did not claim to be absolute keepers of the Divine Law—who did not profess to make the outside of the cup or platter absolutely clean, though perhaps in many instances the inside was as clean or more clean than were the hearts of the Pharisees, who professed perfect holiness.

Matthew Ready

The words of Dean Farrar are well in place at this point: "But He who came to seek and save the lost—He who could evoke Christian holiness out of the midst of heathen corruption—could make even out of a Jewish publican, the Apostle and the first Evangelist of a new and living Faith. His choice of apostles was dictated by a spirit far different from that of calculating policy or conventional prudence. He rejected the dignified scribe (Matt. 8:19); He chose the despised and hated tax-gatherer. It was the glorious unworldliness of a Divine insight and a perfect charity, and Matthew more than justified it by turning his knowledge of writing to a sacred use, and becoming the biographer of his Savior and his Lord.

"No doubt Matthew had heard some of the discourses, has seen some of the miracles of Christ. His heart had been touched, and to the eyes of Him who despised none and despaired of none, the publican, even as he sat at 'the receipt of custom', was ready for the call. One word was enough. The 'Follow Me' which showed to Matthew that his Lord loved him, and was ready to use him as a chosen instrument in spreading the good tidings of the kingdom of God, was sufficient to break the temptations of avarice and the routine of a daily calling, and 'he left all, rose up, and followed Him,' touched into noblest transformation by a forgiving and redeeming love."

A Consecrated Home

Matthew's endeavour to bring his friends and associates into contact with the Master and His teaching is certainly commendable, and is a good illustration of what each one who enters the Lord's flock should do. Each should seek to exert his influence where it is greatest, amongst those with whom he is acquainted and who are acquainted with him, and upon whom either his past honesty and good character should have an influence, or else those to whom his radical change of life would be the most manifest.

Another lesson for us is the propriety of using hospitality as a channel for the advancement of the truth—the homes of those who have consecrated themselves to the Lord should be consecrated homes, in which the first consideration should be the service of the Master; and its influence should be to draw out friends to the Lord, that they might be taught of Him. Too frequently the consecration of the home is overlooked and antagonistic influences are permitted to dominate, with the result that neither the Lord nor the Lord's people are entertained, nor His Cause served in them. Such a house and home loses a great blessing.

Spiritual Food

It would seem from other narratives of this same banquet (which was probably several weeks after Matthew's call) that a large number of people were gathered at Matthew's house aside from those who partook of the banquet (Luke 5:29), and from the connection of the narrative it is supposed that it was on one of the regular fast days of the Pharisees. These facts led to the question:

Why does your Teacher associate with these people, who do not profess sanctification? The objection was not

because our Lord taught the publicans and sinners, but because He ate with them, which implied a social equality, and the Pharisees evidently recognized that our Lord and His apostles were professing and living lives of entire consecration to God.

In answer to this query our Lord said, “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick”—the implication being that the physician had a right to go to and mingle with those whom he sought to relieve, and might mingle with them in whatever manner he saw to be expedient for their cure. This language does not imply that the Pharisees were not sick, and that they did not need our Lord’s ministry, though the fact was that not admitting that they were sin-sick they were not disposed to receive his good medicine of doctrine.

The same thought is otherwise expressed by our Lord in the same connection, saying, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Any one who considered himself to be righteous would be beyond the call of repentance. His first lesson would be to learn that he was not righteous, not perfect; hence our Lord went chiefly to those who admitted that they were not righteous, and whose hearts therefore were better soil for the truth than others. Our Lord intimated this in His parable of the publican’s and the Pharisee’s prayers, assuring us that in God’s sight the publican had the better standing, because of his acknowledgment of imperfections and his petition for mercy.

To all who feel their need, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the Lord is gracious. Such a one of nobler spirit must Matthew have been, whom our Lord knew and called to His service.

(from the “Herald”)