

What Manner of Persons Ought We to Be?

*“Seeing then that
all these things
shall be dissolved,
what manner of
persons ought ye to
be in all holy
conversation and
godliness?”
—II Peter 3:11*

THE FUTURE INSTITUTION of Christ’s kingdom was one of the chief sources of inspiration for the Early Church. While the Apostle Peter did not look for these blessed events in God’s plan to occur prior to his death, yet it was his hope that they were near

at hand. The establishment of Christ’s kingdom—the “new heavens and a new earth”—meant, of necessity, that the heavens and the earth over which Satan is the ruler would have to be dissolved.—II Pet. 3:13

This vital truth was emphasized by Peter to impress upon the Lord’s people the worthlessness of all hopes, ambitions, and joys which have their foundations and their associations in the things of this present world. The fact that these things were

to be dissolved, and that the followers of Christ were looking forward to having part in the new heavens and the new earth, should have been a great incentive to them in giving all diligence to make their “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10

“What manner of persons ought ye to be,” Peter inquires in our opening text, “in all holy conversation and godliness?” If this question was a serious consideration in his day, how much more weighty it is now when we stand at the very threshold of the new dispensation, and are in the midst of the turmoil and trouble which will bring to an end the current world order.

IMPORTANT TO OUR DAY

Soon, we believe, Satan’s rule over the present world will be ended, and mankind will stand face to face with the blessed conditions of the established kingdom of God throughout all the earth! (Matt. 6:10) Within a comparatively short time also, the true church is to finish her earthly course. How important it is, then, that we properly “redeem the time,” zealously carrying out in our hearts and lives the divine will for us in these climactic days.—Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5

It is not merely a fanciful notion, a pleasing illusion of the mind, that we are living in the Day of the Lord, when the old world order is passing away. (II Pet. 3:10) Indeed, the more we study the prophecies of the Bible pertaining to this time, the more vividly we realize the importance of the days in which we are living. Truly, we stand in awe when we realize that it is the blessed privilege of the saints today to see many fulfillments of prophecy,

long awaited by the faithful throughout the centuries, actually transpiring.

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

In seeking an answer to Peter's question, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" we are reminded of Paul's practical application of our understanding of God's Word: "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (I Thess. 4:18) "These words" which the apostle suggests be used for the comforting of the Lord's people, are those in the preceding verses. (vss. 13-17) These tell of the coming resurrection of all those asleep in death. They speak also of the "coming" [Greek: *parousia*, or presence] of our Lord Jesus, his descending from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; also that the dead in Christ rise first, and that those who are alive and remain are to be exalted together with him in the "air"—the spiritual phase of the kingdom.

To those unacquainted with God's Word, the Dark Age concept of Christ visibly descending from heaven with a shout and with a literal trumpet surely would not be very comforting. However, to those who understand the real meaning of these symbolic expressions, and the glorious truths which they set forth for the enlightenment and encouragement of the saints at this time, they are indeed comforting. In fact, the truths pertaining to the end of the present age are of vital importance to the people of God, because they signal we are living very near to the time when all mankind, both the living and those in the grave, will be

brought forth into the earthly phase of the kingdom.

It will be at this time that the words of John the Revelator will be fulfilled: “I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. 21:3,4

Our life of holy conversation and godliness should, therefore, be one filled with thoughts, words, and activities in keeping with the glorious prospect of these events bringing about a time of joy and blessings to all the families of the earth. We are to comfort one another with these thoughts, and not merely to learn about them and then keep them to ourselves. We are not to be ashamed of our knowledge of the unfolding of God’s eternal purpose concerning mankind, nor think it unimportant and therefore relegate it to an obscure place in our belief and ministry.

As the glorious truths pertaining to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom constituted the inspiration of the Early Church, still more should it be the basis of our rejoicing now. This is especially so as we see many evidences all around us that the “elements” [Greek: orderly arrangements] of this world—the civil, religious, social, and financial systems—are, symbolically speaking, continuing to “melt with fervent heat,” and that soon the “new heavens and a new earth” will be established.—II Pet. 3:12,13

LOVE—A CRITICAL TEST

Examining ourselves with the thought that no promise of the Lord, nor any requirement of his, should be overlooked in view of the importance of the times in which we are living, we are reminded of the apostle's lesson in I Corinthians 13 on the importance of love. Paul reminds us that even though we may have faith sufficient to remove mountains, but have not love, it profits us nothing. (vs. 2) It would be of no avail for us, by faith, to be aware of the prophetic fulfillments of our day, and the imminence of Christ's kingdom, if they did not inspire within us that burning love for God and his people which will cause us to devote our all to the divine service, laying down our lives for the Lord, the Truth, and our brethren.

The Apostle John reminds us of the vital test of love, saying, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. ... And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (I John 3:14-16) In the light of this inspired testimony, we can see that love is not to be viewed as merely a shallow goodness. We are not to suppose that the true love of God is really in our hearts simply because we have no animosity toward others, hence would not knowingly do them injury. The love which is the true motive of "holy conversation and godliness" is a principle that will move us to lay down our lives in sacrifice and service for others. The practice of justice will keep us from injuring our brethren and our fellow men, but love will prompt us to serve and do good unto all.—Gal. 6:10

Our love for the brethren should include all. While the Apostle Paul says, "The Lord knoweth them

that are his,” our knowledge is not as complete and comprehensive as his. (II Tim. 2:19) Our knowledge of them is limited. Therefore, our service for the brethren should not be limited to those few with whom we may be immediately associated, but should reach out in an effort to acquaint all who may have a hearing ear with the glorious Gospel message that has been such a comfort and encouragement to us.

LABOR OF LOVE

The Heavenly Father could have made it easy for us to serve the brethren had he so desired. He could in his own way let us know exactly who the individual brethren are in our area and arrange matters so that all we would need to do is to call upon them with the Word of Truth. They, in turn, would accept and we would rejoice in the privilege of thus being used of the Lord to communicate his message to his people.

However, in God’s wisdom, and as a test of the genuineness of our love, he arranged that it should be done in a more difficult way—one which calls for self-sacrifice, labor, reproach, and persecution. That is why the apostle, in Hebrews 6:10, refers to our ministry on behalf of the saints as a “labour of love.”

Unless we are not only willing, but also rejoice, in the privilege of laboring for the Lord, we can seriously question just how much the true love of God has filled our hearts. In response to this labor there may be little apparent results. We may spend weeks, months, or even years in ministering the Gospel to others, yet seldom if ever be rewarded with a certain knowledge that our efforts have really borne fruit in the enrichment of other hearts and lives.

Thereby, however, God tests our faith, as well as our love. After all, the principal result of what we do is the preparation of ourselves for joint heirship with our Lord and Master, Christ Jesus. If faithful we will later have the privilege of sharing with him in the enlightenment and blessing of all mankind. How profitable, indeed, will be our efforts for a few fleeting years in this life, if thereby we are found faithful unto death, receive the crown of life, and are privileged to share in bestowing God's blessings to all the sin-cursed and dying race!—Rev. 2:10; 3:21

We should learn to view matters from God's standpoint. The apostle says that "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." (Heb. 6:10) What does it matter whether others hear, or whether they forbear, whether they appreciate our efforts or are indifferent to them? What does matter is the fact that God does not forget. As a result, we enjoy the rich blessings of faith and hope now, and will be rewarded with all the superlative joys of the kingdom in his glorious presence by and by. (Ps. 16:11; I John 3:1,2) What more could we ask?

Despite the fact that in these last days we have witnessed outstanding fulfillments of prophecy to reassure us of the verities of the Scriptures, it seems more difficult than ever to maintain a burning zeal for the Truth and the brethren. The Lord has permitted such conditions to arise among his people. These are calculated to test their individual loyalty to him. How are we meeting this test? Are the beauties of the Gospel message still an inspiration to us that will carry us on to self-sacrifice in making known its glories to others? Were we zealous in the past merely because others were zealous?

The message of the Scriptures today is the same, and it should be just as vital an influence in our lives as in the past. Jesus is still the Captain of our Salvation, and the spiritual food which he served to his people here in the end of the Gospel Age should still ring clear in our hearts, minds, words and actions, just as it did in the days of the Early Church. (Heb. 2:10; Luke 12:42) We still should be singing today, even as in the past, “Send out thy light and truth, O Lord; Let them our leaders be.”
—*Hymns of Dawn*, #260

If our faith in God’s Word is what it should be, then it becomes a reality to us—something which actually leads us in the footsteps of the Lord, irrespective of how few or how many may similarly be walking in the same narrow way. We are to forget many things which “are behind.” Paul said he was doing this. (Phil. 3:13) On the other hand, we can with profit look back to some of the “former days,” if thereby we can be inspired to return to our “first love” and enthusiasm for the Lord and his Truth.—
Heb. 10:32; Rev. 2:4

In Hebrews 10:32, referenced above, Paul admonished those to whom he was writing to do this very thing. According to this verse and the one which follows, they were at one time zealously engaged in a ministry of love to the saints, but they had seemingly permitted a spiritual lethargy to creep over them. In his effort to revive that first love, Paul admonished them to “call to remembrance the former days.” Indeed, their zeal in the former days had led to a “great fight of afflictions,” and they had been “made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions.” Yet they “took joyfully

the spoiling” of their goods, knowing that they had in “heaven a better and an enduring substance.”—
Heb. 10:33,34

Here is a lesson which is vitally important for any who for one reason or another may have permitted their “first love” and zeal to slacken. It is a mistaken notion that God wants his people to outgrow that wholehearted and irrepressible enthusiasm with which they responded to his love when he first shone into their hearts with the Gospel. What God particularly wants is to see that zeal continue until it consumes our lives even unto death in his service. May we not all, then, with profit, call to remembrance the “former days,” not merely as a pleasant memory, but with the view of having our zeal rekindled thereby, that we may continue our labor of love faithfully to the end of our earthly sojourn.

Jesus sets forth signs in his prophecy of Matthew 24 that would indicate certain conditions leading up to and including his Second Presence and the end of the age. One of these is his warning that because iniquity would abound, the love of many would wax cold. (vs. 12) Here, then, is another reminder that we should especially be on guard that the conditions to which the Master refers could cause a cooling off of our love and zeal. Surely, if we are giving proper consideration to what manner of persons we ought to be, we will not only avoid iniquity in our own lives, but will not permit the iniquitous influences with which we are surrounded to turn us away from the course of sacrifice. Rather, we will “endure unto the end,” and thus obtain our salvation.—vs. 13

WHEN INIQUITY ABOUNDS

What is this iniquity to which the Master referred? As a practical lesson we can think of it as applying to anything that may be out of harmony with the Lord and his teachings. Throughout the course of the Christian age, iniquitous practices of false leaders in the church have contributed to the dampening of zeal on the part of many. This should not be so with us. Our relationship to God through his Word of Truth should be so independent of others that even if those who have taught us should turn aside from the narrow way it would not influence us.

Many are the tests today—fiery darts of the Adversary—which tend to dampen the zeal of the followers of Christ if their eyes are not steadfastly fixed upon him and their hearts filled with his love. Ingenious, for example, are the arguments which might be presented from various sources as to why the Lord's consecrated people should now hide their light and keep it only for themselves and a select few. On the contrary, Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." —Matt. 5:14-16

In another example, perhaps a personal grievance that one may have toward another member in the ecclesia is permitted to influence his reasoning, until he justifies his position of antagonism toward the entire group and their activities. Here is a case where iniquity is permitted to enter into one's

own heart and grows to such an extent that love waxes cold.

Let us seek to rise above petty personal things that have no real bearing on the fundamentals of Truth and our relationship thereto. What does it matter if someone may say something which does not please us? What if something is said even purposely to injure us? Is not the Heavenly Father able to overrule and to cause such things to work together for our good? (Rom. 8:28) Let us not permit iniquity to enter our hearts and take us away from the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren.

As we give closer consideration to what manner of persons we ought to be, let us remember that first and foremost we should try to be like Christ, "changed into the same image." (II Cor. 3:18) If we are truly endeavoring to follow his example, we should remember that he was tested "in all points like as we are, yet without sin." He was reviled, he was persecuted, he was finally put to death, and yet in his dying moments, Jesus continued to be a faithful ambassador of his Father. (Heb. 4:15; 12:3; I Pet. 2:23) Let us remember that the servant cannot expect to be above his Master, and that if we are true servants we will daily strive to be more like him.—John 15:20

"THINK ON THESE THINGS"

"Holy conversation and godliness," if genuine, are not qualities that we can wear merely as a veneer. True godlikeness springs from within, and is based upon our habits of thinking. Peter's question, "What manner of persons ought ye to be?" will be answered according to the manner in which

our thoughts are controlled. True Christian thinking is beautifully outlined by Paul in Philippians 4:8, where we read, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

There are many good and praiseworthy things with which we are surrounded, and upon which our minds can profitably dwell. Nevertheless, we believe that, as Christians seeking to have our minds filled with the things which truly pertain to life and godliness, we will do well to give special thought, first, to our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son, then to the Truth in all its resplendent glory, and finally, to the brethren. If our hearts and minds are filled with things pertaining to God, to his plan, and to his people, these pure, noble, praiseworthy, and virtuous thoughts will be constantly overflowing for the blessing of others. By holy conversation and godliness we will be used of the Heavenly Father to serve and comfort one another and be able ambassadors to the world, sharing with them the glorious message of the Gospel of the kingdom.—Matt. 24:14 ■