

They Who Lived and Reigned

***“I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, ... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”
—Revelation 20:4***

THE PROSPECT OF LIVING

and reigning with Christ is set before his followers in various ways. It is the result of attaining the “mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) From another standpoint it is the outcome of faithfulness to the “heavenly calling.” (Heb. 3:1) It is an “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” (I Pet. 1:4) Paul wrote, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” —II Tim. 2:11,12

In our opening text, the Apostle John describes those whom, in vision, he saw reigning with Christ, and says that they had been “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” The word beheaded, from the natural standpoint, does not present a pleasant thought. Most of us would rather

not think of scenes in which literal beheading takes place. However, the Lord uses this term, and possibly one reason is that there are certain aspects of the Christian life which are not pleasing to the flesh and from which it shrinks. Such experiences, nevertheless, must be borne with fortitude if we are “to live and reign with Christ.”

Crucifixion was quite generally practiced under Roman law, although some prisoners considered worthy of the death penalty were beheaded. However, as nearly as we can ascertain at this time, not many of the early Christians were literally beheaded. Evidently, therefore, the Lord used the expression in a figurative sense, even as crucifixion was thus used by Paul when he wrote, “I am crucified with Christ.”—Gal. 2:20

Crucifixion and beheading both describe the taking of life, but each from a different standpoint. In the crucifixion symbol we are represented as daily taking up our cross, dying daily with Christ, until the death of the flesh is fully consummated. (Luke 9:23) The beheading symbol highlights the fact that we surrender our will to God, and accept Christ as our Head. (Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:18) Thus the “old man” is put to death, while the “new man” follows the directives of its Head, endeavoring to be obedient to his every instruction.—Col. 3:9,10

Paul’s detailed lesson in I Corinthians, chapter twelve, reveals many of the things involved in our beheading. It is in this chapter that he uses the figure of a physical body to represent Christ and his church. In this illustration Jesus is the Head of the body, and the individual members of the church are represented by the other parts of the body. It is

a simple illustration, but with vital meaning for all those who aspire to live and reign with Christ.

In this account, the apostle writes, “As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.”—I Cor. 12:12-14

We enter the “body” by means of the baptism, or burial, of our will and the acceptance of the will of Christ, our new Head. We read, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3) In other words, we know in advance that when we accept the headship of Jesus, by being baptized into his body, we place ourselves in a position to die by following in his footsteps of sacrifice and service.

We know that Christ’s will for us is the same as was the Father’s will for him. “The head of Christ is God.” (I Cor. 11:3) Jesus buried his will into the will of his Father when he said, “Lo, I come: ... I delight to do thy will, O my God,” and he knew that the Father’s will for him, as outlined in the “volume of the book,” was for him to die. (Ps. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7-10) He did not understand this clearly prior to his consecration, but soon thereafter he did, having been begotten by the Holy Spirit. Thereafter, the entire course of his ministry was one of daily dying, until on the cross he cried, “It is finished.”—John 19:30

When we are baptized into Jesus Christ as members of his body, it is a baptism into death. It

is not only the death of our own wills in the acceptance of the headship of Christ, but eventually the death of our bodies also, which are presented to God as “a living sacrifice.” (Rom. 12:1) Our sacrifice is made acceptable through the merit of Christ. It is a serious step to take, and only by divine grace is anyone able to carry through victoriously to the end. However, great is the reward for those who do, for they shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years.—Eph. 1:6,7; 2:4-10

OUR BRETHREN—ALSO BODY MEMBERS

Paul reminds us of the unity and cooperation of the various parts of the body. “If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”—I Cor. 12:15-18

Here, each one under the headship of Christ is presented with a heart-searching lesson in humility and the acceptance of the Lord’s will. There is nothing in worldly associations to compare with this. It is contrary to the natural trends and desires of the fallen flesh. In the world, for example, no one is condemned for ambitiously seeking a place of prominence and authority among his fellows. People think there is nothing wrong that a candidate for office travel throughout the country endeavoring to impress the people with their greatness. Indeed, candidates will spend many millions

of dollars to convince voters that they are qualified for this or that high office.

This viewpoint, however, is entirely out of place for the “beheaded” Christian. Having accepted Christ as our Head, and become members of his body, we leave the choice with the Lord as to just what place we will occupy in the body. Can we imagine the hands and feet of a natural body arguing as to which should become an eye? This may seem incongruous, but it is just this that Paul brings to our attention to impress us with the need of accepting the divine will in this as well as in all other matters.

Paul makes another application of the foregoing illustration: “Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body.” This suggests what may sometimes be observed among the Lord’s people; namely, that if some cannot have the position in the church to which they aspire they become discouraged, and begin to think that they do not belong at all. Such is the reasoning of fleshly thinking, and it may happen that later one with this viewpoint will be found creating a small “body” of their own, not realizing perhaps, that the position they really coveted was to be the head.

Moreover, no member of the body of Christ should undervalue, in any manner, the importance of the other members. Here, also, is a lesson in humility and brotherly interest in all the body members. Those who are truly of the body, regardless of the position they may occupy, will highly “esteem” every other member, regardless of the relative position that any may seem to occupy.—Phil. 2:3,4

It is a privilege for any of us to be in this body at all. It all came about by the grace of God, through Christ. (Eph. 2:8-10) Since God has placed every member in the body as it has pleased him to do, how fitting that we recognize the importance of all our brethren in Christ, regardless of their abilities, or of the place which God has assigned to them in the body.

Paul suggests the proper viewpoint in this matter. "Those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it."—I Cor. 12:23-26

How different is this from the unprincipled and ruthless efforts so often seen in the world to attain positions of honor and authority among people! What a tremendous change must take place in the human heart for one to be truly beheaded and accept the headship of Christ. Such a transformation implies humble submission to the divine will, and of rejoicing to associate with those whom God has called, regardless of their talents, or of how they may measure up to our preconceived ideals.

One of the things some worldly-minded individuals want people to know is that they are personally acquainted with this, that, or the other great

personage in the world of government, business, entertainment, sports, or of some other high profile position. How different it should be, though, among the members of the body of Christ. Of Jesus it was asked, "Have any of the rulers ... believed on him?" (John 7:48) The answer, of course, was no! His disciples were just plain people—fishermen and the like. There was also Matthew, a tax collector, a profession generally looked down upon by most. There was a physician, Luke, and later there was Paul, a Pharisee. Yet his occupation was that of a humble tentmaker. Generally speaking, if we were asked to mention the celebrities whom we know, and who are associated with us, we probably could name none, but we would name those in the humbler and less recognizable walks of life. It is these very ones, however, who will make up the royal company of Christ and his body members.—I Cor. 1:26-29; I Pet. 2:9,10

What a royal company is being selected and developed! They will be associates of a King. Indeed, even now they are on the most intimate terms with him. He is their advocate and helper; he is their elder brother and their espoused Bridegroom. (I John 2:1; Mark 3:33-35; Rev. 19:7,8) These lowly ones, mostly unknown from the world's standpoint, are all of a royal line, children of God, and in training to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.—I John 3:1,2

FOR THE WITNESS OF JESUS

In Paul's use of the body illustration he makes it clear that every member in the body has a work to do. We cannot be in the body at all unless we work.

Looking to our Head for guidance, we hear him say that we are to be his witnesses. The Truth is to be ministered to one another, and to the world. It is this important work of bearing witness to the Word of God that helps to emphasize the need for the harmonious working together of all the members of the body. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. ... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."—John 17:17-21

The world in general will not be able to understand that God sent Jesus to be their Redeemer and Savior, a "ransom for all," until, as our opening text states, the kingdom reign of the Christ, head and body, begins. (I Tim. 2:5,6) We, however, as prospective body members of Christ, are now in training for that future work of enlightening the world, and God is giving us practical tests as to our enthusiasm for his cause by bidding us to be his witnesses now. It is for this witness, the Revelator says, that we dwell under the headship of Christ.

As beheaded followers of the Master we of necessity must be members of his body, else we have no head at all. This means that all of us will work together and cooperate in the general work of witnessing to the "gospel of the kingdom." (Matt. 24:14) As individuals, also, we bear witness to the Truth, but if we are to live and reign with Christ we must, as members of his body, learn to work

together, being “subject one to another,” and above all to our Head, Christ Jesus.—I Pet. 5:5

The expression, beheaded for the witness of Jesus, strongly implies that this is one of the main purposes of our beheading. We are not beheaded to attend meetings, or to merely study the Bible. We attend meetings of the Lord’s people and study the Bible in order that we may become more fully acquainted with the will of God for us, that thus we may be more completely in line with the directives of our new Head, Christ Jesus. When we took on the headship of Christ, we gave up our own plans and ways. Hence, we need earnestly to seek the plans and ways of God that we may work in harmony with him, and in close cooperation and harmony with our fellow members of the body.

TESTS OF CONSECRATION

Witnessing for Jesus as members of his body is a voluntary service. The influence impelling us to faithfulness is love. The message we bear is so wonderful that it is a joy to tell others about it, but the results are not always joyful. The world is in darkness, and the darkness hates the light. As we let our light shine the world often frowns upon us; we may not be accepted among our friends as we once were. Some may even speak evil of us and persecute us. These situations are not pleasing to the flesh, and there may come the temptation merely to adhere as best we can to the righteous principles of the Truth, but not bear witness to it.—Matt. 5:10-12,14-16; John 3:19-21; 8:12

Then there is the temptation to become “weary in well doing.” (Gal. 6:9) Witnessing for Jesus and

for the Word of God is not an incidental thing in the dedicated Christian's life. It is one's chief "vocation" and business. (Eph. 4:1) Other things are more or less incidental. However, sometimes there is a tendency to reverse this arrangement, using less and less of time and strength for the main issue of our consecrated lives, and more and more for the less important things.

Jesus mentioned this danger in his parable of the sower. In his reference to the seed, which fell among thorns, he said, "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." (Matt. 13:22) Here is the case of one who has progressed to the extent of bearing Christian fruit, but then allowing other interests to enter in, to the point of becoming unfruitful.

There is also the danger of discouragement. The cold indifference of the world to the gospel of the kingdom may result in less enthusiasm and have a tendency to dampen zeal. We labor for years, perhaps, and see no tangible results from our witness work. Under these circumstances the flesh would say, What is the use? Why should I continue to spend my time, my strength, my means, when nothing is being accomplished? The new mind, though, consulting the Head, is reminded that the results of our witness work are not our responsibility, that it is "God that giveth the increase." —I Cor. 3:7

We are not invited to witness for Jesus and the Word of God because our special help is warranted, but because we need the opportunity thereby to

prove our zeal for the Truth, and our joy in the fact that God intends to bless all the families of the earth. Such a joy should impel us even now, and at whatever may be the cost, to tell as many as we can about it. The only ones who will live and reign with Christ are those who demonstrate their enthusiasm for the purpose of that reign, and for this cause we now are being beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God.

A temptation that could come to us in connection with the witness work is the inclination to boast of the great things we are doing. Even more subtle, deep down in our hearts we might feel a sense of great satisfaction that we have done so much for the Lord, even though we may not have expressed our feelings to others.

If we find ourselves being tempted along these lines we should recall Jesus' parable in which we are represented as "unprofitable servants." (Luke 17:10) If we have spent much time and strength in the service of the Lord's cause, it is only what we agreed to do when we made our consecration and took Jesus as our Head. Therefore, we have nothing to boast about. What marvelous grace is here manifested! The Lord has taken us into partnership with him, made us one of his coworkers, yet from the beginning to the end of our earthly course, all of the honor and all of the glory rightly goes to the Head, and to him only.

A moment's reflection reveals the reason for this. On the night Jesus was born, God used the angels to make the announcement to the shepherds. First one spoke, proclaiming the glad tidings, and then a whole multitude of the angelic hosts sang,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:10-14) God could have continued to use the holy angels to proclaim the Gospel. With no difficulty at all God could arrange for the angels daily to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom, and with a display of glory the like of which the world has never known. How insignificant and weak our efforts seem when we compare them with what God could do in other ways, but for the fact that he is giving us an opportunity to prove that we are worthy to live and reign with Christ.

LOVE—THE MOTIVE

“God is love.” (I John 4:8) His plan for the blessing of the world is prompted by love. To be in harmony with him, our efforts to cooperate in his plan must also be motivated by love. This is the vital lesson Paul so effectively sets forth in I Corinthians, chapter 13, “If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, ... but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.” (vs. 3, *Revised Version*) Jesus told the rich young ruler that if he bestowed all his goods to the poor he would have “treasure in heaven.” (Mark 10:21) Paul knew this was one of the ways of expressing the terms of the Christian way. He knew that we cannot lay up treasures in heaven except through the sacrifice of all that we have and are for the blessing of others and for the glory of God. Paul knew also, however, that unless our giving, our sacrificing, is prompted by the spirit of unselfishness, by love, it will profit us nothing, and no treasure will be laid up to our account.

Paul stated also, “If I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.” (I Cor.

13:3, *RV*) He knew that giving our bodies “to be burned” symbolizes what is involved in our being beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God. The apostle writes, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” —Rom. 12:1

Presenting bodies in sacrifice is a thought that Paul got from the services of Israel’s Tabernacle arrangement, in which animal sacrifices were burned on the brazen altar in the court. (Exod. 27:1-8; Deut. 12:27) He knew that, similarly, Christians are also called upon to offer bodies to be burned—not the bodies of animals, but their own. These would not be offered on literal altars nor consumed by literal fire, but on the altar of God’s service, and by the trials, testing and suffering for Christ’s sake, which must inevitably accompany such sacrifices. —I Pet. 4:12-16

However, there is no profit in sacrifice, no laying up of treasures in heaven, if we are not motivated by sincere, unselfish love. This does not mean that if we have love we will hold back from sacrifice. Rather, the more fully we are filled and controlled by love, the greater will be our determination to give all we have and are in sacrifice and service, knowing that it will be acceptable to God through Christ.

Love not only prompts to sacrifice, but also controls the way we sacrifice and serve. “Love suffereth long, and is kind,” says Paul. (I Cor. 13:4, *RV*) Under the headship of Christ, we serve one another. Are we doing it kindly, sympathetically? Are we patient with others’ weaknesses as we would like them to be

patient with ours? Is the spirit of kindness and gentleness manifested in our witnessing to the world?

Love should enter into, and control, all our activities and all our associations. To the extent that it does, we will not be envious of others. We will not be boastful and puffed up, and our conduct will be such as becometh the children of God. We will not be easily provoked, nor insisting on our rights, and we will not think evil of others.

Love “rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth in the truth.” Love “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth.” (vss. 6-8, *RV*) Love, filling our hearts and controlling our words and acts, is the great principle and power that makes our feeble efforts in God’s service acceptable through Christ. If we are truly beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, it is because we are motivated by love. By so doing, we may confidently hope for the glorious consummation of living and reigning with Christ in God’s Millennial kingdom. ■

