Seeking Things Above

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."
—Romans 8:13

AFTER HIS LAST OBSER-vance of the typical Passover with his disciples, Jesus took some of the remaining unleavened bread and some of the fruit of the vine and instituted a memorial of his forthcoming death as the antitypical Passover lamb. "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."—Matt. 26:26-29

A NEW TYPE

The Lord did not institute another or a higher type of the Passover. On the contrary, that type was about to be fulfilled by his death on the cross

within a very few hours that same day. It was that fulfillment which the Lord wished his disciples to remember on an annual basis, through the Memorial observance that he established the last typical Passover night. The expression 'this do in remembrance of me' implies that the new memorial should replace the former Passover. It became obsolete by reason of its fulfillment at Calvary. As it would not have been proper, or lawful, to annually observe the Passover at any other time than that which was appointed by God, it is likewise not appropriate to memorialize the fulfillment of that type at any other time than its anniversary.

As the season for the observance of the Lord's Memorial approaches, the thoughts of the consecrated increasingly turn to his experiences, especially those the Apostle Paul says were specifically necessary to bring the Lord to completion as the High Priest of God. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."—Heb. 5:8,9

Paul explains that suffering and humiliation were not merely random sets of unfortunate circumstances that the Lord encountered. They were components of an exquisitely calibrated process designed to establish and demonstrate the character that was required for the priestly office to which he had been assigned by God. "The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." (Heb 7:21) Before many witnesses, his endurance of the severest tests proved that he was perfectly and uniquely fit for that

office. By this, a strong foundation was established upon which those witnesses, and those who would subsequently believe them throughout this Gospel Age, could rest their hope of residing with him in due time.

SHARED EXPERIENCE SYMBOLIZED

The apostle makes it clear that this hope will be realized only by those who willingly share the experience of suffering with the Lord for the sake of righteousness. "We are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:16,17) "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." (II Tim. 2:12) The shared experience of suffering during the Gospel Age is evidence that the Lord and his disciples are of one Spirit. Every commemoration of his death emphasizes that oneness.

Paul, the sole apostle who was not an eyewitness to the institution of the Memorial ceremony, relates what the resurrected Lord related to him concerning it. "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."—I Cor. 11:23-26

The apostle understood that the Memorial ceremony is a representation of the bond, the communion, the partnership between Christ and his church proved through suffering. "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." (I Cor. 10:16,17) In the hearts of the consecrated, each Memorial season prompts a fresh appreciation of the partnership, and the oneness through suffering, of the Lord and his disciples during the present Gospel Age.

A SPECIAL INVITATION

It is Christ himself who emphasized that those who desire a share in his kingdom must prove that desire by humbly sharing his suffering. "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with." (Matt. 20:23) All who are consecrated have previously heard and accepted the Lord's invitation to join him in baptism.

Paul explains that the baptism of Christ is a baptism unto death. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3) The consecrated have vowed to follow him unto that end, forsaking thereby the path followed by the world. As the Lord's disciples annually partake of the symbols that memorialize his death, they consider the privilege of joining him in his suffering. They rehearse the fact that those who first participated in the ceremony did so at his special invitation and that all who have

been subsequently invited have likewise foresworn the things of the earth.

A COMMON COMMITMENT

Those who have renounced their respective wills that they may serve the will of God share a common commitment. In the symbolism of the Lord's Memorial, their collective commitment to the Divine cause may be likened to a loaf of bread. Bread is composed of what once were many individual grains that when blended become one. The essential thought is that had the many grains retained their individuality there could be no loaf. Applying this to the consecrated during this Gospel Age, it is concluded that those who persist in maintaining their personal wills after consecration can never become part of that one loaf. In a similar manner, we partake of the cup that is made up of many grapes. The grapes have been crushed, and therefore lose their individual identities.

It is further concluded that, for the consecrated, complete submission to the process of transformation is a matter of life and death. The apostle indicates that necessity, saying, "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. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every

man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."—Rom. 12:1-5

A NEW CONDITION

Whoever accepts the will of another becomes figuratively dead as an individual. Consecration is scripturally characterized as a death since the consecrated die to their individual will and become alive to the Lord's will. Paul says to the consecrated, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3) That which lives and is 'hid with Christ in God' is a 'new creature' begotten by the will of God. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."—II Cor. 5:17

The New Creature has no will of its own. It becomes a new component of a larger body of which the Lord Jesus is the head. Paul explains, "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. . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (I Cor. 12:12-14,27) The Christ is composed of one body with many members, the church; and one head, the Lord Jesus.

The members of the body of Christ are to seek those things of the Spirit which lead away from the

persistence of the individual will. They are to set their affections on that which is not earthly. The Apostle Paul expresses that necessity, saying, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col. 3:2) He who would keep his heart in the love of God must stifle earthly desires and attractions, and nourish affection for spiritual things.

DEADENING WORLDLY APPETITES

There is a natural attraction to the things of the earth for mankind even though those things have become considerably blemished during Satan's reign. Tarnished and marred, earthly things nevertheless beckon even to those who love righteousness and hate iniquity. Paul defines the course to be pursued to avoid the dangers of that allure. He says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Col. 3:5) It is noted that he does not counsel entering into a cloistered retreat from worldly temptations, but to attend to deadening those worldly appetites grounded in the flesh that foster temptation.

FLESHLY BESETMENTS

Starting with the most obvious and ending with the most subtle, the apostle itemizes various impurities and appetites that spring from the lust of the flesh and the love of the world. 'Fornication'—a prominent evil in Paul's day, as it is in the present—is brought to the attention of the saints as a most obvious evil of the flesh. More likely to be overlooked, though related to fornication, is 'uncleanness.' The Spirit begotten are to be pure of

heart. However, their members touch the earth. They are in contact with defiled human nature. They are subject to contagion from that contact. Every resulting spot or wrinkle requires washing with water through the holy Word. (Eph. 5:26) 'Inordinate affection' is also to be guarded against. To the degree that the Lord's people pursue anything earthly beyond that which is necessary they are bestowing love and regard that belongs essentially to God.

'Evil concupisence' is internal or hidden lust—desires for forbidden things. It is a step higher in the apostle's hierarchy of worldly evils. The Lord's people know and acknowledge sin as evil and strive against it. They are, in addition, to cast out of their hearts every longing, every desire, for anything not fully approved by the Lord. While avoiding gross immoralities, they are not to harbor secret sympathy for the lesser things condemned by him; desiring them if only they weren't forbidden. 'Covetousness' concludes the apostle's list of things which the New Creature must suppress unto death. He declares that covetousness is a form of idolatry. It is among the most seductive temptations the Lord's people experience. It is the finding of satisfaction in things other than the love of God. The New Creature should not love wife, husband, children, or earthly treasure more than he loves the Lord. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."—Matt. 10:37

HATED BY THE WORLD

The Lord Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye

were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:18,19) "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) To the Lord's words, Paul added, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (II Tim. 3:12) These words have been proven true throughout the present Gospel Age to this very day. As it steadfastly resists the allure of earthly things, the body of Christ, following its head, engenders the world's disdain.

LOVED BY GOD

The Master walked a very difficult and narrow way. He was continually beset on every side by forces seeking his destruction. Suffering slander and ridicule, he poured out his life in daily sacrifice to the doing of his Father's will, to rescue a world that did not appreciate or understand him. Likewise, his disciples are not to seek ease in the world but are rather to "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." (Col. 1:24) This emphasizes the fact that his disciples are to be made conformable to his death. They are to spend their lives in sacrifice unto death even as he did. They are to suffer as members of the body of the Christ of which the prophets spoke when they foretold the sufferings of Christ and the glory that was to follow. He that overcomes the world, the spirit of ease, and the allure of comfort and self-will even unto death, shall be given the victor's crown. "Be thou

faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

The apostle addresses those who are serving the Lord to the full extent of their ability from the heart, and who are free of condemnation. He says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1) The faithful walk after the Spirit of truth and righteousness. For them to do otherwise would imply they had lost the new disposition, the new will, the new mind; that they had become dead to the hope residing in the great and precious promises that first led them to their consecration. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."—II Pet. 1:4

This would imply that the child of God had lost the heavenly perspective of the prospect and purpose set before them in the Apostle Paul's epistle exhorting his brethren at Colossae. "You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you. And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity. The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body. And be thankful. Christ's message in all its

richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct one another with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts. Everything you do or say, then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through him to God the Father."—Col. 3:12-17, *Today's English Version*

How appropriate and necessary it is that once each year those who are fully devoted to the service of God are forcefully reminded of the basis of their reconciliation with him and their subsequent privileged communion with his beloved Son. As they partake of the emblems with others who have likewise entered the narrow way, all Spirit-begotten will be mindful of the reality behind the symbols; the reality of the Lord's death and suffering, the reality of their privilege of co-participation, and the reality of their peace. ■