

Authority Established by God

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.”

—Romans 13:1 New International Version

THE APOSTLE PAUL in writing to the brethren in Rome was telling them that they must be subject to the governing authorities. At the time, Rome was a universal empire ruling the Western World. How much guidance did God give to the heads of state who, by his permission, became governing authorities? This varied widely and depended upon the character of the man so chosen.

ISRAEL'S LEADERS

Israel's leaders were guided and directed by God. Beginning with Moses and Joshua, we note how God spoke to Moses and told him, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” (Exod. 33:14) God manifested his presence with a cloudy pillar over the Tabernacle by day and a fiery pillar by night. To Joshua God said, after Moses had died, “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.” (Josh. 1:2) These two faithful servants of God consulted him on all of their problems and looked to him for guidance.

When Israel conquered the land of Canaan and became established in the land during the period of the Judges, whenever the people did evil and were overcome by their enemies, God raised up a faithful person to lead them. They were called judges, and such were Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and Samuel, among the better known of these.

During Samuel's tenure as judge, the people wanted a king. Samuel was old and his sons did not walk in his ways but took bribes and perverted judgment. (I Sam. 8:1-5) The Lord told Samuel to hearken to the people and that they had not rejected him, “but they have rejected me,

that I should not reign over them.” (vs. 7) The people received their wish and Saul was made king over Israel.

ISRAEL’S KINGS

Saul started well, and was humble at first. When he disobeyed God’s command, the Lord rejected him, and had David anointed as his replacement. David, however, did not take office officially until Saul had died. To complicate matters further, after Solomon’s reign the nation of Israel became divided into the northern ten-tribe kingdom (called Israel), and into the southern two-tribe kingdom (called Judah). There were good kings and evil kings. Almost all of the ten-tribe kings were evil and only a few of the two-tribe kings were good. The ten-tribe kingdom was punished first, and taken captive by the Assyrians. The two-tribe kingdom continued for another hundred years more before they were punished and taken captive by Babylon. At the time that Babylonian captivity was imminent, God said to Zedekiah through Ezekiel, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”—Ezek. 21:26,27

GENTILE RULE

Once Israel’s kingdom came to an end, it would not be reestablished ‘until he come whose right it is.’ This was referring to Jesus and his church, as the completed Christ, receiving the kingdom from the Father. In the interim, Gentile rule would prevail by God’s permission. Babylon was the first, and Nebuchadnezzar ruled. Daniel interpreted dreams for him, including one which told of God debasing the king when pride lifted up his heart and he took credit for Babylon’s greatness. He became a mad man and, like the beast of the field, ate grass. When his reason was restored, he acknowledged God’s greatness. (Dan. 4) In spite of several remarkable incidents in his reign, he failed to see God’s hand in his affairs until this humbling experience occurred.

Of all Gentile rulers, probably the most outstanding was Cyrus of Persia, who was used by God to proclaim a decree to have his people, captive in Babylon, return to Judah to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1-4; II Chron. 36:22,23) Before Cyrus was born, it was prophesied of him, “That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall

perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden.” (Isa. 44:25; 45:1) This may be because Cyrus was intended to be a type of our Lord Jesus.

The remaining Gentile powers did not have rulers that acknowledged God as did Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. Alexander the Great conquered the world, but there is no record of him acknowledging God as the great supreme Creator of the universe. Nor is there any record of the Roman caesars doing so. The kings of Europe became involved with the great harlot who made the inhabitants of earth drunk with the wine of her fornication. Many of them acknowledged God, but were not acquainted with him because of the errors promulgated by the ‘woman’ that controlled them.

LEADERS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Meanwhile, hidden away in a remote area of the then civilized world were the continents of North and South America. When it was time to explore these areas, the North American Continent became a refuge for those fleeing religious persecution in Europe. Eventually the thirteen colonies of Great Britain revolted against their mother country and became the United States of America. Their leaders were God-fearing men, and the new nation became the stronghold of Protestantism.

Over the years of this new nation’s existence, the presidents elected to office have had various degrees of faith. Not much has been published about the degree of faith held by these men. Some were more religious than others. Now that we have a president in the White House who openly discusses his faith, reads Bible sermons every morning, and has Bible studies in the White House, the effect of this faith on his decisions has appeared in the media. In the Newsweek issue of March 10, 2003, a complete history of how President George W. Bush received his faith, and the influence it had on his personal life, was published in an article entitled, “*Bush and God.*” There were two articles published—the first, by Howard Fineman, tells how faith changed his life and shapes his presidency. The second, by Martin Martz, tells why his ‘God talk’ worries friends and foes.

In the first article, a brief supplement appeared entitled “*Gospel on the Potomac,*” by Kenneth Woodward. It said:

“Whenever a president speaks openly of his religious faith, citizens want to know how that faith affects his political priorities. And so we look for clues. But the lines between religious convictions and public policy are seldom clear, even in retrospect.

“Consider: for the past ten years the world’s most powerful nation has been led by white, Southern, churchgoing, evangelical Protestants—Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Each opted to attend the church of his wife’s choice. And in both cases that choice was Methodist. But in religion—as in politics—the two presidents could not be less alike. For Clinton, hymn-singing and Gospel preaching are performance arts, and Sunday in the White House wasn’t Sunday without a stroll down the street, Bible in hand, for an hour of gregarious fellowship. In this Clinton remained—and remains—Baptist to the core. Bush’s religion is cut from a more personal fabric of faith.

“The lesson is that denominational labels no longer tell much about those who wear them. Woodrow Wilson, a Presbyterian and Calvinist to the core, was one of the few American presidents of whom it could be said that to know his religious pedigree was to know the man. John F. Kennedy’s Catholicism was a political factor in the 1960 president race, but in his life it was little more than clan inheritance. Ronald Reagan was the first president of our post-denominational society; he rarely attended church and his religious rhetoric was generic Christian.

“Like the current president, Jimmy Carter is a born-again Christian. But his spiritual rebirth was an adolescent rite of passage built into the socially constructed rituals of Southern Baptist culture. Everyone (except some folks in the media) knew where this Sunday-school teacher in the White House was coming from. In contrast, Bush’s spiritual transformation occurred outside the conventional church context; it emerged from the self-confessing, testimony-giving intimacy of a Christian support group. This makes Bush’s understanding of faith different from other presidents, but hardly unique.”

FAITH AND THE PRESIDENCY

One would expect that a president who is religious, and promotes Bible study, would be accepted by his people. This is not the case. Several articles have been written on the concerns people have about the mix of Bible and politics. One appearing in the *Sacramento Bee* on February 17,

2003, was entitled “*Faith Can Compromise Presidency.*” After briefly telling of Bush’s conversion, the article said:

“We now learn from *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush*, a new book by ex-speechwriter and conservative thinker David Frum, that White House advisers attend Bible study groups not because they are required to, but because they are expected to. According to Frum, evangelicalism has made some policy-makers ‘the gentlest souls, the most patient, the least argumentative.’

“Following President Clinton’s failure in character, some Americans may find assurance in a president who turns to the Bible to become a better person. Indeed, Bush laces his most newsworthy speeches with biblical references. He identified America with the forces of good as he battles the ‘axis of evil.’ Most recently, the loss of the Columbia shuttle inspired a quote from the prophet Isaiah.

“Whatever faith’s actual influence on policy-making may be, however, it offers no guarantee for effective decisions. Indeed, history suggests that strict religious doctrine can lead to black-and-white reasoning, especially during war.

“A devout Presbyterian, President Woodrow Wilson believed God ordained him to be president. ‘God save us from compromise,’ he once noted. ‘He who is not with me is against me.’

“He defined America’s entrance into the Great War as a moral crusade from which good must arise. During the Senate debate over America’s joining the League of Nations, Wilson emerged as a tragic figure, preferring defeat over modestly accommodating his political opponents. One does not compromise with God.

“Likewise, President Herbert Hoover’s Quaker faith in community volunteerism proved wholly inadequate in treating the catastrophic problems of the Great Depression.

“The faith upon which our most admired presidents drew strength was usually more ambiguous than Bush’s and balanced with a rich humanity. Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt both knew the Scriptures and saw history as the working out of God’s will. Neither were avid churchgoers, and Lincoln was especially wary of organized religion. For both men, faith was a private, personal matter that rejected dogma.

Eleanor Roosevelt once asked her husband if he was convinced of the truth of Christian doctrine.

“‘I never really thought much about it,’ he said. ‘I think it is just as well not to think about things like that too much.’”

The article then went on to say:

“Presidential Bible study is new and potentially risky. Less ‘spiritual’ advisers could become marginalized, their input lost in a moralistic haze. Frum writes that he felt alienated upon hearing a colleague being gently reproached for missing Bible study.

“Issues run the risk of becoming simplified as good or evil. A missionary zeal can create a belief system resistant to outside facts and information. However noble the gentle, noncombative temperament of evangelicals may be, decision-making sometimes requires passionate disagreement.”

The more critical assessment was published in the March 10th *Newsweek*, under the title of “*The Sin of Pride*.” Some excerpts from that article follow:

RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES

“Never have we historians been busier making sense of presidential God talk than now. We all knew that after a reckless youth and a fall into alcohol addiction, George W. Bush experienced a Christian conversion of the now standard ‘born again’ sort and settled down. On the path to the presidency he saw that his newfound faith appealed to a core constituency of religious conservatives and they appealed to him. His religious rhetoric became more public and more political.

“After September 11 and the president’s decision to attack Iraq, the talk that other nations found mildly amusing or merely arrogant has taken on international and historical significance. It rouses many Americans to an uncertain cause and raises antagonism among millions elsewhere. Few doubt that Bush is sincere in his faith, a worthy virtue when he alone must decide whether to lead 270 million people into war, possibly killing thousands of others. The problem isn’t with Bush’s sincerity, but with his evident conviction that he’s doing God’s will.”

Later the author wrote:

“The concerns of world religious leaders about this war have not induced the White House to open its door to a broader theological debate. The pope and the American Roman Catholic bishops—as well as Protestant bishops and many other lay and clerical leaders outside the president’s core constituency—got no hearing, only dismissal. These clerics have legitimate concerns that extend to the geopolitical scene—as well as to the American soul: how will the only remaining world power assume the burden of building a new empire? One hopes that the Bush people will keep in mind that claims of God’s always being on our side are alienating to many former or would-be allies.

“More dangerous is that Bush’s God talk will set the tinderbox that is the Muslim world on fire. Neither the president nor the American Christian majority have to yield their own faith in order to get along, but how they express it matters. Here the president has shown signs of change and growth. His first understandable outburst against terrorism led him to call for a ‘crusade’ against terrorists. Raging reaction was instant and total among offended Muslims. The term never again appeared in White House language.

“Christian theologians are wary when Bush uses the words of Jesus to draw neat lines and challenge the whole rest of the world: if you are not for us, or with us, you are against us. Without question, belief in American democracy as one of God’s blessings is part of the move against Iraq. But, as theologians in a number of faiths remind us, the demonization of the enemy—and ‘us and them’ mentality—can inhibit self-examination and repentant action, critical components of any faith.

“Long having professed that ‘our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world of Justice,’ President Bush boasts that we are the only remaining superpower left. He gives notice that our military power and moral choices will dominate the world. He follows and leads ever since he first, as he put it, ‘heard the call’ to seek the presidency, and after Iraq he promises to transform the Middle East into utopia.”

THE PURPOSE OF THE ALMIGHTY

Finally, the author of the article gave President Bush this advice:

“In the future, when Bush speaks about God and this country, as he assuredly will, one hopes he will heed the example of Abraham Lincoln.

In other desperate times Lincoln had to seek Almighty guidance for what he called this ‘almost chosen people.’ That president accompanied his seeking with a theological affirmation too rarely heard now: ‘The Almighty has His own purposes.’ These purposes may not always match our own, even if we are called to highest office. Awareness of this might bring the nation and its political and religious leaders alike under judgment as we pursue, by our best lights, responsible action.”

It is evident that the Bible study by President Bush has not led him to believe that God will set up a kingdom on earth in which all will be judged in righteousness “by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31) The Apostle Paul was speaking of Jesus who will assume this task in a day appointed by him. This day is near at hand. It is then that all evil will be exposed and dealt with properly. It is then when all other authority permitted by God to deal with the problems of this present evil world will cease to exist. It was only to be temporary until he ‘whose right it is’ is given this authority by God. As the Scriptures plainly tell us, he is to be “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.”—Rev. 19:16

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Act Boldly in Faith

***Key Verse: “And
were beyond
measure astonished,
saying, He hath
done all things well:
he maketh both the
deaf to hear, and the
dumb to speak.”
—Mark 7:37***

***Lesson Scripture:
Mark 7:24-37***

DURING OUR LORD’S earthly ministry he performed many wonderful miracles which served as illustrations of the future blessings he has in store for the poor groaning creation during the times of restitution. These miracles included the healing of all manner of disease, the casting out of unclean spirits, and an awakening from the sleep of death. As marvelous as these special blessings were, however, they were only examples of the greater power that will be exercised on behalf of the whole human family under the terms of the New Covenant. Then, all the faithful and obedient will be given an opportunity to be

lifted up, and restored to perfect human life.

A certain degree of faith was usually evident by those who were participants in these miracles. Faith makes our Lord’s teachings more meaningful. In addition, there is another measure by which we can gauge the Master’s power to bless. This is manifested by the astonished bystanders who watched him perform these mighty acts. Although they witnessed only the temporary opening of blind eyes, and deaf ears, they also beheld the eyes and ears of understanding being opened at that time.

The Key Verse and scriptural references for this lesson include two occasions where Jesus used the great power God had given to him to perform these miracles. The lesson begins with Jesus leaving the place where he was to journey toward the provinces of Tyre and Sidon.—Mark 7:24

It was there that he entered a house and secluded himself, wishing that no one would know of his whereabouts. His power, however, was about to be manifested in a remarkable way. “A certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet:

The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter."—vss. 25-29

Jesus taught an important lesson in the performance of this miracle. He reminded the woman that her request was inappropriate. The Israelites were the first, or favored children of God, and that she, as a Greek, could not hope for anything more than crumbs of blessing that might be cast under the table for Gentile dogs. Because of her faith, however, Jesus cast the demon from her child, and proclaimed that she had been made whole.

The prophecy of Daniel 9:25,26, known as the promise of 70 weeks of favor, or 490 years, based on a year for each day (see Ezekiel 4:6), promised exclusive favor for this period to Israel. The last seven years of this favor began with the ministry of Jesus, their Messiah. He faithfully observed this favor and had no blessing to give to Gentiles. This Syro-Phoenician woman was an exception, as was the Roman centurion mentioned in Matthew 8:5-12. Both could not be ignored because of their great faith, and their loved ones were healed by Jesus.

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Follow in Faith

***Key Verse: “He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.”
—Mark 8:29***

***Lesson Scripture:
Mark 8:27 – 9:8***

CONTINUING IN THIS series of studies on the subject of faith, we now turn our attention to Jesus’ question to his disciples when he asked them: “Whom do men say that I am?” (Mark 8:27) He received a variety of answers to his question. The disciples said that some thought he might be John the Baptist, while others thought he was Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of Israel’s prophets of old. The people evidently believed that he could have been any one of these men in

some kind of resurrected body.

Jesus then narrowed his inquiry to the disciples themselves when he further asked, “But whom say ye that I am?” (vs. 29) It was at this point that he began to reveal the purpose of his ministry. He was searching for an indication of the disciples’ level of faith and confidence in his being the promised Messiah. Turning to Matthew’s account, because of further details in this important conversation, we read, “Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 16:16,17) He was very pleased with Peter’s answer as an evidence of his degree of understanding and faith.

“He charged them that they should tell no man of him. And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:30,31) Peter, however, was ready to come to the Master’s defense. He was shocked to learn that our Lord must suffer many things at the hands of Israel’s religious leaders, and that he would give his life in the process.

Jesus was about to teach Peter, and his other disciples, that to be one of his followers they, too, must be prepared to suffer many things for the Gospel of Christ. “When he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.” (vss. 34,35) The way to the spiritual High Calling was about to be opened up for the footstep followers of Christ, and these were important instructions for those who were being directed to be a part of this wonderful calling.

The ninth chapter opens with the transfiguration scene. Peter, James, and John were invited by our Lord to see many things that would open the eyes of their understanding. By miraculous power he transformed himself to the spirit condition, thus revealing spiritual things to these three apostles. They saw him in shining raiment, which portrayed his future glory in the coming kingdom. “There was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.”—Mark 9:7

We are now living in the closing years of the Gospel Age harvest. The way to the High Calling in Christ Jesus is drawing to a close as the Lord’s people finish their courses. It is a narrow way that leads to spiritual life, and blessed are they who find it. Let us follow him faithfully even unto death.

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Facing Our Unbelief

Key Verse:
***“Straightway the
father of the child
cried out, and said
with tears, Lord, I
believe; help thou
mine unbelief.”***

—Mark 9:24

Lesson Scripture:
Mark 9:14-37

IN THIS STUDY, JESUS, and the three apostles who had accompanied him to the Mount of Transfiguration, came down from the mountain and were about to join the remaining apostles. When they arrived, our Lord, together with Peter, James, and John, discovered that a large group of people had gathered around the other nine apostles. In Jesus’ absence the father of a young man possessed with an evil spirit had sought the apostles’ help in casting the devil from his son. They were unable to perform this miracle, however, and were being questioned by the scribes.

When they saw our Lord coming they ran up to him in great expectation, believing that Jesus could heal the young man. “One of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him [Marginal Translation, dasheth him]: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.”—Mark 9:17,18

Then Jesus spoke, seeing the boy’s father, together with the others. “He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.”—vss. 19-22

Faith became fundamental concerning the father, and our Lord’s willingness to cast the devil from his young son. “Jesus said unto him, If

thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” (vss. 23,24) He realized that he had to exercise faith, otherwise the boy would not be helped. Faith triumphed, and Jesus commanded the evil spirit to come out of the lad, and enter no more unto him. The spirit frequently left him, but would return later. Jesus’ command was that he leave and never come back.

“The spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.” (vss. 26,27) The Master permitted the evil spirit a certain degree of liberty before leaving the boy, causing him, therefore, much pain and anguish. Perhaps he allowed this for the powerful demonstration he performed for the occasion. He wanted the miracle to be clearly seen and appreciated by the onlookers who were gathered nearby.

The apostles asked Jesus why they were unable to perform this mighty act, as he had done. “He said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer.” (vs. 29) Perhaps there is a lesson for the Lord’s people living now at the end of the Gospel Age harvest. As we struggle in our own conflicts with sin, and the power of sin, we must exercise full confidence in God’s promises to sustain us. It will require strong faith to sustain us. Let each of us strive more diligently as the days become more evil.

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How Bold is Your Faith?

Key Verse: *“Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”*

—Mark 10:52

Lesson Scripture:
Mark 10:32-52

THIS IS THE LAST LESSON in this series on faith, and the Key Verse records the marvelous occasion when Divine power was used to restore sight to a man who was blind. Our Lord performed this wonderful miracle because of the man’s faith in him as the Son of David. Jesus said, ‘Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.’

Our lesson begins with Jesus and his disciples making their way toward Jerusalem. As they walked, he began to prepare their faith for what was to happen to him. He told them that the Son of man would be delivered unto Israel’s

religious leaders, that they would condemn him, and take him to the Gentile authorities demanding his death. Also, he would be mocked, scourged, spit upon, and killed. But he would rise from the dead on the third day, as prophesied.—vss. 32-34

The next recorded incident concerns the sons of Zebedee. “They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.” (vs. 37) James and John were not exercising humility in the request, and were not comprehending the nature of their High Calling in Christ Jesus.

Answering James and John in a firm manner, Jesus said, “Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (vs. 38) Their answer was yes, but they obviously did not understand their position in the request. On another occasion he stressed the seriousness of his own experience. He said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened [Marginal Translation, pained] till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50) Reasoning further with the two, Jesus emphasized that God alone had the

authority to give such honors. He said, “To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”—Mark 10:40

Following this, Jesus restored sight to the blind man. This wonderful miracle happened when Jesus, together with some of his disciples, arrived in Jericho. Among the multitude of people in the city was Bartimaeus, who was blind and was sitting alongside the road begging. “When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.”—vss. 47,48

Jesus heard the man cry out, and address him as the Son of David. His attention was therefore focused in the direction of the man, and commanded that Bartimaeus be brought unto him. The man arose and ran up to our Lord. “Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”—vss. 51,52

Let us all renew our faith in the promises of the kingdom when all the blind, deaf, and maimed of humanity may be uplifted and blessed even as was the blind man.

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God's Plan of the Ages

(The Early Ages)

***“Study to shew thyself
approved unto God, a
workman that
needeth not to be
ashamed, rightly
dividing the word of
truth.”
—II Timothy 2:15***

IN HIS LETTER TO TIMOTHY, Paul reveals that there were some in his day who taught that “the resurrection is past already,” (II Tim. 2:18) and it is evidently in view of this false teaching that Paul admonished Timothy to ‘rightly divide the word of truth.’ The lesson is obvious. The resurrection of the dead is one of the most prominent teachings of the Bible. It is so important in the plan of God that Paul himself wrote, that if there be no

resurrection of the dead, “Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” (I Cor. 15:16-19) The erroneous view mentioned by Paul to Timothy was not the teaching that there would be a resurrection of the dead, but that the promised resurrection was ‘past already.’

This helps us to understand what Paul meant by rightly dividing the word of truth, which was that we should learn to place the various promises of God, and the prophecies of the Bible, in their proper place with relationship to the time sequences in the Divine plan. The Bible emphatically teaches the resurrection of all the dead—“the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15)—but it does not teach that the resurrection was to take place in the time of the Early Church. The “due time” for the general resurrection of the dead is still future.—I Tim. 2:6

THE DUE TIME

God has a ‘due time’ for every feature of his plan of salvation. There was a due time for Christ to come and to die for the sin-cursed world. (Rom. 5:6) There is a due time when the knowledge of the provision of Divine love will be “testified” to all. It is only as we recognize the time

element in the plan of God that we are able to discover the marvelous harmony of his Word.

A simple illustration of this would be an architect's plans and specifications for a three-story building. While there would be some similarity between the plans and specifications for the various floors, in many respects they would differ. Should we attempt to apply the specifications for the third floor in place of those for the first floor, they would certainly seem contradictory.

The divisions in the plan of God, of course, are not from the standpoint of height, as in a building, but in terms of time; and we find that there are three major time divisions in the plan of God. In a very general way these might be designated as past, present, and future. More specifically, however, the Bible refers to these three time divisions as "the world that then was," the "present evil world," and the "world to come."—II Pet. 3:6; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 2:5

The world that 'then was' came to an end at the time of the Flood. This was the antediluvian world, which began with the creation of Adam. The 'present evil world' began after the Flood, and continues to the completion of the church. The 'world to come' begins then, and continues into the endless ages of eternity, the first thousand years being the millennium of Christ's reign.

In the third chapter of Peter's second epistle, he describes the main component elements of these three worlds by the symbolic terms "heavens" and "earth" (II Pet. 3:7), meaning the spiritual, and material—or earthly—aspects of these worlds, or social orders. In rightly dividing the Word of Truth, it is essential to determine when literal language is used, and when the Lord is speaking to us in symbolic language. This can be determined by applying the known facts concerning the Divine purpose in the creation of man. The Scriptures reveal clearly, and unmistakably, that it was God's purpose that the earth should be man's eternal home. We have the assurance that "the earth abideth for ever," and that God created it "not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited."—Eccles. 1:4; Isa. 45:18

SYMBOLIC EARTH

This means that prophecies which refer to the passing away of the 'heavens' and the 'earth' must of necessity be symbolic. The earth itself

did not perish at the time of the Flood, although Peter declares that the heavens and the earth, or world, of that time did perish. (II Pet. 3:5,6) By the same token, when we read that the heavens and the earth which are now will also be destroyed, we know that the literal earth will remain. It is the symbolic earth that is “removed,” and it is the literal earth in which God’s name will ultimately be exalted, when he says to the raging nations, “Be still, and know that I am God.”—Ps. 46:2,10

The Apostle Peter assures us that there will be a “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:13) This will not be a new sun, moon, and stars, and a new planet Earth, but a new social order. It will be the kingdom of Christ—that Divine government which will cause God’s will to be done in earth as it is now done in heaven. In that new social order there will be peace and joy and health and everlasting life for all who obey the laws of Christ’s kingdom.

In our study of the Bible, it is essential to discern which texts, or portions, apply to the first world, which to the present world, and which to the ‘new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.’ We read, for example, God’s instructions to Noah concerning the building of an ark. We know those instructions applied exclusively to the first world, and particularly to Noah. This illustration highlights the fact that certain instructions and promises which apply to one period in the plan of God might not necessarily apply to another.

So far as general conditions in the present evil world are concerned, Malachi says, “Now we call the proud happy; ... yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” (Mal. 3:15) This harmonizes with what we know to be true in the present experience of the human race. But the Bible also tells us that in “his days” the righteous shall “flourish.” (Ps. 72:7) We know that this is not true at the present time; therefore, in rightly dividing the Word of Truth, we apply this text to the third world, to the time when Christ’s kingdom will be reigning.

Jesus referred to Satan, the Devil, as the “prince of this world.” (John 14:30) Paul speaks of him as the “god of this world,” and explains that he blinds the minds of those who “believe not.” (II Cor. 4:4) Jesus will be the king, the ruler, in the righteous world of tomorrow. This, indeed, is what guarantees that it will be a righteous world. Knowing this, we

properly apply all the texts of the Bible, which refer to a time when righteousness will flourish and be triumphant, to the future world.

ADDITIONAL TIME DIVISIONS

The Bible indicates that in this present evil world there are additional time divisions in the plan of God. These we speak of as ‘ages.’ The first age, or era, of this world began with the Flood and continued until the death of Jacob. We refer to it as the ‘Patriarchal Age,’ because it was during this time that God dealt exclusively with the patriarchs—Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. To these God made his promises, the principal one being to Abraham—that wonderful promise that through his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed.—Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18

This promise indicated God’s interest in all the people, yet during that age he did nothing to show his favor to other than the patriarchs. He allowed the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah to continue in their sin until it came to the full; then he destroyed them. Jesus explained that if the same efforts had been made in Sodom and Gomorrah as he had made in Israel, they would have repented and not been destroyed. He said, also, that it would be more “tolerable” for Sodom and Gomorrah in the “day of judgment” than for the Israelites who rejected and persecuted him.—Matt. 10:15; 11:21,23

These statements reveal that God’s due time for extending his favor to the Sodomites is still future, and that it will be during the ‘day of judgment.’ Paul told the Athenians that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.” (Acts 17:31) This again emphasizes the due time element in God’s plan. The judgment day, when God will deal with and offer his blessings to the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah, is an ‘appointed’ day in the Divine plan, and we may be sure that God will keep this, as well as all of his appointments.

Precious Promises

***“The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”
—Psalm 84:11***

THE LORD TELLS US that as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts. (Isa. 55:9) In order that we may be able to grasp the high thoughts of God, he has used many illustrations and symbolisms. This is true regarding every aspect of his loving plan of salvation, and particularly so in connection with the many promises he has made to assure us of his loving interest in his consecrated

people, and his watch care over them.

Throughout his Word, God has told of his love, and assured us that he will supply all our needs. He has promised us strength when we are weak, forgiveness when we err, and wisdom when we need guidance. These are marvelous promises which we lay hold upon by faith, and by which we are encouraged to continue on in the path of righteousness, assured of final victory if we continue to put our trust in him.

But the fact that the Lord, in making these promises, has used various illustrations to help us grasp their reality and the intimacy of our relationship to him, makes them even more valuable to us; makes of them the “exceeding great and precious promises,” by which we are made partakers of the Divine nature.—II Pet. 1:4

The promise used in our text—‘The Lord God is a sun’—brings thoughts of brightness and cheer. How often the immediate circumstances of life are dark and foreboding. This is true in the experiences of all mankind. The reign of sin and death has a blighting effect upon all, but we who know the Lord find ourselves completely out of harmony with our surroundings in the world. The things which afford some joy to the world mean little or nothing to us, so that the darkness which covers the earth because of Satan’s rulership would be most depressing but for the fact that the Lord is our sun.

In our struggles against our various adversaries—the world, the flesh, and the Devil—the outlook often seems dark, and should it continue we would become discouraged and faint by the wayside. The Lord is watching over us, however, and when he sees that we have learned the needed lesson, the dark clouds of despair with which we are surrounded part, and we see the sun—our Sun. Instantly all is light around us, we walk with a firmer step, and our hearts rejoice, because we know that the Lord is with us and has shined upon us.

ALSO A ‘ROCK’

The Scriptures also speak of the Lord being our rock and our salvation. We read, “From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”—Ps. 61:2

The illustration is of one walking through the lowlands where there are sinking sands and miry clay, and it looks as though escape is impossible. But then a rock appears, a rock that is on higher ground, higher than the traveler, and upon attaining it he is able, by reaching up and taking hold upon it, to lift himself up to safety. David uses this to illustrate for us the fact that when we are traveling through sloughs of despair, or when the sinking sands of human help fail, there is a Rock, one that is on higher ground, to which we can cling, assured that when we do we will be safe. That rock is the Lord!

This scripture says, ‘From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee.’ No matter where we are, or what the circumstances may be, the Lord is not far away. The ‘rock that is higher than I’ is always within reach, and because the Lord is the sunlight of our lives, when we might otherwise be overwhelmed, we need only to look up and there we will be able to see the Rock.

A ‘SHIELD’

The Lord is also a shield unto his people. To Abram God said, “Fear not, ... I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” (Gen. 15:1) This was true of Abram, the Father of the faithful, and it has been true of all God’s people since. In this promise, the Lord uses a shield to symbolize the thought of protection. To Abraham (his name was changed from Abram, Gen. 17:5) much of the protection was along physical lines, but with us of the Gospel Age it is largely along spiritual lines.

God was also Abraham's 'exceeding great reward.' Although the patriarch had left his own country and had gone into a strange land, God had prospered him, and ultimately the promise of a "seed" was fulfilled to this "friend" of God. (Gen. 17:7; II Chron. 20:7) How richly the Lord rewards us as we journey on toward the heavenly Canaan, confident that since he is our 'shield' no harm can come to us.

God's protection is over his people in various ways. In Psalm 91:4 we read that the Lord's Truth will be our "shield and buckler." We are being protected as New Creatures. The attacks against us are made on the mind. The enemy's arrows are often "bitter words" (Ps. 64:3), and deceptive, lying words; words designed to cast doubt and instill fear into our hearts and minds. To protect us against these poisoned darts of the Adversary, the Lord has given us his Truth as a shield. Indeed, the Truth constitutes a complete "armour," with its "shield of faith," its "breastplate of righteousness," its "helmet of salvation," its girdle of "truth," and its sandals of "peace."—Eph. 6:13-17

We think of the 'shield' alone as being the Truth which protects against our enemies, and we can consider it from a more intimate standpoint, as the Truth contained in God's promises to never leave us. (Gen. 28:15) We rejoice in God's great plan of salvation for all mankind, but how precious it is to hear him say to us, individually, Be not afraid, I am thy shield. Continue to put your trust in me. Go often to the throne of grace, and you will find strength to help in your every time of need. Your enemies may be hateful and strong, but greater is he who is for you than all who be against you, for I am on your side, and will not permit you to be harmed.

The psalmist details the matter for us, saying, "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."—Ps. 91:5-11

God, by his promises, assures us of protection, and he implements those promises by constituting the angels our guardians—"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." (Ps. 34:7) The angels are real beings, powerful, and equipped with needed knowledge of God's will for each of his people. They know when to ease the burden, when to make the way more smooth. They know when to part the clouds that we may see the sun, that its enlightening, warming rays may dispel the darkness with which our hearts may be overwhelmed.

RESTING IN THE LORD

Because David, the man after God's own heart, had full confidence in the Lord's wisdom and ability to care for him, he could sleep even when his enemies were increasing against him. One occasion was when Absalom, his son, rebelled against his rulership and endeavored to establish himself as king of Israel. This was a severe trial for David. For anyone to attempt to dethrone him and rule in his stead would have been serious enough, but for his own beloved son to be the traitor was a crushing blow.

It was under such circumstances that David prayed, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah. But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me."—Ps. 3:1-5

When David thus cried unto the Lord for help, it was in the spirit of full resignation to whatever the Lord's will for him might be. Even while a fugitive, with Absalom and his fellow conspirators taking over the government in Jerusalem, David said to his loyal friend, Zadok, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."—II Sam. 15:25,26

From this we gather that David's ability to sleep under such strained circumstances was not because he was sure the Lord would save him from his enemies, but because he was fully resigned to the Lord's will in the matter. This is a necessary attitude of mind and heart for all who

would benefit most from the promises of God. The Lord is not a shield to protect us in having our own way, but rather to hinder our enemies from preventing his will being carried out in our lives.

‘I laid me down and slept’—how wonderfully this expresses the thought of full confidence in the Lord’s love and care. But if the turbulent situation in which we are seeking the Lord’s protection is one of our own making, and we are insisting that the Lord help us carry out our will in the matter, then we will have no peace, no rest. Looking back upon the experience we will not be able to say, I laid me down and slept. The proper thought is expressed by the poet: “I love thy will, O God! It is my joy, my rest; It glorifies my common task, It makes each trial blest.”

David said, “Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I would choose rather to sit at the threshold in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” (Ps. 84:9,10, *Marginal Translation*) Here again is the expression of humility before the Lord, and a desire to be in harmony with him, even at the loss of earthly advantage.

To be near to the Lord because we love him, and to want his will done in every circumstance of life, are the prerequisites for full assurance that he is our shield and exceeding great reward.

HIS LOVING-KINDNESS

‘The Lord will give grace and glory,’ our text declares; he will show us his favor—his loving-kindness is the thought contained in the Hebrew word here translated grace. How many wonderful ways the Lord bestows his loving-kindness upon his people! David wrote, “How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.”—Ps. 36:7-9

The Lord’s ‘house’ during the present age is his people, and how ‘fat’ indeed are the provisions he has made for them! In this end of the Gospel Age especially, he has provided “meat in due season” (Matt. 24:45) for his household, the glorious harvest truths of his Divine plan of salvation for both the church and the world. Instead of feeding upon the husks of human tradition, we now have rich, nourishing, and stimulating doctrines

of his Word upon which to feed and thereby become strong in the Lord, and grow up into our Head, Christ Jesus.—Eph. 4:15

The Lord has also made us to drink of the ‘river of thy pleasures.’ God’s pleasure is in all his works—“Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created,” said the “four and twenty elders.” (Rev. 4:10,11) We share this pleasure with our Heavenly Father, for we know his human creation will ultimately be reconciled to him and throughout all eternity will praise and magnify his holy name.

God takes special pleasure in his New Creation. To Jesus he said, “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22) What great pleasure we also take in Jesus! He is our beloved Elder Brother, Exemplar, Advocate, Captain, High Priest, and among ten thousand, the One altogether lovely—a constant friend and companion. In him indeed we have a ‘river of pleasure.’

We read, “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear [reverence] him, in those that hope in his mercy.” (Ps. 147:11) A similar thought is expressed in Psalm 149:4—“The Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.” Here is another of the Lord’s rivers of pleasure of which he has given us the privilege of drinking.

Do we find pleasure in our association with the Lord’s people—the “blessed” people of God who have heard the “joyful sound” of present Truth? (Ps. 89:15,16) Among the Lord’s people there are not many wise, not many rich, not many noble in so far as the world’s standards are concerned, but they are prized very highly by the Lord, and should be, and are, by one another.—I Cor. 1:26

The fraternity of Christian brotherhood is very precious to each of the Lord’s consecrated people. There is nothing else like it in the world. To be a part of it, and to experience the “blest tie that binds” the hearts of all its members together in the bonds of Christian love, is one of the rivers of pleasure which refreshes and rejoices the hearts of all to whom the Lord is a sun and shield. In Isaiah another reference is made to another pleasure of the Lord, another river of pleasure. The prophecy of this text concerns the purpose for which Jesus came to earth, that is, to carry out the loving plan of the Creator for the reconciliation and restoration of the fallen human race. The whole world of mankind

restored to life as perfect human beings is spoken of in this text as the “seed,” the children, of Christ. Jesus was “cut off out of the land of the living” without children, yet, as Isaiah declares, he “shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”—Isa. 53:8,10

We are sure to make frequent reference to those things which give us pleasure, and God likewise, throughout his Word, speaks frequently of his great plan to restore the dead world to life. Peter refers to it as the work of “restitution,” and says that it was spoken “by the mouth of all his [God’s] holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:19-21

This ‘pleasure’ of Jehovah was part of the “joy” that was set before Jesus, the joy which enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame associated with laying down his life for the sins of the world. (Heb. 12:2) We also share this river of pleasure. The knowledge of this glorious Truth of the Divine plan satisfies our longings as nothing else could do. We love to talk about it, and to do all we can to make it known to others. It is a story that never grows old, a veritable river of pleasure indeed.

God’s purpose in the “great salvation” (Heb. 2:3) of the Gospel Age church is another river of his pleasure. It is our privilege to cooperate with our Heavenly Father in attaining to this “high calling.” (Phil. 3:14) Paul admonishes us to “work out” our own salvation with reverence and patience, for, he adds, “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:12,13

We can be assured that regardless of how difficult the way may be, how many discouraging experiences may tend to turn us aside from our course of sacrifice, he who is our sun and shield will continue to work in us to accomplish his good pleasure. “Fear not,” Jesus said, “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”—Luke 12:32

The Heavenly Father has “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, ... according to the good pleasure of his will.” He has also made known to us “the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”—Eph. 1:5,9,10

AND GLORY

Surely those to whom the Lord is a sun and shield are a favored people. We are blessed by his grace—his loving-kindness—as a rich present inheritance, and for a future inheritance an “eternal weight of glory.” (II Cor. 4:17) In his prayer on behalf of his followers Jesus said to his Father, “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”—John 17:22,23

The glory of the Divine nature and the glory of the kingdom had been given to Jesus by promise, and Jesus had promised the same glory to his disciples. They were to sit on thrones, to have the kingdom, to do greater works than he had done while in the flesh, to have a resurrection of life, and to be with him in the place for which he went away to prepare.

After the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, the apostles understood the meaning of these wonderful promises of ‘glory.’ John wrote, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: ... and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:1,2

Peter wrote, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”—I Pet. 4:12,13

Paul likens this promised ‘glory’ to the bright shining countenance of Moses when he came down from the mountain bringing with him the tables of the Law. (II Cor. 3:3-12) In the last verse of this chapter Paul speaks of our beholding the “glory of the Lord” as in a glass, or mirror, and says that we are “changed into the same image from glory to glory.” Then in the seventeenth verse of the next chapter, he declares that our “light affliction” which is but “for a moment”—very temporary—cannot be compared with the “eternal weight of glory” which is being worked out in us by the ‘light affliction.’

James wrote, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”—James 1:12

Jude exhorts, “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Closing his epistle he commends us to him who is able to keep us from falling, the One who is our sun and shield, and is able to present us “faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”—vss. 21,24

NO ‘GOOD THING’ WITHHELD

Our text concludes with the blessed assurance that no good thing will be withheld from those who walk uprightly. “Every good gift and every perfect gift” which “cometh down from the Father of lights” will be ours to enjoy.—James 1:17

Let us take heed lest these good gifts of God become commonplace. First, there is that “unspeakable gift” of his beloved Son! (II Cor. 9:15) How we should continue to treasure him! Through him we have the gift of life. We are also richly blessed by the gift of the Holy Spirit—its enlightenment, comfort, and strength. By it we are also begotten again to a new hope of life, becoming New Creatures in Christ Jesus. (II Cor. 5:17) Paul speaks of the gifts of apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. (Eph. 4:11) All these gifts are shared in common by the Lord’s people, and are a part of the means by which the Lord is to us a sun and shield.

In addition to these gifts of God which are shared and enjoyed by all his people, he continually showers us individually with good things which are needful in order to make our calling and election sure. The guardian angels know exactly what each one of the Lord’s people needs.

It is well to realize, however, that the Lord does not promise to provide all the things which we might think to be good, and need. There are many things which we customarily think of as being good, such as the Truth, fellowship with the brethren, opportunities of service, a reasonable measure of health with which to serve the Lord.

If we remain humble before the Lord and pure of heart, we will always enjoy the blessings of the Truth. However, for reasons known to him he might not think it good for us to be too robust in health. He may know that a trial of ill health would be the very best thing for us. We know that he is able to cause “all things” to work together for our good.—Rom. 8:28

We do not need to understand why the Lord permits us to have this trial which is bearing down so heavily upon us today. All we know, and all we need to know, is that he loves and cares, that he is our sun and our shield, and that he gives his very best to those who leave the choice with him.

Our joy and comfort therefore will continue to be in the fact that because the Lord is the light of our lives we can walk in the dark with him and not lose our way; and, although we have enemies within and foes without, because he is our refuge, our strength, our shield, our rock, no harm can come to us. Praise the Lord for the assurance that because he is our sun and shield, all good things are ours to enjoy, and that he is able to turn into good those experiences which, while unpleasant, he is causing to work out for us the promised 'eternal weight of glory'!

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Our Affections

WHERE SHOULD OUR affections be centered? The Scriptures say, “Set your affection [or mind] on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Col. 3:2) The preceding verse exhorts, “Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” Beautifully clear also are the words of Jesus, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.” “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”—Matt. 6:33; 22:37

EARTHLY TREASURES

Many people have set their affections and built their hopes upon earthly things, only to find them but mocking delusions, leaving the heart at last, broken, crushed, and barren. The treasures of wealth, fame, social distinction, houses and lands, friends, home and family, power and influence, are subject to change and decay. These possessions may vanish in a night. Friends long trusted may suddenly grow cold, and even become enemies. The love that glows upon the home altar may flicker and become dim, or extinct. Many have found the affections and high hopes of youth and early life turn to ashes in a few years or months.

GOD’S WORD

To all the Lord’s people, the Word of the Lord should appeal with special force, when it calls them to come to him with their burdens and their broken hearts. “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (contrition, meaning sincere sorrow for sin). (Ps. 34:18) God’s love and precious promises are very sweet indeed to those who, sad and disappointed in their earthly struggles, come to Christ for rest and comfort. There, alone, true blessing and safety can be found; there, alone, is the real treasure, far exceeding the choicest treasures of earth. Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”—John 14:23

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

Jesus said, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” (not upon earth). (Matt. 6:19,20) One of the chief treasures is the personal love and relationship of God, and of his dear Son. They become to us an unfailing refuge in every time of need—our daily joy, solace, and comfort. Here is a love that never grows cold. A love from which nothing—apart from our own unfaithfulness—can separate us, not even death. During the time of our Lord’s Second Presence, a blessed change occurs for those who die in the Lord. The Scriptures tell us that they are changed “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” to the Divine nature, immortality. (I Cor. 15:51,52) Jesus, through the Revelator, has promised, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.”—Rev. 3:21

INCENTIVES TO FAITHFULNESS

Some of the blessed and inspiring promises which the Father and the Son cheer each of the truly consecrated are: “Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty.” (Isa. 33:17) Ye “shall be mine, ... in that day when I make up my jewels.” (Mal. 3:17) “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” (John 15:16) “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (immortality). (Rev. 2:10) “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6) These heavenly treasures call for special zeal and faithfulness, under every trial and test of the present time.

PRESS ALONG

As heavenly pilgrims nearing home, we are to keep our affections set upon the spiritual, eternal things; more and more laying up treasures, where moth and rust cannot corrupt and where thieves cannot break through and steal. (Matt. 6:20) If our heart is upon the heavenly treasures, the disappointments and afflictions of the present life cannot overwhelm us. We care not for the illusive bubbles of this poor world, so soon to burst and disappear. We wisely “touch lightly the things of this earth, esteeming them only of trifling worth.” They are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. By the Lord’s help we faint not by the way, but press along the heavenly road until we reach the goal of our hopes.

CONTINUAL FIGHT

To be a child of God does not mean that we shall be free from all earthborn cares. There is a continual fight within us—the New Creature against the old. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.” (Gal. 5:17) Indeed the world, the flesh, and the Adversary oppose our way as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Not only must our affections of the old mind be torn from their earthly props, to which they naturally cling, but they must be trained heavenward, and be held there by the cords of faith, love, and devotion toward God. Our Father must be first, all else subordinated.

GOD FIRST—SELF LAST

The fleshly mind rebels against this requirement. But the New Creature sees this obligation in a special light which leads to the making of a full consecration to the Lord and his glorious cause. This involved enlistment under the banner of Jesus to fight a good fight against sin, entrenched in the flesh, requires faithfulness in this warfare even unto death. In making his consecration, the Christian puts God first, Jesus next, and himself as the servant of these, and of the principles which they represent. His flesh is devoted, consecrated, given over to death in the service of God, his will, plan, and ways. Nothing is to be done “through strife or vainglory,” but all to the glory of God.—Phil. 2:3

SANCTIFICATION

To give the heart to God is to surrender all that we have to his will. It involves self-sacrifice. Taking this definite and wise course enables us to meet and overcome all the coming temptations. This is part of our sanctification. Those sanctified may implicitly trust Divine wisdom, love, and power, and hold fast the exceeding great and precious promises. All things shall work together for their spiritual and eternal welfare. Only those thus consecrated have the deep peace and joy of heart which the passing storms and difficulties of the present time cannot disturb. We must keep the center of the affections right, true, and pure, remembering that “A double minded man [whose affections are not centered in God] is unstable in all his ways.”—James 1:8

A LIFE OF NEW AFFECTIONS

For all mankind there is a natural attraction to earthly things. The true Christian, however, must not only keep setting his affections on heavenly

things, but he must keep rooting out all earthly desire and attraction. Ours is a life of new desires and affections. As footstep followers of Christ we seek to attain a share in God's kingdom with our dear Redeemer. This includes a share in the Millennial reign—as the bride of Christ, to sit with him in his glorious throne for the blessing of all the families of the earth. Meanwhile, by Divine help, we continue faithful to the present mission of the church, the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service, to develop in herself every grace, to be God's witness to the world, and to prepare to be kings and priests in the next age.—Rev. 20:6

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