

The Unity of the Faith

***“He gave some,
apostles; and some,
prophets; and some,
evangelists; and some,
pastors and teachers;
For the perfecting of
the saints, for the
work of the ministry,
for the edifying of the
body of Christ: Till we
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of God, unto a perfect
man, unto the
measure of the stature
of the fulness of
Christ.”***

—Ephesians 4:11-13

THE YEAR 2000 WAS declared by the Roman Catholic Church to be a Holy Year. An article in the “*New York Times*” on September 20, 2000 reminded the Christian world of this Holy Year and the objective that the Catholic hierarchy had in its establishment. A Holy Year is proclaimed from time to time and although there have been many in the past, this year was unusual for it was the first year of the new millennium.

HOLY YEAR

The reporter for the “*New York Times*” started the article by saying, “For Catholics, a Holy Year is a time to make pilgrimages to Rome and throw open the doors of their faith. At the Vatican, however, there are signs suggesting that top church officials are working behind closed doors during this Holy Year to reorganize top echelons and prepare for the future. The most glaring signal was

the reassignment of a close aide to Pope John Paul II, Bishop Giovanni Batista Re, 66, the deputy secretary of state, whose Vatican job description is akin to that of a White House chief of staff. Last weekend, the bishop, a career Vatican diplomat, was put in charge of the office that selects bishops, a powerful post that will almost certainly result in his elevation to cardinal.”

The article went on to remind everyone of the frailty of the present cardinals, some who had to resign their office because of illness. There is also a deepening awareness of the 80-year old pope’s failing health.

The number of cardinals under age 80—and therefore eligible to vote in a conclave to choose a new pope—has shrunk to 100 from the maximum 120 allowed. The reporter wrote, “The busy Holy Year calendar has not deflected preoccupation in the church administration with the cardinal selection process, which is expected to be completed by February. ‘All you hear is talk about cardinals and when they may be named,’ Bishop Joseph Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston said this summer after visiting Vatican offices.”

FUTURE POPE

For some time there has been speculation among Vatican experts on the subject as to whether the cardinals building on the precedent of a Polish pope would move toward electing a candidate from Africa, Latin America, or Asia, or whether they would return to an Italian. The oft cited battle between the so-called liberals and conservatives inside the Vatican is believed by some to be exaggerated since the pope shows no signs of winding down his mission after the Holy Year comes to a close. The article reported, “In recent weeks, plans have been floated for the pope to visit Armenia either this year or in early 2001. The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, said last week that the pope wanted to resurrect his plan to make a pilgrimage to Ur, a holy city in Iraq, a trip that was canceled in December after the Iraqi government withdrew its consent.”

PRIMACY DECLARATION

It appears that the pope wants to continue his program of ecumenicism and interfaith dialogue, but a 36-page document issued in September by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who directs the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith seemed to deflate the pope’s efforts in this direction. The document stressed the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church and declared that it (the Roman Catholic Church) cannot be any group’s “sister church” because that would imply a “plurality.” And it said non-Christian religions, while holding out the possibility of Divine grace, “are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who in the church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.” To some, the document seemed to deflate the pope’s bold efforts to further ecumenicism and interfaith dialogue, most notably with his silent prayer at the Western Wall in Jerusalem last March. The document offended

many leaders of other churches, who saw it as a tactless step backward. When John Paul opened a joint commission on dialogue between Catholics and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in September, he did not allude to any change in his own thinking, saying, "The commitment of the Catholic Church to ecumenical dialogue is irrevocable."

One outstanding event in this Holy Year was the pope's visit to the Holy Land in March and holding a public mass in that land. Some students of the Bible have viewed this event as another fulfillment of our Lord's words in Matthew 24:15. The pope scheduled a dialogue between Christians and Jews for October 3. The document on the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church issued in September, and a few days later the "*New York Times*" ran a short article saying, "VATICAN: MEETING WITH JEWS CANCELED. The Vatican was forced to cancel an October 3 symposium on dialogue between Christians and Jews after two Italian rabbis dropped out to protest a Vatican document asserting the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church. Rabbi Elio Toaff, chief rabbi of Rome, and Rabbi Abramo Piattelli told the Vatican that given the current climate, they could not attend. 'It is difficult to organize a celebration between two faiths when one is missing,' said the Rev. Remi Hoeckman, secretary of the Vatican's office for relations with the Jews."

IS UNITY OF FAITH POSSIBLE?

It is evident that stressing differences in faith will not help the ecumenical efforts of the pope. What should we expect in attaining unity of faith as preached by the Apostle Paul to the Ephesian church in Ephesians 4:11-13? First, God's objective in the present time must be understood. At the present time, he is selecting "a people for his name" (Acts 15:14) which is the true church. These are called members of the "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." (Heb. 12:23) Jesus mentioned that this was a very selective work. He concluded the parable of the wedding garment and feast with the words, "Many are called, but few are chosen." (Matt. 22:14) This special choosing of those that can become members of the church is emphasized by Jesus in John 15:16, when he told his apostles, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." This is contrary to the usual concepts our Christian friends have

about the Gospel message. They believe that today is the only time available for salvation for everyone, and that we must seek out and choose Jesus as our Savior.

On the Day of Pentecost God sent his Holy Spirit upon the apostles and those gathered with them. Israel was enjoying exclusive favor from God, so this blessing was limited to Israelites indeed. The Apostle Peter gave a mighty discourse on that day and three thousand were immersed into Christ. This was the sudden appearance of the true church. Later Peter said, “The promise [of the Holy Spirit] is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”—Acts 2:39

When exclusive favor to Israel ended three years later, God instructed Cornelius (a Gentile centurion) to send for Peter. Peter had received a vision from the Lord that convinced him that God was directing the matter and he went to see Cornelius. As Peter briefly summarized the events of Jesus’ ministry, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his family and friends. God was visiting “the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”—Acts 15:14

The Holy Spirit (God’s influence on our hearts and minds) is essential to an understanding of God’s plan. When the Apostle Paul and his companions went to Philippi, they went to a place by the river on a Sabbath to worship. There was no synagogue in Philippi and faithful women came to this location to pray. One of these, Lydia, heard Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke expounding on God’s plan, with Paul being the chief spokesman. The Scriptures say of Lydia, “whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” (Acts 16:14) This is an experience that every child of God being chosen to be a part of the Church must have. We do not receive an understanding of God’s plan by our own astuteness and wisdom. We are utterly dependent on God opening our hearts to receive the message.

HELPERS FOR UNITY

Along this latter line, God has provided much assistance to make matters clear. When writing to the Ephesian church he tells us about these helps. “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” (Eph. 4:11) These helpers would be used by the Lord “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work

of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (vs. 12) The goal to be achieved by these helpers is, “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”—vs. 13

The Apostle Paul wasn’t saying that during this present Gospel Age all professing Christians would eventually be unified in faith. The opposite is true. Church dogmas differ from one sect to another, and often these differences interfere with the churches joining one another in unity. During these attempts at unity of the faith, statements are made that would indicate a change in doctrine or attitude. Such has been the experience of Protestants with Roman Catholicism. Statements have been made that appear that the church is deviating from its former stance. In one such incident, an article in the Vatican newspaper, “*L’Osservatore Romano*,” published April 17, 2000, the author, Father Suaudeau, gave that impression, and this was seized by some as a change in philosophy. Father Suaudeau was questioned about this and our article said, “‘I don’t understand why people want to interpret what I stated clearly in my article,’ Father Suaudeau said with a sigh. ‘But there is no change in church teaching.’”

STEPS TO UNITY

It is evident that as stated, ‘There is no change in church teaching.’ Roman Catholics intend to hold on to their beliefs and the various Protestant sects intend to hold on to their beliefs. What then was the Apostle Paul alluding to when he told the church at Ephesus that God’s helpers would bring them to a unity of the faith? This could only apply to those being chosen of God to be members of the ‘church of the firstborn.’ The steps necessary for this achievement are as follows:

1. Selection by God and Jesus
2. The opening of our hearts by God
3. Dedication of ourselves to serve God and accepting Jesus as our Redeemer
4. Receiving of the Holy Spirit
5. Attaining an understanding of God’s plan
6. Growing up into “the stature of the fulness of Christ”—Eph. 4:13

This ultimate objective of the unity of the faith is stated elsewhere as, “to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Rom. 8:29) If any one of the steps indicated does not occur, there can be no unity of the faith.

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Reclaiming the Lost

Key Verse: “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

—Luke 19:10

***Selected Scripture:
Luke 18:31-34;
19:1-10***

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS attracted all types of Israelites, from parents with little children to publicans and sinners, from the poor and the handicapped to the rich. The background scriptures of Luke 18:15-37 tell of parents bringing their children to Jesus and the disciples rebuking the parents for doing so. Jesus asked the children to come to him and used them as examples of the humble and teachable character necessary for all to possess if they were to enter the kingdom of God.

A rich young ruler came to Jesus seeking to know what to do to gain eternal life. Jesus called attention to God’s commandments in the Law. When he claimed to be trying to keep them, Jesus said he lacked one thing, “Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.” (vs.22) He couldn’t do it, causing Jesus to comment on how difficult it would be for the rich to enter God’s kingdom. Peter spoke up saying, “Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.” (vs. 28) Our Lord’s response was that for so doing they would receive greater rewards.

What no one knew, including the apostles, was that before anyone of Adam’s family could receive anything worthwhile such as eternal life, Jesus would have to die as a ransom for father Adam. He tried to disclose this precious truth to the apostles, taking them aside and saying, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.” (vss. 31-33) This was a brief summary of events to come. They understood none of these things, nor would the events that followed make any sense to them.

They passed a blind man who cried unto him as the ‘son of David’ to have mercy upon him. Although rebuked by others, the blind man was persistent and Jesus rewarded him for his faith by restoring his sight. The blind man was most grateful and glorified God. As Jesus continued his journey he passed through Jericho. There was a rich publican who wanted to see Jesus, but because of the press of the crowds and being small of stature, he climbed a tree on the route Jesus was taking. Jesus spotted him in the tree and told him to come down because he was to be his host for that night. At this there was murmuring by all the people.

At the home of a joyous Zacchaeus Jesus was told by the publican that he wanted to give half of his goods to the poor and if he had collected taxes unjustly of anyone, he would restore them fourfold. Jesus said, “This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”—Luke 19:9-10

Jesus was glad to go to Jerusalem and to give up his life for the salvation of those like Zacchaeus who were considered to be traitors to Israel and the worst of sinners because of their profession. All the poor and despised people of earth will receive the benefits of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice during the future kingdom because he truly came to earth to save the lost.

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Service—The Way to Greatness

Key Verse: “Ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.”

—Luke 22:26

***Selected Scripture:
Luke 22:14-30***

THE YEAR WAS A.D. 33 and the time had come to kill and eat the Passover lamb. Jesus gave careful instructions to his disciples for finding the place where they could prepare and eat it. Meanwhile as the Passover drew near, the chief priests and scribes were laying plans as to how they might kill Jesus. Satan entered into the heart of Judas Iscariot and he communed with the chief priests and captains how he might betray Jesus when there was no multitude around to interfere.

The disciples followed our Lord's instructions and everything turned out as he said it would. They found the house and guest chamber where they would eat the Passover and they made it ready. When the hour was come, after sundown on the fourteenth of Nisan, Jesus sat down and the twelve apostles with him. Jesus expressed to them his great desire to eat this Passover with them. It would be the last time. They had eaten it together three times before. As faithful men of Israel they had done so many times before always recalling the part that the Passover lamb played in the deliverance of their nation from Egypt. They were unaware that Jesus was about to fulfill the type as the antitypical Passover lamb. He, their Master, was laying down his life for them and all mankind.

That evening, as they were eating, Jesus instituted a new ceremony, the breaking and eating of unleavened bread representing his broken body, and drinking of the fruit of the vine as representing his blood to be shed for them. This he asked them to do in remembrance of him. Yet, as all this was taking place Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot had betrayed him, and said, “Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.” (Luke 22:21) As they inquired among themselves as to which one of them should do this, the inquiry led to a dispute among them as to who of them was the greatest. One might expect that the somber aspect of the

occasion would not have led to such strife. Apparently the apostles were still not able to comprehend that Jesus was to die that night. In their eyes he would go on forever being their Master.

It was necessary for Jesus to give them important advice. Their role models were the kings of the Gentiles who were lords over the people. This was not for them. They were to learn how to serve others, because greatness lay in their success of being servants. Jesus on a previous occasion had said to them, “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:28) They were to learn that following Jesus meant the same for them. They were not to be ministered unto but were to lay down their lives in service to God, their Father. They were to follow the example of Jesus and he was one among them “as he that serveth.” (Luke 22:27) After Jesus died and made possible the receiving of the Holy Spirit they would recall his example and realize how true it was that “Before honour is humility.”—Prov. 15:33

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Fulfilling One's Mission

Key Verse: “*Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.*”

—**Luke 23:46** *New International Version*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 23:33-49

JESUS, WHO IN HIS PREHUMAN experience was the *Logos* (Word of God) (John 1:1-3), is pictured as answering the question raised by God concerning a mission to put down the rebellion of sin upon earth. The Prophet Isaiah records, “I heard the voice of the Lord[Jehovah], saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I [the *Logos*], Here am I; send me.” (Isa. 6:8) Thus it was that “The Word [the *Logos*] was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14) When he reached the age of thirty he came to Jordan in fulfillment of Psalm 40:7,8 to do God’s

will and fulfill the mission for which he was sent.

After three and one-half years of ministering to the people, telling them about God’s wonderful kingdom, his enemies decided it was too risky for them to allow Jesus to continue winning over the people. They conspired to put him to death and seized him in the Garden of Gethsemane where he had gone to pray after partaking of the Passover. They took him to the home of Annas, former high priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest. When the Sanhedrin had assembled at the home of Caiaphas, they took Jesus there and held a trial. The trial was a mockery and Jesus was condemned to die.

Israel was a captive nation and could not put Jesus to death under their own laws. His accusers had to bring him to Pilate, the Roman governor, who interrogated him. When Pilate could find no fault in Jesus and sought to chastise and then release him, he met severe opposition from the priests and scribes. He sent Jesus to Herod who also interrogated him, hoping to see a miracle. Instead he said not a word. He was sent back to Pilate who did everything possible to release him, but was forced under threats of

treason to Caesar to crucify him. So they led Jesus away with two criminals to be crucified.

None knew that our Lord had come to earth as a perfect man to give his life as a ransom for the perfect life of Adam that had been forfeited by disobedience to God's law. The Apostle Paul would later say, "Who gave himself a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:6) As our theme text says, he breathed his last and died upon the cross. His mission was accomplished. Now an opportunity for eternal life was guaranteed to all of Adam's progeny.

It is interesting to note how God used natural forces and other events to indicate his reaction to all the events involving the death of his beloved Son. A great darkness covered the land and the veil of the Temple was rent in twain. (Luke 23:44,45) Although Jesus was put to death as a malefactor, as soon as he died, a rich man, Joseph of Arimathaea, asked Pilate for the body and provided a rich man's tomb for his burial fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9. A centurion standing guard at the cross in viewing the darkness and the storm as Jesus died, glorified God and said, "Certainly this was a righteous man." (Luke 23:47) Only a righteous man could accomplish this important and necessary mission and Jesus was that righteous man.

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You Are a Witness!

Key Verse: “That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.”

—Luke 24:47, 48

***Selected Scripture:
Luke 24:33-49***

WHEN THE MISSION JESUS had come to accomplish of providing a ransom was completed at his death, it was not possible to continue holding him in death, and God used his mighty power to raise him from the dead on the third day. Jesus appeared to his disciples on various occasions starting on that day and during the following forty days before he left them to go to heaven. It was necessary to have eyewitnesses of his resurrection. As Paul would write later, “He was seen of Cephas [Peter], then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are

fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”—I Cor. 15:5-8

The women who came to anoint his body after the Sabbath were also eyewitnesses of his resurrection as were other faithful disciples. Two of them left Jerusalem to go to Emmaus about seven and one-half miles from Jerusalem. They knew of the report brought by the women who had gone to the sepulchre and were told by the angels that Jesus was alive. This was confirmed by others who had gone to the sepulchre, but the body was not there. Even this news was not enough to make them glad, rather they were still puzzled and sad as they journeyed. They were joined by our risen Lord who appeared to them as a stranger and asked what was engrossing their conversation to make them sad? They proceeded to tell him about the crucifixion of Jesus who was “a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” (vs. 19) They believed that he was the Messiah. But his death was a great puzzle to them.

Jesus then said, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (vss. 25,26) He witnessed to them, beginning at Moses and the prophets and explained what had happened and why. They came to the village and he appeared to be going farther but they pleaded with him to abide with them. When they sat down to eat and he blessed the bread and gave them to eat, they recognized the familiar manner of Jesus and their eyes were opened, but he vanished out of their sight. The witness Jesus gave to them caused their hearts to burn within them.

The two could not stay in Emmaus and hurried back to Jerusalem that same night and found the eleven apostles and other disciples still puzzled by the events of the day. As they told of their experience, Jesus appeared in their midst, and they were frightened. He had them touch him and ate with them. Then he expounded to them all that had been fulfilled as written by Moses, the psalmist and the prophets. A new work was to begin, later described by James as God taking out “a people for his name.” (Acts 15:14) Israel still had exclusive favor from God and from their nation would be found those who would be willing to follow Jesus. They would be used to witness to others, but first they had to receive the Holy Spirit to make their understanding of God’s plan complete. This would happen on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem.

The Mediator of a Better Covenant

CHAPTER 8

VERSES 1,2 “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.”

‘We have such an high priest.’ Throughout the seventh chapter Paul tells about this wonderful High Priest, that had been appointed by God, and that was the antitype of Melchisedec, who had no predecessors or successors in the priesthood, and who was a king as well as a priest—a royal priest. The fact that Jesus is a royal priest is further established by the explanation that he is now ‘set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.’

Despite his exaltation Jesus is still a ‘minister,’ a servant, of the sanctuary. But now there is a different sanctuary, the true tabernacle—the antitype of the Tabernacle constructed by man in the wilderness of Sinai. This true tabernacle is ‘pitched’ by God. In reality it is a condition, not a place. The first ‘holy,’ is the Spirit-begotten condition of New Creatures, while the ‘holiest of all’ is heaven itself, where Jesus appeared in the presence of God for us.

VERSES 3,4 “Every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law.”

The principal work of the typical priests was to ‘offer gifts and sacrifices.’ All of these were typical and pointed forward to the sacrificial work of Christ. In the type, there were the Atonement Day sacrifices as well as those subsequent to the Day of Atonement. Those offered on the Day of Atonement typified the sacrifices offered by the antitypical priesthood for the sins of both the church and the world, while those

subsequent thereto pointed forward to the fact that the people in presenting themselves to the Lord during the millennium would do so in recognition of the sacrifice which had been previously offered for them by the antitypical High Priest.

To fulfill these types, it was necessary, Paul declares, that Jesus ‘have somewhat also to offer.’ It was for this reason, other scriptures reveal, that he was “made flesh.” (John 1:14) It was his own flesh—not that of bulls and goats—that Jesus laid down in death, and it is on the basis of the merit of this sacrifice that he now has appeared in the presence of God for the church, and will later appear for the entire world of mankind.

The sacrificial work in the type, particularly that of the Day of Atonement, was concealed from the view of the camp of Israel. In the antitype, while Jesus actually died in view of the people, they did not realize the significance of his death, for the meaning was concealed from them.

In the type, after the slaying of the animals, the priest took the blood into the Most Holy and there sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat. Antitypically, this was accomplished by Jesus when, after his resurrection, he entered into the presence of God for us; for it was then that he had somewhat also to offer—sufficient, indeed, to effect the reconciliation of both the church and the world. Thus, as Paul shows, the priestly office of this age and of the next age, is on a much higher plane, a spiritual plane. He agrees that if Jesus were on earth, as a man, he would not be eligible to serve as a priest; but this is not important, for the purpose of that typical priesthood had been served.

VERSES 5,6 “Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.”

The Tabernacle and its services were intended by the Lord to be illustrations of better—‘heavenly’—things to come and for that reason he gave Moses such specific instruction to have everything according to the pattern which had been shown to him. It was probably difficult for Jewish converts who had been accustomed to the typical arrangements,

which had been in force during the Jewish Age, to realize that they were merely illustrative of the spiritual things of this age.

Every feature of God's dealings with Israel foreshadowed better things to come (Heb. 10:1), including the covenant into which they entered with the Lord at Sinai. Paul reminds the Hebrews that God had promised a 'better covenant,' and that Jesus was its Mediator. He explains that this better covenant is established upon better promises. God promised the Israelites that if they could keep the Law Covenant they would live. But they were unable to live up to its perfect requirements, and the sacrifices of bulls and goats which were made each year on their behalf failed to take away their sins; so they remained under condemnation to death. The promises of life under the New Covenant are 'better' because an adequate provision has been made to take away the people's sin—the provision of the blood of Christ.

VERSES 7,8 "If that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

The first covenant was not 'faultless' because of the sinful condition of those with whom it was made, and because the sacrifices which accompanied it had no power to remove their sin. Paul reasons that God's promise of a New Covenant was tantamount to 'finding fault' with the old. The thought is not that of scolding, but as the words literally state, a fault had been found in the old covenant. God knew from the beginning that this fault existed. It was not a fault in his part of the covenant, but in theirs; for they were unable to keep their part of it.

Not understanding the plan of God, many have supposed that Paul, in his reference to God's promise of the New Covenant, is implying that this promised covenant had already been inaugurated, and that the Hebrew's relationship to God was through this new arrangement. A careful study reveals, however, that this is not the case.

Throughout the epistle the followers of the Master, his 'brethren,' are depicted not as those in the camp of Israel being blessed, but as a part of the antitypical priesthood. In the type on the Day of Atonement only the high priest could enter into the Most Holy, and in the antitype Paul encourages us to follow Christ, our 'Forerunner,' into the antitypical

holiest of all. In that typical arrangement there were priests, sacrifices, a tabernacle, and a covenant. In the antitype, we have all these, and the church is associated with Jesus in the priesthood, the sacrifices, the heavenly tabernacle, and with him will, during the thousand years of the kingdom, administer the laws of the New Covenant.

The making of the typical Law Covenant began when first the Lord “took them by the hand” out of Egypt, and then took Moses up into the mount and gave him the Law. (Jer. 31:32) Following, there was the sacrifice of animals and the providing of blood by which the people and the book of the Law were sprinkled. That which took a matter of days in type requires the entire Gospel Age in the antitype. With the sacrificial work—the ‘better sacrifices’—of the age complete, then will come the inauguration of the covenant, first with ‘the house of Israel and the house of Judah,’ and ultimately with all mankind.

VERSES 9,10 “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”

‘Not according.’ The Law of the old covenant was written on stone (the Ten Commandments) and the various ordinances were recorded either on clay tablets or parchment. But the writing of the laws of the New Covenant will not be according to this manner, for the promise is that it shall be written in the hearts of the people, implying their restoration to the original image of God in which Adam was created. Adam was in a covenant relationship with the Lord before he fell.—Hos. 6:7 (*Marginal Translation*)

In II Corinthians 3:3 Paul speaks of the “epistle of Christ,” not engraven on stone, but “in fleshy tables of the heart.” Then he explains that we are made “able ministers of the new testament,” or New Covenant. (vs. 6) Some have mistaken this as proof that the promises of the New Covenant are now being fulfilled in the experiences of true Christians. But in this lesson Paul is not referring particularly to the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34, which he quotes in Hebrews, but is taking

a lesson from the writing of the Law on the tables of stone. Antitypically, it is this work which is now being done: and just as the typical tables of stone were prepared prior to the inauguration of the old covenant, so Paul is describing a work which is now going on prior to the inauguration of the New Covenant; namely, the preparation of the church to be the ‘able ministers’ of that covenant when it is put into operation for the blessing of the people.

VERSE 11 “They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.”

This promise will become literally true when the ministers of the New Covenant have made their “calling and election sure” and it is finally made with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. (II Pet. 1:10) Of that time, it is promised that the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14) Herein is a very obvious proof that this covenant has not as yet been put into operation. If it had begun to function at the First Advent as an agency of reconciliation between God and men, as some claim, how utterly it has failed to accomplish the purpose God designed for it, as outlined in this verse! But there can be no failure in the plans and purposes of God, and when this covenant is inaugurated the whole world will indeed learn to know him and be reconciled to him; those who willfully resist Divine grace being destroyed from among the people.—Acts 3:23

VERSE 12 “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”

“This is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins,” writes Paul in Romans 11:27. In this eleventh chapter, he explains that the blindness, iniquity, and ungodliness of Israel, or Jacob, shall be turned away by the “Deliverer” that is to come “out of Sion,” which, as he explains, is to occur following the time when the “fulness of the Gentiles” has come in. (Rom. 11:25-28) Thus does Paul locate the time for the fulfillment of God’s promise of the New Covenant and its sin-cleansing powers as following the work of the present Gospel Age, the work of calling out from the world the Zion class, the ‘little flock,’ which is to live and reign with Christ, and with him, as the great ‘Deliverer’ and ‘Mediator,’ ministers of the New Covenant.

VERSE 13 “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”

How keen is Paul’s reasoning, that the Law Covenant was made ‘old’ simply by God’s promise of a new one. When God declares a fact it is established. From God’s standpoint, it had served its purpose. Israel had been cast off; and when the time should come for him to again deal with this people whom he still loved for the “fathers’ sakes,” it would be under the arrangements of the New Covenant. (Rom. 11:28) Then their sins, which caused them to be rejected, will be taken away and they shall once more be his people, and he shall be their God.—Jer. 31:33,34

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Church

“Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

—Matthew 16:18

THERE ARE MANY churches, bearing a great variety of names, and holding to many shades of belief with respect to the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. When we consider these differences of viewpoint it is not out of order to inquire as to what the word church really means. Is there any way of knowing which is the true church, or do all the denominational groups together make up the true church?

THE MEANING OF THE WORD

The word church does not appear in the Old Testament, and its first use in the New Testament was by Jesus when he told Peter that the “gates of hell” would not prevail against it. It is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means ‘a calling out,’ or a selection. Jesus said to his disciples, “I have chosen you out of the world.” (John 15:19) Basically, then, the church is a company of people who, in accepting the invitation of Christ, have become separated from the world.

The church is not a building, although the word church is used to denote the place where a congregation meets. If the expression ‘meeting house’ were more universally used to describe the gathering place of a congregation, it might help to lessen some of the misunderstanding which prevails concerning the true significance of the word church itself.

In Jesus’ ministry he used the word church only three times, once in his remark to Peter, and twice on another occasion when instructing his disciples in the proper procedure for dealing with misunderstandings which might arise among them. (Matt. 18:17) The next time the word appears is in Acts 2:47, following the account of the three thousand souls who accepted Christ as a result of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost. It is a simple statement, saying merely that “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

This simple statement of fact should cause us to analyze the matter. On the Day of Pentecost alone three thousand became identified with the ‘church,’ and thereafter there were ‘daily’ additional converts. All of these converts were Jewish people, and when, under the persuasive ministry of the apostle, they recognized that Jesus, whom their leaders had crucified, was the Messiah of promise, they believed on him and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins.- Acts 2:38

As the number of the disciples increased, and they assembled for mutual edification, these groups of people were called ‘churches.’ In Acts 11:22 we read of “the church which was in Jerusalem.” In Romans 16:5 Paul extends greetings to “the church that is in their house”—that is, the house of Priscilla and Aquila.

THE EARLY CHURCH

From these texts we get the thought that in those early days of Christianity each group of believers, regardless of its size and location, was considered a ‘church.’ And indeed, it was a church because each such assembly of believers was made up of those who, by the Gospel, had been called to separate themselves from the world and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

These individual groups bore no denominational names, but were identified by their location, being spoken of as the church at Jerusalem, the church at Philippi, the church at Rome, or, as in some instances, the church that held its meetings in the home of one or another of the believers.

In Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, seven churches are mentioned and identified by the cities in which they were located, and special messages sent to them. There is reason to believe that these seven churches are in a general way representative of all believers throughout the entire age—which is another, a broader use of the word church as descriptive of all, in every place, whom the Lord looks upon as being ‘called out’ from the world to serve him and his cause.

Jesus was speaking of this broader meaning of the word when he said to Peter that the ‘gates of hell’ would not prevail against the church. It is this application also that Paul makes when in Ephesians 1:22,23 he speaks of Christ as being the “Head over all things to the church, Which

is his body.” It is in this sense that Paul again writes about the “church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”—I Tim.3:15

In I Corinthians 12:12,13 Paul elaborates on the thought of the church being the “body” of Christ. He says, “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.”

HOW TO JOIN

How does one join the church, the one which was established by Jesus and the apostles? Acts 2:47 reads that “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” This indicates that becoming a member of the Lord’s church depends upon him. This, we believe, would be conceded by all Christian people. But just how does the Lord add members to his church, and what qualifications must one possess in order to be recognized by the Lord as belonging to his church?

STEPS TO TAKE

Briefly, the Scriptures indicate the steps of approach to the church as being, first, a repentant recognition of the fact that we are members of a sin-cursed and dying race, and could therefore have no standing before the Lord in our own righteousness. (Mark 2:17; Acts 26:20) Next, the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our personal Redeemer and Savior, realizing that only through the merit of his shed blood can we be acceptable to God.—Acts 13:38,39; 16:31; Rom. 3:22; 5:1

Then, upon the basis of our confidence in the merit of the shed blood of the Redeemer, we are invited to present ourselves in unreserved devotion to do the will of God. We could speak of this as making a consecration of ourselves to God. And let us emphasize that this consecration is made to God, not to man, nor to an organization of men.—Rom. 12:1,2

The Scriptures are very explicit as to what this consecration will mean in our lives. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me [be my disciple], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matt. 16:24) To deny self does not mean merely the giving up of some petty pleasure or satisfaction for a short period of time, or even for all time. It is, rather,

just as the expression implies, a complete denial of self. It is the same word that is used concerning Peter's denial of Christ—when he said that he did not know Jesus at all. So to deny self is to deny ourselves the right to recognize our own wills. We renounce our wills, and accept instead the will of God as expressed through Christ and the Word.

What is the Divine will for those who, responding to Jesus' invitation, deny self? It is expressed in his further invitation, "Take up your cross, and follow me." Jesus used the symbolism of crossbearing to denote going into death. When Jesus gave this invitation he was himself laying down his life in sacrifice. His sacrifice was completed at Calvary when he cried, "It is finished."—John 19:30

Those who accept Christ's invitation to take up their cross and follow him likewise lay down their lives in sacrificial service. They are not all literally crucified, although in the beginning of the age some were. Many suffered martyrdom in other ways. In the case of every follower of the Master, the will to serve and to suffer regardless of the consequences must and will be present.

This following in the footsteps of Jesus is described by Paul as being "planted together in the likeness of his death." (Rom. 6:5) Before we came to Christ we were 'dead' in trespasses and sin. But through obedient faith in the merit of his shed blood we are released from Adamic condemnation. Yet we die, not as sinners, but as joint-sacrificers with Jesus. Paul expressed the thought when he wrote, "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

BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Paul wrote, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:3,4) The baptism here referred to is not in water, but into Christ, and into his death.

The word baptism in the New Testament is translated from a Greek word meaning 'to bury,' or 'submerge.' Our baptism into Christ is the

burial of our will into his will. It is a death baptism because it is the Divine will that we die with him.

In Revelation 20:4 this thought is symbolized by the use of the word “beheaded.” Here we read of those who are “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God.” This does not refer to a literal beheading, but to the renouncing of our will, as represented by the head, and accepting Christ as our Head.

Paul elaborates further on this point, saying, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” (I Cor. 12:13) It is by the influence of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Truth, that we are drawn to the Lord, and led by his love to present ourselves in full consecration to him. Since this consecration means the renouncing of our own wills and accepting the will of God in Christ, he thus becomes our Head, and we become members of the church which is his body.

Thus we see how it is that God, by the power of his Spirit, adds members to the church of Christ. Our part in it as individuals is merely to yield to the influence of his Spirit, and take the steps which the Divine Word indicates; that is, the steps of repentance, acceptance of Christ, and the presenting of ourselves in full consecration to do the Lord’s will.

Can we know, after taking these steps, whether or not the Lord has accepted us, and does actually recognize us as probationary members of the church, the body of Christ? We believe so, and we can ask, are we joyfully walking ‘in newness of life’?

Paul also wrote, “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) Have the ‘old things’ belonging to the ‘times past of our lives’ passed away, in the sense that they hold no real attraction for us? Do we find our greatest joys in the ‘new’ things of the Lord—our new vocation of Divine service; our new hopes, new aims, new ambitions?

Having taken this step of full consecration to the Lord, our former friends and relatives may fail to understand us; in some cases they may even persecute us. But in any event, they will not find in us the same degree of companionship, for they will not be in harmony with our new way of life. Not that we will love them any less, nor cease to do all we can for them, but simply that the ways of the world and the ways of the consecrated people of God are far apart. Are we having this experience?

Paul again wrote, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” Then he adds, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—I Cor. 2:9,10

Is the Lord leading us day by day into a deeper appreciation of the marvelous truths contained in his Word? Are the ‘deep things’ of his Word pertaining to our calling in Christ Jesus more clearly understood as we seek to know and to do his will? If so, we have this additional evidence that he has accepted us and is leading us in the path of righteousness.

Jesus himself gives us a very definite assurance of our standing before the Lord. First he declares that no man can come unto him unless drawn by his Heavenly Father. (John 6:44) Then he tells us that those who do come to him he “will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37) What further assurance do we need than this?

Our rejoicing in the spiritual things of the new way of life in which we are walking, and our loss of interest in the former things of the flesh and of the world, are signs of our acceptance by the Lord. A measure of misunderstanding, and perhaps even of persecution, from the world and our increasing appreciation of spiritual things, particularly as they pertain to our heavenly calling, all these are evidences that our consecration has been accepted by the Lord, and that we have actually been ‘baptized’ into the church, the body of Christ.

WATER BAPTISM

The question of water baptism naturally arises, and properly so, for Jesus himself was baptized, buried, in water, and we are to follow in his steps. What is the purpose of water baptism? John baptized for the remission of sins and could not understand why Jesus requested baptism, for he knew that Jesus was not a sinner, but rather, that he was the Holy and Just One.

John’s baptism applied only to members of the Jewish nation and it symbolized their return to the covenant with the Lord under which God was dealing with the entire nation, the covenant made at Mount Sinai. Even the Jews who accepted Christ needed this baptism in order to be transferred, from Moses into Christ. Jesus, however, was not baptized for

the remission of sin. In asking John to baptize him he simply said, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matt. 3:15) It is Jesus’ example that we follow in our water baptism. To him it was a symbol of his covenant to die, and of his hope to be raised from the dead.

How aptly water immersion pictures these two thoughts! When one is lowered into the water by the immerser he becomes helpless in his hands, and would remain buried, as in death, except as raised up out of the water. So, in our consecration we give ourselves up to die with Christ, inspired by the promises of God that we will be raised up in the resurrection, even as Jesus was, to be associated with him in the great future work of his kingdom.

Water baptism, then, is a beautiful symbol of our true baptism into Christ. Is it essential? Not in the sense that it is a saving ordinance. But since those who are properly eligible for water immersion have renounced their own wills, and have covenanted to do the Lord’s will, they will recognize that this is part of the Lord’s will for them, and will gladly comply. Any other attitude would indicate something less than an all-consuming love for the will of God.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The present mission of the church is the perfecting of the saints for a future work of service; to develop in herself the graces of Christian character; and to be God’s witness to the world concerning Christ’s kingdom of blessing now so near. And there is also a glorious future work for which the church is now being prepared!

Jesus said to Peter, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” (Matt. 16:18) That which is ‘built’ in due time reaches completion. It is not God’s design that the ‘building’ of the church shall go on forever. It is not a case of all who will ever obtain salvation through Christ becoming members of the church. The very meaning of the word, ‘a calling out,’ is contrary to this concept of God’s purpose through the church. The church is called out from the world. It is not God’s plan to bring the world into the church.

“Thou art the Christ,” Peter testified, “the Son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16) This expression identified Jesus with the Messianic promises of the Old Testament, and indicates that Peter properly

recognized in Jesus the One whom God had sent to fulfill those promises. In order to see clearly the full Divine purpose through the church, it is essential to keep in mind the Old Testament promises concerning Christ; for the church is called out from the world to be associated with him in the fulfillment of those promises. God said to Abraham, “In thee, and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) In Galatians 3:16 Paul informs us that this ‘seed’ of promise is Christ. But Paul gives us additional information concerning the seed of promise. In verses 27 and 29 we read, “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Here is unmistakable proof that those who, through full consecration to do God’s will, become members of the church which is the body of Christ are a part of the promised seed through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

This means that instead of the fullness of God’s purpose toward the children of men being represented in the establishing of the church, it is only the beginning of his plan to bless mankind. In James 1:18 we are told that the church is a “kind of firstfruits” of God’s creatures. This expression is also used in Revelation 14:4 and applied to those who are associated with the “Lamb” on the symbolic Mount Zion.

THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

In the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians, Paul points out very clearly that the hope of life for both the church and the world depends upon the resurrection of the dead. If there be no resurrection of the dead, he argues, “They also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” (vs. 18) But he gives us assurance of the resurrection, saying “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—vs. 22

Paul shows that there is to be a definite order, or sequence, in the resurrection—“Every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.” (vs. 23) The ‘firstfruits’ here referred to includes the church, for as James explains, we are a ‘kind of firstfruits unto God of his creatures.’

But ‘afterward’ others are to be resurrected. Who are these? Paul explains, ‘They that are Christ’s at his coming.’ This is a faulty translation. A proper translation of the Greek text would be, “Those who

become Christ's during his presence." This is a reference to the thousand years of his kingdom, when Christ and his church will reign for the purpose of destroying sin and death, and giving all an opportunity to accept the gift of life provided by his shed blood. This is shown by Paul's further statement, which immediately follows:

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (vss. 24-26) This is the great, the ultimate, purpose of God to be accomplished through Christ and the church—the 'afterward' blessing to reach all mankind when the building of the church shall have been completed.

HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY

In his lesson on the resurrection Paul reveals that some are to receive heavenly bodies, and some human, or earthly bodies, the determining factor in each case being the sort of "seed" or "bare grain" that is sown. (vss. 37, 38) The 'it' or 'bare grain' to which Paul refers is simply the personality, the sum total of a person's lifetime thoughts, his character.

Those making a full consecration to do God's will are 'buried' with Christ in sacrificial death, and throughout the remaining years of their natural lives 'walk in newness of life.' To these will be given a celestial, or a heavenly, body. They are prepared for this. During their earthly pilgrimage as they continue to 'set their affections on things above,' their hopes are heavenly and through faith they are seated together with Christ 'in heavenly places.' In death they 'sow' spiritual characters, and in the resurrection these receive a heavenly reward.

The vast majority of people, however, are not interested in spiritual things. This does not mean that they are necessarily wicked. Most of them are not. They love the good things of the earth because they were created human, earthly beings, and God does not condemn them for not aspiring to heavenly things. It is in the very nature of things that these in death sow an earthly character, and as a result will be raised from the dead as human beings.

The Apostle John speaking of the resurrection of the church, describes it in Revelation 20:6 as the "first resurrection." Paul further explains, "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour;

it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”—I Cor. 15:42-44

To this Paul adds, “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” He would have us understand that in describing the change of nature to be experienced by those who participate in the first resurrection, he is not implying that these are the only ones to be raised from the dead, for all mankind are to be resurrected, only they are to receive natural bodies.

Paul continues his lesson, saying, “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy [those who die with human hopes and desires], such are they also that are earthy [in the resurrection]: and as is the heavenly [those who now set their affections on heavenly things], such are they also that are heavenly [in the resurrection].” —vss.47-48

Paul concludes this lesson on the resurrection, saying, “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”—vss. 53-55

Thus in a few words Paul presents both the hope of the church and the hope of the world. The resurrection hope of the church is “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) No human being possesses immortality by nature. It is a reward given to those who faithfully follow in the footsteps of Christ unto death. In Revelation 2:10 we read, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

The call and preparation of these for the fruition of this glorious hope in the ‘first resurrection’ has been the work of God through the Holy Spirit during the present age. But Paul explains that when this is accomplished, and the last member of the body of Christ has entered into glory, then will be the time for the fulfillment of those glorious promises of the Old Testament concerning the destruction of death—‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’

DEATH DESTROYED

Here Paul is quoting from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14. Both texts assure us of the Divine purpose to destroy man's great enemy, death, and the grave—or *sheol*, as it is in the Old Testament—and *hades* in the New, the Hebrew and Greek words for hell. It was this same glorious consummation of the Divine purpose toward the human race that Jesus referred to when he said that the 'gates of hell' would not prevail against the church.

What a wonderful assurance! Throughout the reign of sin and death 'hell,' which is the grave, or tomb, has continued to claim its victims. But in Revelation 1:18 Jesus tells us that he has the "keys" of hell. He purchased these 'keys'—that is, the right to unlock hell's gates—by his own death as man's Redeemer. When his church is completely 'built' she will be associated with him in bestowing the promised blessings of life upon all mankind.

The fact that meanwhile so many billions continue to go into death, into the Bible hell, will not deprive them of these blessings. The gates of hell did not 'prevail' against Christ and they will not prevail against his church; for by Divine power they will be swung wide open, and all death's prisoners released!

This will be the future work of the church. And what a glorious work it will be! What an incentive it should be now to prove faithful to the Lord. Perhaps you are just learning of this glorious purpose of God through Christ and the church. If this knowledge has reached you prior to becoming a Christian, we suggest that you consider well the steps of repentance, belief, and consecration as we have scripturally outlined them; and trusting in the strength of the Lord, and in appreciation of his abundant grace, devote yourself to him and to his cause.

There is no greater peace or joy that anyone can experience than that which results from being 'at-one' with the Lord, and in living a life of full devotion to him. There are trials, but as Paul reminds us, these are in reality "light afflictions," lasting but for a "moment" when compared with the "eternal weight" of glory which the Lord has promised. —II Cor. 4:17,18

It is surely a blessed privilege to be among the 'called out' ones, the church, at the present time; for surely the Lord is blessing his people,

especially in revealing to them the beauties of his plan of salvation. And how thankful we are that through Christ and his church the whole world is yet to have an opportunity to rejoice in the blessings the Lord has designed for them—blessings of “restitution,” as Peter described them, “which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:19-21

In view of God’s harmonious and loving plan of salvation for both the church and the world, some of the beauties of which have already been revealed to us through his Word, we can well understand the great Apostle Paul’s feelings when he wrote:

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out [completely]! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”—Rom. 11:33-36

Dawn Bible Students Association

Our All-wise Lord

***“These things saith
the Son of God, who
hath his eyes like
unto a flame of fire.”
—Revelation 2:18***

THIS SCRIPTURE SPEAKS of the infinite knowledge, understanding and insight of our Lord, the great Head of the church, the supervisor and caretaker of all its affairs. Our Lord announces himself in this way to the church in Thyatira. This church belonged to the very darkest period

of man's history, the Dark Ages, when the spiritual interests of the people of God appeared to be at their lowest ebb.

COMFORT FOR MARTYRS

How comforting to suffering martyrs, when right was on the scaffold and wrong upon the throne, to know their Lord and Master understood the situation perfectly. He was pleased to test the faithfulness of his saints in the fire of affliction, so that they were frequently constrained to cry, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10) They knew he would take speedy vengeance upon the persecutors as soon as the due time arrived, even though they had to bear long with these persecutors; or, to use Paul's expression, he “endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.”—Rom. 9:22

What more important lesson could there be for us today than to realize that we are dealing with the same gracious, loving, and all-wise Master, before whose eyes everything is naked and open (Heb. 4:13), and who discerns the very thoughts of our hearts, yea, and even the motives underlying these. How important to remember this in our daily walk and conversation—in every plan we entertain, and every project we seek to carry out. How important, too, to remember this in dealing with the brethren, and in all the affairs of the church!

SELF-JUSTIFICATION

For instance, the natural tendency of us all is to seek to justify ourselves in all we say and do. Hence, to this end we may quote certain scriptures which appear to support our views, or the course we wish to

take. Whether our application of scripture be correct or incorrect, let us ask ourselves what are our motives for our conduct or for the course we are persuaded is the right one. Are they influenced by the Spirit of Christ and love for the brethren and our fellows, or by our natural inclinations, which may deceive us into thinking our course is the right one?

How easy it is to be misled if there be an idol in the heart. Our Master can never be deceived, either by our words or our actions, for his eyes are as a flame of fire. He is all-seeing and able to penetrate all outward forms and subterfuge, discerning the very thoughts and intents of the heart. Hence, the important thing ever to remember is that while we may deceive ourselves or our brethren by a misuse of the scriptures justifying our course, or by a failure to remember and apply the Word of the Lord to the matter upon which we need special guidance, we cannot deceive the Lord.

All things are open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do, and he is judging us accordingly—not, in the final analysis, by our words or our daily walk before the brethren or the world, but according to the thoughts and intents of the heart. Even if we have erred unwittingly, and later it is brought to our attention, let us at once offer our ‘trespass offering’ and seek to be restored to full at-one-ment with the Lord.

For the comfort of the honest and faithful children of God, the Apostle John says, “If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (I John 3:20), as much as to say, Wherein we may have done wrong, he may be able to find an excuse for us when we cannot find one for ourselves. (I Cor. 4:3) So, let us not cast away our confidence, he knoweth our frame. He that searcheth the heart, knoweth the mind of the Spirit. And as a father has a tender regard for his children, so the Lord has a tender regard for those who fear him.

The Sunlight of the True Gospel

THE WOMAN CLOTHED with the sun, the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars (Rev. 12:1), is generally understood to be a symbolical picture of the true church in apostolic times. The overcomers in the early church (the “chaste virgin” espoused to Christ in II Corinthians 11:2), especially through the ministry of the Apostle Paul, enjoyed the full, clear light of the Gospel shining upon them. They were bathed in the Gospel ‘sunshine,’ and the Old Testament “moon,” especially its types and prophecies, which proved a continual support to their faith and their standing as New Creatures.

The Early Church, also, enjoyed the ministry of the twelve apostles—“twelve stars.” Since the apostles fell asleep the church has continued to have the benefit of ‘the twelve’ whose teachings have come down to us in written form.

Favor and enlightenment was enjoyed by this company who took their place. As they went everywhere preaching the word, they were indeed “a great sign ... in heaven” (*American Standard Version*), that is, in the religious world of that day. They attracted the attention of all classes as the Master pictured the matter, “A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.”—Matt. 5:14

This happy condition of things did not long continue, however, as the Lord had plainly foretold. After the apostles fell asleep a great apostasy took place. Referring to this, Paul says, “In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” (I Tim. 4:1) As a result of these ‘doctrines of devils’ which began to be disseminated among the Lord’s people, the organization of the church became sadly deformed. A thoroughly worldly class, resulting from the threats of the terrible calamity which would overtake them if they died ‘outside’ of Christ, began to crowd into the precincts of the church as our Lord had foretold.—Matt. 13:25,38

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven [symbolizing false doctrine], which a woman [influenced by false leaders in the Christian church] took, and hid in three measures of meal [representing

the spiritual food of the Lord's household], till the whole was leavened."—Matt. 13:33

God was not taken by surprise at this apparent victory of Satan, the prince of darkness. He saw fit to allow these apparently unfavorable conditions for the testing of the faithful. The three cardinal errors which corrupted the faith once delivered unto the saints are the 'trinity,' 'eternal torment,' and the 'immortality of the soul.'

These grievous errors and sad hindrances to the enjoyment of the full, clear light of the Gospel, in spite of the efforts of earnest reformers, remained an integral part of the beliefs of the majority of God's people down to the harvest, or end, of the age and the Second Presence of the Master.

As soon as this time was reached, however, the darkness began to pass, and the true light started to appear and God's people began to be translated out of darkness into light. This is pictured by the Revelator using a symbol similar to that used to represent the favored position of the Early Church.—Rev. 12:1

As in the days of the Early Church, not all of God's people enjoy the light of Truth in its fullness. Witness the confusion concerning the covenants experienced by the Galatian brethren; the spirit of division among the Corinthians, with its consequent obscurity of much teaching of practical import, and the misunderstanding of the Truth relative to the Second Advent and its bearing upon Christian conduct of the Thessalonians. The wholly faithful were able to overcome these differences.—Phil. 3:15

So, at this end of the age, not all Christians have enjoyed the light of 'present Truth,' nor have all of those once enlightened continued to walk in the light. May we, who have been so signally favored by the Lord, never declare by word or action, "Our lamps are going out." (Matt. 25:8, *Marginal Translation*) May we seek to be like John the Baptist, burning and shining lights.—John 5:35

A faithful holding forth of the Word of life means sacrifice of the flesh—a using up of the potential energy of the justified human nature. This must be our privilege and experience if we would glorify the God of truth, and faithfully follow our gracious Redeemer. "Yea, and if I be

offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.”—Phil. 2:17

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Ambassadors for Christ

***“Now then are we
ambassadors for
Christ.”***

—II Corinthians 5:20

AN AMBASSADOR IS A minister who represents the sovereign power and dignity of his state at a foreign court. It is customary for governments of earth to appoint ambassadors or ministers of state to foreign countries. Thus to represent

one great nation of earth before another is considered a very honorable profession. How much more honorable it is to represent the heavenly kingdom and its King of kings and Lord of lords before the citizens of this world.

If we as Christians could keep this thought always prominent before our minds, what dignity it would add to our characters. It would be a transforming power, an assistance to us as New Creatures in our battle with the world, the flesh, and the Adversary.

Our citizenship is in heaven. Jesus said, concerning his followers, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” (John 17:16) While still living in the world, we are not of it, but have transferred our allegiance and citizenship to the heavenly kingdom. Our Father in heaven, has “delivered us from the power of darkness,” and has “translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”—Col. 1:13

As representatives and ambassadors for Christ, we should feel the dignity, the honor of the position, and the weighty responsibilities. We should ever keep in mind the apostle’s words, “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”—Col. 3:17

BEARING WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

As Jesus was in this world, so as his followers, are we. Our Master said, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” (John 18:37) It was the Lord’s faithfulness to the Truth that brought upon him the opposition of those who were blinded by the Adversary. It was his witness and loyalty to the Truth that brought him suffering and death.

Similarly all the Lord's followers are to bear witness to the Truth. They are to prove their loyalty to the Truth in respect to God's Holy Word, his character, and his great eternal purpose. It is because of such obedience and faithfulness to the Truth, that all the true followers of Christ have the privileged experience of suffering with Christ at any cost. The Scriptures say, "If we endure patiently, we shall also reign with him."—II Tim. 2:12 (*Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*)

When Jesus walked this earth he suffered "the just for the unjust" that he might bring men to God. (I Pet. 3:18) Since his high exaltation in heaven, his followers are called upon to demonstrate their loyalty to their Lord by walking in his footsteps throughout their earthly pilgrimage.

We can expect as we are faithful ambassadors for Christ and the heavenly kingdom of light, and let our light shine before men, that the opposing forces of darkness will be in conflict with us. The darkness, and those who are of the darkness, hate the light, and therefore oppose all who are children of the light as faithful representatives for Christ.

How do we receive the appointment as ambassador? We receive it through repentance, justification, and consecration. We first recognize that we are sinners. Next we believe on Jesus as our Savior. Then it is our determination, by the Lord's help, to live not unto self, but unto him who died for us, and to comply with Romans 12:1,2, "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."

OUR EXAMPLE

The Lord Jesus is our example, and as we are to represent him, we do well to take heed to his example and admonitions. He was 'the faithful witness.' We, too, are to be faithful witnesses, and while doing so, we look unto Jesus; we attentively consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.

Each consecrated follower of Jesus realizes the leadings of the Holy Spirit, saying, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; ... to bind up the brokenhearted, ... To proclaim the acceptable year of

the Lord.” (Isa. 61:1,2; Luke 4:18) This is the period during which God is pleased to accept a little flock as living sacrifices, through the merit of the Redeemer.

Our ambassadorship is a glorious ministry! The Apostle Paul as a faithful ambassador felt the influence of the Holy Spirit. It prompted him to engage in the work of telling all with whom he came in contact who had ‘ears to hear,’ of the ‘ransom for all,’ accomplished through our dear Redeemer’s sacrifice. It also prompted him to exhort all to be reconciled to God, and begin at once to walk in the paths of righteousness. The apostle declares, “I kept not back from announcing all the will of God to you.”—Acts 20:27 *WED*

Further, the Apostle Paul says, “If any one be in Christ, he is a New Creation; the old things have passed away; behold! they have become new. But all things are from that God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given to us the ministry of the reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting to them their offences; and has deposited with us the word of the reconciliation. On behalf of Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors; as if God were inviting through us, we entreat, on behalf of Christ,—be you reconciled to God!”—II Cor. 5:17-20 *WED*

EFFECTS UPON OURSELVES

Some of the effects of keeping the thoughts of our ambassadorship upon our mind and heart are:

(1) Dignity. While all the ambassadors realize that of themselves they have nothing to commend to the Lord, and that therefore not fit representatives of him and his perfect government. When we realize that we are covered with a “robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10, Phil. 3:9), and that we go forth in his strength and with his message, it lends dignity, nobleness, elevation to our character.

(2) Honor. We are to walk circumspectly, so that we will do nothing to cause reproach to be brought upon his name, character, word, or government.

(3) Responsibility. The position will be appreciated which, in turn, will assist us in being faithful to our trust.

(4) Transforming power. It will enable us to transfer our affections from earthly things to high, spiritual realities. At first, before becoming ambassadors of the spiritual kingdom, our hopes, aims, and ambitions were all centered upon earthly things. Now, as ambassadors, we are minding the things of the Spirit and not the things of the flesh. Being risen with Christ, we seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Our affections are on things above, not on things on the earth.—Col. 3:1-4

(5) Awareness. It will be of great assistance to the New Creature to keep the thought of our ambassadorship upon our hearts and minds helping greatly in the battle of the New Creature.

(6) Self-control. The thought of our ambassadorship regulates our walk in life—henceforth we walk in newness of life—after the Spirit, and not after the flesh.—Rom. 8:1,4

(7) Faithfulness. Our faithfulness as ambassadors results in a growing fruitage of the Holy Spirit, and thus an entrance is abundantly administered unto us into the kingdom.

FAITHFULNESS REQUIRED

Whoever will faithfully exercise his ambassadorship and not shun to declare the whole counsel, or will, of God, will speedily know something of the sufferings of Christ. They can say truly, “The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.” (Psa. 69:9) We behold the wonderful wisdom of the Divine plan. Each ambassador, in performing his priestly ministry, finds that the Holy Spirit moves him to offer up himself.

Hence the measure of self-sacrifice and sufferings for Christ endured by each of the consecrated becomes a measure of the faithfulness of each as an ambassador. Only those faithful as good soldiers of the cross will be granted the inestimable privilege of participating with the great High Priest in the glorious ‘at-one-ment’ work under the favorable conditions of the Millennial Age.

Faithfulness unto death will mean that we shall have a crown of life—immortality, the Divine nature. We shall have joint-heirship with Christ in glory; reigning with him in his throne; sharing with him in his grand

kingdom honors, and in his glorious work of blessing all the families of the earth.

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The Importance of Love

***“Keep yourselves in
the love of God.”***

—Jude 21

THE LOVE OF GOD IS A different love from that which is common to the natural man, and we need to be directed into it, and to grow or develop in it, as the apostle testifies, saying, “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.”—II Thess. 3:5

We are directed into this love through the Divine Word which brings to our attention the peculiarity of God’s love as distinguished from that of the natural fallen man. While love in the natural man is more or less selfish, even in our very best exercise of it on behalf of friends, God commendeth his love toward us. It was a superior kind of love, because, while we were yet sinners, aliens, strangers, enemies through wicked works, God arranged that Christ should die for us.

This kind of unmerited, sacrificing love is wholly different from anything that is known to fallen humanity. As our Lord Jesus said, the greatest love among men would be that a man should lay down his life for his friends, but to lay down his life for his enemies is certainly a much higher type of love—unselfish, gracious, heavenly. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he [Christ] laid down his life for us.”—I John 3:16

It is after we have thus perceived the love of God that it begins to operate upon us, if we are in a favorable condition—if our hearts are good ground, prepared under Divine providence for this knowledge. We should know what to look for as evidence of our growth in grace and of our attainment of this love of God.

The Apostle John declares, “This is [proof of our possession of] the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” (I John 5:3) Whoever of the Lord’s people is in harmony with him so deeply that they delight to do his will, have as this an evidence of the love of God dwelling in them richly, and abounding.

Knowledge, when it serves its proper purpose, brings us to a realization of ‘the love of God’ and to a realization of the wisdom of copying his

character. We should seek so far as possible to be like our Father which is in heaven, and copies of his dear Son. Undoubtedly love is the principal thing to be studied, appreciated, copied, and practiced in our lives. “God is love.”—I John 4:8

Let us practice and become perfected in this love.

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