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Christian Liberty

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." -- Galatians 5:1, NIV

"The true doctrine [of Christian Liberty] is not the right to think for ourselves, but the right of the other man to think for himself." The widely prevailing impression is that the battle for Christian liberty has been fought and won. As far as the more active precautions are concerned this may be largely true. The right of the minority to free speech and free action in line with their conscientious thought is (at least in theory) conceded.

It is a mistake to assume that because laws have been softened that the human race has been radically changed. The grosser forms of persecution have disappeared, but subtler forms remain. The spirit of intolerance has survived the death of many institutions in which it was once manifest. Christian liberty is still to a considerable degree conceded only theoretically. Men still intimidate those with the temerity to differ from them.

There is no surprise in this inconsistency. It is a curiosity of history to see how the persecuted became persecutors as soon as power was transferred to their control. Why? Because the principle of Christian liberty has not been grasped. The right of a man to differ from others has always been claimed-there is no novelty in that. From the beginning every Christian sect has vehemently contended for its right to differ from others. The sects protested against persecution-that is to say persecution of them by others. But in few cases has any sect conceded the right of others to differ from it; nor have any hesitated to persecute different persuasions when they had the power to do so.

In our day each person promptly claims this right for themselves. Yet, how disinclined they are to concede the equal right of other men' to think for themselves. Everyone resents coercion if he is pushed into something he does not believe. But how few hesitate to coerce others!

The teaching of Christian liberty is not our right to think for ourselves. It is the right of the other person to think for himself. There is no present danger that our right to do so will not be insisted upon and enforced. (This is particularly true if a person's opinion happens to agree with the present majority on that point.) But it is the other person's liberty to think as he will that is in danger-particularly if he is in the minority. It is his liberty that demands defense at all hazards, for if liberty is denied one, how long will it be conceded to us?

To demand liberty for others is not to admit that truth and error are one-or to deny that what a person believes and teaches matters! We may occasionally be duty-bound to resist with all our might what another person teaches, denouncing it as deadly error. But this may be done without defaming the man along with the teaching and without a display of intolerance or persecution. We need not try to make the man displeasing to others because his opinion is offensive to us. Loyalty to the truth balanced by a faithful recognition of the equal rights of others is not an easy state to achieve. The two may, however, work together harmoniously. Nothing can be more certain than that the preservation of Christian liberty for one person is conditioned upon the concession of that liberty for all.

- N.Y. Examiner, 1881

Perseverance

Yet nerve the spirit to the proof,
And blanch not at thy chosen lot.
The timid good may stand aloof,
The sage may frown -- yet faint thou not.

Nor heed the shaft so surely cast,
The foul and hissing bolt of scorn;
For with thy side shall dwell at last
The victory *of* endurance born.

One requirement of discipleship is to learn the ways in which sin skews our nature and submit what we learn to the continuing will of God so that we are reshaped through the days of our obedience.

- E. Peterson

Living the Christ Life

"Therefore, for me to live is Christ..." -- Philippians 1:21.

Benjamin Wilson's literal translation of the New Testament, *The Emphatic Diaglott*, renders this text with a slight difference: "Therefore, for me to live is for Christ." One could not live a Christlike life without living for Christ, nor could one live for Christ without living their life as Christ lived his.

Later in the Epistle we read, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Phil. 2:5). The word "mind," in its broad meaning, covers all mental activity: the will, the desires, and the disposition. To live a Christlike life, we must have a Christlike mind. Let us, then, note some characteristics of Jesus' mind. As we discover the attributes of his character we will be better enabled to copy him as our pattern.

Perfect Obedience

Speaking prophetically of our Lord, the psalmist says: "...Lo I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psa. 40:7,8). Not only did our Lord delight to do the Father's will, it was also his meat, his sustenance, the essence of his life (John 4:34). His wholehearted obedience enabled him to meet every test successfully. Only a thorough dedication (or "consecration") and full acquiescence to God's will would have enabled him to pass every one of the tests to which he was put.

We can almost hear the Lord's agonizing cry, O Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me: however, if not, then your will be done (cf. Luke 22:42)! Our Lord's reference to the cup could not have referred to his physical death. This we know because he came to earth for the purpose of giving his life a ransom for all (Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6); it had been written beforetime that he would die as a malefactor (Isa. 53); and he would shortly be accused of blaspheming the Father whom he loved with all his heart. This ignominy may have been the cup to which he referred; but his perfect submission to the Father's will is manifested: "...not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Compassion and Mercy

Our Lord was "...holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners..." (Heb. 7:26). Perfection notwithstanding, he had compassion on sinners. His came to save sinners. His message was one of compassion and forgiveness. Whenever men have heard the name of Jesus, they have associated with it the qualities of tenderness and mercy.

Humility

Jesus was the Son of God (Rom. 1:4), the only begotten of the Father (John 1:14). In spite of his exalted birth, his humility has never been equaled. "I can of mine own self do nothing..." (John 5:30). Can the perfection of his humility ever be better described than by those words from the Apostle Paul:

"Who, though being in God's form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God, but divested himself, taking a bondman's form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in

condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8, *Diaglott*).

Steadfast Love

"...having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). The love of our fellow human beings is frail by comparison to that of our Master. Though our intentions may be the very best, we frequently fail each other in times of need. Jesus loved his own unto the end. He has never failed, and will never fail to love his own-"...behold, I am with you all the days, till the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:20, *Diaglott*).

The Life of Christ in Us

"...For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). In order to put on Christ, you must do more than adopt an insignia or bear his name. To put on Christ is to adopt Jesus' style of living; it is to be moved by the same spirit and disposition as moved Jesus. "Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

The church is spoken of as the "epistle" or "letter" of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3). Similarly, it is spoken of as the light of the world (Matt. 5:14) and as living epistles or letters known and read of all men (2 Cor. 3:2). The word "know" in this text does not suggest that the church is understood by all men. History illustrates that this has not been true. Rather, we find that what has been true is that the world takes cognizance of those who profess to be believers. By comparing their actions with their professions, the world judges whether the believer's life is in agreement with his profession. Jesus said, "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). May our associates be able to say of us, "These people have been with Jesus. We know that they have been taught by him because we see his spirit in their lives."

Living Like Jesus

We learn about Jesus by looking at him, as the author of our faith (Heb. 12:2). We live like Jesus, however, by copying his attitude of consecration, his humility, his steadfast love, and his faithfulness. It is such copying to which Paul referred when he told King Agrippa that he had not been disobedient to the heavenly vision which he had seen (Acts 26:19). We, too, have received a vision of our high calling in Christ (Phil. 3:14). May we learn, always, to be obedient to that vision, and

May no earth born cloud arise
To hide thee from thy servant's eyes.

In this poetic thought we find the meaning of the Lord's words, "...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). We must follow Jesus Christ, step by step, and not open up a path for ourselves. We can only follow him by denying ourselves; and what is this but unreservedly abandoning every right to decide our own course of action? St. Paul tells us: "... ye are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19). Not a thing remains that belongs to us! Woe to him who reasserts possession of anything after abandoning it. The conclusion (consummation or end) of our consecration is when our humanity shall have been consumed in death.

Jesus desires to be nearer to you by his pure love than *you* are to yourself. He would have you look upon this "me" as a stranger; he would have you escape from its walls, sacrifice it wholly to him, return it absolutely and unconditionally to him from whom you received it. What you are ought to be less precious to you than he by whom you are.

God is a jealous God; and if in the recesses of your soul you are attached to any creature, your heart is not worthy of him: he must reject it just as a spouse would reject the bride who divides her affections between her bridegroom and a stranger.

There was a time when we first devoted ourselves wholly to God. In the sacrifice which we made then, we reserved nothing and felt happy in so doing. We looked at our lives in prospect: generally, and at a distance. But God takes us at our word. He accepts our offer in detail. Gradually, we are made aware of a thousand facets of our lives which are repugnant to God. Previously, we were not aware of these things. Our courage fails when we see them. We offer ourselves frivolous excuses which flatter our tempted and feeble hearts. We hesitate to obey; we doubt whether obedience is even our duty. We mix the influence of God with something of ourselves and end up doing only half of God's will. All this may be done to nourish that corrupt "self," which we have given over to God but which insistently refuses to die.

We learn to pray that God might take our life; but we long to die without pain. We would die to our own will by the power of the will itself. Yes, we want to lose all and still to hold all. We say that we are attached to nothing and are overwhelmed by even the smallest losses. What God requires of us is a will which is no longer divided between him and any creature.

Humility

"...Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:5,6).

Jesus told us that he was meek and abject (Matt. 11:29) He humbled himself, enduring even the criminal's death upon the cross. How appropriate it is, then, that we who are but dust should also humble ourselves. This we should do not only before God and our Savior; we should humble ourselves before our brethren also: "...let each esteem others better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3).

We sometimes become discouraged because we are unable to discern any progress in our own lives towards perfect obedience. Some persons mistake this sentiment for humility. Upon examination we find that it is self-love which longs for perfection? If we have faced this reality, may we question, just as honestly, another? Is this discouragement the result of humility or of pride? We think the answer is evident. When considering the history of God's dealings with men we note that he never gives to his human creatures the sensibility of its own weakness except so that they may be better receptacles of his strength.

Men judge our deeds by their appearance. God, however, is not dazzled by our brilliance. Simply, he seeks a pure intention, a heart ready to accomplish any task he may name, hands which are ever pliable to his service, and an honest abandonment of self. These traits are just as easily manifested on small occasions as on large.

Holiness

It is impossible for fallen men to attain to the Master's degree of holiness (cf. Heb. 7:26). We are encouraged, in spite of the object's unattainability, to follow after holiness-to walk in that direction; to point our lives towards holiness and to pursue it. That is why the Apostle admonishes us thus, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). What does this admonition mean? Is this not a wholehearted following after of holiness? Such a pursuit requires undivided attention, spurred on by love. Such a human will can mind only one influence: the will of God.

To follow peace does not mean to attain it. God does not expect more of us than we are able to render. But he does expect us to do that which we are able (2 Cor. 8:12).

Infinite Compassion

What has the Lord promised to his faithful followers? That if they remain faithful to death (Rev. 2:10) they will participate in blessing all the families of earth (Gal. 3:29). We are now in a figurative schooling period. The purpose of this schooling is that we might be prepared for a future work. And one of the lessons requisite of those who must exercise mercy and compassion is the exercise of these two traits. Note how Jesus laid down this rule for the conduct of our lives: "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:15) If we fail to be merciful to others, we are evidencing to God that we are not fit for the work which he has assigned to the Kingdom Age to come-the times of restitution of all things (cf. Acts 3:21).

Billions of humans will return from the grave during that time. They will return with the characters which they became during this life. Oh, what infinite compassion and mercy will be required of those who are to deal with these returning masses. These must be prepared to assist men to overcome mental blindness and to develop psychological muscles which will loose the limbs of personality made lame by sin. What a job will lie ahead for those who will help in the grand work of restoring men to the image and likeness of God!

Compassion and mercy are the pure fruits of godly trials. That is why our heavenly Father permits the trying experiences which his people share in this life. It is by his permission that we are allowed to bear crosses which, to us, seem unbearable. We are like athletes who train their muscles with literal weights, except that our "weights" are our trials. Just as the athlete develops muscles, so we are also being developed; our fruit, instead of being muscles, are the strengths of mind and character which are so perfectly displayed in the person of our Master. An able mind has said this about God's way of teaching us:

"...able as he was to save us without crosses, he has not chosen to do it, as he has not seen fit to create men all at once in the full vigor of manhood, but has suffered them to grow up by degrees amid all the perils and weaknesses of infancy and youth. It would be as great a wonder to see a person full of self become in a moment dead to all self-interest and all sensitiveness as it would be to see a slumbering infant awake in the morning a fully developed man."

We should like to be consumed at once by the flame of pure love, but such an end would scarce cost us anything: it is only excessive self-love that desires thus to become perfect in a moment and at so cheap a rate.

Faithful Love

We referred to our Lord's faithfulness; loving his own unto the end. We are enjoined to similar faithfulness in our attachment to our Lord, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). It is not enough that we begin to follow our Lord. Nor is it sufficient that we continue faithful for a time. Only one kind of faithfulness will be rewarded with a place in his kingdom. That which will have the Lord's final approval is the faithfulness unto death, as it is written, "... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

If our Lord's love and life have had their work in our hearts, we will desire to demonstrate our love to our heavenly Lord. How are we to demonstrate this to him? He is, at this time, clothed with the divine nature, seated upon the right hand of the Father and possessed of all power in heaven and in earth.

There Is a Way

These were the Master's words: "...Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). Some say that this is a parable which applies to the Millennial Age; that the words do not apply to us. This interpretation notwithstanding, the principle used by the Lord applies with equal force to the Gospel Age. Have not consecrated followers of Christ been the members of his figurative "body" in the flesh (Eph. 5:30; 1 Cor. 12:27)? Let us, brethren, be faithful in our love for one another.

Sometimes we become aware of a failure on the part of one of our brethren. They may have fallen spiritually. Or, they might just have stumbled. Here is an opportunity for us to lend a hand. "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

These words have two entirely separate meanings. There is the obvious meaning: each person must hear, for that one, initial time, the message of the Gospel. Those who are instrumental in bringing a heart to repentance and devotion to God have accomplished a great work. There is also another work to which this applies: those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, have given their hearts to him, and then err along their path towards holiness. How are we to show our love toward such? Shall we pass them by, saying in our heart, Thank God that I am not like this person! God forbid! The Apostle said it succinctly: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

Jesus' Beautiful Lesson

Jesus illustrates this in a beautiful lesson that centers around Peter. His disciple, much to Peter's horror, had fulfilled the prophecy made by the Master that he was to deny his Lord three times. Our Lord looked upon this man who had spent those three years with him, and Peter, realizing what he had done, went out from the Lord weeping bitter tears of repentance. How did the Lord treat Peter when next they met? Did he hold him at arm's length, as though he was no longer trusted? Did Jesus say, "Now Peter, you have failed me in my hour of need, you have denied me, and from now on I am going to keep my eyes on you?" Did Jesus say, "Peter, I will let you associate with my disciples, but I cannot take you into my confidence as previously I had done?"

No. None of these attitudes are found in Jesus' care for Peter. Just as Peter had denied the Lord three times, the Lord now gave him opportunity to affirm his love three times. Further, fulfilling the promise that he had made before Peter denied him, the Lord gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. One of these keys Peter used at Pentecost. The other key Peter used to open the door to Cornelius, and to all of the Gentiles, to enter that same kingdom.

Brethren, our Christian brethren are flesh and blood just as are we. The services which we have the opportunity to perform for them are counted by the Lord as done unto himself. We expect the members of the body of Christ to be gathered to him-on the other side of the veil of death. But when so gathered they will no longer need our help or our encouragement. Let us, therefore, use the present and its opportunities to strengthen and encourage our brethren along the way. Having loved them, let us love them even unto the end.

God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and if we would have his reward in its fullness we must learn upon what factors it depends, and apply them to our lives.

The Question Box

What does the "rod of iron" represent in Psalms 2:9?

The rod of iron represents unbending rule. No man will be rich or powerful enough to bend Christ's laws to his own advantage. [Iron was the stiffest of all familiar metals. Though osmium, tungsten, and beryllium are stiffer, they were not in common use.] We note also that to "break them" sounds less violent than to "dash them in pieces." The Greek of Revelation 2:26, 27 says "he shall shepherd them with a rod of iron," which suggests breaking the haughtiness only of those who will resist Christ's rule of benevolence and righteousness.

- J. B. Parkinson

Rods are used in various ways in the Old Testament. Aaron's rod that budded, which was kept in the Ark of the Covenant, symbolizes authority and election, while the rod of Psalm 23 symbolizes peace and comfort. The rod of Psalm 2 is associated with ruling and power and appears again in Revelation 2:27. There the Greek word for rule means "to shepherd."

That provides the key to understanding that the rod of Psalm 2 is likely the shepherd's iron club of Leviticus 27:32. It was used to fight wild beasts which attacked the sheep (I Sam. 17:3) and to beat through the dense undergrowth leading to grassier pastures. The club was thus associated with defense and feeding.

Rotherham suggests this explanation in his rendering: "he shall shepherd them with the scepter of iron." That is the picture in Micah 7:14, where Israel's restoration is likened to "feeding thy people with

thy rod." The iron rod is the guarantee of protection and sustenance that the Christ will give his children in the kingdom.

- Len Griehs

The "rod of iron" in this verse is a symbol and the question rightly asks its meaning. The rod is used to "break" the "heathen" and the "uttermost parts of the earth" (1) after it is requested and (2) after those mentioned in verses 1 and 2 have "broken" [torn asunder-not the same words as in vs. 9] the "bands" of God. These words draw a clear picture of hostility.

While the words for "break" and "iron" mean precisely that, the word for "rod" is not so easily dispatched. Of the approximately 190 times the word *she bet is* used in the Old Testament, 141 of those times it is translated "tribe." Most contemporary translations render the word as "scepter," symbolizing kingship (cf. "crown" and "diadem"). The scepter is the emblem of power, not of authority. It was used ceremoniously to demonstrate sovereign power which is precisely the use being pictured here.

In the kingly context of the scepter's use would not gold, silver, or brass be more appropriate? Why is this Messianic "scepter" pictured as a rod of iron? The answer lies in the context: Those who are "broken" by this rod have rebelled against God and torn asunder their bonds. The seriousness of this rebellion is stated in Psa. 2:10-12.

The scepter symbolized the king's power, but the power itself was exercised through armies, laws, prisons, powers of taxation, and the like. The picture in the second psalm is one of divine power exercised against rebellious powers. The manifestation of that power is not stated, but demonstrates that the servant of a king is to obey the king's decisions. The last verse affirms this interpretation: "kiss the Son," that is, submit yourself to him, obey him lest you feel the power of his wrath. This is a terse but glorious picture of the kingship required to bring earth's self-willed billions into submission to God during this kingdom of his dear son. Only after submission has been attained can blessings begin to flow from the "Everlasting Father." The closing words of the psalm reinforce this point: "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

- P. J. Pazucha

The "rod of iron" is unbending. Perhaps it refers to divine justice as pointed out in Romans 8:28 [*Diaglott*] to the ultimate glorification of our heavenly Father in the Millennial Age. God means business in the Millennial Age.

- Francis Earl

In the eighth verse (Psa. 2:8) there are two necessary prerequisites for wielding the iron rod: (1) "Ask of me" and (2) "I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance." As long as Jesus is dealing with the church, he cannot ask for the heathen (Heb. 11:40). And until he asks, they cannot be given to him. Further, until they are given to him, he cannot "break them with a rod of iron."

This expression is broadened and applied to the overcomers of the Christian age as well in Revelation 2:26, 27. In that reference the important principle is added by the inspired record: "Even as I received of my Father."

Jesus receives humanity by purchase price, and "Even as," the church becomes a joint-heir with him. It is obvious that the "rod of iron" does not primarily apply to the periods of trouble incident to the early phases of the Lord's advent but to the work of that advent which will be shared by Jesus and his glorified church.

The Millennial Kingdom so looked forward to by many will not be outwardly serene and happy. It will require a strong, yet benevolent, dictator to reverse six thousand years of history and to right this world's wrongs. Men coming back from the grave are described as having "stony hearts," which will need to be broken and remade as "hearts of flesh" (2 Cor. 3:3). Well did the prophet say, using the illustration of a potter, "the vessel was marred, so he made it again" (Jer. 18:4).

- Carl Hagensick

Rod, or scepter, of iron indicates a non-perishable, non-flexible, instrument able to accomplish its purpose. In Psalms 2:9 and Revelation 2:26, 27 it is spoken of in association with ruling the nations and breaking them in pieces like a potter's vessel. In Jeremiah 18 the potter is casting clay upon his wheel. The intended clay vessel fails to come up to expectation, so it is then fashioned into another vessel-in the pliable state it can be refashioned. In Jeremiah 19 a potter's earthenware jar (a hardened vessel) is used to demonstrate that a hardened vessel cannot be repaired, illustrating that we are to remain pliable in the Master's hands-we are not to become "set" in our ways.

- Tom A. Herz

In this verse God's son is prophesied to break the heathen "with a rod of iron." In a parallel passage (Rev. 2:27) the overcomer is promised a share in this work and is pictured as ruling over the nations "with a rod of iron." The setting for both of these texts is the opposition of earth's masses and their rulers against God and his anointed, as they attempt to resist the establishment of the Mediatorial Kingdom (cf. Psa. 2:1-3; Rev. 11:17-18).

But the Scriptures make clear that the destiny of Jehovah's Anointed One is to reign as earth's rightful king (Psa. 2:6-8; 72), and any that defy him will be confounded and destroyed (Psa. 2:9-12; Psa. 46:6-10). The "rod" that is employed in "breaking" or "ruling over" the nations is the divine power and authority that will be wielded to put down all opposition. The "iron" composition of the rod shows the firmness and vigor with which all that is out of harmony with Messiah's reign of righteousness will be dealt (cf. Dan. 2:44; 1 Cor. 15:24, 25; Heb. 12:26, 27).

- Charles F. Redeker

Notice of Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Pastoral Bible Institute, Inc., is scheduled to be held (D.V) on Saturday, June 2, 1990, at 11:00 A.M., at 4454 S. [4th Street, Suite 2, Milwaukee, WI 53221-2357.

Only members of the Institute may vote (in person or by proxy), but all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ and his appearing are welcome to attend.

A report on the Institute's activities during the preceding year will be given and an election of directors to serve during the coming year will be conducted. Opportunity will be given for such other matters as may properly come before the meeting.

These brethren, who are now serving as directors, are candidates for selection, namely: C. A. Czohara, A. Gonczewski, A. Jarmola, P. J. Pazucha, L. Petran, T. M. Thomassen, J. B. Webster.

Whoever helps us to think kindly, of another aids the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Practical Hints for Our Spiritual Life

"Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." - 2 Peter 1:10

The path of a human upward in pursuit of God, godliness, and righteousness has never been an easy one. In fact, this sin-filled world has never helped men on in their pursuit of spirituality. Several influences actively work to impede one's spiritual growth. These are the influences to which the Apostle refers when he counsels believers neither to "grieve" nor "quench" the holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19).

These impediments may be categorized as: (1) cares of this life which disturb our spiritual practice and encroach upon our studies; (2) conflicts with our natural tastes and desires; (3) direct assaults on one's mind by the Adversary.

Three human definitions parallel the three manifestations of character weakness which John offers in his first epistle. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15).

Character may be practically defined as the sum of all of our habits. Good habits create good characters. Bearing this thought in mind, we ought to pay attention to the direction in which our characters are building: whether for good or for bad.

"Seek Ye First"

This injunction (Luke 12:31) applies to the pursuit of spirituality in two ways. First, how importantly do we regard something? That is, what costs are we willing to endure

to obtain it? Secondly, when we do a thing, how quick are we to perform it. Do we perform our duty early in the day? Or do we put it off until our strength is sapped by the rigors of the day?

The first point, what we are willing to endure, is often spoken of, but the second, seldom. But the importance of seeking God first is self evident. Spiritually, we should place as high a priority upon when we do things as we do upon how important they are to us (hence, what things we are willing to sacrifice to achieve them).

Make time to begin your day with unhurried prayer and communion with God. Make time for this daily spiritual bread as surely as you do for physical nutrition, because spiritual food is more essential. What is more, anyone who begins the day in the presence of God can only find that the abiding Presence will ease the load of the day and lighten the weight of this world's cares upon their shoulders.

No Substitute For Regular Prayer and Meditation.

Introduce regular time for God in your life in addition to your morning, evening, and mealtime devotions. Learn to seek out times during the day to break away from your ordinary activities. Is it not our own "busyness" (self-importance) which makes us think that we cannot find time for God during the day? Test the possibilities carefully. How often do you appear to others to be occupied with routine matters when your mind really has transported you into the Eternal Presence? A person holding a book is assumed to be reading, but they can just as easily be lost for

the moment in quiet reflection. If another cannot tell whether you are reading or day dreaming, why not use the opportunity to grasp a few moments alone with the Lord. Another example of finding time for devotion might be taking a moment when starting out at the beginning of every new task for a silent prayer.

Cards or other objects can be used in any home, office, or shop as a reminder of our need for dependence and intimacy with God. A small card bearing a single key word or a note on the edge of a desk pad may be all one needs to bring the mind back to thoughts about God's abiding presence. A particular sister wrote the word *agape* on a card on her desk as a reminder of the need to live a life of Christian love. Remember, however, that reminders need periodic changing to remain effective.

Thought Control

A person's thoughts are the most elusive part of their lives. Thoughts flit through our mind with lightning speed, and at times those ideas which remain seem as uncontrollable as our inability to retain those we would prefer.

Thoughts are influenced by the way we live, and how we use our leisure time influences our thoughts. If the adage is true that we are what we think about, should we not be careful about what occupies our mind? What we read, what we talk about, and where we go. "My meditation all the day" is how the Scriptures say it (Psa. 119:97), and we need to remain close to God all the day long if we would progress in the way of holiness. If we can learn, whether by perseverance or study, to be "saturated" with God's thoughts, we will be too busy to be occupied with thoughts of this world.

To help in this effort, reserve ideas at the back of your mind that can be called forward to replace those unwanted thoughts that arise in the busy rush of daily activity. If your memory is short and you cannot remember those little "reminder ideas," try writing them out. One might think about a brother or sister for whom we have special regard, or better still who may be in spiritual need at the time. If our circumstances are trying or confusing, we can always remind ourselves of the apostle's words, "Whatsoever things are true...honest ... just... pure ... lovely ... of good report: if there be any virtue and if there be any praise think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

Thoughts relate to your work and activities. The apostle urges that we do our jobs "...heartily as unto the Lord." Our minds are often filled with earthly cares and interests. Some find it helpful in struggling against this incessant preoccupation to concentrate on the excellence with which they do their work while resisting any tendency to concentrate on the work for its own sake. Be diligent toward your work but devoted to the Lord.

Apply Christian standards to all activities. Do not content yourself with asking "What would Jesus do?" Begin asking yourself more difficult questions like: "Would you continue what you are doing if Jesus were watching you, in that room?" He is watching, you know!

Think pictorially. Our job may consume our conscious attention, but every activity has moments where there are idle thoughts. In place of idleness it is possible to place productive thoughts. Picture in your mind a brother or a sister and be encouraged by the beauty of their character. Envision a Bible scene and stand amazed at the power or love or compassion of your God. It is always possible to build spiritual "castles in the air."

Think thoughts that harmonize with your occupation. Even routine activity can provoke spiritual thoughts. Washing, digging, or cleaning windows can all provoke thoughts on particular Scriptures. One sister thought of Psalm 42:1 every time she thirsted. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

The more of your senses you can involve with a task the more likely you are to remember it. Read the Scriptures with pen in hand so that you can mark special passages. Try copying out selected passages and you will find that by writing them down and involving your eyes, your mind, and your hands, they are the easier to remember. Make references in your Bible that mean something to you from what you are reading: a Manna, an expository article, whatever. Make a list of texts you want to use as scriptural messages in your personal correspondence. After you read a passage in Scripture summarize it, quote special references that caught your attention. If a chapter divides into several thoughts summarize them at the end of each section. Or take a key word like "faith" and look it up in the concordance. Then classify references according to their various aspects, such as "saved" through faith; "indwelt" by Christ in our heart; faith as a "shield" against the darts of the wicked, etc.

Read aloud. This can be a real aid to concentration. Try to read convincingly, as if the words were your own. Catch the importance of the words and the mood in which they were spoken. Read them in their context and discover the point the writer was making and whether these words were at the beginning, middle, or the end of his train of thought.

Pray-even praying aloud. We quote a well known writer:

"Any who have difficulty keeping the mind concentrated during prayer should intensify and shorten their prayers ... it is best to think about what you want from God in advance of starting your prayer."

When we excuse ourselves for not remembering something it is usually because we never really knew it or have not given it conscious thought for a long time. The rules for memorizing are simple:

Consciously absorb what you wish to remember.

Bring it to mind as frequently as possible.

Convert the subject matter or words into a mental picture.

Memorization

Memorization requires more than merely reading or listening intelligently. The following memory aids may help you absorb knowledge for later recall. They are not "tricks," but aids that have helped others.

Associate this new information with something you already know.

The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God (1 Peter 5:1,2).

Peter seems to have been thinking of Christ's crucifixion and of his first meeting with his resurrected Lord (John 21). This type of association will identify these verses with Peter-that "new" Peter of the epistles-and it may help one to remember where to find them.

Identify the subject matter and the style of various writers. Individual writers can often be recognized by their style. "And we know and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him" (1 John 4:16). These words bear the distinctive style of John just as others are uniquely Pauline. "Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize" (1 Cor. 9:24, 1 Cor. 9:25-27).

Recognize the position of a passage in the writer's overall theme. If you read "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7) and recognize it as part of Peter's closing exhortation, it will help you to locate that verse in the last chapter of his First Epistle.

Memorize in pictures. This is probably the most important of all of the aids. For example, one can associate any extract from the Epistle to the Romans with an impression of Rome in their mind.

Memorize chapter numbers. It is not necessary to memorize verse numbers. If you can remember chapter numbers the verses are easily found. Think of a familiar idea with which to associate the location you wish to remember. Whatever association comes to mind think about it. Link it with the picture in your mind of the verse. As an example, the words in I Corinthians 6:2 are "the saints shall judge the world." The core of the verse is only six words. Be careful, because numerical clues are useful only if they mean something to you.

Memorize hymns and spiritual verses. Psalms are easily memorized. The Beatitudes, too, come with a little work. It is advisable to be selective when memorizing Scriptures. Concentrate on key quotations, and writing down the words always helps.

Control Your Tongue

This may seem the most hopeless of challenges. Many attempt an impossible task, however. There is no sense in insisting upon pure and loving words before learning to control the act of speaking. The third chapter of James emphasizes control of our speech as though it were a new habit to be acquired. Whatever words we use, have we first learned to control our tongue? Do we think before we speak? Are we accustomed to thoughtless rejoinders? Do spontaneous jokes spring from our lips? Practice thinking before speaking -- even in trivial circumstances -- see whether you do not learn more quickly to control what is said. We may only have a moment for thought, but we can always ask ourselves, "Is it necessary?"

Study When Tired

This may seem at first to be contradictory or ill advised. But, even when a person is too tired for concentrated study, they can profit by many passages of Scripture. There are what might be called "spiritual candies" which are easy to absorb even when the body is not in the mood for a heavy "meal." Narratives can provoke our mind to spiritual thoughts.

Genesis 22:1-19 -- the "sacrifice" of Isaac;

Genesis 24 -- Rebekah;

Genesis 18:20-33 -- Abraham pleads for Sodom;

Judges 6&7 -- Gideon's army;

Daniel 2 -- Nebuchadnezzar's dream;

Mark 14,15 -- Christ's last days on earth;

Genesis 37 & 39-46 -- the Story of Joseph; Ruth,

1 Kings 17-19 -- Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

Write down the references so that when you feel like reading but do not want to get out the concordance you can just open the Bible to a scene and enter right into the story.

Some readings are best when read from one of the more contemporary translations.

A translation which uses the phrases and reasonings with which we are familiar will be easier to understand. And the eloquence of some passages alone can be sufficient to lift our heart to yet unattained heights. Such readings might include, Hebrews 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12; Rom. 4,5, 7, 8; 1 Cor. 15.

Read slowly. Think about each phrase--each word. Choose those passages that best suit your momentary mood, and there is an inexhaustible supply from which to choose.

Psalms - As a special note we call your attention to the fact that where the word "Law" is used in the psalms it means "teaching" or "direction" and not "statutes." The word "heart" in the Old Testament epitomized the entire conscious, thinking, being. Add these to your list for slow and considered reading: Psalm 1, 23, 27, 45, 46, 51, 84, 90, 91, 96, 103, 110 (a section at a time), 121, 139, 145; Isaiah 35, 40, 53, 55, 61; Matthew 5:1-16, 6; John 14, 15, 16, 17; 1 Corinthians 13; Philimon 3; 1 John 4. Look at these carefully and in a translation like the 20th Century, Weymouth, Moffatt, or the New English.

All of these hints can be applied to any person and none of them require the assistance of anyone beyond the believer and his God. Our spiritual life is exactly that, our own. We cannot grow close to God in his spirit if we seek him only in concert with others. We cannot expect to increase our confidence in him if when we are troubled we seek consolation from others. When our mind is troubled another human cannot still the waves of our unsettled peace, but the Almighty is able and willing to utter that "peace, be still" so needful to our growth. Meetings are wonderful and conventions offer blessed opportunities for fellowship and a sharing of mutual experiences. But no meeting, no convention, no ceremony or observance can replace time spent with our God, with his precious Son, and being enraptured by the beauties of his Word and the outworking of his will in our lives.

"...He made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27).

- from an article by L.H. Bunker

The Repulsions of Christianity

The attractions of Christianity are apparent, but rarely do we consider that it also possesses repulsions which are equally necessary to its purity and permanence. If believers in Christ draw to themselves that which they cannot assimilate, their own life is imperiled. The body of believers must be at one with itself, even though it be at war with the world. Its purity and its power depend, first of all, upon its unity. If the Christian faith attracts men without transforming them, if they are attached to membership with other believers without assimilating them to the Christian life, the body of believers has only weakened itself by its increase and diminished itself by its additions. It is a hard and ungracious saying, then, to declare that the church of God must be able to repel as well as to attract. The Scriptures teach that the work of attracting men primarily belongs to God ["...no man cometh unto the son except the Father which hath sent Jesus draw him" .(John 6:44).], but they do not teach that the believer is absolved of responsibility of acting in appropriate opposition to the impurity and unrighteousness of the world around it.

Nature is an austere teacher. The rose is fragrant, but is armed with thorns. While its delicious odors attract, these little sentinels stand guard with drawn bayonets to defend the flower, which is endangered by its own beauty and sweetness.

The church of Christ is too fair to be left upon the earth without defenses. Hypocrites have hidden themselves under her beautiful garments; covetous men have gotten personal gain by her godliness; pleasure seekers have turned the grace of God into lasciviousness; and avaricious persons have made merchandise out of her pearl of great price. The followers of Jesus have been named to the wonderful honor of the bride of Christ. Can you conceive that the heavenly bridegroom would leave his bride in this world without endowing her with that chastity of holiness and a native aversion to impurity which would be her defense against all who would betray her? "The king's daughter is all glorious within; Her clothing is interwoven with gold. She will be lead to the King in embroidered work" (Psa. 45:13, NAS) and "Like a lily among the thorns..." (Song of Solomon 2:2, NAS). The beauty of Christ's church is guarded by the harshness of her discipline. Her graces are contained by a wall of self-denial. Her gifts are compassed with crosses. Her triumphs are crowned with thorns.

This is her safety from those who might be won to her only so as to waste and dishonor her.

Highest Standards

Christ requires a sanctity of life and character in his bride. It is these which are her most powerful defenses. Native chastity constitutes her truest safeguard, and nothing is so severe as purity; nothing so effectively repels the familiarities of the wicked.

Men would fence in the fold of God (indeed they have over the past nearly two thousand years) with guards and restrictions so that the unsanctified and unclean may not enter. This is a confession of weakness and frailty. The holy virgin of the Lord is endowed with a native purity which is her true shield and defense. What does Scripture mean when it commands us to stand, being clothed by the breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:14)? Is not righteousness the strongest repellant of wickedness and corruption available to us.

Some may say that purity shrinks from contact with impurity. But this aversion is mutual. Uncleaness recoils from purity. It sinks from its presence as wild animals cower before the eyes of a fearless man. No one need theorize on this point. Ungodly men have, themselves, confessed

to feeling uncomfortable, almost tortured, when compelled to associate with good and holy people.

What does it take to win converts to our faith? It has been said that all we need do is live in the same luxury as them, dress with the same extravagance, and drift in the same tides of fashion. If we seek wealth with their greed and pursue pleasure with their fondness, they will feel at ease with us. If we love society as do they and if we are "popular" preachers, eminent Christians and zealous churchmen, they will flock to join us. But in doing so we shall have made men think well of themselves, which is the surest way to make them think well of us and of our belief ... And so we have won them. Or have we?

What would we really have done? What would have been gained if we "win them over" by our being conformed to this world instead of their being transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:2)? What will have been gained if we bring them into the church by lowering its fellowship to them instead of raising them to its fellowship? A holy church is armed with the perpetual willingness to remove that which is hypocritical, profane, and unclean from its presence-either in itself or in its fellowship.

This willingness to be separated unto God, apart from the world, is open to misunderstanding. It is improper for any man to adopt the attitude of being holier than others. But neither should we engage in impurity for the sake of attracting others. By their conduct believers can stand apart from the world. Their unconscious example can be a reproof and an encouragement to those who witness their manner of life.

Do I speak coldly and harshly of the relation of Christians to the world -as though there were some principle in their aloofness from it, or as though by touching the world through enforced association they would be defiled? God forbid that any man should teach those ideas. The power of God is greater than the power of this world.

Consider the Master, the forerunner of our Salvation. It was said of him that "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke 15:2). What a blessed tribute to our Lord! He associated with sinners but was undefiled in his association. He ate at their table but fed them his own food, the eating of which could bring them into eternal life. If we bear any similarity to his character, we will imitate him: rebuking that which is sinful and attracting those to our fellowship who will forsake the paths of sin and unrighteousness for the blessedness of true and pure service to God.

- Contributed

Free From Stain

I watched the sparrows flitting here and there,
In quest of food about the miry street;
Such nameless fare as seems to sparrows sweet
They sought with greedy clamor everywhere.

Yet 'mid their strife I noted with what care
They held their fluttering pinions fleet.
They trod the mire with soiled and grimy feet,
But kept their wings unsullied in the air.

I, too, like thee, O sparrow, toil to gain,
My scanty portion from life's sordid ways.
God grant I too, may have the grace,
To keep my soul's uplifted wings from stain.

Personal Possessions

"And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." - Malachi 3:17.

How do we feel about personal possessions? Each one of us has a list of personal possessions. That list may be quite long, or it may seem small. I have noticed some lists of personal possessions of patients entering my place of work, a "home for incurables"-all they have in the world, listed in just a few lines. But many of us have a long list, our home and all the comforts it contains, and many other items. It is amazing that once we entered this world with nothing.

"Go! Sell all that you have, and give the money away, then come, and follow me."

"Master, everything?" "Everything."

If we owned very little in this life and had few needs, easily met-we guess that might not be too difficult. But here was a man with many possessions. He had worked hard for them, they meant much to him, how hard was the master's requirement, how great to that man the cost.

Suppose the Lord here and now asks that very thing of us. How many of us would follow him on those terms? How many of us will find ourselves following that man as he turns away, sorrowful? Personal possessions become special to us, part of us, part of our life. When a man dies he leaves all behind. To leave all behind at any time before that event, well, it means he has to act dead. It is natural to cling to our possessions. Maybe if the natural mind had its way we would awake in the Lord's presence still clinging to some treasures of this earthly life. Would not that be embarrassing? We just would not know what to do with it or where to put it. If the Lord asked me, "What treasured possessions would you like to take with you?" I wonder what my reply would be.

Possessions We Take With Us

What are the special things to us, personal possessions that we have now, and that we look forward to taking with us as we pass, Lord willing, through that veil? Our text is Malachi 3:17, "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." We have the word "jewels" in our English Authorized Version. The Hebrew word appears eight times in the Bible. The first occurrence is Exodus 19:5 where the Lord speaks to Israel: "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me."

Three further places in Deuteronomy use the expression in the same way, all to Israel (Deut. 7:6; Deut. 14:2; Deut. 26:18); so does Psalm 135:4. Ecclesiastes 2:8 speaks of the "peculiar treasure of kings." 1 Chronicles 29:3 uses it of departing David who, out of his own personal possessions, contributes to the structure and the beautifying of the Temple of God to be erected after his death, "...because I have set my affection to the house of my God." There David illustrates beautifully the way in which the Lord's people carry over with them into glory the most treasured things that they possess, the "silver" and their "gold" -- "silver" of truth in the inward parts and "gold" of the divine likeness of character in all its reflected glory. The Hebrew words then, refer to personal possessions, private treasures, if you like, but notably things that are personally owned, and that with great delight.

Without using the word in question, the Song of Songs embraces the thought in Song of Solomon 6:3. "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." He is my personal possession. I am his personal possession. A similar thought is expressed elsewhere concerning God and his people, and the concept of this special relationship is transported into the age of the church in Titus 2:14 and 1 Peter 2:9.

What makes them so special to the Lord? One reply must be that he is special to them. What makes him special to them? Because he makes it wonderfully apparent that they are special to him. As soon as we try to explain this bond, this special tie, this precious relationship, we get caught in this never-ending circle, something eternal. But it had a beginning. "We love him because he first loved us."

The Malachi text has always been meaningful to the Lord's people. It has, nevertheless, a special significance to us for more than one reason. Firstly, because we believe that at this moment of time our heavenly Father is engaged in gathering to himself those who are his. How can we help but share something of those high and holy emotions of God, the joy which this hour is filling the heavens as he embraces his own and sets them as jewels in that crown of his eternal glory. We love our Father so much, our hearts thrill as they reach out to him in this time of such deep satisfaction of his dear heart's desires. Zion, so choice to the Lord! Home and rest to the longings of a heart full of divine love! Oh yes, brethren, our hearts are tuned, like those harps of our brethren in glory, and we cannot help but join in the song they now sing around that throne.

There is another aspect which brings the words of Malachi closer to us. His message was given to Israel after they had left Babylon in the day of Cyrus. It revealed the needs of the Lord's people at that similar late stage of their gathering to him. We believe it is therefore worthy of our attention today. Cyrus was a type of Christ. He was predicted in prophecy as the Lord's Messiah ("anointed") and shepherd (Isa. 44:28-45).

The Master Speaks

Note two aspects of Jesus' message to the church at Laodicea. He speaks of their complacency and their spiritual apathy. The same reflections are prominent in the message of the Lord through Malachi. What strikes us more keenly is the fact that Malachi's words were not addressed to the people in Babylon, they were not directed to a system "weighed in the balance, and found wanting," and thenceforth passing through its long course to eventual destruction. These words were addressed to the people of Zion who had come out of Babylon, the people that the Lord was purifying through the long and somewhat trying sequence of events that had followed those earlier days of high hopes and eager expectations.

Daniel received a vision. He saw a giant measuring line stretched between the works of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi to accomplish the cleansing of the Sanctuary of God and a similar work of cleansing the spiritual sanctuary of our day. Through both periods, one perhaps typical of the other, he is as a refiner's fire. The Lord knew when his people first left Babylon that many tests and experiences were yet required to purify them unto himself. At first the gathering was physical. They moved from one place to another, found a different community for fellowship. There were high moments when they thought they were gathered unto him, just as there are spiritual highs in our own experience, but the passage and test of time was to reveal the breaches that were yet to be built and bridged to make them truly his.

The Test of Time

The Lord often uses time to test and develop the faith of his people. It is not easy to maintain the sense of urgency as one decade follows another and the hopes of earlier years remain still not realized. What is easy is the slow, almost imperceptible change of attitudes that time may produce, the acceptance of the standards of our brethren around us, perhaps confusing them with the Lord's standards. What is easy is the introduction of that tiny root of compromise that will enable us to be reasonably comfortable in the flesh while we await the realization of our higher hopes.

Such trends were demonstrated in the days of Malachi, and it was against complacency and spiritual apathy that he speaks to those known to the Lord for their deep attitude of heart towards him. He was their possession. They were his possession. The passage of time could only deepen and strengthen that bond. They knew him, and he knew them for his own. The Lord knew what kind of response would arise from his message. In a remarkable way he anticipates in the same words the reaction of complacency and the response of hearts sensitive to his every word. "Wherein have we" done this or that? This question of the hearers is repeated many times. From the spiritually complacent they are the response of hurt pride, for these are quite satisfied with their position before God. It does not even occur to them it may be lacking. "Thou knowest not" (Rev. 3:17).

That same question, however, is the response of hearts that desire truth to sanctify their inmost parts. "Wherein have I, Lord, fallen short of your standards in this matter?" This is a use of the same words, but with what different spirit! Introspective and self-examining, they recognize that the Lord knows our heart better than we can know ourselves, and they yearn for that full submission of everything within them, every thought to the obedience of Christ. Theirs is the attitude of the words of Psalm 139:23,24:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Such an attitude acknowledges that whatever stage has been reached of relationship and fellowship with the Lord there remain greater heights yet to scale. They are content with whatever the Lord brings into their experience and the circumstances that surround their lives, but they will not be satisfied until that work of God within them is complete to his eternal glory and praise.

"Wherein hast thou loved us" (Mal. 1:2)? We may sometimes question ourselves about the evidences we have of the Lord's love for us. The movement of Nehemiah's day was as full of reversals and ups and downs as today. When someone tried to build up someone else, another agent, pulled down. What was the point? Where was the movement going? What evidences are there of the Lord's love for his people today? The answer of Revelation 3:19, the words of Jesus for our day, tell us that every experience has been needful. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." What matters is our response and reaction to all the circumstances around us among the brethren and in our own individual lives. The Lord watches for that response. We are not going to put everything right among the Lord's people, any more than we could smooth out our own lives so that they were never disturbed or ruffled by any kind of trial. Everything that happens, the upsets as well as the blessings, all is permitted and overruled for our sakes, and to one glorious end -- if we are rightly exercised thereby.

"Jacob" vs. "Esau"

The introspective hearts of his saints address this question to their own individual lives. "Wherein do you love me, Lord?" "In what way?" The Lord's reply, so full of meaning for his people, says it all. His love for Jacob, and his hatred for Esau. Sharing the womb, these two struggled within Rebekah (a type of the church), one representing all that is opposed to the divine will and ways and the other representing that new mind that supplants the flesh, takes from it the birthright, and prevails to become prince with God. Paul said "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these two are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). It is the mind of the new creature that is loved by the Lord. All that is of my old nature, all that is of the flesh, the carnal mind, he hates, and so do I, Lord.

The evidences of that love lie in every experience and circumstance that serves to bring home to me the utter helplessness and hopelessness of the flesh. The struggle is needful for my development, or the Lord would have aborted Esau long ago. When the carnal mind rises above the spirit, whether entering into the meditations of individual hearts or intruding upon the assembly of the Lord's saints, they know that this is the challenge to which that Spirit of God within them must rise. When it has done its work and that new mind is grown to the full measure of the stature of Christ, then will the Lord dispose of the flesh. Its end is sure. Only that which is of him can endure before him.

"Wherein have we despised thy name" (Mal. 1:6)? The Lord is using words that may startle in order to draw attention to the sliding away of his people's devotions. "A son honoreth his father ... if then I be a father, where is mine honor?" He does not speak to the people of the world but to the priests, those who offer sacrifice at the altar of God. An element of ritual had entered into the day-by-day offerings. Every day fresh offerings had to be made. The procedure of one day was repeated on the next, and with the endless repetitions came familiarity, and the early fresh enthusiasm of the sacrifice began to lose its edge and gradually recede, to be taken over by ceremony and form.

Form is the outward appearance. It is, if it stands alone, totally unacceptable at the holy altar of God. The Lord reminds us that even the world will, in the future, offer a pure offering with incense (Mal. 1:1). All will worship in spirit and truth. Nothing less than this can now be acceptable from his own during this age. Are there any ways in my offering that I kindle the altar fire for nothing? Do I ever find myself praying ineffectually with words of vain repetition? Do days pass without deep devoted committal of my all? Is there something missing in my offering? He who sees in secret, does he find the meditations of my heart acceptable to him? Every day the offering needs to be examined. It must be whole, nothing missing. Every day it must be washed and prepared and worthy of his table.

"Wherein have we polluted thee" (Malachi 1:7)? The word for polluted is *gaal*, very close to the word meaning "to buy back, redeem," and used of the kinsman redeemer. Yet here it is used in the sense of buying back, at the price of compromise, something which belongs to the Lord. This is sacrifice in reverse. This is buying back consecrated time for an unworthy cause. If I earnestly desire to be among those that reverence his name, then everything I am and have is his, totally his, for I am his personal possession. My Father's name is a name of love, love that gives the dearest and the best. How long for my Father that walk to Mount Moriah! Yet he counted not the cost. This is the love that God has shed abroad into my heart. A compelling love that meets my God in sacrifice, and finds its fulfillment in consummation.

"Wherein have we wearied him?"(Mal. 2:7). The chapter shows that it is not in our slowness of learning, for the Father is very understanding of how long it takes for the knowledge of him to grow within his child. His weariness lies in our thinking that we have arrived, when our conduct reveals that we have hardly yet begun. Chapter two spoke of the very high standards of the priests of the Lord. Like the angels of heaven, they are the messengers of God. Verse seven says that, and the three verses, five to seven, sum up those standards as exemplified in that worthy leader of the priesthood Levi. That was, of course, the Aaronic priesthood.

For us the great exemplifier is "Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:20). He has left us an example that we should follow his steps. Verses five to seven of Malachi 2 beautifully describe those high and holy standards depicted by Jesus our Lord. We leave you to meditate upon these yourselves, and to reflect how high they are, and how easy to let them slip.

Verses ten and eleven (Mal. 2:10-11) introduce the theme of illicit unions and illicit separations among the Lord's people. Then as now the people of the land were prosperous compared to the Lord's people. Their comforts and luxuries were very attractive. Before long the first deflection took place. One of the Lord's people, one whose parents had forsaken Babylon and asked the way to Zion, put away his own true partner in life and married a woman of the world. Soon others were to follow. How great a responsibility is the influence of our conduct and course upon other people.

Note Malachi's words for they hint at a possible counterpart in our day. "Judah had profaned [de-consecrated] the holiness [some translate this "sanctuary"] of the Lord which he loves, and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (Mal. 2:10). Brethren, I know that even to flirt with the ways of the world, to play with the little foxes, or regard them as harmless little ways of the flesh, even to look upon with desire the allurements of this world, is to begin a course which ends in spiritual death unless sooner or later I get off that downward path. The holy is the condition of total absorption in the things of God. Every spiritual sense of longing is satisfied in God. The gods of this world cannot compete with their earthly goods and monetary pleasures. They cannot offer the hope of glory, the riches of his goodness, the deep sustaining sense of peace of a heart that is stayed upon the Lord.

Do we find any evidence of worldliness in our fellowship? Do we see any signs of illicit unions with the spirit of the world? Do we detect divisions and separations between the brethren, not caused by the spirit of God but caused by personalities, by ways of the flesh? "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created..."(Mal. 2:10) this new creation? How deeply this causes me to search my relationship with the consecrated people of God! I lack the Lord's ability to search the hearts of others. I have a full-time job searching my own heart. This makes the matter one of the most demanding experiences of our day.

In the times of Nehemiah a distinction was ultimately made between those who were Israelites indeed and those who could not prove their lineage. It seems that the same test is now upon us, dear brethren. I must prove my lineage, prove that I am an Israelite indeed, a true child of God. Should it come, I must accept the separation which the Lord has designed the test to reveal, the distinction between those that are his and those that are not. May I not fail that test by a wrong or alien spirit in my heart toward one true member of the body of Christ.

Verse thirteen expresses the matter in a way so touching and these are the words of the Lord. He speaks of the altar of God being covered with tears. Are these not the sentiments of Christ?

If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come, and offer thy gift (Matt. 5:23,24).

Lord, let me not weary thee by an inconsistent life, the putting of evil for good,- the despising of those for whom thou hast given me the honor to lay down my life.

God's Personal Possession

How ready God is to bless, to reward the diligent seeker after him, those who thirst for deeper spirituality, those who simply and without question believe that all that their heart can long for, he is.

We cannot exclude verse seven of the third chapter. "Come back to me, and I will come back to you." Is not that a beautiful reprise? It is just like our Father. Oh Lord, dear Father, wherein shall we come back to thee? To know that in those troublous times of the building up of Zion of Malachi's day he invited them to return is great encouragement to those who have seen no less searching experiences in our own day. There is a people known to the Lord whose hearts are perfect towards him. He knows them -- he sees not as man sees-he reads hearts, desires, longings-he sets his mark on those who sigh and cry.

In Nehemiah's days, chapters 9 and 10 (Neh. 9-10), the Lord's message stirred the hearts, and a list, a scroll, a book was written and sealed of those who feared his name. The Lord tells us that he too has a book (Mal. 3:16). If I have set my seal, the Lord will set his seal. What seal is that? Oh, the most meaningful seal that has ever been set -- "The Lord knoweth them that are his." He is their personal possession. They are his personal possession.

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned (Song of Solomon 8:6,7).

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work (2 Tim. 2:19-21).

Amen and Amen.

- D. Holliday, ENGLAND

Love

"God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." - 1 John 4:16

Love is the principle of self sacrifice-the law and habit of preferring others. Love first of all gives God the primary place, and then denies self for the sake of an unselfish ministry to men. Meekness is love at school. Temperance is love in training. Gentleness is love in society. Goodness is love in action.

God is twice defined as love (1 John 4) -- because he lives to impart blessing, and he gave his most precious possession, his son, to be the savior of the world.

To love, as he loved, is the perfection of all character and attainment, and the steps are here given:

1. We know and believe the love of God towards us.
2. We confess that Jesus is the son of God and so dwell in God and God in us.
3. Love is made perfect in casting out fear, even of the judgment.

The love here commended is the opposite of selfishness, which develops into hatred. As selfishness centers and focuses all upon self, love radiates and diffuses blessing upon others.

Here is a new attitude towards service. We perceive that Christ *"died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves"* The Devil's maxim is "spare thyself." The Lord's maxim is "deny thyself" (cf. Matt 16:22-25). Love loses life for self to find it in others. Selfishness, in saving life for self, loses it as a source of good to man and to the glory of God.

Love is not a feeling or an affection, it is the divine principle of self oblivion. Because God is love, he that loveth is begotten of God and knoweth God.

Here is the last great executive act of the will-the self surrender of love in supreme devotion to God and in unselfish ministry to men.

This is what we understand by Christian "perfection": not the faultlessness of perfect holiness, but the blamelessness of a complete separation unto God, a full apprehension and appropriation of Christ, and a yielding to the control of the spirit of life, light, and love.

- A. T. Pierson

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