

To Us The Scriptures Clearly Teach

THE CHURCH

GREAT VARIETY OF meanings has been attached to this word **church**, most of them not in harmony with the Scriptures. Its meaning, however, is amazingly simple when the light of the divine plan is focused upon it.

Many have assumed that a beautiful edifice built with marble, or stone, or brick, which has engraved upon it in a prominent place the words, "Church of St. Peter," or "Church of the Holy Nazarene," or "Holy Trinity Church," is what the Scriptures refer to as the 'church'. But this is not true.

Others think of the word church as applying to some or one of the many denominational groups to be found throughout the professed Christian world. It has become customary to refer to these various divisions as the "Roman Catholic Church," the "Protestant Episcopal Church," the "Methodist Episcopal Church," the "Baptist Church," or the "United Lutheran Church," or others. From this, many have erroneously concluded that the church is some earthly organization or society of religious worshipers, or perhaps a group of ethical, social, or moral reform workers.

The word church, as used in the Bible, is really a title—not a name—and is applied to any company of faithful footstep followers of the Master, or to all of them combined. It is a translation of the Greek word **ekklesia**, which literally means 'a called out' or 'selected class'. The Bible applies this term to the consecrated followers of Jesus, and by it identifies them as a class that is being selected as co-workers with him in the execution of God's great plan of salvation. Those to whom this term applies are the ones foretold in divine prophecy who were to be associated with the Messiah in the work of his kingdom.

Jesus himself began the selection of this class. To his disciples he said, "Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." (John 15:19) While Jesus did not use the word church or ecclesia in this instance, the thought is the same—he was telling the disciples that they were to be part of a specially elected, called out, or chosen company, to whom it would be the Heavenly Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom in due time.

The Gospel Preached to Abraham

The elect feature of the Christian's standing in the divine plan is brought clearly to our attention in both the Old and New Testaments. God's purpose to bless all nations through a select 'seed' class was first definitely stated to Abraham when he said to him, "In thee shall all nations be blessed." (Gal.3:8) Concerning Abraham, God said, "I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." (Isa.51:2) It is through the spiritual 'seed' of this one whom God called 'alone', that all the families of the earth are to be blessed.—Gal.3:14,29

Just as God selected, or elected, Abraham, to whom the promise of a coming blessing for all mankind originally was made, so now he is selecting, or electing, those who are to become the 'seed' of that promise—the channel of blessing. Thus in applying the title 'church' to this seed class, its elect quality is emphasized.

Membership in this elect company, however, is not upon the basis of an arbitrary choice by God. He makes the selection on the basis of faith and full consecration to him. The necessary steps on the part of any individual who aspires to become a member of the church class are, first, a turning from sin and the acceptance of Christ's ransom sacrifice; and second, a full and unreserved consecration to do the Heavenly Father's will; and finally, to live up to the terms of that consecration faithfully even unto death. The joining of an earthly religious organization is not at all

involved in the matter of membership in the LORD'S elect company, his true church, whose names are enrolled in heaven.—Heb.12:23

Although our English word **ecclesia**, appears only in the New Testament, the thought of a 'chosen people' was not a new one with God's servants before that time. The entire nation of Israel—the natural seed of Abraham—was a chosen people. God dealt with and blessed them to the exclusion of all other nations. In this broad sense of the word, therefore, all Israel was a church, a chosen or selected people. Of them the LORD says, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2) Had the Israelites been faithful to him, God would have completed the selection of the Christian church from them alone.

But the nation of Israel did not prove faithful. When Jesus came at his First Advent, the Scriptures say of him that "he came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:11) However, some of the Israelites at that time did receive Jesus, and of these the Scriptures say that "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."—John 1:12

"REMNANT" OF ISRAEL, PART OF GOD'S "ELECT"

Gentiles Grafted In

The Apostle Paul explains that because so few of the Jews did receive Christ, the Gospel finally was taken to the Gentiles. In the eleventh chapter of Romans he aptly illustrates this fact by likening it to the breaking off of the natural branches of an olive tree, and the grafting in of wild olive branches.

In this illustration the apostle likens the Gentile converts to ingrafted wild branches. These now had the privilege of becoming the sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ,

even as did the believing Jews. From the standpoint of scriptural terminology this means, in reality, that the entire church of Christ is Israelitish—whether Jew or Gentile, its members are the spiritual ‘seed of Abraham’.

Doubtless this is the reason the Lord, in one of the symbolismes in the Book of Revelation, describes the church, or elect company of his associates in the kingdom, as being made up of twelve thousand of each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The nucleus of this elect class was indeed from among those who originally were members of one or another of the literal twelve tribes of Israel. But Gentiles had to be brought in to fill up the foreordained number, and in this symbolism they, too, are spoken of as Israelites. The calling out from among the Jews of this select Christian company to be ‘spiritual Israelites’ began at Pentecost. In Acts 2:47 we are told that “the Lord added to the church daily,” and at that time all the converts were Jewish.

Later, however, the Lord began to graft Gentiles into the places vacated by unfaithful Jews who had lost their privilege of becoming the spiritual seed of Abraham through which all the families of the earth were to be blessed. The first of these Gentile converts was Cornelius. In order to emphasize this change in God’s arrangement of dealing exclusively with the Jewish people, the Apostle Peter was sent especially to Cornelius, and when he accepted the Gospel there was a unique demonstration of God’s acceptance through an outward manifestation of the Holy Spirit coming upon him and “all them which heard the Word.”—Acts 10:44

Following the conversion of Cornelius, other Gentiles began to come into the church, and it was not long before many of the local groups of disciples were mixed companies, made up partly of Jewish converts, and partly of Gentile converts. Paul’s letter to the Romans indicates that the church, or ecclesia, at Rome was made up of

both, and the first few chapters of his epistle to them are devoted to the matter of showing that in God's sight there is now no difference between the two—that all must come to him through faith in the shed blood of Jesus.

The Bride of Christ

The word church is not the only title given in the Bible to this elect Christian company. In addition to their being called 'the temple' of God, this people, called to be separate from the world and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, is also identified, symbolically, as the 'bride' of the 'Lamb', and again, as the 'body' of Christ.

Shortly before Jesus was crucified he prayed that he and his followers might become one even as he and the Father were one, and the application of these various titles to the followers of the Master is designed to help us visualize the full sense in which Jesus' prayer for oneness is to be answered.

The expression, 'body of Christ', is used in the Scriptures in much the same sense that we speak of a legislative body. It simply means that this elect company is to function under the dictates of its Head, Christ Jesus, the King of kings, and that they, as under-kings, will share with him in the work of the kingdom. Paul carries out this illustration in much detail, and indicates that the many members of the Christ body may properly be likened to the various members of a literal body. Some may be likened to a foot, others to a hand, etc., but all must function under the direction of the one Head, Christ Jesus.

In this we see that the body illustration represents the present relative oneness of the Christ company, from the standpoint that every member is expected to function in harmony with every other member because all are subject to the dictates of the Head. Oneness of the body of Christ, while its members are still in the flesh, is only

approximate, because the church is as yet merely in the process of preparation.

However, one of the most important lessons for all Christians to learn is to be submissive to the will of Christ. Until that lesson is learned by all, there cannot be perfect unity in the body. The Apostle Paul writes concerning the present state of the church, saying that we should be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit,” but full oneness will not be attained until all the body members have proved their faithfulness unto death, and have been raised from the dead and united with Christ in glory.—Eph.4:3

Future Oneness

In Revelation 19:7, Jesus, the Lamb of God, is represented as being married to his faithful followers. “The marriage of the Lamb is come,” writes the apostle, “and his wife hath made herself ready.” In Revelation 22:17 this class, having become the ‘bride’, is represented as being the agency through which the promised blessing of life for the world is dispensed—“the Spirit and the bride say, Come...Take the water of life freely.”

The title of ‘bride’ as applied to the followers of the Master seems to represent more particularly their future oneness with Christ—a oneness which will be shared with him in the glory of the kingdom. As in the natural realm the bride shares the honor and riches of the bridegroom, so the bride of Christ is to be a joint-heir with her Bridegroom in the honor and glory of the kingdom.

It is when we recognize what constitutes the true church of Christ, and what the work of the church has been throughout the Gospel Age, as well as what her future work and glory is to be in the Millennial kingdom, which is to reign for the blessing of all mankind, that we realize the plan of God in connection with the selection and development of the church has not been a failure.

Something which can sustain the faith of Christians today is a clear understanding of the plan of God as it relates to both the church and the world.

A RANSOM FOR ALL

“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim.2:3-6

JESUS CHRIST CAME into the world to save sinners, the Scriptures declare. (Matt.9:13; 18:11; Luke 9:56; 19:10; John 3:17) His coming was in keeping with the purpose of his Heavenly Father, the Creator, hence our text refers to God as being ‘our Savior’. God’s plan for the salvation of the world through Jesus was a manifestation of his love for sinners, for we read that God “so loved the world” that he gave his Son to be the Redeemer, with the provision that all who believe on him “should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16

The basis upon which salvation is brought to the sin-cursed and dying race through Jesus is the fact that in death he became a substitute for the forfeited life of father Adam. “As in Adam all die,” wrote Paul, “even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (I Cor.15:22) This substitutional arrangement is referred to in our text as a ‘ransom’, or, as it means in the Greek, ‘a price to correspond’. Jesus’ sacrifice of his life on behalf of Adam and the dying race was, indeed, a price to correspond; for just as Adam was a perfect human being, before he sinned, so Jesus was made flesh—flesh that was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”—and this flesh he gave “for the life of the world.”—John 6:51; Heb.7:26

In I Timothy 4:10 the apostle speaks of God as the “Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.” In this passage of Scripture the apostle mentions a point which at first might seem strange. He says that “we both labor and suffer reproach” because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men. Why should anyone be reproached and caused to suffer for believing in such a God? Yet it is true that they do.

One may not be too sure about the background meaning of this statement by the apostle, but evidently the suffering and reproach to which he refers came from those who believed in one or more of the many false gods worshiped by the people at that time. Under the influence of prejudice and superstition, stimulated by the spirit of Satan, these worshipers of false gods resented the truth concerning a true and living God of love, a real Benefactor of the people, one who loves the world and has made a provision of salvation for all who believe. The same is true today. Churchianity has discarded the names of the heathen gods of the pagans, but transferred these same pagan doctrines and superstitions to the God of the Bible. So when they worship him they cannot in reality fully worship the true and living God, but the gods of the pagans. (John 17:3; I John 5:20) In some theologies their conceptions of God may even be more grotesque than were those of the pagans. And just as pagan worshipers reproached those who worshiped the true and living God in Paul’s day, so faithful Christians are reproached today.

The Gospel of salvation through Christ has been distorted to the point that, to many, salvation means to be rescued from the tortures of a creedal hell, with only a few in all the ages fortunate enough to escape. The latter are flattered by being told they are “special”. The bearers of the true Gospel of love – those who believe in, and teach that God is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe – are reproached by those who worship the torment deity, and are even held up before the people as opposers of Christianity.

OUR GOD IS JUST – BUT NOT VENGEFUL...

But thanks be to God that we have learned to know him as the Savior of all men, and especially those who believe! Those who have come to know this glorious truth are glad to lay down their lives heralding forth his praises, for he has called them “out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (I Pet.2:9) We could not have a better vocation, a better cause for which to die, than that of magnifying the name of the true God of love.

Perhaps we have not appreciated this privilege as much as we should. Perhaps we have tended to be somewhat apologetic when enemies of the truth accuse us of being preachers of a ‘second chance’. What is there about teaching a second chance for which we should be ashamed? Adam sinned willfully, and God will give him a second chance—indeed, his love provided for it through the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Why should we not glory in the fact that our God is a loving, merciful, and forgiving God?

Through the Ransom

Our God is also just—but not vengeful. Through Jesus, he has made a provision whereby he can be just, yet the justifier of all who believe. (Rom.3:26) Surely we are honored in having the privilege of knowing such a God—knowing him in advance of the time when the world will know him; knowing him and rejoicing in his love at this time when the world is still in darkness.

Paul says of our God that he “will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” The great truth which all shall eventually learn is that the “man Christ Jesus” preparatory to his work as Mediator between God and men, “gave himself a ransom for all.”

This harmonizes with John 1:9, where we read that Jesus is that “true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” So while we rejoice that we have come to a knowledge of the truth, our joy is increased in the realization that ultimately—in God’s due time—all mankind will learn to know him, whom to know aright is life eternal.—John 17:3

Paul’s phrase, “Who will have all men to be saved,” does not indicate “universal salvation” within the accepted meaning of that expression. It does not mean that God’s love will save everlastingly every individual who has ever been born. The remainder of the expression clarifies its meaning: “and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (I Tim.2:4) Practically every member of Adam’s race has gone down into death wholly or partially ignorant of the provision of life made by God through Jesus. These must be awakened from death—saved in this sense of the word—in order that they might be made acquainted with the great and saving truth of the ransom for all.

“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” declared the Master. How few there have been who have already had an opportunity to believe in him! But this has been taken into consideration in the LORD’s plan, and the provision made to rescue them from the sleep of death that they might have an opportunity to hear and believe and be saved. It is this fact that the apostle emphasizes when he says that the great truth of the ‘ransom for all’ is to be ‘testified in due time’.

Acceptable Time for Sacrifice

It was not the due time during the ‘world’ before the Flood for the people to learn about God’s provision of salvation through Christ. Nor was this great truth testified to the people during Old Testament times. In the time since, the Gospel has been preached worldwide as a witness, but it has come far short of reaching all; and the blinding

influences of the “god of this world” (II Cor.4:4)—Satan—have prevented nearly everyone from really appreciating the truth concerning the true God of love and the provision for life he has made through the ransom for all.

The Millennial Age—the “times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:19)—will be the due time when the knowledge of the ransom will be testified to all. During this present Gospel Age another feature of the divine plan is being developed; that is, the call and development of the church of Christ. These are called to “glory and honor and immortality” (Rom.2:7; 8:17), and to joint-heirship with Christ; and it is the ransom which constitutes the basis for this glorious hope.

One of the conditions upon which we may live and reign with Christ is that we suffer and die with him. Paul speaks of this as filling up “that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” (Col.1:24) He speaks of it also as being “baptized into his death.” and as being “planted together in the likeness of his death.” (Rom.6:3,5) And when we question what he means by the likeness of Jesus’ death, the apostle answers that Jesus died unto sin, that is, as a sin-offering and that “likewise” we should reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin.—Rom.6:10,11

What does the apostle mean by reckoning ourselves to be dead unto sin? Simply that we are authorized, through our faith in the merit of Jesus’ shed blood to count ourselves as offering an acceptable sacrifice to God—a sacrifice that will have to do with ridding the world of sin, hence a sin-offering. In verse seven the apostle explains—according to the **Marginal Translation**—that those who are thus dead are planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ death and “justified from sin.”

This means that they are not dying as sinners, for the blood of Christ frees them from condemnation; they are dying, rather, as sin-offerings, even as Jesus died “unto sin.”

There is no sin-canceling merit in the sacrifice of the church....

This wonderful arrangement whereby the followers of Jesus may join in his sacrificial work for the salvation of the world in no way changes the fact that the ransom sacrifice of Jesus releases mankind from sin. Jesus' ransom sacrifice is the basis of the entire arrangement. It is only through the ransom that we are authorized to 'reckon' ourselves to be dead unto sin.

There is no sin-canceling merit in the sacrifice of the church. But when the LORD authorizes us to reckon it as being part of the "better sacrifices" of this Gospel Age, we should honor him by doing so, and seek faithfully to keep our sacrifice on the altar until it is fully consumed. (Heb.(9:23) It is this thought that Paul stresses saying, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Rom.12:1

Jesus "tasted death for every man," declares the apostle. (Heb.2:9) However, this alone does not complete the work of reconciling the lost race to God. If nothing more were done, the living generations would go on in sin and continue to die, while those in the tomb would remain there. It was necessary in the divine plan that a knowledge of this 'ransom for all' should be made known to those for whom it was provided, and it is in this phase of the atonement work that the church has a share.

First, Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared "in the presence of God for us." (Heb.9:24) The apostle states the same thought in another way, saying that Christ was "raised again for our justification." (Rom.4:25) And why should we, the church class, be justified? It is in order that we might present our bodies an acceptable sacrifice and

be planted together in the likeness of Jesus' death. This is not for the purpose of adding anything to the ransom price, but in order that each one in the true church might prove his full harmony with the divine program of love for the human race, and be trained to share with Jesus in the future work of enlightening and blessing the world.

It is in this way that the merit of Christ's ransom will reach the world through the church. This merit is first used to make the church's joint-sacrifice with Jesus acceptable, and when this sacrifice is complete and the church is glorified with the LORD, together they will be the channel through which the offer of salvation will reach mankind. And how will the benefits of the ransom be made available to all? It will be through the enlightenment of the people in order that they might have an opportunity to believe.

“How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom.10:14), asks the apostle. As the merit of the ransom is available at the present time for those who believe only, it becomes evident that the church has a very vital part in the work of reconciliation—not by providing the ransom, but by being co-workers in the divine arrangement whereby, on the basis of imparted knowledge, the benefits of the ransom will be available to the people. It was in keeping with this divine arrangement that Jesus prayed for the oneness of the church with himself—that full oneness which will be attained in the “first resurrection”—“that the world may believe.”—Rev.20:5,6; John 17:21.

So while the due time for testifying the knowledge of the ransom to all mankind—the living and those who will be raised from the dead—will not be until the mediatorial kingdom of Christ is established, now is the “acceptable year (time)” (Luke 4:17) for the followers of Jesus to lay down their lives as joint-sacrificers with him. This proves that the church is to be used, together with Christ, as the servants of God in establishing this covenant.

This whole arrangement is made possible through the “ransom for all.” (I Tim.2:6) Truly it constitutes the basis of hope for both the church and the world. And what a blessed hope it is for both! For the church it is a hope of glory and honor and immortality; and for the world, restitution to human perfection on the earth.

As we have seen, the hope of the church also is that she may share in the work of restoring the world. “I will preserve thee,” says the LORD, “and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish (**margin**, ‘raise up’) the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners (of death), Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves.” (Isa.49:8,9; 42:6) It will be in the fulfillment of this promise that “the ransom for all” will be testified to all “in due time.”—I Tim.2:6; I Pet:5,6

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

“When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men....And 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.”—Ephesians 4:8-12

WHEN OUR Lord Jesus was put to death as a malefactor by the cruel method of crucifixion, it seemed that the power of darkness had triumphed, and that God’s purpose to perfect saints for the work of the ministry of reconciliation had been defeated. But this seeming victory of the Adversary was short indeed, for our Lord was raised from the dead on the third day, as it had been foretold that he would, and later he ascended on high.

By our Lord’s resurrection and ascension a great victory was gained, for we are told that ‘he led captivity

captive', or, as the *Marginal* reference renders it, "He led a multitude of captives (purchased the whole race of mankind, captives to sin and death)." Beyond this great victory, he 'gave gifts unto men'. The purpose of his gifts to men was to carry out God's original design, which was to perfect saints for the work of the ministry of reconciliation and to edify or build up the body of Christ.

The task of developing and perfecting God's saints—his holy ones—has been a comparatively slow and difficult task. God did not choose to accomplish this tremendous task either by "might," or by "power," but, as he declared, "by my Spirit." (Zech.4:6) It is God's Holy Spirit working in the hearts of the consecrated footstep followers of his Son that causes them "both to will and to do of his good pleasure."—Phil.2:13

As the LORD's people are influenced and led by the Holy Spirit they become interested in carrying out his plans and purposes. Their Heavenly Father's interests become their interests. So when we speak of the church's mission being that of perfecting the saints for the future work of service, it is understood that this is also God's mission for the church, that there is a oneness of purpose between God and his people, the same oneness that exists between the Heavenly Father and his Only Begotten Son.

The LORD foresaw the needs of the church, and provision was made for those needs. In order for the LORD's people to understand the Word of God, they would need apostles to outline and declare the basic faith of the saints; they would need prophets—expounders—to proclaim the Word of truth; they would need evangelists to "teach (disciple) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt.28:19) they would need pastors, or shepherds, individuals to visit, encourage, strengthen, hold together, and defend the flock of God; they would need teachers to instruct them in the proper understanding of the truth contained in the Scriptures.

Therefore, the LORD 'gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers'. Provided in this way, the church could carry out its mission.

Before anyone can be trained and prepared for the future work of service, he must first become a disciple of Christ. This requires the work of the evangelists. Their duty is to make disciples of those who will receive their message. The word disciple signifies 'pupil', and those interested through the evangelists are as pupils in the primary department of the school of Christ. As they become instructed in righteousness, their full consecration is in order, as represented in baptism—death to self and to the world—buried with Christ by baptism into his death.—Rom.6:3-5

Those who go this far, who respond to the preaching of the Gospel and inquire concerning the way, the truth, the life, and who, with true repentance from sin, desire to become disciples of Christ, and who then take this step of consecration, are baptized thereby into the church, 'the Body of Christ'. Paul's words, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular," then applies to them.—I Cor.12:27

These do not need their names written on any earthly roll or register. The names of such, we are told, are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Rev.21:27) Concerning those who are faithful to their covenant, the Master said, "I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels," (Rev.3:5) The seal of their acceptance is the Holy Spirit, whose leadings and instructions and marks of character daily become more and more discernible to them and to others, as they thereafter seek to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Once begotten of the Holy Spirit, these consecrated followers of the Master are then in a position to begin

their preparation for the future work of service which will take place in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. In all good schools, the students are first taught the principles of the subject they are studying, and then they are given problems to solve, or laboratory experiments to perform, that they may thoroughly acquaint themselves with their subject, both in theory and in practice. Christians in the school of Christ are also first given rules and commandments by which to live, then they are tested in the world, which we might speak of as being God's laboratory.

As students of the Word of God, which is the 'textbook' used in the school of Christ, they become acquainted with God's wonderful plan of salvation, and the boundless love that prompted God to give his Only Begotten Son to make possible the salvation of the world. They learn of the perfect attributes of God's character, which are Love, Wisdom, Justice, and Power. They learn of Jesus' faithfulness in carrying out the will of God—how he "loved righteousness, and hated iniquity" (Heb.1:9); how, "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil.2:8); and how he "poured out his soul unto death." (Isa.53:12) In a word, we might say that these must learn and prove "what is that good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom.12:2

Upon learning the plan, character, and will of God, pupils in the school of Christ are required to act in conformity with their Christian education. When the faithful students in this school learn of God's wonderful plan of salvation, they are commissioned by the Holy Spirit to proclaim it to others, "to preach good tidings unto the meek;....to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the Day of Vengeance (against all evil) of our God; to comfort all that mourn." (Isa.61:1,2) When they learn of God's perfect and holy character they are told, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father

which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matt.5:48) When they learn God’s will to be “even (their) sanctification,” they are then expected to become completely sanctified.—I Thess.4:3

In that the church is being prepared for their future work of service, it is befitting, indeed, that they should be thoroughly trained for the service, for the ministry of reconciliation, and that they shall then be called upon to perform. What better training could the church have for their future work of service than to engage in that work even now!

Ah! but one might say, “Now is not the time for the world to be reconciled to God. How can we engage in that ministry now?” Nonetheless, we have the apostle’s declaration that God “hath given to us (the church) the ministry of reconciliation;....and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” (II Cor.5:18-20) Verse 20 in **Wilson’s Diaglott** reads: “On behalf of Christ, therefore, as are ambassadors; as if God were inviting through us, we entreat, on behalf of Christ—be you reconciled to God.” Even though the present time is not for the conversion of the world, nor for their atonement with God, yet from the apostle’s words we gather that it is the church’s privilege to go forth with the ‘word of reconciliation’, saying, ‘be ye reconciled to God’.

If the joyful message were appreciated it would bring ready response from every place; but alas, it was, and still is, commonly rejected. Nor should this seem strange; for the prophet, speaking for the ‘royal priesthood’ cried, “Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the Arm of the LORD revealed?” (Isa.53:1) The Arm of Jehovah—Christ, the power of God—offers salvation to as many as believe his report—even as many as the LORD our God calls to be of the royal priesthood; for “no man taketh this honor to himself, but he that is called of God.”—Acts 2:39; Heb.5:4

Salvation can be had at the present time through Christ, but only at the cost of entire self-denial and complete acquiescence to the Heavenly Father's will. The way that leads to life at the present time is said to be "Narrow." (Matt.7:14) For this reason it becomes a "savor of death unto death" to those who realize it. (II Cor.2:16) In that men are frantically trying to save and preserve their lives, it is no wonder that baptism into Christ's death is offensive and obnoxious to them.

Under present circumstances, with sin abounding in the world, the faithful 'ambassadors' of God, in Christ's name and stead—as members of his body—are hated and persecuted, even as were their Lord and his apostles. Hence the measure of self-sacrifice and suffering for Christ endured by each of these becomes a measure from God's standpoint of the faithfulness of each as an ambassador.

Those who have faithfully engaged in the ministry of reconciliation, or atonement, under the adverse conditions of this Gospel Age, shall have received the necessary schooling and training to qualify them for their future work of service. We see how wonderful has been the training and perfection of the saints for this future work of service.

Developing Every Grace

Our Lord gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, not only for the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service, but also for "the edifying of the body of Christ." The apostle declared that the usefulness of these 'gifts' to the church would not cease until "we all come in (or into) the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."—Eph.4:12,13

The apostle apparently realized that before the 'body of Christ' could be properly built up or edified, a unity of

faith and knowledge of the Son of God would be requisite. Without this unity of faith and knowledge, they would be as “children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” (Eph.4:14) Once established in doctrine, every member of the church could then properly develop into a ‘perfect man’, unto the ‘measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’. This, of course, implies the development of all the graces and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

In order for the Christian to develop every grace, he must put off the ‘works of the flesh’, and become filled with God’s Holy Spirit. If God’s Holy Spirit is allowed to have free course in a Christian’s life, unhindered by other influences, it will result in the development of the ‘fruit of the Spirit’. The Apostle Paul tells us that “the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” (Gal.5:22,23) The development of the fruitage and graces of the Holy Spirit results in that “holiness without which no man shall see the LORD.” (Heb.12:14) It has been the mission of the church then to develop in herself every grace—else she could never be accepted of him who loved her and bought her with his blood.

How can the church develop in herself every grace? Surely not by each member isolating himself from the other members of the church—the body of Christ. No, rather by their gathering together unto the Lord, and with the fellow-members of his body. By this means they can encourage one another “unto love and to good works.” (Heb.10:24) The apostle emphasizes the need of interdependence within the body of Christ. He says: “The whole body fitly jointed together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”—Eph.4:16

The Master used the illustration of a vine and its branches, to show his relationship to the church and their dependence upon him. He said, “I am the true vine, and my

Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. . . . As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. . . . He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.”—John 15:1-5

The graces that the church is to develop in herself may be summed up in one crowning grace, which is love. Faith, hope, joy, etc. are the result of love for our Father and our confidence in his love, as expressed in his promises to us. Love in its various phases constitutes the fruit which must be found in every branch if it is to retain its place in the vine and be glorified with Christ.

Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that other things will do, and that we may pass the divine inspection without this fruit. The study of the truth, the proclamation of the truth, the good works unto all men, the laying down of our lives for the brethren, etc., are only acceptable to the Father in proportion as they are the results of this fruitage in our hearts. The apostle expresses this forcefully when he says, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity (love), it profiteth me nothing.”—I Cor.13:3

We see, then, the thought is that we must cultivate in our hearts the graces of the Holy Spirit, and that we must have these graces in an abounding measure to be pleasing to the LORD. We must bear much fruit. The manifestation of the fruit, therefore, undoubtedly will be through various channels—laying down our lives for the brethren, opportunity by opportunity; doing good unto all men; proclaiming the truth; studying the truth. If we give our ‘bodies to be burned’ on God’s altar of sacrifice through our faithfulness to the principles of righteousness and through our love and loyalty to the LORD, then happy are we indeed.

God's Witness to the World

In Matthew 24:14 we read, "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Some feel that this text of Scripture has reference to the conversion of the world before the end of the Gospel Age. But **witnessing** to the world does not imply the **conversion** of the world. The text says nothing concerning the manner in which this testimony would be received. However, the context clearly shows that this witness would not result in the conversion of the world, but rather that the world would be in ignorance of the Lord's presence, even as the people in Noah's day 'knew 'not' of the Flood until it overwhelmed them.

So while the witness may have been given to all nations, yet this did not effect their conversion, nor even the illumination of their minds concerning Christ's Second Advent; otherwise, the "tribes of the earth" would not "mourn" when they see the "Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."—Matt.24:30

The witness of the Gospel, which was to be preached in all the world, was not given until the nineteenth century. While the Early Church faithfully preached the 'Gospel of the kingdom', yet their proclamation fell short of being a 'witness unto all nations'. Nor are we to think of this witness as having been given during the time when the "woman" (the true church) fled into the wilderness condition, for within this same period God's "two witnesses", the Old and New Testaments, prophesied for "a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth (dead languages)." (Rev.12:6; 11:3) It was not until the end of the 1,260 symbolic years—a day representing a year—which terminated in 1799, that the "two witnesses" began to be translated into all languages and circulated worldwide.

The dawning of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a new era of liberty, and freedom of thought. The sacred Volume, which had been confined and kept covered in dead languages, began to be scattered by the millions, and in every nation and language. The British and Foreign Bible Society was established in 1803; the New York Bible Society in 1804; the Berlin-Prussian Bible Society in 1805; the Philadelphia Bible Society in 1808; and the American Bible Society in 1817. During the nineteenth century these societies accomplished a remarkable work. In 1861 their reports showed that the Gospel had been published in every language that was then known—though not all of earth’s millions had received it. Now in the 21st Century, it is known that at least parts of scripture are published in over 2000 languages. We believe that the Bible Societies’ accomplishments fulfilled the conditions of the text (Matt.24:13), for the Gospel of the kingdom was published and made available to every nation of the earth. It was to be, and has been, a witness and a proclamation to the nations. And now the ‘end’ has come. The Master explained that “the harvest is the end of the world (age).” (Matt.13:39) We see, then, that the witness given by the Gospel was not for the conversion of the world, but merely preparatory for the great harvest work which is taking place in this end of the age.

However, the fact that the witness which was to be given to all nations has already been accomplished does not in any way work contrary to the fact that the present mission of the church is still that of being God’s witness to the world. While this work of witnessing may be considered as secondary when compared to the chief mission of the church to develop in herself every grace, yet it is important—so important, that the 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) Surely, all who have the spirit of the Master will also go out into the world and bear witness to the truth. In the Book of Revelation, even one of the means of identifying

the great “Amen” is the succinct statement that he is “the faithful and true witness.”—Rev.3:14

When the ‘witness’ had been given to all nations, the ‘end’, which is the harvest, came. With the Chief Reaper then present, the cry went forth, “Thrust in thy sickle, and reap:....for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” (Rev.14:15) The ‘sickle’ which was to accomplish the harvest work, unmistakably is the truth—the harvest message. Hence, in order to accomplish the work of harvest, the mission of the church to be God’s witness to the world became vitally important.

The true church has the spirit of the Master, who said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” (John 4:34) With this attitude of heart, the church at this end of the age is engaged in the harvest work, which work they were expected not only to begin, but also to finish. ‘Thrust in thy sickle’—proclaim or herald forth the present truth message—is the cry to the Chief Reaper and also to the fellow-workers in the harvest time.

The effect of present truth as the reapers witness to it, is to “gather” the saints unto the Lord. (Ps.50:5) Those who are in the proper attitude of mind and heart receive the truth avidly, and joyfully desire to enter “in at the strait gate.” (Matt.7:13-15) As they enter in at the ‘strait gate’ of consecration to the LORD, they find that the “way, which leadeth unto life,” is “narrow.” It is ‘narrow’ because it is a way of sacrifice. Those who have been reaped or gathered unto the LORD are, in turn, commissioned to join in the harvest work and to bear witness to the truth.

“When he (the Holy Spirit) is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16:8) This work of reproof, or convincing the world, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. However, in that the world does not have God’s Holy Spirit, we conclude that the Holy Spirit must accomplish this work in a reflex manner.

We understand that it is God's Holy Spirit operating in his church which shines forth upon the darkness of the world. So then, as the church bears witness to the truth—as they let their light shine—as they live holy and godly lives, they are accomplishing a secondary mission which is that of reproving 'the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment'.

Kings and Priests

In that the church is to be made "kings and priests unto God and his Father (the Father of Jesus Christ, vs.5)" (Rev.1:6), it is befitting, indeed, that she should be thoroughly prepared to discharge the duties of the office which she will hold. She will not take the office of "kings and priests" until after she will have been raised in the "first resurrection"—when "the second death" will have no power over her. The term of her office will last "a thousand years."—Rev.20:6

How does the church prepare to be the kings of the next age? Certainly not by trying to 'reign' as kings at the present time. The apostle, writing to the Corinthian brethren, said, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us." (I Cor.4:8) But he was merely reproving them ironically for endeavoring to assume a kingly office, whereas they should have been sacrificing, as was the apostle. Before the church can rule the world as 'kings' in the next age, they must first learn to rule their own "spirit." (Prov.16:32) They must bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."—II Cor.10:5

Apparently the LORD also judges the church by her faithfulness in the use of the 'talents' that each possesses. In the parable of the talents this lesson is emphasized, for only those servants who had made good use of their talents—natural gifts or abilities—received the words of commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee

ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” (Matt.25:21,23) So we see, then, that the LORD prepares the rulers and kings of the next age by training them to be faithful rulers over ‘a few things’ at the present time.

The church must also prepare to be the priests of the next age. They do this by becoming sacrificing under-priests in this present Gospel Age. This was all beautifully pictured in the Tabernacle arrangement of the Israelites. We understand that in that arrangement the Aaronic priesthood typified chiefly the humiliation and sufferings of the Christ. The sacrifice of the bullock and the LORD’s goat—which respectively represent Jesus, the perfect man; and the church, the sacrificing followers of the Lord—constitute the sin-offering. (Lev.16:11,15) The lesson to be gained from this type is that while the LORD’s goat—illustrating the church—as part of the sin-offering, is filling up “that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ,” they are also preparing to be priests of the next age.—Col.1:24

The priesthood of the next age is typified by Melchisedec, who was “king of Salem (city of peace), priest of the Most High God.” (Heb.7:1) Having been recipients of the LORD’s goodness and mercy, the royal priesthood of the next age will extend mercy to the people. Once in glory, they will no longer be called upon to sacrifice on their own account. Rather, as shown in the sacrifices subsequent to the Day of Atonement, the people of the next age will present offerings and sacrifices to the royal priesthood.

As we review the mission of the church, we see how wonderfully the LORD has provided for her every need. Even the opposition of all the enemies of God could not thwart his glorious mission for the church; for our God is an infinite Sovereign, who causes even the wrath of man to praise him. As we are blessed with the understanding of these things, how can we help but sing, “Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.”—Rev.15:3

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

THE HOPE FOR the world lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ's Millennial Kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa.35

'Eschatology' is a word not often met with in ordinary conversation today. It is a word of Greek origin—*eschatos*—and literally means 'the furthest', 'the last'. Applied to Scriptural matters it may be called 'the doctrine of last things'. It has to do with the subjects of death, resurrection, judgment, immortality. This was early a subject of vast and wide debate in the church, and whole sects were built on 'this, that, and the other' interpretation of the words of Jesus and the teachings of the apostles concerning the end toward which the Christian was tending.

There has, since those early days, been much speculative philosophy about these same subjects, and perhaps as much confusion exists now as then as to just what was to be the end of the earthly life. Does man go to heaven? Does he abide forever in a hell of flames and torment? Does he enter at death into a purgatory of cleansing experiences? Does he ultimately earn a place in Paradise? Is death the end of everything, and is this life man's only experience?

The questions are endless; the answers, however, are also numerous, with seemingly conflicting answers for every question. Is there a true answer? And if so, may it be easily found?

Let us take the last two-part question first, and reason out an answer from God's Word. God says, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa.1:18); and the psalmist says, "Thy Word is true from the beginning; and every

one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.” (Ps.119:160) Jesus himself declared concerning his Father, “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17), and concerning himself, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6) The Apostle John also declared Jesus to be the Word of God (John 1:1), and Jesus taught both the multitudes, and his disciples privately, concerning the hope that the world might find salvation through him and his ministry of reconciliation.

Reconciliation of man to God through Jesus Christ is the central doctrine of the Christian faith, and at the heart of this central and most important teaching is Jesus, the atoning sacrifice for man’s sins.

In parable after parable, Jesus declares the purpose of God to be that through his—Jesus’—sacrifice, man might again find life; that even as the ‘first Adam’ lost life for his children, so the ‘last Adam’, Jesus himself, should purchase the world of mankind from the hands of divine justice, and having bought it, restore the world to life. To restore is ‘to replace’, ‘to reestablish’, ‘to return’, and in the case of the human race it could only mean a giving back to them something they had once possessed, otherwise it could not be a matter of restoration at all.

What was it man once possessed, lost, and through the Mediatorial work of Jesus, could have restored? Life, for one thing; a sinless state, and a perfect environment. Without the sinless state, life could not be lastingly restored.

Mark well this fact! God could not give man a spiritual reward, for man had never possessed a spiritual nature. Anyone being begotten by God to a spiritual nature is no longer counted as human by God, but is described by the apostle as a “New Creature” in Christ.—II Cor.5:17

The vast majority who have been born into this world have no conception of being children of the Spirit, or New

Creatures. They are human, and have no defined spiritual aspirations. They are of the earth, earthy. (I Cor.15:47) To impose upon such a reward of heaven as a dwelling place for eternity would be to compel them to live under conditions for which they have no desire. Jesus, in his many parables, speaks of his going away from the earth, but that he would return in due time and take over the rulership of earth's affairs.

Through the testimonies of the ancient prophets, the mind of God concerning his plan for world restoration can be traced. Peter, the apostle, declared that these "times of refreshing" which should come from "the presence of the LORD" had been "spoken by the mouth of all his (God's) holy prophets." (Acts 3:19-21) These 'times of restitution' consisted entirely of giving back mankind his lost heritage, the earth, which had been prepared for the human creation.

Moses spoke of the coming of one who would speak with such authority that all would have to hear him and obey if they desired life, and all the prophets from Moses to Jesus also spoke of a time of restoration which will apply to all mankind. True, the people of Israel gradually came to the viewpoint, which was encouraged by their leaders, that they as a nation were to be the chief recipients of God's restoring favor, and they assumed to themselves all the values inherent in the promise made by God to Abraham, that through Abraham should come the 'seed' that would carry out the work of blessing.

The Apostle Paul, however, in the masterly argument presented in his letter to the Galatians, punctured this theory by the fact of the universality of the promised blessing. He identifies the 'seed' of Abraham with Jesus Christ, and shows Israel that their position was assured only by and through the Law Covenant which was added to the original promise, and which, having done the work for which it was intended, had ceased to be of any further value in the outworking of the divine plan for man's

salvation. The Law showed them that they were sinful and needed a Redeemer. Mission accomplished! The original promise, however, remained, and would be fulfilled in due time through the redeeming work of the Messiah, the Savior, which work would apply to all people—"all the families of the earth."—Gen.22:18

First, however, must be accomplished the work of selecting from all kindreds, peoples, and tongues those who will constitute the bride of Christ, the co-workers who were to have the oversight of humanity's affairs in the reestablishment of peace and happiness on the earth.

The times of restitution, or restoration, which will be ushered in during the millennial reign of Christ and his church, his bride, are spoken of by another, and one of the greatest of God's prophets, Isaiah. He refers to this great work under the symbol of a road along which mankind would travel toward the new Paradise. In the thirty-fifth chapter of his prophecy he speaks of the wilderness of this earth restored to beauty and perfection. He describes the blinded, sin-sickened masses of humanity, having lost all physical vigor and spiritual strength in their long struggle to establish themselves without God's aid, finally being brought to hear the true message of hope, and to see the blessings they might enjoy under the rule of the glorified Christ.

He then describes the onward march, during the thousand years of the Messianic reign, of the people of the earth, all who respond to the voice of the risen Lord calling them back from the tomb and from among the shambles of a fallen man-made 'civilization'. (John 5:28; Rev.18:4) "An highway shall be there," Isaiah says, "the way of holiness." Paraphrasing his following comments, he says: "Unclean ones shall not reach its end uncleansed, but it is meant for such. Foolish, headstrong men shall not repeat their former mistakes, for all things that formerly caused them to stumble shall be removed." These, ransomed from sin and death by the great sacrifice of Jesus, shall

reach the end of this trial period rejoicing, and shall “come to Zion” with “joy and gladness.”—Isa.53

The Apostle John, sees the completion of this picture and records it in Revelation 21:3-5: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, . . . and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”