

Continuance, Discipleship, Knowledge

"If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free"—John 8:31

JOHN CHAPTER EIGHT

WHEREVER Christadelphians meet from Sunday to Sunday, there is a sameness which characterizes their coming together. Their meetings are, for the most part, held in the same Hall, with the same individuals present, the same order of service, and with the same object in view.

We come together on the first of the week to remember our absent Lord, and partake of the emblems representing his broken body and shed blood. And we try to encourage with words of exhortation which have as their primary design the strengthening and upbuilding of each other.

To those of this wicked, degenerate age, this weekly practice, under such circumstances, would seem uninteresting and monotonous. It is quite obvious that there is nothing here which would attract the natural man. Our assembly is small, and consequently distasteful to those who are seeking the companionship and association of large numbers.

To them our singing would be obnoxious and in all probability, the source of unkind ridicule.

We have long discarded the reactions of unenlightened men as of being of any concern to us. We know their destiny, and, while seeking opportunity to acquaint them with the Truth, we are not perturbed by their uncomplimentary opinions,

It IS true there is a "sameness" in our meeting, but that sameness goes much further than what might appear to the casual observer. There is a sameness in Hope and Purpose. And it is this Hope and Purpose that brings us together, and draws us here each Sunday with a magnetic force.

In this Hope there are clear-cut reasons which are powerful enough to overcome influences in the opposite direction.

IN almost every aspect of our daily lives, we find that there are reasons for acting in many different ways. It is the way which is supported by the most powerful inward urge which is usually translated into outward action.

A child, however, soon learns that it is not always his most powerful inward urge which finds acceptance in his small society. Instead of his most powerful urge, he finds the law of his parents, which must be obeyed if he is to enjoy liberty and favor.

There are many reasons, from a natural point of view, why we should NOT be here around this table. There are many things, we could be doing, which would be more in keeping with the flesh's desires in its quest for satisfaction and pleasure.

But on the other hand there are many reasons why we SHOULD be here, and those who find themselves established in the Truth, have come to realize the overwhelming influence of the reasons that are in favor of our presence here.

One of these reasons is in the form of our attitude. We cannot assemble around this table without contemplating that "long looked for" and expected day when these meetings will no longer be necessary.

As we have said, the purpose is to remember our absent Lord. When he is no longer absent, it will no longer be necessary to remember him in this way. Consequently, anyone of these meetings could be our last one. It is natural for us to wait eagerly for the peace and glory of the kingdom.

All the world's distresses and hardships will give place to peace and the spirit of human-kindness that will make living the pleasure it was originally designed to be.

However, for us we know that there is a major issue that lies between our last breaking of bread service, and any peace which might be ours in God's Kingdom. The great issue is the decision that must be passed at Christ's judgment seat upon the merits or demerits of our life as a brother or sister of Christ.

It is with this that we are most concerned because we know that if we are accepted there will be no worry as to the future benefits. Our endeavour NOW should be try as best we can to do the things which will influence that decision in the way we would like it to be.

It is difficult to imagine ourselves being turned away from the presence of the Lord when he returns. It may SEEM our entire lives have been devoted to waiting for him, and it is terrible to contemplate the possibility of finding no favor before him, when he comes to assemble his brethren.

However, the fact remains that we cannot of our own reason judge ourselves in regard to what may seem to be the case. It is much wiser to investigate carefully the way which GOD has declared acceptable to Him, and walk in it.

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THERE are two opposite views expressed in John 8—the true and the false, the spiritual and the natural. A contemplation of them may help us in the maintenance of the correct and proper perspective in regard to spiritual things. In vs. 31-32, Jesus said to those Jews which believed in him—

"If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the TRUTH; and the Truth shall make you free."

We often speak of ourselves as "having the Truth," "knowing the Truth," or "preaching the Truth" to others. But let us examine the word as it is used in these two verses, and see if it is not a thought worthy of our earnest consideration.

Let us take the last word first—"Free." We preach the Truth to others simply because we believe they are enslaved by sin, as Jesus continues to say:

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant (doulos—SLAVE) of sin"

—v. 34.

The only possible way for man to extricate himself from sin is to believe the promises and doctrines incorporated in what is termed "the Gospel" which Jesus and the apostles preached. We see the unenlightened masses in the same attitude as the Scribes and Pharisees were in Christ's day. They said—

"We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man" (v. 33).
So modern religion says—

"We have accepted Jesus as our Saviour, consequently, from that moment on we are saved."

The point is this, that in reality the Truth is not something which we can inherit by lineal descent, nor is it a possession by virtue of a moment's emotional declaration. It cannot be given to us as a gift, nor is it something which once received may be forgotten about.

It is true that the Truth WILL make us free, but before we can attain the freedom which the Truth offers, we must each be the subject of the necessary process which it entails.

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LET us go back to v. 31 and follow the words of Jesus to their logical conclusion.

There are three steps to Freedom. The first is a "continuance in the Word" Jesus spoke. What does it mean to "continue in my Word"?

The phrase reminds us of a very familiar passage in the prophecy of Ezekiel (18:25-29)—

"Ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not My way equal? Are not YOUR ways unequal?"

"When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die.

"Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.

"Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not My ways equal? Are not your ways unequal?"

There can be no turning back. Does not this clearly demonstrate what "continuing in the Word" means? It means, does it not, that we must possess the Truth to begin with, and never turn from it.

This is shown as Jesus continues his remarks to the Pharisees who claimed Abraham, as their father. In v. 39 it, is recorded they answered him—

"Abraham is our father."

And Jesus replied (vs. 39-41)—

"If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the work of Abraham.

"But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the Truth, which I have heard of God; this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father."

To this they indignantly replied, raising their claimed relationship even higher—

"We be not born of fornication! We have one Father, even God!"

But Jesus showed them the true meaning of divine relationship—even divine LIKENESS and CHARACTER—

"If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God: neither came I of myself, but He sent me."

"Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my Word."

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.

in "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

"When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own for he is a liar, and the father of it.

"And because I tell you the Truth, ye believe me not.

"Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the Truth, why do ye not believe me?"

(vs. 41-46).

It is a clear matter, then—by the exercise of wisdom and divinely-imparted knowledge—of making our most powerful inward urge conform to the standards of righteousness, set forth in the Scriptures—developing a love and zeal and eagerness for that which is good and right and spiritual and well-pleasing to God, as Christ did. This is—

"Continuing in the Word."

It is the continuous application of correct thinking, combined with correct behaviour, coming from the knowledge of and love of, right, and a deep, abiding affection for its Author.

It is not enough that we live 40 or 60 years in obedience to the Truth, we must continue **to the very end** in conformity to the commandments of the One we have assembled to remember in the emblems on the Table, and in the sincere and loving expectation of his return.

To have the love of God and Christ "dwelling in us richly," it must be a progressive, ever-increasing, thing.

We must grow in it day by day, and each day must evolve an improvement in our character.

If we planted a seed in our garden, and it failed to grow on to maturity after breaking through the soil, it would be as worthless as a weed. We would act quite reasonably if we pulled it up by the roots to make room for more productive plants.

God looks upon us in the same way. We must be begotten by the Word, and "born of water" by being baptized into the Name of Jesus.

But this is only the start. We must—like the seed planted in the ground—GROW ON TO MATURITY, and bring forth the fruit of righteousness, which the husbandman has every right to expect.

The only possible way is to **have our goal clearly in sight** at all times, and the incentive or reason for striving after that goal always existing, as our most powerful inward motivation. Well, our goal is the Kingdom, the reason is the spiritual joy that will come with our acceptance into that Kingdom, into the family of God.

The great question is: Just HOW EARNESTLY do we really desire a place in the Kingdom of God? Is it but an accepted expression which repeatedly falls from our lips, without too much thought or meaning or feeling—or is it something so deeply rooted within us that it acts as a guide, governor, and strong motivating power on all we say or do.

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GOING back to v. 31—

"If ye continue in my Word, then ye are my disciples indeed."

The second step, then is discipleship. What are the attributes of discipleship?

Well, to be a disciple suggests first of all closeness of companionship. There will be an intimate and loving association between Jesus and his followers when he returns and establishes the Kingdom, and his saints rule with him. There must however, in these present dark days of unbelief, be a faithful, waiting discipleship among those who desire the privilege and joy of the Age to Come.

The word "disciple" indicates "an allegiance to the doctrines of one looked on as a master." It obviously means more than simply believing certain doctrines and accepting them as a personal individual philosophy.

The word "disciple" indicates that the individual who accepts the doctrines and teachings, also regards his teacher as a Master or Lord, and imparts to him the exclusive right to make such commandments or rules of conduct as he may think proper and right.

In the Garden of Eden a break was made in the relationship which existed between Adam and his Creator, because of Adam's failure to recognize the prerogative of God. He thought himself an individual with full right to think independently of the Law under which God placed him.

As a result of this foolish presumption, he and his posterity have been dying and suffering the consequences ever since. How reasonable it is that the system which should re-establish the communion and association between man and his Creator should be the **very reverse of Adam's failure!**

The principles upon which God condescends to recognize and accept men are, first, their recognition of His existence, and second, that He has unquestioned right to set forth the conditions upon which He will restore man to his original position of favor.

There is another aspect of discipleship which may be worthy of our notice in which we as disciples have pledged our allegiance to Jesus in the recognition of his Mastership. We believe that his Mastership extends beyond ourselves as individuals.

When Jesus was with his twelve disciples they found not only was he a teacher of true wisdom, but that he was also Master of wind and sea and that they obeyed his voice when he spoke. Indeed, all the elements were subject unto him, and he could as easily cast a mountain into the sea, as he could cure the ailments of the infirm.

It remains the same today—in a less direct way, perhaps, but unabated in its power. God completely controls the circumstances of our environment.

He can produce the test to prove us, and He can extricate from difficulty. He can provide for our necessities, though our short-sighted human eye may not perceive the possibility of provision.

This does not mean that the concern of a disciple is primarily that of material things. Rather does it mean that the disciple is above all seeking the Kingdom of God first, but while doing so remains firm and confident that all things necessary to this temporal life will be mercifully provided.

This includes that necessary chastening, the inevitable and important conflict with trial and temptation; that frequent and needful association with trouble and deprivation which is the surest and quickest way to develop a strong, healthy, spiritual man, IF we are exercised thereby.

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"If ye continue in my Word, then ye are my disciples indeed, and YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH."

Our first thought might easily be that this third point of "knowing the Truth" is covered by the previous two. How would it be possible to "continue in the Word of Jesus" and, "be His disciples" without "knowing the Truth?"

The answer to this seeming difficulty lies in an investigation of what is fully involved in "knowing the Truth."

It is one thing to be familiar with a system of thinking, and another to KNOW and appreciate the SPIRITUAL IMPORT which lies at its foundation—to inwardly know and experience the "fellowship of the Spirit:"

Israel under Moses might serve as a good illustration. When the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai after the children of Israel had come out of Egypt, He gave Moses the Ten Commandments, and so terrible were the accompanying signs of power that the children of Israel begged that the Lord God would not speak to them so directly any more lest they die. They were powerfully moved, and when confronted with the opportunity to choose whether or not they would follow the Lord, they all with one voice said—

"ALL that the Lord has spoken we will do!"

As years passed, and the Mosaic institution became fully established, the children of Israel continued in their observance; they were in fact disciples of Moses. They recognized him as a prophet, priest, and king. But did they have a basic faith in the Truth which those things foreshadowed? We have to answer that they evidently did not, or they would never had acted in the way they did.

The same applies to us. It is possible to continue as the Israelites in an observance of those institutions connected with the Truth, and indeed, confess that Jesus is Master of all, without possessing a deeper recognition of those things upon which these institutions are built—without a LIVING faith, a TRUE knowledge of God that will control all our acts and thoughts.

Bro. Roberts made mention of this very thing during the Inspiration crisis of 1882. He said:

"Many have accepted the doctrines of the Truth in a theoretical form without the thorough acquaintance with the Scriptures which results in submission to their sentiments and practical requirements.

"They have in many cases merely changed their creeds and their denominational profession, without coming into sympathy with the Spirit of God as brought to bear on us in the writings of Moses, the Prophets and the Apostles.

"They have become nominal 'Christadelphians' without receiving the Spirit of the Bible."

However, if we truly continue in the Word of Jesus **by conforming to the standard of righteousness** exhibited in his teachings, and by growing steadily in love and the development of our character, THEN we shall be his disciples indeed, knowing the closeness of his companionship and ever-controlling hand, and rejoicing when it is our privilege to know the fellowship of his sufferings.

Then gradually we shall begin to "know the Truth." It will unfold to us in all the beauty and magnitude belonging to the wisdom and mercy of our Heavenly Father.

It will become that mind-and-life-engrossing thing that it really is. It is at the same time the Sword, Shield and Helmet. It is the summary of strength. It will protect, because nothing can withstand it. And it will save to the uttermost those who believe and accept it, because God's inflexible purpose is behind it.

Then shall we "know the Truth" in its fullness, because we understand, and appreciate the riches of God's mercy manifested in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we have noted, these 3 things—Continue in the Word, Discipleship, and Knowledge of the Truth—were calculated to produce what is commonly known as "Salvation," or a state in which the individual is saved from perishing.

While these steps exist separately in the process of salvation, they are, nevertheless, inter-related in that one forms the indispensable step to the other.

If we continue in the Word of Jesus, then we are in a position to become his disciples. We are then to come to a full knowledge of the Truth, and if we know the Truth, we shall eventually partake of the freedom from sin and death it was originally designed to bring about.

Paul exhorts us to examine ourselves as we approach once more the time in our service for partaking of the emblems, the bread and the wine. Let us do so. Are we "continuing in the Word?" Are we the "disciples of Jesus?" And, do we "know the Truth," in spirit as well as in letter? Are we showing forth those qualifications of character which that Word teaches?

We should: we MUST. It is those alone who continue steadfast to the very end that Jesus will look upon with approval at his return.

Then will he manifest to each one the deep and abiding truth of many of his sayings, one of which was that none have laboured in vain in his service, if they truly ARE in his service.

Let us renew again our determination, and realizing the nearness of our Master's return, exert our utmost effort to walk in the way he has opened for us.

—R.A.W.