

# Maintaining our commitment\*

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**I**T IS MOST important that we join together regularly in fellowship around the emblems. The remembrance of Christ, his dedication and his sacrifice can help us during the intervening week in our walk, that individual walk in which we have to walk by faith and not by sight. We are called out of the world as individuals, and ultimately, when we stand before the Master, the great judge, we shall stand there as individuals, having to answer for ourselves. We cannot then blame others for our actions, nor claim that we did things because others did them. Each of us will be held responsible for our own life of probation. We are to be held accountable for our actions and our words; nevertheless these things do have a bearing upon our relationship with others, namely, our family, our brethren and sisters and the world.

## Voluntary service

In the book of Numbers we read about the voluntary offering for the tabernacle by the twelve princes of Israel. The princes made this gift and the offerings for the altar on their own initiative. It is, however, significant that, although it was not commanded by Yahweh, it was accepted by Him. In Numbers 6 we read of the Israelite who desired voluntarily to fulfil the dedication of the high priest, and in chapter 7 we read of the voluntary offerings on the part of the princes to provide wagons for transporting the various parts of the tabernacle.

Brother Robert Roberts made the following comment on this precedent: "From this we may draw the useful conclusion that the arrangements we are obliged to make in this latter day in the absence of divine direction, will receive the divine sanction and favour provided they are made in the sincere spirit of desiring to help the Lord's work, and are in harmony with the requirements of that work as specified in the word of Jesus and the apostles".<sup>1</sup> Brother Roberts applied this to the use of the printing press and the holding of meetings for lectures. We could extend it to the use of computers or various teaching aids. The principle is that we should use this world but not abuse it, and there is a lesson for us from these voluntary offerings that we can apply in our daily lives. It is a good practice, which is

perhaps more easy when one is retired, to start each day by thinking about what service we can do for the Truth. Voluntary service can be done in small ways, such as a letter to someone, a telephone call, or the sending of an exhortation to someone in isolation, and I am sure we can think of other ways. In this way voluntary service for the Truth is put first each day.

What is notable in Numbers 7 is that the wagons were not given to the sons of Kohath: "But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders" (v. 9). David committed an error in that, when he first attempted to bring the ark to Zion, he put it on a new cart, and this resulted in tragedy. In doing this the principles in the Word of God were being violated. David, however, learnt from his mistake, and then the ark was carried on the shoulders of the Levites.

Perhaps there is a lesson for us. The ark represents Christ. We have to bear Christ on our shoulders. We must uphold Christ in our lives. Christ must be seen, not us. Christ should "dwell in [our] hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17). So the Apostle Paul spoke of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), and said of himself: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Our way of life must exalt him, for he has been given the "name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (2:9,10). But how do we exalt Christ in our lives?

## Get wisdom

Solomon was instructed by his father David, and declared: "He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain [keep fast] my words: keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Prov. 4:4-7). Paul says of Christ:

\* Based on the readings from the *Bible Companion* for 26 March: Numbers 7, Proverbs 4 and Luke 18.

1. *The Law of Moses*, pp. 308-9, Birmingham, 1946.

“. . . who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

So how do we exalt Christ in our lives? Solomon continued: “Exalt her [wisdom], and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee” (Prov. 4:8,9). The Lord Jesus Christ was the Word made flesh. He was the embodiment of wisdom. If we exalt the wisdom in God’s Word we shall exalt Christ in our lives, for the whole of God’s Word is centred in Christ. What a glorious hope is before us: “a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee”!

The pathway to that crown, however, is not an easy one, as we see from the example of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (vv. 6-8). The pathway to the crown of life is shown for us in Proverbs 4:

“Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (vv. 14-19).

The wicked are those who hate instruction and cast God’s words behind them. This can apply to the world, but if any of our members hate instruction and cast God’s words behind them they are even more responsible. Note the imperatives again:

- avoid it
- pass not by it
- turn from it
- pass away [from it].

These words are relevant to our young people, who are so vulnerable, and yet they must apply to all of us because we can all easily stumble. The path of the just is the path of wisdom. It shines more and more unto the perfect day of

the Kingdom. The path is amplified in verse 23: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life”. The word “keep” means ‘to guard, to protect, to maintain’.

Let our young people ponder upon these words. They mean that we need to take great care over our spiritual life. We need to guard it as we would guard a treasure. Why? Because “out of it are the issues of life”. Our eternal life depends upon it. Baptism is not a ticket to the Kingdom. We have to work on our lives with all diligence, daily feeding upon the Word of wisdom and allowing it to transform our mind and our heart. Hence the earlier words of David to his son Solomon: “Let thine heart retain my words” (v. 4).

This care of our heart is manifested in verse 24: “Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee”. The word “froward” is associated with the meaning of ‘to knot or distort, to pervert’. How important it is that we always tell the truth, and, when there is an opportunity to speak about our beliefs, that we do not, through fear, distort the answer and therefore do not faithfully witness to the Truth. I know myself that we can be so easily guilty of this. We need the words of verses 25-27: “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established [that is, be established by the Word of God]. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil”. This was a characteristic of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1: “they went every one straight forward” (vv. 9,12).

Let us therefore fulfil these words now. If we do this we will not let anything deflect us from the path of wisdom. In this respect the words of Jesus in Luke 18 are helpful. The opening words of the chapter are: “And he [Jesus] spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”. To faint means ‘to give up’. We must never give up. Our path of wisdom must shine on as a shining light. We must continue to look straight before us, not being deflected to the right or to the left from the path of wisdom, for this can easily happen. If, in fact, it does, then we must not give up, but remove our foot from evil and continue on the straight path.

If the unjust judge of this parable avenged the widow because she continually worried him and wearied him, how much more will our heavenly Father “avenge His own elect, which cry day

and night unto Him, though He bear long with them" (v. 7)? Our Father may not answer our prayers immediately, but this does not mean we should give up praying. We must believe with all our heart that He will regard our prayers. Jesus reassures us that God will avenge His elect speedily. Yet even despite this, "when the Son of man cometh, shall he find [the] faith on the earth?" (v. 8). There is the danger that the Christadelphian body will fall away from the faith at the epoch of the coming of the Master. We are at that epoch now. How diligent we need to be, as individuals in Christ, to apply those urgent words in Proverbs 4! There can be no settling on our lees. We must not give up.

### The reproach of Christ

Present riches can deflect us from the path of wisdom. Hence the example of the ruler who came to Jesus but was reluctant to give up his riches (vv. 18-25), and the words of Jesus: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (v. 24). The outcome of Jesus's words was the statement of Peter: "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee" (v. 28). What excellent characters these humble fishermen were! They had left their livelihood and their families to follow Christ. They had exalted Christ in their lives. They had chosen the path of wisdom. Truly "a crown of glory" will be delivered to them, as to the Apostle Paul.

Jesus's reply applies to all those who have followed their example: "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (vv. 29,30). These words are amplified in the account in Matthew 19 and

show the exalted position the apostles will have: "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (vv. 28,29).

Abraham forsook the land of Ur of the Chaldees for the sake of Christ. Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Ruth left her people. Gideon left his father and cast down his altar of Baal. So we could go on through the faithful characters of the Scriptures. Moses could have been the greatest ruler in the world, but he gave it all up because he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. 11:26). They all put Christ before those closest to them.

When we consider these things we may feel we fall far short of these ideals. When, however, we meet to remember the Master, to remember how close we are to him as members of his body, we remember all that he has done for us. May this constrain us to live unto him. Let us not give up: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (12:1-3).

### Russia takes control of Armenian nuclear plant

According to a news report in *The Times*, Russia has assumed management of Armenia's only nuclear power station and main electricity producer in exchange for £24 million in fuel debts that Yerevan owes Moscow. The deal, according to the report, is the latest instance where Armenian officials handed over prime pieces of industry to write off sums owed to Russia. Yerevan last year cleared around \$100 million in outstanding debt by transferring ownership of five of the country's main enterprises, including the main thermal power plant and an electronics factory. Under the arrangement Moscow would take over financial management, while the plant itself, which provides around forty per cent of Armenia's electricity needs, remained in Armenian hands. Press reports said Russia's Atomic Energy Ministry and the Russian electricity monopoly would pay off Armenia's \$32 million debt to TVEL, Russia's nuclear power operator, and would provide \$8 million to purchase additional nuclear fuel.—*Joan Brooks*