

Blessed Is He that Watcheth and Keepeth His Garments

Beloved Brethren and Sisters in Christ Jesus, and Friends, our title from Rev. 15:16 speaks to us of blessing and watching and clothing, and of nakedness and shame. Blessed means happy—permanently, spiritually happy. This is God’s guaranteed recipe for happiness, and there is none other, as most of the world learns too late.

WATCHING

There are four words for “watching” in the New Testament, and they are interesting. The principle, most common one is gregoreuo (gray-gor-yoo’-o). The name Gregory means watcher. This is the word here in this verse. Its literal derivation is to be awake, and its meaning is vigilance.

The second word for “watching” is tereo (tay-reh’-o). That is the word in this verse translated “keep,” as it usually is throughout the New Testament. But sometimes it is translated “watch.” This word means to keep the eye fixed upon something, as to guard something valuable or to follow a guide carefully.

The third word is agrupneo (ag-roop-nee’-o), and literally it means to chase away sleep, from agreeo, to chase, and hupnos, sleep, from which we get the word hypnotism. It implies forcing the mind and the senses to be alert, despite strong physical desire for rest and relaxation. This is a very instructive word. It is the one Jesus used when he said, in Luke 21, “Watch, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy.” If we don’t, we won’t. And Paul of his tremendous labors, “in watchings often.” (II Cor. 11)

The fourth is nepho (nay’-fo), which literally means to abstain from wine, and therefore, to be sober, to be clear-minded. “Watch thou in all things, and endure affliction” (II Tim 4). “Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith” (I Thess 5). The “wine” to be abstained from are the things of this life—anything that takes our mind from eternal reality, that gives a temporary false sense of well-being and pleasure, that affects our judgment and discernment and stability.

The reality is that we must all soon stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that this life is very brief, and that everything to do with it is very unimportant. While eternity is very long, and everything to do with it is very important.

The watching required is not so much the external watching for the Lord’s return and for the signs of it, rather it is the watching of one’s self and one’s own duties and responsibilities, so as to be ready and acceptable, whenever the Lord returns. A watching, too, for the welfare of the ecclesia and of the Body, and for individual members’ needs, both natural and spiritual. Christ will ask each one of us at his return, “What have you done for me and my little ones?”

All that we do, all day and every day, must be consciously done in the light of his return, and with a view to its being a joyful occasion, bringing approval and blessing and eternal love and communion. This requires a constant watching—a constant self-reminding and redirection of the mind and actions.

By nature, we tend to drift with the immediate present—that which is pressing in on us—with comfort and desire and all the passing little animal interests that make up ordinary life. There must be a strong underlying love for God that will motivate memory and desire. Remembering is easy for love. If love is strong enough, it takes absolutely no effort to remember. It is impossible to forget.

Where the effort is required is in developing and sustaining this love at a strength that will override all other loves and desires and interests. This is a spiritual thing, and can never come naturally without effort, because by nature we are fleshly. And our natural desires are all related to present, tangible, fleshly things. This is the mind of the flesh—the natural ordinary mind that we all have and are.

The mind of the spirit is something introduced from without—something put into our minds by study and meditation upon the Word of God. It is an educating of the mind to something higher, and more satisfying and more substantial, than the brief things that all end in the grave. It is the truest kind of education. In fact, it is the only real education at all—from ignorance and death to knowledge and life. All natural education is merely an embroidering of the dying flesh, for the sake of the flesh.

There will be no mind of the spirit to bring Christ’s acceptance, if there is not a consistent and large-scale application to the Word. This applies to brethren and sisters alike, and equally. God requires that we

fill our minds with His Word, so that the mind is transformed from natural rubbish to divine riches. Twenty minutes a day doing the readings is useless of itself, without a strong effort at concentration, and a determined endeavor to subsequently think about and meditate upon what was read, and to put into practice what has been learned. Doing the readings should be our most alert and intense daily activity—our basic watching.

The commands of God apply to every moment of life. They are a total new way of life—a way of directing our thoughts and conduct at all times and in all circumstances. We should do nothing without a sound reason that has a relation to the purpose of God. We should never just drift thoughtlessly, following natural desires. We should always be spiritually alert—watching—moving forcefully and purposefully up the tide toward our glorious goal. Life is very short.

This applies with equal force to all of the natural and necessary activities of life. They must be made integral parts of a consistent God-directed, God-centered whole—a complete life of purpose and meaning. No part of our life can be left out of this transforming process. Everything we enjoy (and we should enjoy everything) should be within the conscious framework of constant thankfulness to God, and must be limited to such things wherein we can have confident assurance of His blessing and approval.

All time not required for the necessities of life must be devoted to the things of God—to spiritual growth and activity, not simply as duty or obligation, not as a chore or a burden, but in the eager thankfulness of love and desire. There are such people.

This is what we must learn to want. It is a growing up process, like learning anything else. It takes effort. Very few in the world ever grow up at all. They are just children, wanting to play and to be amused, and to have toys—all sorts of different kinds of toys.

We must force ourselves to put away as dangerous impediments all things not related to life's main purpose—all of the flesh's childish playthings. All the activities of life must be consciously directed to this one great purpose—union and unity with God. This is the meaning of watching—being sober, forcibly keeping awake to the eternal reality, keeping the whole mind and all activities directed to the right things.

There are many warnings in scripture about watching and the urgent need for it. All present things pull in the opposite direction, which is pleasant but deadly. Christ speaks of them as the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. That is, both our needs and our possessions pull us away—take our time and attention. "Riches" here means anything, possessed or desired, beyond what is necessary and useful for our life and service in the truth—the many toys that man hoards and plays with.

Christ warns in Matt. 24 about watching and of being found, at whatever moment he may come (or death may terminate our period and activities, which is the same thing for us), of being found doing the Lord's work and serving the Lord's people.

He speaks of us as "purchased," "servants," and "stewards" in His household. Everything we have is His. We have no right ever to be doing anything but His work. And this warning is immediately followed, with a connecting "then," by the parable of the Ten Virgins in Matt. 25. The whole central point in this parable is the oil in the lamps. The oil is the Word of God, absorbed and constantly replenished—not only an inner absorption but also an outer shining force in good deeds and a wholly God-dominated life. "Ye are the light of the world."—A very high calling. "Let your light so shine that men may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven."

"Oil" in the scriptures is light and warmth. Oil's light is knowledge, and its warmth is love. Certainly it is not knowledge alone in that glorious verse in II Corinthians 4, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Paul said in Ephesians 6, immediately following his exhortation concerning the whole armour of God, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching—watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." It will be noted that there are four "alls" in this brief watching command—always, all prayer, all perseverance, all saints. A very intense verse, after Paul's usual style.

To him, these things were terribly urgent and important. He speaks of warning night and day with tears, of writing with many tears, and of weeping as he wrote. Paul took the things of God very seriously, and he sadly knew that so few gave the truth the urgency that was needed to gain them eternal life. And it was a tragedy.

“Watching,” here, is again *agrupneo*—chasing away sleep. It is clear from this verse as elsewhere that Paul considered continuous persevering prayer for one another as essential to salvation. Even to the loss of sleep, as he himself is a worthy example, for of himself he says, “in watchings (*agrupneo* – self-forced sleeplessness) often” (II Cor. 11), because of the care of all the ecclesias—not just the ecclesias as organized units, but each member of them. “Who is offended, and I burn not?”

Prayer for others—we do not do enough of it. We never could do enough of it. We are too self-centered. But we can, and we must, gradually train and condition ourselves in this direction. Prayer is not necessarily the closing of the eyes and formally articulating specific words of address. We must train ourselves that prayer becomes a continuous frame of mind—a continuous, conscious seeking for help and guidance at all times and under all circumstances. God doesn’t need words. He knows what we need far better than we do ourselves. It’s best to leave that to Him. Prayer is a matter of looking constantly to Him, and keeping the line of communication continually open, of keeping the mind fixed upon God. That is living prayer.

The guidance is through the Word. Prayer is a mockery without continuous study of the guidance and instruction that has already been lovingly given. It is like trying to pass by giving the teacher an apple without doing the lessons. It’s childish—folly. But on the other hand, study by itself is useless without the consciousness that everything we are and do depends entirely upon God’s help and blessing. Our relationship to God and His Word must be intensely personal and alive, not just scholastic and doctrinal. It is so easy to contend for the truth just because we enjoy contention, without ever getting the spirit of it.

Paul says that prayer must be for others—for all saints. This is divine wisdom. No man “liveth to himself,” because such living is not living at all. Prayer for self, at its very best and highest, has some element of selfishness, or at least of self-centeredness, even if it is sincere prayer for the ability to help others. The flesh enjoys having and manifesting ability. Prayer for others eliminates this flaw. We shall never enter the Kingdom alone. If we have not helped others to enter, we shall not enter at all. And woe be unto us, if we have done, or failed to do, anything that has caused others to stumble or not to enter.

Paul prayed for others and asked them to pray for him. This is the beautiful oneness and interdependence of the Body. This is how a man can lose his life and save it. He prays for others and works for others, and leaves it to God’s providence that others will pray and work for him. If we do not, as a body, attain to this mutual self-suppression and dedication to the service and welfare of others, then we are not the Body of Christ at all. For this, above everything else, is its badge of identification, whatever knowledge we may have.

Jesus said, in the moment of his greatest agony, to those three men who were closest and dearest to him, “Could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation.” He was not concerned for himself, but for them. Their love for him should have kept them awake and attentive in constant prayer for him. But it was not love for him that was lacking here. They had that in full measure. It was lack of realization of their own personal need for vigilance and prayer.

When Jesus said, a little before this, “All ye shall be offended because of me this night.” Instead of the humble wisdom of believing and heeding his warning and doing something about it, Peter presumptuously and directly contradicted him. “You are wrong, I know better, I will never be offended.” He had no need to watch and pray. And when Jesus repeated his warning in even stronger and more specific terms, “Thou shalt thrice deny me.” Still Peter flatly contradicted him to his face. “He spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I should not deny thee in any wise.” And it was not just Peter, but “likewise said they all.” They thought they were being very noble and loving in these protestations. But they completely missed the point. They had no realization of their weakness and need. The warning was very, very clear. “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” For then, it may be too late.

Christ makes much of his servants being faithfully watching and alert at the moment of his return. This is not in the sense of by chance being caught out, as in musical chairs or something, but in the sense of day-in, day-out consistency and constancy. If we are not spiritually minded at all times, and ever abounding

in the work of the Lord, then our service and spirituality is just a part-time hobby and a sham. Unless our life is a totality of watching and prayer, we are not watching and praying enough.

So many act as if they have their salvation all sewed up and guaranteed, and they can engage in all sorts of unnecessary enterprises and activities, and still easily make it. Can we possibly be so foolish in the face of scripture, when eternity is at stake? Are we so sure of our salvation? Doesn't just plain common sense wisdom demand that we give the race for life every possible ounce of effort and attention? So much to learn; so much to do. This attitude is understandable with the shallow religious world, with their easy substitute magic carpet salvation, but brothers and sisters of Christ **SHOULD KNOW BETTER**.

"The righteous shall scarcely be saved," says Peter. "When ye have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants." What shall we answer at the judgment seat, if we have not done all? If we have frittered away our time? Jesus said of the ecclesia at Sardis, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain." Here again is responsibility for others—for the Body as a whole. Are we each individually strengthening the things that remain, as our conscious purpose in life? Can we ever feel we have done this enough? And the things that remain are all nice and strong, so that we have time for other unnecessary things. Are we (and this must sadly be admitted of some) not only not strengthening the things that remain, but actually weakening them, criticizing and gossiping about those whom Christ has commanded us to pray for and to help in the spirit of sin-covering love? It may be replied, "I have tried that. They don't deserve it. They don't appreciate it. It does no good." We could slough off any divine command with that kind of unworthy excuse.

To speak ill of others in the Body (sadly true though it may be) is a worse sin than any weakness that we may be condemning in them, because it is an ugly shriveled sin of the spirit. Truly, there are proper times and occasions when some things must be constructively discussed with a loving prayerful view to helping in or dealing with the weaknesses of others. But we must first have consistently manifested by our actions toward them and by our entire course of life that our motive in what we say is purely love toward the erring. Anyone can brandish the sword of destruction in zeal for the Lord. This can be very satisfying to the flesh. Truly, it is sometimes sadly necessary, as a very last resort. But it must be done with extreme reluctance and anguish and humility. If we find that this is the first and natural reaction with us, let us greatly suspect it is the flesh and not the spirit.

If there is true love for all the brethren and sisters, weak and strong (and without it we are dead), then there can only be sorrow and pity for anything that mars the fullness and beauty of that love. Let us never speak evil of a brother or sister, especially to those outside, even if it is true. This is of the flesh.

Love seeks with all its power to cover a multitude of sins—not to obscure, or condone, or ignore them—but to bring about their wholesome covering in a Christ-like way. There must be a close and affectionate oneness and mutual protection among us, such as the world could never know. Or, we just do not have the truth, and we are not the children of God. There must be a mutual recognition of weakness and a mutual desire to strengthen and help, and not to expose and condemn. There must be no fleshly antagonism. All problems must be handled in the spirit and according to the Law of Christ. There must be the quiet, peaceful, beautiful unity of mutual love and self-sacrifice. If we cannot rise up to this of our natural fleshly selves, if we do not have the wisdom to subdue the flesh, and discipline and train ourselves to this, then we do not have the mind of Christ, and we are none of his.

So frequently, we need the exhortation in scripture: take heed, watch, always be aware, alert, observant, thinking, meditating, contemplating about the important things—the spiritual things. Take heed for every danger and pitfall, from within ourselves and from without, not in fear and timidity, but in wisdom and enlightenment, always walking carefully according to the light. "If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light. If a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." We have no light in ourselves.

Whenever we are not carefully watching and observing the divine light, and following it, we are stumbling, though it may seem we are sailing along very smoothly. For we are following the flesh, and there is no good in the flesh—no light. Every act, every word, every thought involves purpose and motive. That purpose and motive must be either carnal or spiritual. There is no neutral ground. We have no spiritual momentum of our own. It must come continuously from without, by continually following the light. The moment we forget, we revert to the flesh. Therefore, the exhortation, "Watch and pray always."

THE GARMENTS

Beside underclothing, there were in New Testament times, usually three common articles of clothing. First the chiton (khee-tone'), usually translated in the Authorized Version as "coat," but really resembling what we would call a long tunic put on over the head, very much like an old-fashioned nightshirt. It came somewhere between the knees and the ankles.

Second, over that, was the himation (him-at'-ee-on), or "cloak"—a somewhat heavier garment, more like what we would call a housecoat, open down the front and about the same length as the chiton. This term himation was also used for clothes in general, and it is usually the original where "garment" or "raiment" appears in the Authorized Version.

Third, the girdle, or sash, around the waist—a very important item because of the general looseness of the clothing. It was useful for carrying things, either rolled up in it or hung from it.

Another garment, the stole (stol-ay'), usually rendered "robe," was longer to the ground and more ornate. This was the garment of dignity, office, and authority, as a royal robe or a priestly vestment. It is the original where "robe" occurs in the Revelation, as being giving to the redeemed—not just clothing as such, but honor and position. This is the word used in the parable of the prodigal son. "Bring forth the best robe," (literally, the first robe, the chiefest, preeminent one) "and put it on him." The greatest dignity, the highest honor—such is the Father's love to those, who coming to themselves turn humbly to Him, in total unreserved repentance and submission, as the erring son did. And as their action is total, so is His. Naturally speaking, it is not to be wondered that the elder son was very annoyed.

Scripturally, clothing is used symbolically with five varieties of applications. First, covering of the natural and fleshly, which is nakedness and shame. This is the sense in the passage before us in Revelation 16.

Second, the ornament and adornment of pleasing qualities and characteristics—not outward adorning but "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" (I Peter 3). "Get wisdom...an ornament of grace and a crown of glory" (Proverbs 4).

Third, dignity and authority—the cases just mentioned, the prodigal son and the redeemed, and Joseph, and Daniel, and the High Priest. "Awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem" (Isaiah 52).

Fourth, armor and defense—the whole armour of God. "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation on his head" (Isaiah 59).

And finally, any strong and overpowering motivation—"the garments of vengeance for clothing and clad with zeal as a cloak."

The first is the primary use—a covering of nakedness, of the flesh, of sin. Here, there are two aspects—our own duties and responsibilities, and the covering provided in Christ. We must perceive both, and the harmony between them. To depend wholly on the first is to make the mistake of the Jew—seeking righteousness through works of law and personal accomplishment. To depend wholly on the second is to make the mistake of the churches of the world—the delusion that Christ has done everything, and we, not only need not, but cannot do anything to contribute to our own salvation. We can, and we must do much with God's help.

The Protestants generally, and especially the Evangelicals among them, react violently to any suggestion of the necessity of works—of doing something ourselves for our salvation. It's a reaction of the perversions of the Catholic Church; but it is a wrong reaction. The Scriptures make it very clear that there must be both—total effort ourselves and total dependence on Christ.

We cannot earn salvation. Our very best and fullest efforts are utterly inadequate and powerless in this respect. It is wholly of God's grace, and love, and mercy, and gift, or none would attain life. BUT, our efforts will determine whether or not we receive and retain that grace and gift and mercy. There is so much solemn scripture in this direction that the world's churches either ignore or pervert. John says, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar" (I John 2). There must be patient continuance in well doing—works, unto the end, before there can be eternal life (Romans 2 and Matt. 24).

Paul commands the Philippians, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you.” The second part does not cancel the first, but intensifies it. If God is graciously doing His promised part within us, or willing to, we certainly must do that part commanded us. Both aspects are essential and inseparable. We are not saved by works, but the best works of obedience that we can render are necessary to being saved, because that is the specified condition upon which God makes His gracious gift. And it is a very reasonable condition.

Christ supplies the garment of righteousness to cover our natural, naked, sinful fleshliness, but only—only on the condition that we will repudiate and energetically fight that fleshliness. That’s works.

It is we who must put the garment on—works. And keep it on—works. And keep it clean—works. And this is only done by the most intensive effort of careful obedience, constant prayer, and seeking of cleansing through forgiveness. Because of the weakness of the flesh, there is a continuous defilement, and there must, therefore, be a continuous cleansing that at any given moment the raiment may be in God’s sight pure and spotless, or we cannot stand before Him.

In this life, we shall never be perfect, either in quality or in quantity of service and obedience. But perfection in both quality and quantity must be the continuous goal and the object of continuous effort. For we must be accounted perfect to be accepted. And we certainly shall not be accounted perfect in Christ, if we are not at least striving with all our might to be perfect. Perfection will not at the end be forced upon us, if we do not value it, and realize its urgent importance, and strive continually for it.

The king in the parable of the marriage supper came in to see the guests and found one without the required wedding garment (Matt. 22). He was cast forth unto outer darkness. The man had failed to put on the covering garment, or having put it on, he had failed to keep it on. The method of putting the garment on is clearly specified. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” (Mark 16). “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3). “Put on” here is literally clothed with, and is so translated elsewhere, as “clothed with camel’s hair” (Mark 1).

Christ himself is the glorious garment we must put on. It is a very living, personal relationship, and must be very real to us. Putting on Christ is not the mere ritual of baptism, essential as that is, as God’s only appointed doorway to salvation. Putting on Christ is putting on his character and his total God-centered love and submission and life-long service.

As to keeping the garment on, Jesus said in John 15, “Abide in me...If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth...and burned.” “If we walk in the light (that is, as long as we walk in the light), the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1).

Walking in the light is walking according to the commandments—specific obedience—works. The spirit of Christ says in Isaiah 61, “God hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” The righteousness and salvation of Christ was the work of God in him—The man he made strong for himself (Psalm 80). And Jesus said, “I can of mine own self do nothing.” “The Father who dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” (It is God that worketh in you.) This was true. But there was the equally true other side—

“He continued all night in prayer to God.”

“Not my will, but thine be done.”

“For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame.”

“He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death and was heard in that he feared.”

“Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience—obedience—by the things that he suffered.”

“I do always those things that please him.”

Here, clearly, was no passive inert instrument in God’s hands, but an intensely striving and agonizing man. As the Head was perfected, so must the Body be.

There was complete submission and loving, voluntary obedience, even unto death. He was indeed God-strengthened in the awful struggle. But still he could himself truly say, “I have overcome the world.” So must it be with us.

He is our example, not our substitute. He said to the ecclesia at Laodicea (Rev. 3), “Buy of me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed.” He must supply it. They could not themselves create it. We note that

he was addressing an ecclesia. Presumably therefore, his hearers had once had the garment, but they had it no longer. They thought they still had it, but it had slipped, unnoticed, away from them. How common! How tragic! “Thou sayest thou hast need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art naked.”

There are two aspects of the Christ-supplied garment—present and future. Clearly, in the foregoing passage, it refers to the present—the present covering, by and in Christ that makes us children of God and acceptable to Him, presents us faultless before Him. The wedding garment that the unacceptable guest lacked was obviously the present aspect of the Christ-covering. In Rev. 3:4-5, both aspects appear: Verse 4, “Thou hast a few names which have not defiled their garments”—the present probation and dispensation. Verse 5, “He that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment”—the future aspect—the garments of salvation—the complete change of raiment of the spirit body.

The two aspects appear again in Rev. 7, “Whence came they?” (v. 13) “They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (v.14) That is the present overcoming, here, looked back upon. But their state as portrayed in verse 9 is the future. They “stood before the throne...clothed with white robes and palms (that is, a victory) in their hands.” “They came out of great tribulation.” (also v.14)

The verse under consideration in our title, Revelation 16:15, “Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments,” is obviously the present, probationary, Christ-covering that must be preserved spotless by continual prayerful washing. But in Rev. 4, the white raiment of the twenty-four elders, who are shown seated on thrones before the throne of God and crowned with golden crowns is necessarily the spirit nature. And so is the fine linen, white and clean, in which the host of heaven in Rev. 19 are garbed, who follow the king on white horses to subdue the world—character-perfecting first, and then nature-perfecting.

Symbolically, the girdle is a very important part of the raiment of Christ-covering righteousness. “Gird up the loins of your mind.” This is the tightening of the girdle and a pulling up of all the loose flowing ends of the garment into it for rapid travel or strenuous labor. This takes effort and determination. It does not come naturally and easily. The easy way is to please the flesh. We must be strongly impressed with the necessity of effort and strongly motivated to it by the love of God. “We must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom.” (Acts 14)

The tribulation is in crucifying the flesh, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, when the flesh wants to follow its own inclination. Paul said (I Cor. 9), “I keep under my body, lest I should be a castaway.” “Keep under” is a most feeble and inadequate translation. The Revised Version is a little better: “I buffet my body.” But this is still too weak. Rotherham comes closer: “I beat my body under.” The context and the language show that Paul is using the figure of boxing. “Fight” in verse 26 should be “box.” It’s pukteo (pook-teh’-o), from which we get the word pugnacious. The root is fist. Not boxing as it is today, but as it was in the stern Roman day. The word here for “keep under” is hupopiazoo (hoop-o-pee-ad’-zo) and it literally means to punch beneath the eye, to strike violently in the face. It is a boxing term for knocking out the opponent. Roman boxers in the arena did not use soft padded gloves for mere entertainment. Their hands were wrapped in leather thongs with metal knobs. A writer says, describing them, “One wonders how any human being, no matter how strong and powerful, could stand the blows from such weapons.” They were accurately called limb breakers. Boxing, in the Roman arena, was a bloody conflict unto death. This is the figure Paul uses of the conflict of his own flesh, and for him it was literally true. As a direct result of his faithful, fearless walk and teaching, he was stoned and left for dead, scourged with whips, and beaten with rods repeatedly. He permanently bore the marks on his battered body, as we read in Galatians. These are harsh realities intended to make us think.

We are not likely to be called upon in these soft, easy, treacherous days to endure these things for the sake of the Truth or the brotherhood, as so many of the faithful have been in the past. The test for us is just the same—whom we will serve, to what extent of faithfulness and completeness we will render that service, and to what extent we will please the flesh?

The concept, for a divinely provided covering for nakedness and sin, goes right back to the beginning. Adam and Eve, conscious of their sin and shame, sought to cover their nakedness with little aprons of fig leaves. But God in His mercy made them long coats of sacrificial skins. The word for “coat” here kuttoneth (koot-to’-neth) indicates a long garment. The word for “apron” is usually translated girdle—that is, a waistband.

The Son of Man similitude in Rev. 1—the Multitudinous Christ is clothed with a garment down to the feet—completely clothed—completely covered with the Christ garment of righteousness and immortality, and securely girded with a golden girdle of faith perfected through trial.

The clothing of the king's daughter in Psalm 45—the Bride, the Lamb's wife—is “wrought gold.” That is gold refined and purified and hammered and shaped for beauty and usefulness

The promise in Psalm 132, “I will clothe her priests with salvation.” Here is the future eternal garment of immortality and glory.

“Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.” It is very possible to loose the garment once it has been acquired—the garment of salvation. The fleshly concept of “once saved, always saved” is the very opposite of the truth of God. “He that endureth to the end shall be saved.” But keeping the garment is more than just retaining it. It is keeping it spotless and shining white, by constant, prayerful, repentant washing in the blood of the Lamb.

Jude speaks of hating the garment spotted with the flesh. And Paul, writing the Ephesians, about the love and care of Christ for the ecclesia, his Bride, says that he sanctifies and cleanses it with the washing of water by the Word, that it might not have spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but should be holy and without blemish. The garment figure is not expressed here but it is clearly implied in the language. And here is the second medium of cleansing, beside the blood of the Lamb, and it only operates through our familiarity with the scriptures—the washing of water by the Word.

In the Song of Solomon, Christ says of the Bride in the same relation, “Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee.” And again, from Jude, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory.” And Paul to the Colossians concerning Christ's work in us, “To present you holy and unblameable and unproveable.” These are terms of perfection—not spot, faultless. We are dealing with very exalted things—with perfection and eternity. We are presuming to approach in intimate communion unto the Eternal and glorious Majesty of the universe, Who cannot for a moment look upon sin or folly. We must stand unblameable and perfect in His presence, or be destroyed by the effulgence of His glory.

We cannot ourselves attain to this perfection. It is through Christ, mercifully imputed and implanted, on account of our faith that works by love. But it is very holy ground. We must be deeply impressed by the infinite seriousness of our position. Carelessness or negligence can mean destruction.

God said, when he blotted out Aaron's two eldest sons by a bolt of divine fire, “I will be sanctified in them that draw nigh unto me.” Only love—pure total all-consuming spiritual love—can walk these precincts without incurring annihilation. “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men...to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness.”

We see from this, as elsewhere, that love one toward another is the only path to holiness and to safety in the awful presence of the Eternal Creator. How often, and how strongly, is this essential characteristic—this badge of discipleship—emphasized by Christ and the apostles—

“Love one another, as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)

“Ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (v. 35)

“This is my commandment, love one another.” (John 15:12)

“I command you: Love one another.” (John 17)

“With brotherly love...preferring one another.” (Romans 12)

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.” (Romans 13)

“By love serve one another.” (Galatians 5)

“Forbearing one another in love.” (Ephesians 4)

“Have the same love, be of one accord, of one mind.” (Philippians 2)

“Be knit together in love.” (Colossians 2)

“Ye are taught of God to love one another.” (I Thess. 4)

“Let brotherly love continue.” (Hebrews 13)

“Love one another with a pure heart fervently.” (I Peter 1)

“Love the brotherhood.” (I Peter 2)

“Love as brethren.” (I Peter 3)

“He that loveth not his brother is not of God.” (I John 3:10)

“He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” (v. 14)

“Beloved, let us love one another.” (I John 4)

“If we love one another, God dwells in us.” (v. 12)

“Love one another.” (II John 5)

And these are not all. Two things stand out very clearly: One, that this is the most vital aspect of discipleship. And two, it is a matter that is considered to call for a tremendous amount of divine emphasis and repetition. Obviously, it is not something that will develop naturally, or that will take care of itself. It must be reiterated over and over, so that the dull fleshly mind may at last, hopefully, be impressed.

The flesh tends to pettiness and antagonism and criticism and touchiness and pride. But God has called us to spiritual things. Regardless of what anyone else does or does not do, this is the personal responsibility of each one to each one, for which each one will have to answer. What others do will be no excuse for our failure. God has put us in the Body with the weak and the strong, and told us what to do. Our life's task and duty is crystal clear.

And so, Paul marvelously reveals the divine mystery to the ecclesia at Ephesus, “God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

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