

BE YE CLEAN THAT BEAR THE VESSELS OF THE LORD—Isa. 52:11

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May 1969

“For we are God’s Coworkers; you are God’s Field; you are God’s Building.” (1 Cor. 3:9 Diaglott translation). After making this statement, especially concerning our being God’s “BUILDING,”¹ the Apostle refers to a foundation. Vs. 11, according to the Diaglott again, “For no one can lay another foundation besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Then vs. 12 begins, “If any man build upon this foundation”—his reference is to building of character.

There are two types of character mentioned in this 12th verse—proper character as suggested by the words “gold, silver and precious stones,” and improper character as suggested by the words “wood, hay and stubble.” The reward of proper and improper building is mentioned by Paul, and then in vs. 16, 17 he says “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”

And such temples Paul in Heb. 6 (vs. 4, 5) says that “We have been enlightened, we have tasted of the heavenly gift, we have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, we have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the incoming age.” In other words, we have all had the privileges of Divine instruction—cleanliness would be necessary from start to finish in our walk before God. BE YE CLEAN THAT BEAR THE VESSELS OF THE LORD.

We recall that there were many vessels of the Lord in the Tabernacle services. Exodus 38 mentions many of these. Vs. 3 for example: “And he made all the vessels of the altar, the pots, and the shovels, and the basins, and the fleshhooks, and the firepans: all the vessels thereof made he of copper.” In certain parts of the services of the Holy and Most Holy, the priests only handled the vessels used. In the less important services, the vessels were covered and carried by the Levites. In any case, the vessels were handled by either the priests or the Levites. The vessels themselves required cleansing before being used and in the case of Aaron and his sons, who were bearers of the vessels, they too must be cleansed—that is, typically washed free from sin: THOU SHALT BRING AARON AND HIS SONS UNTO THE DOOR OF THE TABERNACLE OF THE CONGREGATION AND WASH THEM WITH WATER.—Exodus 40:12.

In the antitype, our Lord is the great High Priest and we his followers are the under priests. All who have made an acceptable consecration to do the will of their Heavenly Father have the covering robe of Christ’s righteousness—they are made clean—cleansed from sin is the thought. Anyone not covered with this robe, or in other words not

justified in God's sight, could have no part in handling the Holy things—the vessels of the Lord, which represent the precious truths of God's Word. The thought of cleanliness is everywhere manifest in the typical arrangement—a cleansing from sin is the picture we believe. When the prophet makes the statement “BE YE CLEAN” (Isa. 52:11) we especially notice that in the type God required that everything should be clean. So we, referred to as the TEMPLE OF GOD, having within us the Spirit of the Truth, must also be clean: cleansed by the precious blood of Christ, as well as making every effort to be pure in heart: “BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART.”

The particular time in which we are living we find it easy to keep clean outwardly. With modern plumbing and easy access to every kind of soap, we have no problem this way. At one time, through lack of facilities, the Saturday-night bath was fairly the standard. Just as surely as it is easier to keep clean outwardly today, we find on the contrary that it is much more difficult to keep clean inwardly—think of the news we hear and read, and the low grade magazines available to all, and the low standard of movies, music, art, radio and TV. The effect of the Truth should certainly cause the Lord's people to desire to be as outwardly clean as possible. However it is not a sin to get dirty outwardly in the carrying out of our duties—but it is a sin if we voluntarily stay dirty.

We all have a love for the approval of others concerning ourselves—we naturally like or love the approval of others. This natural desire to have others approve of us would lead almost anyone to keep that which is seen outwardly up to the accepted standards or even above it. But with all this we have the Lord's own word for it—that God looketh on the heart. A person could look quite grubby outwardly through some peculiarity resulting from the fall of Adam, and yet be pure in heart and acceptable before the Lord. To the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 16) the Lord said, “LOOK NOT AT HIS COUNTENANCE OR THE HEIGHT OF HIS STATURE, FOR I HAVE REFUSED HIM.” The countenance here had reference to the shape of the head and the features of the face. Some members of the human race are considered to be handsome and good looking; while others may be thought of as considerably less than handsome—but the Heavenly Father is not concerned with these trifles!

Most of us wear watches—a wristwatch or a pocket watch. We usually consider the outward appearance of a watch we own. However a jeweler or watchmaker would be more concerned about the contents of the watch—what made it tick. The Heavenly Father is concerned about our contents—what's in the heart, what makes us tick. A pure heart is so important to us—BE YE CLEAN THAT BEAR THE VESSELS OF THE LORD.

In the closing verses of 2 Cor. 6. the Apostle is again referring to the fact that the church is considered to be the “TEMPLE OF GOD,” and also that we are “SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF HIM” and that we may call Him Our Father. He opens chapter 7 by

saying—“HAVING THEREFORE THESE PROMISES, DEARLY BELOVED, LET US CLEANSE OURSELVES FROM ALL FILTHINESS OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT, PERFECTING HOLINESS IN THE FEAR [OR REVERENCE] OF THE LORD.”

The word “spirit” in this text would seem to refer to the mind—let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and mind. The cleansing of the mind would be far more important to us, than the cleansing of our flesh. The cleansing of the flesh includes not only keeping our bodies clean, properly adorned and so on, but it refers also to our ridding ourselves of habits, considered unclean before the Lord. (Brother Barrett and Brother Zahnow regarded smoking as a habit displeasing to God.) These habits must be set aside, not only in the beginning but all during our walk before the Lord, as soon as we come to see their uncleanness. This continual work is indicated by the Apostle here when he says—PERFECT HOLINESS IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD.

Whatever attainments we make in cleansing our flesh, we will never do perfectly according to the flesh. The cleansing of the mind is the important thing. We might succeed in a large measure in cleansing of the flesh, and yet the mind could still be impure. For instance we remember how our Lord rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for being clean on the outside, but not so clean inside. (Matt. 23:25,26) “Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisees, cleanse FIRST that which is within the cup and platter—that the outside of them may be clean also.” In vs. 27 he says to them: “For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear outwardly beautiful, but are within full of dead bones and all UNCLEANNES.” We can imagine that these whom the Lord was speaking to were meticulous in their outward appearance. Vs. 5 seems to indicate this—THEY MAKE BROAD THEIR PHYLACTERIES AND ENLARGE THE BORDERS OF THEIR GARMENTS. Here then were the professed people of God, using their outward appearance to cover up the impurities of the inmost parts.

The effect of the truth should be the reverse of this—a righteous effect on the heart first and then also affecting the outward appearance as the need is seen. The Lord sets a pattern here (as it were) showing that cleansing of the inward parts (referred to as the heart) is essential to a complete cleansing. When we say complete we refer to the intentions—we must completely intend to be right and to do right. To cease fighting against our imperfections is to be overwhelmed. Being in this battle for purity and cleanliness, we are convinced that constant vigilance is necessary. We are also convinced that this effort is only partially effective. We think of the men that go into fight a great forest fire—as they look into the maze of burning timbers, they are aware that they cannot cut it off right now—but they can stop it from spreading.

And so we, with the Apostle say, in the language of Rom, 7:18, 19, “FOR I KNOW THAT IN ME (THAT IS, IN MY FLESH) DWELLETH NO GOOD THING: FOR TO WILL IS PRESENT WITH ME [to intend to do right is present with me], BUT TO PERFORM THAT WHICH IS GOOD I FIND NOT: FOR THE GOOD THAT I WOULD, I DO NOT, BUT THE EVIL WHICH I WOULD NOT, THAT I DO.” In spite of this (only partial effectiveness), it is a blessing to know that all, on the side of purity and cleanliness, are on God’s side. God in his own due time and in his own way, will come to our rescue and grant a complete victory. The victory is going to be so complete that there will be no more sighing, crying or dying. No more sorrow or pain anywhere in the earth—a world-wide Paradise, considerably described in Isaiah 35.

Other people of God saw and felt the great need of fighting against the impurities of the flesh. For instance the Prophet David, in the 51st Psalm uses the expressions—“WASH ME” “CLEANSE ME” “PURGE ME.” In keeping with the lesson of Matt. 23, concerning the “cleansing of that which is within, that the outside may be clean also,” the prophet says, in vs. 6 (Psalm 51) BEHOLD THOU DESIREST TRUTH IN THE INWARD PARTS; AND IN THE HIDDEN PART, THOU SHALT MAKE ME TO KNOW WISDOM. And in vs. 10 he says, CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART O GOD, AND RENEW A RIGHT SPIRIT WITHIN ME. The prophet calls upon God to help him in these needful cleansings; and in contrast to Paul’s thought (2 Cor. 7)—LET US CLEANSE OURSELVES, this prophet in Psalm 19 prays to God CLEANSE THOU ME.

In Psalm 19:12 to 14 we read, “WHO CAN UNDERSTAND HIS ERRORS? CLEANSE THOU ME FROM SECRET FAULTS. KEEP BACK THY SERVANT ALSO FROM PRESUMPTUOUS SINS: LET THEM NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER ME; THEN SHALL I BE UPRIGHT, AND I SHALL BE INNOCENT FROM THE GREAT TRANSGRESSION. LET THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART BE ACCEPTABLE IN THY SIGHT, O LORD, MY STRENGTH, AND MY REDEEMER.” What an inspired prayer this is! We believe that the Psalmist is in harmony with the thoughts of the Apostle Paul. Paul says “Let us cleanse ourselves.” The Psalmist prays, “Cleanse thou me.” As we strive to cleanse ourselves, according to Paul’s suggestion, we supplement our efforts by our prayers—“Cleanse thou me from secret faults and presumptuous sins.”

We can all pray that the Lord will help us to overcome those secret faults known only to him and ourselves. Regarding “presumptuous sins,” we take note of the Pastor’s comment on Reprint page 1296, par. 5, “Let us consider what kind of sins would be presumptuous sins. To presume signifies to take for granted without authority or proof. A presumptuous sin would therefore be taking for granted and asserting as truth something which God has not revealed or the perversion of what he has revealed. To claim and hold tenaciously as a part of God’s plan any doctrine, merely on the ground of

fallible human reason and without divine authority, would therefore be a presumptuous sin.”

As we consider our text “Be Ye Clean That Bear the Vessels of the Lord”—we recognize that it applies surely to all the fallen tendencies of the flesh—the secret faults as well as the outward ones. We recognize also that it applies to pure or clean doctrine. This can be summed up in the one text—1 Tim. 4:16, “TAKE HEED TO THYSELF AND TO THE DOCTRINE.” Paul’s words to Timothy would apply to every member of the New Creation. A doctrine is a teaching—what are we teaching? Doctrine is not referred to in scripture as being clean or unclean—we read of pure doctrine, good doctrine and sound doctrine. By implication we would say that there could be impure or unsound doctrine. Remember that our text says: BE YE CLEAN, THAT BEAR THE VESSELS OF THE LORD. The word “Ye” represents the Lord’s people, and the vessels they bear, are the doctrines or teachings of the Truth. And just as surely as we ourselves are to be clean in thought, word and actions just as surely must our doctrine be in harmony with the Divine Plan—clean, pure or sound.

We referred to the fact that our Lord rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their outward show of purity—YE ARE LIKE WHITED SEPULCHRES. He also rebuked them for their teachings. In Matt. 15:2 we find they came to him saying, “WHY DO THY DISCIPLES TRANSGRESS THE TRADITION OF THE ELDERS? FOR THEY WASH NOT THEIR HANDS WHEN THEY EAT BREAD? But he answered and said unto them—‘Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?’” In vs. 7 he refers to them as hypocrites, and then refers to a prophecy found in Isaiah concerning them. In vs. 9 he tells them that they—“taught for doctrines the commandments of men.” In vs.14, Jesus calls them “BLIND LEADERS OF THE BLIND.” I’m sure we are aware that our Lord was not speaking derogatorily about those who are without physical sight. “The blind leading the blind” represents the ignorant leading the ignorant into difficulties, into the ditch. The Lord was saying that these would stumble and experience injury, instead of reaching their destination. The destination of the Jew was fellowship with and relationship to God. This great favor was mentioned to Abraham—“IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.” The Apostle Paul refers to their failure to obtain—“ISRAEL HATH NOT OBTAINED THAT WHICH HE SEEKETH FOR, BUT THE ELECTION HATH OBTAINED IT AND THE REST WERE BLINDED.” This was the very thing that our Lord attempted to warn them of—they were too trusting—following the lead of the scribes and Pharisees. One who is a disciple, or follower, is not going to fare any better than the one he follows. How necessary then, that we look to the right leaders—unblind leaders. If we know the doctrine, have thoroughly studied it and then are able to recognize it in all its purity, we will not be misled by those who would pervert the truth.

I read a paragraph in the Reprints some time ago, and it really set me to thinking. I marked the place and have read it several times since I first noticed it. It is Reprint page 3199, par. 5. “Each consecrated believer should ask himself, How carefully have I studied that which I have clearly recognized as Divine Truth, and how fully capable am I, therefore, of handling the sword of the Spirit? Few indeed are those who can say that they have fully digested and assimilated all they have received; that they have let none of these things slip from memory; that they have so treasured it up in their hearts that it in their meditation by day and by night; that they have a ready answer—a ‘Thus saith the Lord’ for every man that asks them for a reason for the hope that is in them, concerning any point of doctrine; that they can clearly and intelligently portray the Divine Plan, quote the Divine authority for each successive step of it, and if need be, point out its place in the Divine system of types. To gain such proficiency in the Word is indeed the work of a life-time; but every day should see a closer appreciation to that proficiency and will indeed, if we are faithful students and faithful servants of the Truth.” This indicates that in a general sense at least, that the entire church should become skillful in the word of truth. One thing we are sure of, that is, it takes time and effort to study the truth. Even the wise man realized that study cost something, saying “MUCH STUDY IS A WEARINESS OF THE FLESH.” (Ecc. 12:12) The question presents itself—How weary are we willing to become to know the doctrine? The time and effort put forth in this manner, becomes a part of the admonition—BE YE CLEAN.

How easy a matter it is to jump into the shower and cleanse our flesh—also quite proper and invigorating; but it is not so easy to lay aside the newspaper or some secular magazine, or not pick them up to begin with; and then just one little twist of the knob and a picture comes on the TV and we can while away many minutes, sometimes hours. Oh it is quite true that we cannot be studying the Truth all the time, and few of us do. We should keep in mind however, that a study of the truth relates to our being clean—a cleansing of the mind.

The Apostle in Heb. 5:11 declared that he had many things to say that were hard to be uttered or difficult of interpretation (Diaglott) SEEING YE ARE DULL OF HEARING. FOR WHEN FOR THE TIME, YE OUGHT TO BE TEACHERS, YE HAVE NEED THAT ONE TEACH YOU AGAIN, WHICH BE THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE ORACLES OF GOD: AND ARE BECOME SUCH AS HAVE NEED OF MILK AND NOT STRONG MEAT. FOR EVERYONE THAT USETH MILK IS UNSKILFUL IN THE WORD OF GOD, FOR HE IS A BABE. BUT STRONG MEAT BELONGETH TO THEM THAT ARE OF FULL AGE, EVEN THOSE WHO BY REASON OF USE, HAVE THEIR SENSES EXERCISED TO DISCERN BOTH GOOD AND EVIL. We had this 14th verse for one of our manna texts, on the third of this month, a Saturday. Perhaps we somewhat remember the comments that went with it—“Those who have real and sincere faith in God are willing to take him at His word; and with these the first principles of the doctrine should long ago have been established; much of the

superstructure of gold and silver and precious stones should already be erected, and the work steadily progressing. Such are able, if they are loyal and true to God, to discern between truth and error. We ought to know what we believe and why we believe it, and then should be bold and uncompromising in declaring it, for ‘if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?’” This seems to show a special responsibility toward each of us in knowing the doctrine and keeping it clean—in harmony with our text—BE YE CLEAN THAT BEAR THE VESSELS OF THE LORD.

The most precious thing that we can lay our hands on, and store up in our minds is the truth. We’ve all heard the expression that we could lose the truth (a deplorable thing), and in a manner this is a true statement, but the more correct thought seems to be that it is taken away from those who fail to fully appreciate it.

In 2 Thes. 2:10 Paul refers to those who received not the Truth in the love of it. In vs. 11 he says “AND FOR THIS CAUSE GOD SHALL SEND THEM A STRONG DELUSION THAT THEY SHOULD BELIEVE A LIE, THAT THEY ALL MIGHT BE JUDGED WHO BELIEVE NOT THE TRUTH, BUT HAD PLEASURE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.” In the word for word Greek rendering it is stated “A STRONG WORKING OF DECEIT.” What did the Apostle mean that God would send a strong delusion? We recognize that God would not be the author of the delusion, but that he would allow it to come. Since we are aware that God will allow this—purity of doctrine is a thing to strive for. Concerning these texts I would recommend the reading of the Reprint article on page 2274 entitled STRONG DELUSION.

A delusion is an error, and from certain standpoints it has the appearance of truth. If a building contractor would be deluded and misled into building a large tract of houses in a supposedly booming area, the effect for him could be financial disaster. So likewise, the eternal interests of the Church can be affected by the delusions of error. When a person is deluded, he is certain he is right. That person may claim to be honest in his convictions and apparently he is—“THERE IS A WAY THAT SEEMETH RIGHT” (Prov. 16:25), but the end thereof, is something else again. In the world there are many delusions and many deluded people—financial delusions, political delusions, things that do not greatly concern those who bear the vessels of the Lord. The vessels of the Lord are the concern of those who bear them. Our desire is to defend the Truth, and incidentally the pure Truth is our defense. Delusions along truth lines, is then, our concern.

The Apostle in Eph. 6 refers to the Truth and its effect upon our lives, as an armor. In vs. 13 the Apostle says, “TAKE UNTO YOU THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, THAT YE MAY BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND IN THE EVIL DAY, AND HAVING DONE ALL TO STAND.” The Psalmist asks the question in the 24th Psalm, vs. 3, “WHO SHALL ASCEND INTO THE HILL [OR KINGDOM] OF THE LORD? OR WHO SHALL STAND IN HIS HOLY PLACE?” Notice the answer, vs. 4 and 5, “HE THAT HATH

CLEAN HANDS AND A PURE HEART: WHO HATH NOT LIFTED UP HIS SOUL UNTO VANITY, NOR SWORN DECEITFULLY. HE SHALL RECEIVE THE BLESSING FROM THE LORD, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM THE GOD OF HIS SALVATION.” The thought of “clean hands” suggests that the work of these will be clean—what they do will be done with simplicity, as unto the Lord, and not for the praise of men. They will also have pure hearts—under God’s inspection, their motives are seen to be pure. The entire course of the class mentioned here is one of sincerity and truth. When we say that “under God’s inspection, their motives are seen to be pure”—we recognize that God is a very thorough inspector.

In Heb. 4:13 the apostle states (Diaglott), “NO CREATURE IS CONCEALED IN HIS SIGHT, BUT ALL THINGS ARE NAKED AND EXPOSED TO HIS EYES, WHOSE WORD IS ADDRESSED TO US.” With such close tolerance inspection as this—indeed “BE YE CLEAN THAT BEAR THE VESSELS OF THE LORD.” Let us remember, along with this lesson (Heb. 4:13) that our God is a very thorough inspector—the additional lesson that GOD’S WORD IS ADDRESSED TO US. We have long since learned that practically all the New Testament books are addressed to the saints in Christ Jesus. Our Lord himself (John 6:45) speaking specifically of those who would become his, said “IT IS WRITTEN IN THE PROPHETS, AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.”

The Ethiopian Eunuch (referred to in Acts 8:27 and the context) was taught of God and we note the manner in which this came about. Philip was sent to the area where the Eunuch was. The Eunuch had the scriptures and was reading from the prophet Isaiah, but did not understand what he read. In vs. 30 of Acts 8 Philip asks, “UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU READEST?” The Eunuch’s answer was (vs. 31) “HOW CAN I, EXCEPT SOME MAN SHOULD GUIDE ME?” The context shows that Philip preached Jesus unto him, and no doubt the entire plan of God.

A similar situation existed with Cornelius (found in Acts 10th chapter). Cornelius was already a devout man—“He gave much alms,” he was a generous and a reverent person. Yet in the Lord’s providence it was necessary to send Peter to tell him how he would come into complete harmony with the Lord. This is the method which God himself chose to teach Cornelius. It was not sufficient merely to send Cornelius a copy of the Scriptures, but he had to have someone expound to him the way of the Lord.

How can anyone really interpret the word of God and make it plain without Divine assistance—no one can. Let us not forget these things. Let us be clean enough, pure enough, to acknowledge how the Lord chose to reveal the truth to us at this end of the age.

The prophet tells us in Isa. 1:3 that THE OX KNOWETH HIS OWNER AND THE ASS HIS MASTER'S CRIB. The word "crib" has the thought of a place of feeding. Anyone who has had any experience at all with animals, realizes that they know where to go for nourishment. They have an appetite for foods, and they soon learn all the incidentals connected with their being fed.

Through the prophet, the Lord seems to indicate that some of His people are less wise in this respect than are the animals. The Lord indicates here that some forget how, and when and where they received their previous food. This is not true however of the Lord's little flock.

Using another illustration—the true sheep—these know the green pastures, the still waters and the shepherd's voice. The voice of a stranger will they not follow because they recognize not the voice of strangers: "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me."

And so, Brethren, with the many lessons that are contained in the Scriptures—let us realize that they are somewhat summed up in that portion of the text of Isa, 52:11—"BE YE CLEAN, THAT BEAR THE VESSELS OF THE LORD."