

## CHRISTIAN DECISIONS

(Discourse by Brother Arthur B. Newell given to Bellingham Ecclesia, Saturday, Feb. 8, 1975.)

The word “DECISION” is used only twice in the Scriptures, both in the Old Testament (1 Kings 20:40; Joel 3:14). Neither usage applies directly to the Christian; yet the making of decisions and the carrying out of them is of major importance throughout the life of every consecrated child of God. Therefore we believe that the consideration of decisions is of vital importance to individual Christians and to Ecclesias. On this basis, the subject is chosen.

Man, as originally created by God, is a free moral agent, i.e., he is free to decide what is right and what is wrong, and to decide what course to take under a given set of conditions and circumstances. In fact, each member of Adam’s race has the right and power to make such decisions. It is not always as clearly recognized that the responsibility for such decisions and the resulting course of action are inseparably linked with that right and power.

To what extent man may be able to implement his decision in a given instance depends upon many factors, known or unknown to him or to others. Nevertheless that does not alter the fact that he has been given that power to make decisions. Of course, over an extended period of time, one may partly or wholly lose that power, just as a failure to use muscles leads to atrophy and the proportionate loss of further ability to use and control them.

However, each normal child starts with this power to make decisions at an early age. Any parent can testify to the fact of its exercise, even before the first birthday in most cases. Teaching the child how to make the right decisions is a major responsibility of the parent. Also it often provides opportunity for that parent to develop character along the lines of patience, etc., we may be sure! Of course those not parents receive other opportunities to develop that essential grace of patience and the other graces as well.

Throughout each human being’s lifetime he or she is constantly making decisions—not just daily but many times a day! I doubt if anyone present, or elsewhere, can look back to a single day in which he made absolutely no decisions! Naturally the decisions vary greatly in importance to the individual, and also to whomsoever maybe affected by the decisions when carried out. Depending upon the position of the individual making the decision in his family, in his company or in the government of his country, one man’s decisions may affect only a few in that family, or his business associates, or they may affect an entire corporation, the future of his country or even the course of nations throughout the entire world. We might cite as a prime example, not the decisions of

Julius Caesar, nor of Napoleon, Hitler or any other powerful world ruler, but the decision of Adam and Eve to disobey their Creator, as recorded in Gen. 3:1-6. Every single human being's life has been and will be affected by that wrong decision!

Many books have been written about decisions—how to make them, the necessity of promptness in making and implementing those decisions, and especially about the decision-making functions of the heads of worldly organizations. It is sometimes said that, under many circumstances a wrong decision is better than no decision at all. That is no doubt true for the world in many instances. For the Christian that would have to be modified. However, we shall examine more in detail later, the attitude of some brethren —“Let us not do anything because we might do something wrong.” That is also a serious error. One definition of an executive in the business world which has much merit is, “An executive is a man who makes decisions, some of them right.” Even wrong decisions sometimes teach us important lessons of value in our Christian life!

Our consideration of the subject today is primarily related to those decisions which we made before, at and since that of our consecration, and more particularly those which we must yet make in the fulfillment of our “covenant by sacrifice.” In this connection we would like to consider the following aspects as a help in reaching the right decisions; that is, those which we believe would meet with the fullest approval of our Head and Judge, Christ Jesus, the Righteous: (A) Some Biblical characters pleasing to God and the record of their decisions and actions. (B) Major factors to be taken into account in reaching what we might term “Christian Decisions.” Some questions to ask ourselves before we make our decisions. (D) The effect of right and of wrong decisions upon Christian character development. (E) The effect upon other brethren and upon the ecclesia if we insist on forcing our decisions upon them.

### **(A) Biblical Characters Pleasing to God.**

In Gen. 12:1-4 it is recorded that Abram was told by God to go into the land of Canaan and He (God) would make of Abram a great nation and would bless him and his people. Abram promptly decided to obey and acting accordingly. A series of decisions to do just what God told him on each occasion led to the great Abrahamic Covenant and to the development of natural Israel with which we are all familiar.

Next we might consider Rebecca, when invited to become the bride of Isaac in Gen. 24:10-61. When Eleazar presented the matter to her the family urged delay in making the decision. However, she heard Eleazar, who pictured the Holy Spirit, and simply said, “*I will go.*” It was one of the most prompt decisions in the Old Testament record. We know from the Scriptures how Rebecca was blessed for her prompt decision! There is a message in this for each of the consecrated!

David, the shepherd lad, came to the site where the Philistines, headed by Goliath, were bringing fear into the hearts of all Israel. When he heard Goliath defy Israel's God, Jehovah, his firm and immediate decision was to defy Goliath and all of the Philistines in the name of the God of Israel in these words found in 1 Sam. 17:45-48: "*Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into my hand... that all the earth may know that there is a God of Israel!*" In David's own strength that would have been an empty boast, but David's decision was based upon his strong faith in God, and God fully approved it as the record shows.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as we find in Dan. 3:17, 18 also made a firm decision based upon their strong and unshakeable faith in God. When threatened with the fiery furnace for not worshipping Nebuchadnezzar, they expressed that final decision in these words, "*O Nebuchadnezzar... if it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*" There was no hesitancy whatever there! Neither was there any hesitancy in Daniel's mind or heart when he was about to be thrown into the lion's den under the reign of King Darius for praying to the God of Israel three times daily. (Dan. 6:10)

Paul's decision on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) to follow Jesus Christ, whom he there learned he had been persecuting through His followers, was probably the most prompt and clear-cut decision on record in the New Testament. However, we would put the decision of the Logos to become man's Redeemer ahead of any decision of man, recorded or unrecorded. Consider it from the standpoint of its cost to Him and to our Heavenly Father, or from the standpoint of the long range benefits to the entire human race. It is the most significant and the most beneficial decision for all of Adam's race who will ever be found worthy of life upon any plane!

With this background of decisions by those who were outstandingly pleasing to God, we might note that each right decision was based upon a strong and unshakeable faith in God and in what He had promised, also faith in His unlimited wisdom and power. Along with this we might also keep in mind that our own most important decision was that of making a full and unreserved consecration to do God's revealed will faithfully unto the sacrificial death of Psalm 50:5 and Rev. 2:10, and fully giving up our own will, preferences and desires—not just for a limited time, or with mental reservations, but completely and forever and ever!

### **(B) Major Factors in Christian Decisions.**

1. God's will as expressed in His Word and clarified in accordance with Matt. 24 and Luke 12. We believe this would include the major doctrines, primarily the Ransom, and also the Lord's Second Presence, the Sin Offering, the Covenants, Chronology, etc., also the four attributes of God's Character. 2. Pertinent examples set for us primarily by our Lord during His 3½ years ministry, and secondarily by His Apostles and other faithful followers. 3. Each one's family and other earthly obligations. We believe that these are important in the order just given, and that any others such as personal desires should rank far below these. Next we would suggest some questions of help in the application of these major factors.

### **(C) Questions to be Asked of One's Self Before Deciding.**

1. What do I already understand to be God's revealed will in the matter on which I am making the decision?

We know that the Lord is holding us responsible for making our decision and for acting in accordance with whatever we already understand—no decision can be contrary to this and still be acceptable to Him! If we were to pursue such a course deliberately, then there would be only one possible outcome. The Lord would give us experiences and reminders for a time, but if we did not heed these, He would, in time, let us pursue that course without any further dealings from Him and outer darkness would engulf us.

2. What can I find in the Scriptures and in the helps He has provided for us in the Harvest period which would further assist in making the best decision?

Today we have the Volumes, Tabernacle Shadows, Reprints, all well indexed by Scripture passages and topically, and then such additional helps as the Question Book, What Pastor Russell Taught, and several others which our own and some other Ecclesias and groups have reprinted, and some excerpt printings, all of which can be of real help in determining the basis of a Scripturally correct decision. If we do not have the one we need in our own library we can nearly always borrow it from some other brother or sister who does have it, and we know that any brother or sister with the spirit of the Lord is more than glad to help the brethren. Paul tells us that in Gal. 6:9, 10, "*Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*"

Our Lord expects us to use whatever we have to determine our Father's will and then to do it. In Ex. 4:2 God asked Moses, "*What is that in thine hand?*" In other words, what of ability and means do you possess? He expects each of us to use whatever we do possess. 2 Cor. 8:12 tells us, "*If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.*" It is really another way of saying he requires each one to do what he can, but will not expect more than that. That applies to every decision we make and to the action which should follow it.

3. Have I heard or do I know of an experience of my fellow brethren which would help men my decision?

How many times have brethren said that some other brother or sister had told of an experience, either in a testimony meeting or at another time, which was a great help in the solution of that brother's or sister's problem! The next time you are in a testimony meeting and do not feel like testifying, just keep this in mind. You may help someone else in the making of a better decision because you decided to share a helpful experience with your brethren. Let us not be selfish with our experiences!

4. Recognizing that I have weaknesses of the flesh, also personal and group loyalties which might influence my decision unfavorably, have I examined myself and these weaknesses, one at a time, to see how I can avoid this happening?

That is a real danger for each of us, brethren. The old creature has its strong desires and also a lot of tricks to use in order to get its own way. Paul reminds us in Gal. 5:16, 17, *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."*

And if we cater in the least to the flesh, it can find so many reasons for not doing the things for the Lord and His people, and at the same time advance many reasons for doing the things which are not in keeping with our consecration vows. For instance, the Lord is always pleased when we do things which will benefit other brethren. While the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matt. 25:31-46 is applicable to the Millennial Age when the Kingdom is fully set up on earth, yet a principle stated therein applies now. In fact it applied in the day of Saul of Tarsus. The principle is in Matt. 25:40, 45, *"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me... Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me."* Acts 9:4 —*"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"*

Yes, the flesh has many ways of getting around the plain responsibilities of our consecration and will make a Nominal Bible Student out of us if it can, i.e., if we permit it to do so. As an example, there is a service or some other special activity at which we might use some time and strength in His service and that of our brethren. Do we decide —*"there is a family gathering that evening,"* or *"I would like to have some personal friends over about that time and I just don't feel like being at both of these so I will stay away from the meeting and be in better shape for my family gathering or for my friends"?*

Do we believe that the Lord will consider us in better condition spiritually if we make that decision and act upon it? Which condition does our *"covenant of sacrifice"* call for? And which condition did we consecrate to work for—the physical or the spiritual? Repeated practice of that which is inconsistent with our consecration vows will, in time,

dull our sensibilities of things spiritual. As the Lord puts repeated reminders of our responsibilities in front of us, we are forced to one of two decisions: (1) To drop the natural interests, or (2) To become to some extent insincere in our professions—and that is very poisonous to our spiritual life!

As a further example: do we attend or remain absent from meeting by deciding upon the basis of “who is serving then”? rather than by the decision that “I need to be built up spiritually. I can get some good lessons from the discourse or the discussion by the Lord’s grace, even if I don’t like the brother so much. Maybe I can develop some more brotherly love by going to hear him and exercising what brotherly love I have.” Which line of reasoning do we use in making our decision?

5. Is what I now consider doing or believing, in full harmony with each of the major factors as I understand them, and with the examples set by our Lord? And if not, why should I consider it any farther?

Brethren do we make sure we can answer this correctly each time we make a decision? Next we will consider:

#### **(D) Effect of Right and Wrong Decisions Upon Christian Character Development.**

It was mentioned somewhat earlier that, with the right and power to make decisions, right or wrong, goes the responsibility for each decision and the resulting action. That is of especial importance to each of the consecrated, those found faithful as “*more than overcomers*” (Rom. 8:37). They will be installed as the “*Little flock*” to whom the Kingdom will be given as “*joint heirs with Christ*” (V. 17). That is to be the most responsible position in the universe, excepting only the Father and His Son! Every right decision will add to the necessary character development for each individual, and every wrong decision will do one of two things for each one—if unintentional, it will serve later as a lesson to be more careful in reaching our decisions, and may become a stepping stone for later development; if to some extent intentional or deliberate, then a definite weakening of character takes place and must be corrected soon, or Satan, the world and the fleshly weaknesses will combine to pull us farther from the Christian goal. Let us be very careful!

Yes, dear brethren, every decision is to be carefully weighed. By making sure that each one is correct to the very best of our ability to see and to act, then we can advance our spiritual welfare to an eventual assured “*well done, thou good and faithful servant*” (Matt. 25:21) at the end of our course.

And promptness is another aspect of making the right decision. We noted that characteristic in studying some examples of those outstandingly pleasing to God in various ages. Do we recall the words of Ananias to Paul after he had told him what his

commission of the Lord was to be as recorded in Acts 22:13-16, “*And now why tarriest thou? arise and be baptized.*” Again in Acts 12:6-11 the record is that Peter, bound with chains to two soldiers, was freed by an angel. As the angel freed Peter from his chains he said to Peter, “*Arise up quickly!*” (V. 7) This was one of a number of such occasions when angels emphasized promptness to the Lord’s people. We learn from these!

In an excellent Reprint article entitled “DECISIONS IN CHARACTER BUILDING” from the Feb. 1, 1902 Tower (page 2950) we find some very timely advice on the importance of this matter of promptness in making our decisions. He had been discussing who have problems in making a decision. We quote from column 1 of the article: “What is the difficulty? Why do they not accomplish more? They should obey promptly, but they hesitate—holding important questions in abeyance, and continuing to balance and to weigh matters which they have already determined are *right*. They halt between two opinions, they hesitate to take the Lord’s word fully and entirely and to walk boldly forward in the right direction, even when they clearly discern the footsteps of Jesus, and the proper course for them as his followers... For all such our text is especially appropriate. [*How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow Him, but if Baal, follow him*” 1 Kings 18:21.]

“A part of the mistake is in the exercise of a wrong kind of caution;—proper enough in respect to earthly affairs, in which we have to guard our interests against unscrupulous fellows; but out of place, impedimenta, in our dealings with God. This wrong caution says:—Do nothing until you see how it will all end;—I must walk by mental sight at least. But this kind of worldly wisdom will not do, in dealing with God. He makes the rules by which we may approach Him and progress in His favor. One of His rules is, that every item of truth we learn must be accepted and acted upon before we are ready for more. They that receive the truth in the love of it, will surely serve it with all the decision they can command and acquire...”

And brethren, Bro. Russell’s whole life was a testimony to his recognition of the fact that decision and promptness in decision were vital to spiritual accomplishment. The constant practice of that belief brought to him the Lord’s help so that he accomplished almost miraculous amounts!

It was also mentioned earlier that we would consider in more detail the dangers of being so concerned with not making any mistakes that we degenerate into doing practically nothing at all, or at most very little worth while. We should always try to do what is right and to avoid doing what we recognize to be wrong. From one standpoint that is one of the Christian’s major goals, and our decisions should be in keeping with this. However, this should not be used as an excuse for the “do nothing, or as little as possible”—approach. Fear so often can practically freeze us if we do not use the spirit of a sound mind. We become practically tormented over the possibility of doing the wrong thing. 1

John 4:18 says to us: *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect [mature] in love.”* This was the loving Apostle John speaking.

Then his companion, Apostle Peter, was another of those especially pleasing to the Lord. Peter, along with Paul, was probably one of the two most widely used in the establishment of the early church, and Peter was always going ahead with the action. He made many mistakes, but he was right there wanting to do things for the Lord and His people. (We note that in Mark 16:6, 7 the two Marys were told, *“But go your way, tell His disciples, and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee...”* Peter was the only one of the twelve who was mentioned by name. Could it be that our Lord knew that Peter would be especially the one who would do something about it, promptly when he heard the word?) Peter had to learn by his mistakes. So do we! In fact, has the Heavenly Father not been working out His plan on the basis that the whole human race is having a full opportunity to learn that way for 6,000 years?

In Luke 19:12-26 there is also a lesson on the responsibility to do something with what we have, rather than to be fearful of not doing the right thing. The one man took and hid his pound in a napkin and then handed back when the time for an accounting came. We note his fearful explanation in verses 20 and 21: *“And another came saying, Lord, behold here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man.”* And the Master’s answer was: *“... wherefore thou gavest not my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? ... Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds...”* Very evidently our Master is telling you and me that he does not approve of the decision to do nothing for fear that we might not do the right thing. We should do the best we know how, and if the decision was wrong, it was at least one of good intentions. He will, in His own way, show us the mistake and how to do better next time.

Still another reminder that we are expected to give evidence of our real faith by some works, not just a minimum, is found in James 2:17-20, *“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works... But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”* We all know that works alone or just principally works is not approved of God. It is important that we realize that the opposite extreme is also not approved. James’ statement might be considered as also saying that our having faith with a minimum of works for fear of doing something wrong is very ill and near death. Let us see how much we can do for the Lord and His people, consistent with our various obligations such as studying, etc.! Such a decision and efforts consistent with it are sure to be pleasing to our Lord and judge.

Another good Reprint article on the importance of decision in character building is found in the same volume of Reprints on page 3093 entitled “CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YE SHALL SERVE.” His opening statement is this: “Decision, one of the most important elements of Christian character, is the essence of this lesson.”

### **(E) Effect of Forcing Our Decisions Upon Other Brethren and Upon the Ecclesia**

After we have taken all the steps we know to assure that our decision is scriptural to the best of our understanding, suppose that we find the majority of our Ecclesia do not see it our way. Are we justified in demanding that the Ecclesia majority give in to our way of thinking, or after we have clearly stated what we believe is right, are we going to grant them the same liberty in Christ which we expect them to grant to us? And, if we find that they do not see eye to eye with us, are we going to insist or to pout like a spoiled child? It has been said at times in the world that the worst spoiled child is often one old enough to vote.

Good teachers in a worldly school try to teach children how to get along together regardless of differences, and not to become bullies and selfish. In some instances we see large groups of children of different ages and backgrounds getting along very nicely and quietly and it is a pleasure to watch them. In other cases, children get used to having their own way for years. Then, when they come in contact with others, especially those of the same temperament and lack of discipline, they insist on pursuing the same course, and chaos usually results, unless they are able to force others to submit to their demands, or are restrained by someone stronger than themselves.

Such situations should never be found among the Lord’s people, it would seem. However, our Pastor’s experiences were such that he decided it was necessary to write some very plainly worded advice to the brethren on several occasions over the latter part of his ministry. We felt that you brethren might be interested in considering his pastoral advice to the brethren, since human nature is much the same in various parts of the country—in fact throughout the whole world. It is always better to see what has happened among brethren in other places, then we are better able to face similar problems in case they should develop locally. Also, by noting problems carefully as they have arisen among other brethren we can make sure by self examination that we make wise decisions and do not become a similar problem to our own brethren.

With this in mind we made some excerpts from four different Reprint articles. (See Addendum at end of talk.) These excerpts may help us to see that problems among the brethren are not new, and they may help us to more mature and less selfish decisions when facing our own problems and problems of our Ecclesia as they may arise, even though we all trust that certain problems may not arise and particularly that we may not be the source of these problems.

Since our dear Brother Russell's words are so explicit in these excerpts I will not spell them out here. Rather I will only quote in part from the first excerpt. If you have not read these articles recently you may find the excerpts challenging enough to reexamine one or more of the entire articles in your Reprints. Here are five sentences from the first article: "The Lord's people are all jewels—not only are they purified by the Lord's grace, but they have crystallized characters. This being true, as we have previously pointed out, there is more danger of cutting and scratching when they are together than there would be with materials less hard... Remembering this, the Lord's people should be very sympathetic with each other and very appreciative of each other... at times these qualities of character may cause some trouble. No wonder then that Berean Bible classes have their difficulties sometimes, as well as do worldly organizations!"

We know that our Pastor did not take time and also space in the Tower on several occasions unless he recognized what he wrote upon to be a matter affecting the spiritual interests of the brethren generally. Therefore, his words based upon his years of broad experience are of value and interest to us. While we do not put his words and writings on an even level with those of the inspired message of the Apostles, yet it is also dangerous to brush aside such serious words of caution from the one who was especially used of the Lord in clarifying the Scriptures for His people at this end of the Gospel Age and the opening years of the Millennial Age. Is it not also dangerous for any of us to say, either to other brethren, or even silently to himself, "I know some others who could use it, but I do not need it at all?"

In considering the overall lesson we would suggest that to make decisions pleasing to our Heavenly Father and to our Righteous Judge, several factors must be included: The proper basis and information must be secured. The basis of this is faith in God and in His Word, and from that Word through the helps He has provided for us we obtain the necessary information. That may come directly and also indirectly through other brethren and through His providences. Examples in the Scriptures are indeed a help also! Having assembled our information we must thoroughly digest it by meditation, prayer and by asking ourselves questions which will help in that digestive process. We must recognize the importance of making the right decision, and that promptly; also the dangers of ignoring God's instructions and requirements and of delay, once we see the right course. We must also consider the effect upon our brethren and our Ecclesia of our decision and the resulting action. The development of unselfish love will help us greatly in this and may help us to better decisions in our own individual and our Ecclesia problems as they may arise.

As a sort of summary or closing question for us to ask ourselves when considering what decision to make in a given instance, we might suggest this: Does the challenge of Jesus to Peter in John 21:15—"*Lovest thou me more than these?*"—appeal most highly to us,

or do we find the world, the flesh or the devil, or possibly all three of these influencing our decision as we make it? Our primary accountability is, of course, to our Lord and Head and Judge; but the benefits of a right decision or the difficulties of a wrong decision may have far more effect upon our brethren and our Ecclesia than we can realize in advance of our making and acting upon it.

## ADDENDUM

### **AT PEACE AMONG YOURSELVES (Reprint 5929)**

We have all heard the proverb “Diamond cut Diamond.” All jewels are very hard as well as very pure. This hardness enhances their value. The Lord’s people are all jewels—not only are they purified by the Lord’s grace, but they have crystallized characters. This being true, as we have previously pointed out, there is more danger of cutting and scratching when they are together than there would be with materials less hard. Putty and clay do no cutting—neither do characters of putty-like quality.

Remembering this, the Lord’s people should be very sympathetic with each other and very appreciative of each other. We learn to appreciate, as the Lord does, positiveness of character, strength of character, fixity of purpose, even though at times these qualities of character may cause some trouble. No wonder then that Berean Bible Classes have their difficulties sometimes, as well as do worldly organizations!

### **The Lord’s People Not Strife-Breeders**

Nevertheless, the Lord’s people are to remember the special injunction of their Master that they should be peace-makers and not strife-breeders. It requires no great skill to stir up trouble. It requires considerable of meekness, gentleness, patience, and the other qualities of the holy Spirit amongst the Lord’s people to prevent strife, even with only the best of intentions prevailing. How much we all need to be on guard lest the adversary tempt us, mislead us from the paths of peace!

It requires considerable experience and the wisdom that cometh from above to enable us to judge rightly whether a matter of difference between others and ourselves is a question of principle, where some fundamental truth is at stake, or whether it is merely a question of opinion and preference without principle being involved. In the latter case, we should be willing to submit to practically anything for the sake of peace, whereas we could not do so where principles would be involved. However, the delusion is often presented to us that our preferences are always backed up by principles of truth and righteousness. We must learn from experience that this is a mistake, and must critically examine every such suggestion, asking the Lord’s wisdom to enable us to see the difference between that

which is merely our preference and those questions which involve principles and teachings of divine origin.

For instance, in a class there are often brethren or sisters who critically insist on a matter being done in a certain way, because that had been the previous custom or because they believe it to be the better way. They are ready to precipitate a quarrel unless their preference is followed. The wiser course is to waive our preference in favor of the preferences of others, if they are insistent, provided the right result is reached—namely, provided the will of the class is really attained; for the will of the class is to be taken as the will of the Lord—or if not that the Lord will overrule the matter and bring a lesson to us out of it for the Class.

Each and every member of a class should earnestly strive to promote in a class fruits of the holy Spirit—meekness, gentleness, patience, brotherly-kindness, love, joy, peace. This promoting is to be done by remembering these qualities and exercising them ourselves, thus setting an example to others and showing forth the influence of the holy Spirit operating in our own hearts and lives.

### **A Frequent Mistake**

Too often the mistake is made of thinking that the whole weight of responsibility rests upon us—forgetting that our responsibility ends when we have exercised our judgment and have acted upon it.

Lack of faith in the Lord is closely associated with the error of bringing strife into a class on some technical grounds. We should remember the Lord's interest in the class and in all of his people, and that he is able and willing to overrule our experiences for good—likewise the experiences of others. If, therefore, matters are not going exactly to our pleasement in the class, it will be better for us, and often for all, that we take the matter to the Lord in prayer, rather than that we should be continually nagging or fault-finding with that which is or which appears to be, satisfactory to the others, or at least to the majority of the class.

### **BROTHER RUSSELL'S EPISTLE TO PILGRIMS (Reprint 5040)**

To the Pilgrim Brethren of the I.B.S.A.:—

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Redeemer! I often wish that I could meet you personally and say a few words and hear from you. I will take this opportunity of giving you my little message inaudibly and without the expense of a regular journey. I want to refresh your memories respecting some things which I have already said, but which, it

appears, will slip from the memories of some of your number. My experience in the work and knowledge of conditions are the basis for the following counsels:

(1) Avoid as much as possible all unkind references to Christian ministers or others who differ from us in Bible interpretation. Preach the Gospel! Let its mighty power do the work. In referring to others, speak as sympathetically as possible, endeavoring to make apologies and allowances rather than to condemn, which is not our province. Avoid as far as possible all discussion of the immortality of the soul, the Trinity and our Lord's presence. The time may yet come for wrangling over these things, but we believe it has not arrived. Take your cue, please, from the Dawns, Towers and sermons, and be sure to make your statements less rather than more pungent and specific. The people are prejudiced along these lines. Experience shows that they can be much better reached otherwise, and after they come to understand others matters of the truth—when these matters so difficult for them become easy.

(2) By precept, as well as by example, you can help all the dear friends along the lines mentioned and help the cause much. The truth has suffered more from the unwisdom of its friends than from anything its enemies have said.

## **LOVE OF THE BRETHREN A CRUCIAL TEST (Reprint 4994-5)**

### **Causes of Friction Increasing**

... But it seems that the causes of friction are increasing rather than diminishing. It is proper, therefore, that we should note the source of the difficulty and thus be enabled to ward off the danger and to be peace makers amongst the brethren. "Ye that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." (Rom. 15:1) If this standard be the measure, there are not so many strong as we might have hoped; therefore, it behooves each of us to become strong and helpful to the weak brethren in the church.

Some of the Lord's people boast that they do their own thinking. But the wisest course is for us to do our own believing. Some subjects are matters of inference and not of knowledge...

... We presume that the Lord would not be averse to our having certain reflections along certain lines. We are, nevertheless, to remember that if we have a thought and present it to the brethren, and it does not seem logical to them, we are not to force it upon them, nor are they to force their views upon us. The difficulty seems to be that there is a tendency in such matters to fight each thought to the finish, to want everybody to agree with us, whereas the proper way is to be content and let the matter rest.

Each brother has a right to his own opinion. We have no right to make our own views tests. The things that are tests are the things given us in the Scriptures; as, for instance, it is a test with us and as to our standing with the brethren that we should believe that Jesus Christ is the Anointed One and the Saviour of the world; that we are to be joint-heirs with him and share in his inheritance; that we are bought with a price; that we are to have share with our Lord in the sufferings of this present time and in the glories to follow.

## **JOURNEYING TOWARD CANAAN (Reprint 3060-61)**

### **Rebellion Against the Divine Order**

The lesson of trusting to the Lord's vigilance in minding his business and the lesson that each Israelite indeed should mind his own business, are still closely identified. Many, nay all, still need to learn these lessons. The officiousness which inclines so many to think that the Lord's work will go to wreck unless they control the lever and pass judgment upon everybody and everything, is dangerous to all who have it, and their name is legion. It is born of too great self-conceit mixed with lack of respect for God's wisdom and with a desire to meddle as "busybodies in other men's matters." Each should early learn that while doing his own part with his might he should trust much to the Lord, and that to him each servant stands or falls. Failure to do this leads to leprosy—sin.