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in opposition to the Dogmas of
Papal and Protestant Christendom

A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

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AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD
"LORD, INCREASE OUR FAITH"

We have been listening to this very plea by the apostles to Jesus. What moved them to pray thus for increased faith? Must not they have perceived a lack in their own belief and trust? Jesus had been speaking about the consequences of offending "one of these (God's) little ones" (Luke 17:2) — those over whom He watched. He had instructed:

"... If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

Luke 17:3-4.

We, being flesh, do indeed trespass and are at times trespassed against. Jesus' exhortation is for mercy if one repents after being rebuked. Thus we are to forgive him even if he offends and repents seven times in a day. The word "rebuke" involves first the thought of honor, also precious — that which is valuable. How can rebuke be considered valuable, for it is difficult to do and perhaps even more difficult to receive? When it is done lovingly, seeking to help, to lift up rather than hurt, this can encourage a "little one" — a brother or sister — to make a necessary change in one's thinking, thereby becoming more pleasing to God and to one another. We find examples in God's word to illustrate how to spiritually rebuke. When Jesus explained how He must soon go up to Jerusalem to suffer many things and ultimately to be killed (Matthew 16:21), Peter responded in shock and concern, and:

"... began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee."

Matthew 16:22.

Peter, although well intended and in concern for Jesus — also fearing the loss — rebuked Him. However, instead of helping, he was an offence, a stumbling block to God's requirements of what He must do to become the promised redeemer. Jesus in love:

"... turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Matthew 16:23.

This may appear as a harsh rebuke, for Jesus addressed Peter as Satan. Yet Peter was truly a satan (an adversary, as the word means), a stumbling block to Jesus, hindering rather than helping in His agonizing to submit to His Father's will. Which rebuke was

done in true love — Peter's or Jesus'? The answer is obvious. Peter was savoring (setting his affection on) Jesus' living presence, overlooking that on which Jesus was setting His affection — to honor His Father's will.

How difficult it is to lovingly, spiritually rebuke one who trespasses against us. Our natural reaction is to take offence, to be annoyed or put off by such failure. Can we see why Jesus' apostles prayed: "Lord, Increase our faith" as Jesus spoke of rebuking and, if heard, forgiving? It takes faith and trust to put away one's own strong emotions and feelings, to be governed not by fleshly reactions, but by true love for the weaker brother who may offend often but just as often repent. Is not our ability to do so a measure of our trust in God, and in our brother as one of His "little ones"? Do we not need to pray that our faith be enhanced, built up, natural feelings put aside, and to remember how often we offend, need rebuke and repentance in order to obtain forgiveness? We may not trespass seven times in a day, but some days it may be more! How merciful is our Father toward His "little ones" as David reveals for us:

"He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. Like as a father pitieth (has compassion) his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."
Psalm 103:10-11, 13-14.

Our heavenly Father indeed remembers that we are dust, for in the beginning He created all men from the dust, and deals with us in compassion, as we also strive to do.

The apostles heard Jesus' words: "... thou shalt forgive him" — realizing how they themselves failed. Can we then better understand why they immediately were moved to pray: "Lord, Increase our faith"? These circumstances took place shortly before Jesus' death, after His three years of teaching, doing miracles and preaching the gospel. Yet His brethren still needed to grow in true perception and faith.

Jesus on several earlier occasions had addressed them: "O ye of little faith." In the first year of His ministry, the apostles were with Him in a ship when a great storm arose, threatening their lives (Matthew 8:24). In great fear, they awoke Jesus from sleep, saying:

"Lord, save us: we perish."
Matthew 8:25.

Jesus replied:

“Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.”

Matthew 8:26.

In such a position, might we too cry out: We perish — forgetting that if Jesus had perished, the purpose of God would have been thwarted? Must we in our own minds trust in God as He did, hoping and beseeching God for increased faith?

A year later, the apostles once more were in a ship when Jesus appeared to them walking on the water (Matthew 14:25). Peter seeing Jesus, spoke in faith:

“... Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.”

Matthew 14:28.

Jesus did so, and Peter did indeed walk on the water toward Him. Yet humanly:

“... when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”

Matthew 14:30-31.

Peter had taken his eyes off Jesus — looking with fear at the wind and waves — and began to sink as doubt erased his faith. With ourselves, does not the fear native to us sometimes take over, causing us to flounder? Let us, Brethren and Sisters, join with our apostolic brethren, praying: “Lord, Increase our faith.”

Even after Jesus’ death and resurrection the apostles continued to doubt. Jesus a little later:

“... appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided (reproached) them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.”

Mark 16:14.

Those who were closest to Jesus, who had seen the Holy Spirit working as He did miracles, as He rose from the dead, and taught them for 40 days before His ascension, still doubted. We might ask: How could they? They were flesh, as we are, and so were prone to doubt things which appeared to be improbable. How much we too need to put away fear, and to grow in reliance on our Father and His Son.

As these apostles faced Jesus’ teaching to rebuke and forgive — they cried in need: “Lord, Increase our faith” — that they might be able to do that which was contrary to their natural inclinations. Their minds could have been: Why should we forgive one who so

often offends us? Earlier Jesus answered them when His disciples had asked: "Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1): Part of His answer was:

"... forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us . . ." Luke 11:4.

Unless there is a spirit of forgiving toward those who offend us, can we expect God's forgiveness of our own failures? Paul helps us to perceive how we should forgive those who offend:

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

Galatians 6:1.

The spiritual man will take heed, remembering how he too fails and needs forgiveness; and will put himself in his brother's place, working in love to restore. In this requirement, the fleshly mind may look down upon any who are at fault. But the spiritual mind works in love for his brother, rebuking and forgiving, aware of his own human frailties. Also, we are to keep in mind Jesus' words as he instructed His apostles:

"... when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Luke 17:10.

A servant has an assigned duty, a work which is owed to his master, for which he has been hired. One who loves his master will strive to do above and beyond what is required, even though it may stress himself.

Let us keep in mind, Brethren and Sisters, that at best we fail; we come short of what our Master requires, as our own inclinations interfere. What is the solution to this inherent weakness? Our brethren's response to Jesus gives us direction — pleading and trusting, pray: "Lord, Increase our faith."

J.A. DeF

"THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL"

Psalm 94:19

In this Psalm under consideration, David's thoughts are divided into three parts. In verses 1 through 8 he speaks of the wicked saying:

"Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.

LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?" Psalm 94:2-3.

These eight verses describe man in his natural state, unrestrained by the Spirit's influence, one who, guided by his carnal nature, distains obedience and humility before God and shows no mercy, or kindness for his fellow man.

In verses 9 through 11, David expresses his trust in God as a hearing, seeing, all knowing Power who will not forever ignore man's brutish behavior, bringing one day upon the wicked, His righteous vengeance.

Verse 12 to the end of the Psalm speaks of the work of the righteous, those who struggle to please Him through obedience. In this endeavor, even through failure and frailty, they look to Him as a Rock of defence, a Comforter who strengthens and succors those who cry out to Him.

David realized how frail the flesh is and how little is man's strength, especially when endeavoring to do what is right before God. To strengthen himself, he often meditated and prayed, in order to build up the inner spirit man. Being cognizant of the Almighty's kindness and care he said:

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul." Psalm 94:19.

This word "comfort" used in our verse under consideration comes from a root meaning to ease, to repent. The help and sustenance that God daily gave to David was an easement or blessing to his life, making him aware that without God's succor and comfort, life would be empty and bleak, with no hope save the grave or the awful judgments reserved for the wicked:

"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law;

That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked." Psalm 94:12-13.

This David acknowledged and was determined to hold fast to God's word, savoring His care and blessing.

Through the prophet Isaiah, this word comfort is used as consolation, giving the same thought:

“Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.” Isaiah 66:10-11.

David derived a quietness and peace from the word of God — a calm assurance in the promises given, hopeful of the blessings promised to all those who labor in obedience. The Lord Jesus spoke of this same inheritance to His disciples saying:

“In my Father’s house are many mansions (abiding places): if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know . . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John 14:2-4, 6.

At times David knew oppression, and cried out for God’s help, lest his persecutors rejoice over him. He recognized his own frailty and how prone his flesh was to failure and the urgent need of the Father’s care, comfort and forgiveness:

“For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord, my God.

For I said, hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me.

For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me.” Psalm 38:15-17.

The world looks upon those who halt, going softly, looking for His direction, as foolish and weak, not aggressive enough to go after what they desire. This humble carefulness often draws the world’s ridicule, for they do not understand this submissive attitude — rather it is despised.

The familiar Psalm 23 also from the pen of David, is filled with the comforts only He can provide to His people:

“ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Psalm 23:1-4.

The rod for chastisement and correction, and the staff to strengthen and support — both aspects of the Almighty's care for His people:

"For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." Isaiah 51:3.

Through the prophet Isaiah, is revealed God's promise of a future comfort to come upon Zion when the Lord Jesus returns. At this time, the earth will be subdued, governed in righteousness by Christ and His Saints, and the Almighty's eternal blessings and comfort will spread like a mantle upon the earth and its inhabitants.

What an encouragement and help are these words of David, making us aware of His help, care and mercy in store for those who strive now to walk in love and obedience before Him, sustained by the hope of that comfort to come.

M.C.S

COMFORT (AT A TIME OF SORROW) 1873

There is a great deal of false comfort given and taken in the world. There is no true comfort but of God; all other comfort falls short in the weakness and inferiority of this corruptible, and ends in the grave. When HE says, "Comfort ye; comfort ye, my people", we may listen with ears attent, and drink deeply the proffered draught. He has said this. He has caused these pleasant words to be written that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem: say unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. She hath received at the LORD'S hands double for all her sins." To whom come these words if not to the children of Jerusalem, wherever and in what age found? She (exalted) is the mother of all who receive the adoption of children by the faith of Christ Jesus, who are thenceforth no longer Gentiles in the flesh, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, but fellow heirs and engrafted branches on the good olive tree. To us, then, as constituents of the mystic Jerusalem, which has the city of David for its topographical basis, the prophet is commanded to "speak comfortably". And what are the comfortable words spoken? "Say unto her, her warfare is accomplished; her iniquity is pardoned." Long and bitter has been the conflict of Jerusalem; heavy and destructive the burden of her sin ---. The enemy has for a long time prevailed, and has said to her soul, "Bow down that we may go over." In all her tribulations her true children have shared, and now share. --- "But now, O LORD, Thou art our Father. We are the clay and Thou our potter: and we are all the work of Thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O LORD; neither remember iniquity for ever. Behold, see we beseech Thee; we are all thy people; Thy holy cities are a wilderness; Zion is a wilderness; Jerusalem a desolation."

Their prayer is answered in the words of comfort commanded to be spoken. God has said, "I will give unto Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings" and He has fulfilled His word: for the apostolic message is neither more nor less than the announcement of His appearance "to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion; to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." This is good tidings; and though the chosen nation did not receive it, believing not the report, nor perceiving the arm of Jehovah stretched out in Christ to reconcile them to Himself, not imputing their trespass unto them, a remnant in the nation believed; and that

remnant has its representatives now, men who mourn the obliquity and adversity of Israel, and who share deeply and feel the evil of the times, but who cling hard by the comfort which God has commanded to be spoken — the assurance of the end of this warfare and the pardoning of this iniquity, in the blessed day, when in the mountain of His choice, God will “swallow up death in victory, and wipe away tears from off all the faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth.”

THE SUPERSTITION OF RANDOM BIBLE OPENING
(DR. J. THOMAS)

How often do we hear of “Christians”, of high standing for piety among their own sect, in relating their own “experience” or telling their clergyman “what God has done for their souls” — having recourse to the following HEATHEN expedient to obtain comfort or consolation:— “Ah! sir”, says deponent to the “Pastor”, “I am often afflicted with doubts and fears, so that, if it was not I had ‘felt so good’ once, I should despair of heaven or of ever having my sins forgiven.” “Well, well”, RÉPLIES THE HOLY PRIEST, “don’t despond, for your very doubts and fears are evidential of your being a christian — I have no faith in that man’s christianity who never doubts!” “Oh! yes, so I have often been told, that if I would get to Mount Zion I must go through ‘Doubting Castle’; and Bro. B. says, that the best way of finding out my true state, is to take the Bible, and let it fall open, and that the first text my eye fixes on will be the mind of God concerning me; for he knows many people who have ‘got religion’ in that way. Upon one occasion I tried this, and the Bible fell open at Matthew chapter 9 — and the first words I saw were, ‘Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven’, which, as you may suppose, gave me strong consolation.” Our readers, perhaps, are little aware that this superstitious practice was very common among the Pagan Romans. The persons who practiced it were called SORTILEGI OR SORCERERS. It is Isidorus who applies this name to those, who, upon opening any book at random, formed conjectures from the meaning of the first line or passage which happened to cast up --- . Thus Pagans and Sectarians prove themselves in bondage to one and the same Master, who, as willing slaves, are led captive at the Devil’s will.

“--- AND THE TIME DRAWETH NEAR ---.”

Jesus warned of some, not truly His, who would arise, pointedly speaking of His second coming, “Go ye not therefore after them” He said. (Luke 21:8) Jesus was not denying that He would return from heaven, but He knew that through declension, matters of Truth would be spoiled by some, through their having “turned unto fables”, and therefore becoming the propagators of truth mixed with error.

Over the centuries the subject of His Personal Return, has been one of debate. The years in the calendar being particularly noted. For example as the important date A.D. 1500 approached there was a mood of expectation in Europe. A friar named Savonarola, coming to prominence, declared that political events in the world indicated that the Apocalypse was almost upon them. The book of the Revelation was referred to, and the date A.D. 1500 was made significant as being “the half-time after the time”, therefore the unrest being experienced was “the Devil set loose for three and a half years” following which “Christ would gain the victory over the Devil.”

Now the year A.D. 2000 approaches, and there is a particular significance being made of this date. A papal bull has been issued (so named after the bulla, or lead seal attached to special Vatican documents). This has been named “Incarnationis Mysterium” and grants indulgences, stating that Catholics can obtain such by making pilgrimages, doing good deeds, or fasting — if only for a day. Mark the millennium by abstaining from smoking and drinking at least for one day has been the message from the Vatican; and there will be indulgences (that is remission of punishment in purgatory) for those who make pilgrimage to Rome for the Holy Year. Of course in this there is no suggestion of a Second Coming of Christ. But since early on in the 19th century some religious denominations have been declaring “the time draweth near”. For example the American Adventists said Christ would return in 1844, and the Seventh Day Adventists who have followed on, are still declaring His Second Coming, saying His return is imminent.

An important national Newspaper has taken up this theme, an extract from which is as follows:-

“--- Advent themes — the end of time, the Day of Judgment, the Christian longing for the Second Coming of Christ — a tension between the “already” and the “not yet,” the urgent notes to “watch” and “wake up”, and prayer that God will

not delay. The Lord's Prayer itself is an urgent, Advent prayer - - - . There is a longing for an End that makes sense of it all. Human beings are made for ends. Only at the end of lives can obituaries be written, and the whole life seen in some kind of perspective - - - . And when the End is known there is a judgment of what life is about, and what it is to be human. - - - The linear sense of the Jewish and Christian scriptures give time a significance and history a meaning. The very first verse of Genesis speaks of a beginning, a shaping moment of creation. The Bible ends with a vision of a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth. At the centre of that new creation is set the lamb of sacrifice. There at the heart of God's life is the face of Christ in whose life Christians believe God emptied himself, identifying completely with his creation, redeeming all time, so that every human life might find there a grace which gives meaning and its purpose. When the Christian Church speaks in language of Messianic expectation of the Christ who will come again in glory, the faith proclaimed is not primarily concerned with describing a descent of Christ from heaven like an astronaut returning to earth after a time in space. What it affirms is there will be a final triumph of the love made known in Christ.

That is the horizon of the history and the End for which Christians long. - - - "

Our readers will note that the above extract having begun on a theme of "the Second Coming", ends with an uncertain and vague note which emphasises a "triumph of love" rather than a specific personal return. How significant and pertinent then are the words of the Lord Jesus concerning "the time (that) draweth near", when He says in the same context, "take heed that ye be not deceived."

A BIBLE CLASS

“... EVERY SCRIBE WHICH ... BRINGETH FORTH OUT OF HIS TREASURE THINGS NEW AND OLD”

Matthew 13:52

In teaching His disciples Jesus used many parables, most of which referred to the promised kingdom of God. We might ask: What is a parable? The concordance states — “a similtude or narrative of ordinary life conveying a moral or spiritual lesson.” An example is seen when Nathan came to David because he had failed so grievously when he ordered Uriah killed in order to take his wife Bathsheba for himself. Nathan used a parable concerning a rich man who took a poor man’s only lamb to make a feast for a traveler, rather than use one of his own many lambs (II Samuel 12:1-4). David’s anger was kindled against this unrighteous rich man and exclaimed:

“... As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die.” II Samuel 12:5.

When Nathan replied: “Thou art the man” (verse 7), David was shocked and quickly perceived his own grievous wrong for which he was worthy of death. In repentance he immediately replied:

“... I have sinned against the LORD ...” II Samuel 12:13. David was forgiven of God, but endured affliction for the rest of his life because of this. How grateful he would be to Nathan for his care and love in gently but clearly warning him through this very telling parable.

In later years, Jesus also spoke in parables to teach of God’s ways, especially concerning the kingdom of God. Discerning this, His disciples asked:

“... Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” Matthew 13:10.

Jesus replied:

“... Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should

be converted, and I should heal them."

Matthew 13:11, 13, 15.

He knew most were not teachable. But to those whose hearts were touched, whose eyes were opened, Jesus said:

"But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."

Matthew 13:16.

To such, "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" are opened.

Jesus then spoke many more parables, saying to His disciples.

". . . Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord."

Matthew 13:51.

Unlike most of those who heard, they could comprehend the "mysteries" and would grow in knowledge and appreciation, because their hearts were responsive and they could therefore store up that precious teaching. Jesus, perceiving their receiving spirit, commended their "hearing" and knew they would be faithful in their witnessing of Him.

". . . Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

Matthew 13:52.

What is a "scribe"? The word means one who writes. Originally the scribes in Israel were those who copied out or wrote down the law and so were well versed in God's word. In an earlier time, Ezra was chosen of God to help his brethren in Jerusalem after their return from Babylonian captivity:

"This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, . . . and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

Ezra 7:6, 10.

He was a "ready" scribe — one diligent and quick to respond, whose heart was prepared to seek and obey the law of God. Therefore, the Almighty used him to encourage his brethren in Jerusalem.

As time went on the scribes as a class became "professional" interpreters of the law, laboring in the letter but far removed from its spirit. Such was the case at the time of Jesus, for they despised and persecuted Him. When Jesus spoke to His disciples of the "scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," He meant one who was touched in his heart and subject to the spirit of the law:

". . . like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth

forth out of his treasure things new and old.”

Matthew 13:52.

A “householder” is a master or head of a house who has responsibility for the things of that house. The word “treasure” involves the thought of a storehouse for valuables, kept safe for future use. An example is a modern-day book entitled “Thesaurus” (Greek for treasure), which contains a store of words, an index of terms helpful in finding information. A faithful scribe then is one who has stored up the valuable words of God and is able to bring them forth from that “storehouse” in time of need. Jesus instructed His brethren concerning the storing up of such treasure:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, . . .

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Matthew 6:19-21.

If one’s heart is fastened upon God and His word, such a heart will become a storehouse for His word — that which tells us what He desires of His people. Paul writes of Moses who gratefully treasured God’s word and showed his faith by:

“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”

Hebrews 11:26.

Through his many experiences of both trials and blessings, Moses valued and built up in his heart and mind a sure hope of salvation, and was able to call upon that storehouse of spiritual strength to help himself and Israel endure the trials which this faith required.

Are we today striving to be faithful servants — scribes — instructed in the word of God, storing up strength in our hearts, ready for the time of trial and affliction? Are we not disciples, like those early ones, given the nourishment of God’s word and the comfort of God’s people as companions? Are we not favored and thus enabled to carry on, receiving each other’s help and example? It is a true treasure now in these evil times, with a sure promise of greater blessing as we hold on, helping one another, all relying on our Elder Brother and our Father’s endless love and mercy.

J.A.DeF.

STATEMENT OF FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP

One of the main ecclesial magazines recently expressed the following, concerning “a basis of fellowship”.

“If we agree that the BASF is an accurate epitome of the first principle teachings of scripture, we are not being unreasonable when we require assent to ALL the doctrines — and agreement to fellowship consistently on that basis — before fellowship can be extended.”

The article then sadly went on to question whether other very important requirements, not in the Amended Statement of Faith, should be equally treated as matters of fellowship. Under the sub heading “Additions to the Statement”, the following comments were made:-

“There is a further point. Sometimes individuals, and occasionally ecclesias as well, wish to include additional matters before they will agree that fellowship exists. The most commonly suggested subject is the question of divorce and remarriage (though from time to time other subjects also arise in this context). What should we do if an individual wishes to elevate this to a first principle teaching — essential for salvation and fundamental to fellowship? It is a subject which has always excited strong feelings, but it has never been treated as a first principle - - - .

As we have agreed not to include it in our Statement of Faith, we cannot make belief on this subject a test of fellowship. Some fellowships do treat divorce and remarriage as a first principle, and individuals who hold that view could also UPHOLD it if they were members of those fellowships. Again, our position in this matter is clear. We do not view divorce and remarriage, or any other Bible teaching which is not listed in our Statement of Faith, as a FIRST PRINCIPLE doctrine. Such subjects must not be introduced to determine fellowship; individuals and ecclesias who wish to do so risk separating themselves from the Brotherhood whose fellowship is based solely on the teachings included in the Statement of Faith.”

We ask the question, is it right to have such a rigid stance? If the Statement of Faith is not to be inviolated, why then is it now called the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith? And if it has been amended once, why cannot it be amended again? What is the more important, a Statement of Faith of mans' compilation, or the Word of God? Conscience is particularly exercised by the expression “- - - the question of divorce and remarriage - - - has never been

treated as a first principle - - - ." We would suggest that if it hasn't, it ought to be.

Consider what happened to the faithful John the Baptist:-

"Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife, for he had married her.

For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." (Mark 6:17-18).

John most certainly thought such a marriage was against a first principle, and he lost his life because he held to this conviction.

Jesus was very clear on what the Spirit required:-

"Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.

And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery."

(Mark 10:11-12).

"Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery - - - ." (Luke 18:20).

The Spirit's declaration through the Apostle Paul is also clear:-

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers - - - ." (1 Cor. 6:9).

Members of an ecclesia who persist in flouting the commandment of Christ concerning marriage cannot be forgiven; therefore while they remain in their wrong association through divorce, how can they be in the way of life? And if they are not in the way of life, how can they be fellowshipped by the ecclesia? We however believe that failure in marriage before knowledge of the Truth, and therefore before becoming responsible, is forgiven at the time of baptism. The ecclesia in that case is required to accept the divorced and remarried as being fit for fellowship.

The principle is clear. If those who flout Christ's commands, knowing full well that they ought not, and persist in their divorced and remarried state, such cannot inherit the kingdom of God unless they repent and put right their wrong. And if they have no hope of the Kingdom through their wrong persistence, how can they remain in the Ecclesia? Is not this a most important first principle, which however carefully drawn up the Statement of Faith might have been, cannot be the excuse of relegating the subject of divorce to a less important place in the Truth's beliefs. The lesson is that a Statement of Faith can indeed be useful; but it cannot take the place of the Word of God.

SIGNS OF HIS COMING

“Beye ashamed, Oye husbandmen; howl, Oye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished.

The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men - - - .

Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.”

(Joel 1:11-12 & 15).

Commentators may relate the above to a figurative expression for past events, and apply the words particularly to the ancient kingdom of Israel. But “the day of the LORD” of the past is but an earnest of a greater day, as the purpose of God with this good earth, approaches its completion.

Man is failing his environment. The world’s natural wealth is being spoiled by greedy over-consumption. The World Wide Fund for Nature has produced the most detailed dossier ever published, revealing an alarming decline of the world’s natural resources.

The world’s forests have been dwindling by 0.5 per cent a year since the 1960’s which is equivalent to an annual loss the size of England and Wales. During this time wood and paper consumption has increased by two-thirds world wide. The wealthier nations are the chief culprits, they exert two and a half times more pressure on the environment than people living elsewhere. There is a considerable decline of fresh-water lakes, rivers and wetlands. The Aral Sea in Asia for example has lost seventy per cent of its water. And this is happening at a time when accessible fresh water is being used in much greater quantities.

Marine fish consumption has more than doubled since 1960. As a result some of the world’s fish resources is also in decline.

But over consumption is not the only problem. There is a great over-pollution factor. Carbon dioxide emissions from motor vehicles and factories has more than doubled since the 1960’s. This pollution does affect trees and wild life as a result; for birds, reptiles and mammals are declining in number.

The ancient record cries out, “beye ashamed, Oye husbandmen - - - .” God gave man “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the

earth." (Genesis 1:28). But God is not prepared to allow mankind to go on being profligate.

It is foolish to disregard the natural environment. When it is decimated man loses the provision for himself which was a feature in God's creative work.

Exploitation also plays very much a part in the deterioration. The more wealthy nations are tempting poorer countries to denude themselves of their natural wealth for the purpose of their obtaining consumer goods from the more advanced nations.

From time to time there have been world leaders who have voiced cautious hopes for an improvement in the lives of all races. The late President J. F. Kennedy made the following comment, having been asked the question:-

"A lot has been written about the waste of American wealth for the production of unnecessary goods. How should the United States use its affluence wisely to live up to its global commitments and to enable her to lead Western society?"

President Kennedy replied:-

"I do think that if we're going to play our role as a great defender of freedom — to meet all of our commitments, to prepare ourselves for a population which is going to be double what we have today — we have to continue to maintain our 'capital structure.' We have to develop our natural resources, build schools and hospitals, homes and recreational facilities and all the rest. And that requires a public effort, not merely a private satisfaction of our needs. That requires the local, state, and national governments to meet their responsibilities. And that's always a struggle because it requires draining off from private consumption, which is immediate, funds for public consumption, which is less obvious to the individual - - - . I would say that we must persuade people that there are certain expenditures in the public sector that must be made — that this is a commitment which must be met - - - ."

Whatever plans President Kennedy had, were stalled by his untimely death; and the consumer society continues to exploit and waste the earth's resources; for there is no government prepared to make a stand that would begin to turn around modern profligate trends.

Into this scenario comes the arms trade, which is run by very rich influential people. The international arms trade is not only a

major factor in keeping twenty five armed conflicts going throughout the world; those who are desperately trying to uphold their political positions by force of arms, find it necessary to allocate a large proportion of their natural products for consumption abroad, to pay for the expensive tools of war which they crave.

The United Kingdom is one of the biggest of these arms suppliers. It is reckoned Britain has nearly twenty five per cent of the global arms market. Human nature however, being what it is; attempts to alleviate the world's ills is likely to operate amongst people who are pulled in more than one direction; especially when arms sales contribute so greatly to the wealth of their respective dominions.

But are the nations ashamed of what, through greed and short term planning, has brought about such global problems, and such an injurious trend? Hardly, for wealth production and profiteering is now made out to be a virtue.

Are not the words of the prophet Joel, then, applicable to this global situation? "Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen - - - ."

Divine intervention is promised, to turn around this modern disastrous course. The earnest in the prophet Joel's message, applicably speaks to ourselves, and for these times:-

"Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength - - - . And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil."
(Joel 2:22-24).

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS

HAMBURG, NEW YORK, Corner Southwestern Blvd. and Pleasant Ave.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.30 a.m.

Sunday Afternoon Class 1.45 p.m.

Midweek: Bible Class: Forestville, Hamburg and Fredonia

Every Third Week: Revelation Study

The annual winter Party is scheduled for February 13th, 1999
God willing.

Much gratitude is felt for the discovery of a Sister's need for surgery, at an early stage. We know that the Father is aware of all our circumstances and we rest upon His merciful will.

J.A.DeF.

MANCHESTER, Ryecroft Hall, Audenshaw.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.00 a.m.

Thursdays: Bible Class 7.15 p.m.

As we move further into this new year, the days of the coming Millennium grow closer. It is a significant time, for the Spirit has declared that "--- in the days of the voice of the seventh angel ---" "there (shall) be time no longer ---."

Time does move on, but time is also running out for "nations, tongues, and kings" of the world's present political systems.