

YOUTH  
and  
THE TRUTH



Practical guidance from the Scriptures  
for Young Brethren and Sisters



## **Preface**

The contents of this booklet were written by a brother E. J. Toms and published by "The Dawn" Book Supply. The original publication contained the following Preface:

The chapters of this booklet originally appeared as a series of articles in "The Dawn" Ecclesial Magazine for 1973/4. They are now set out in this form in the hope that they may be helpful to the young and not-so-young. The aim throughout has been to look sympathetically at the needs and problems of youth and at the same time set out clearly and firmly the scriptural principles and divine standards which all who accept the Truth have declared their willingness to uphold. When we obeyed the call to repent and be baptised for the remission of our sins in effect we made just such a declaration. It has been our endeavour to present the standards not merely in the form, "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not" (though there are many such commands), but as the reasonable way of life of those who have publicly confessed to being "servants of righteousness".

The chapters are now reproduced with a few minor amendments for the benefit of a later generation. Whilst written mainly for the young, they contain helpful advice for brethren and sisters of all ages.

The wisdom imparted to earlier believers is still applicable to life in the Truth today. Whilst our environment may have changed - and for the worse rather than the better - scriptural principles of doctrine and practice remain constant for each and every age.

We have taken the liberty of including an Appendix to draw attention to our responsibilities with regard to Military Service.

It is hoped that those who read this practical scriptural advice may be helped and encouraged to remain separate and distinct from the evil society by which we are surrounded.

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## Introduction

Whilst many would feel that in society around us there is an exaggerated emphasis on youth, its problems and its needs, there can be no doubt that in the Truth these needs and problems are real and, moreover, different from those of an older generation. Inevitably, since most articles and addresses are prepared by older brethren, they are directed primarily towards the needs of their own generation. This is particularly true of exhortation and practical teaching. It does not therefore come amiss to look more closely at this question of "Youth and the Truth".

Youth is an important phase of our lives. It marks the beginning of independent thought and character, an independence frequently demonstrated in ways which an older generation finds difficulty in accepting. It is a time of change: physical and mental changes affect our attitude toward almost every aspect of life. It is a time of abundant energy and enthusiasm for whatever is in hand, a tremendous zest for living. Yet at times youth is smitten by a lassitude and disinterestedness which is the despair of parents and others. This remarkable alternation of mood which is so characteristic of this period of our lives can make life depressingly difficult for all affected by it.

Youth is a time of contradictions: a time of high ideals; and yet that idealism often flounders on the self-centredness which is another characteristic of youth. New feelings, new powers, emotions and desires can be very beautiful and pleasurable but also very disturbing and ugly. Youth is a time of decision. Important decisions have to be made; decisions on a career, on marriage and, most important of all, on our attitude towards the Truth. Yet youth is often ill-equipped to make such decisions and advice is resented.

Youth, then, has its peculiar problems and it is right that we should recognise them and think about them. At the same time it is easy to exaggerate these needs and by so doing inadvertently do more harm than good. Many pass through adolescence with no more difficulty than any other part of life. Some might even resent the suggestion that they need special help. Indeed if we all applied the counsel of Paul we would be so conscious of the needs of

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others that our own needs, whether considered individually or as a group, would be quite unimportant: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2.4).

There is a feature of youth which youth itself overlooks despite its being so obvious. Like every other phase of life it is transient, it soon passes. In a few years youth, as we are considering it now, has gone. Interests and ambitions and even convictions which seemed permanent can soon change completely. We observe this again and again in young people in society around us. A seemingly wild and undisciplined youngster comes to a job straight from school or college. At first one almost despairs of making contact. But in a year or two quite often a complete change takes place. Interests and tastes change. What seemed so important at one time loses all significance. One observes a much greater conformity to the tastes and interests of an older generation. Topics of conversation which would once have been dismissed as belonging to the world of "oldies" takes on a new meaning. Pop music gives place to classical, cars and discussion of the opposite sex to furniture and mortgages and even gardens. A degree of conformity is reached which at one time would have been considered quite unthinkable.

Youth passes more quickly than any other phase of life. Since it is so transient, how necessary it is, especially when seen in the light of the Truth, to make good use of it. We have energies and powers and opportunities which we may not have again. Though transient in themselves, our use or misuse of them can make a permanent impression. Youth is above all else a time of preparation for the future.

This may seem a rather unexciting way of looking at youth. The Truth calls for soberness. Yet at the same time none would deny the very real joy of the strength and vigour of young manhood and the freshness and beauty of young womanhood. These are blessings of a wise Creator - we ought to be able to enjoy life to the full when we are young. Enjoy your youth, but let it not be said, as you look back in a few years time, that you see more to regret than to remember with pleasure. We are reminded of the words of Solomon: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let

thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement" (Ecclesiastes 11.9).

How much is there in the Scriptures to guide us? A great deal. There are examples for both good and bad - Cain and Abel - Esau and Jacob - Joseph - Ruth - David and Daniel. In the New Testament we have a young man like Timothy and, of course, the outstanding example of our Master himself, only 33 years of age when he gave his life on the cross. There is no lack of direct counsel as, for example, in the Proverbs, the letters to Timothy, and in Peter's letters. It cannot be too strongly emphasised, however, that once we have accepted the Truth we are fully responsible to all the commands and principles we find in the Bible. We cannot excuse ourselves from that responsibility on the grounds of our youth. We may reasonably expect our brethren and sisters to make allowance for our youth, our high spirits and to some extent our nonconformity to traditional patterns. We may expect them to make allowance also for our ignorance and inexperience though we ourselves might be reluctant to confess to these particular failings. But we ought not to excuse *ourselves*. Having taken the decision to accept the Truth it is up to us to recognise the nature of its call. We accept it voluntarily. We should have counted the cost. For all of us, young and old, the only sensible approach to life is that put forward by the one we claim to follow: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness".



### **Making the Choice**

Most readers of these words will already have made the choice. Why then consider the making of it? Because it is important that we appreciate that in looking at the Truth we are faced with a choice and in accepting the Truth we have made a definite decision: by deciding to take one road we have effectively rejected

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all others. Moreover throughout our lives in the Truth we shall find ourselves continually faced with further choices all arising from our first decision. Decisions have to be taken, a firm course set; we cannot just drift. To appreciate this is to take the first step towards making the right choice and sticking to it.

Again and again Jesus presented this choice to men and women. He told the young man who wanted to follow him that he could have either his riches or the Kingdom, not both. Another had to choose between following Christ and remaining with his family; Jesus spoke of the broad way and the narrow way, of serving God or serving unrighteousness. The twelve had to choose between following Christ and pursuing their normal occupations. Everyone, men and women, young and old, when confronted with Christ, had to make a choice. Judas, Nicodemus, Pilate, the thief on the cross - to each one the very presence of Christ called for the making of a decision. All were faced with a choice; not exactly the same choice but in every case a very real one. From the beginning this has been so. Eve could have obeyed God; she chose to listen to the serpent. Abraham could have stayed in his house in Ur; he chose to respond to God's call and live in a tent in the land of promise. Even Christ was faced with the same choice between two clearly marked paths. In the wilderness he had to choose between God and Satan; the same choice was with him in the garden of Gethsemane. He could have followed his own will; he chose to submit to his Father's. This decision which Christ had to make is particularly relevant to the circumstances of youth today.

Most of those who come to accept the Truth are "brought up in the Truth". This is an unfortunate phrase for it obscures the fact that whatever our background there comes a time when we are faced with the same decision that Christ had to make. He had been "brought up in the Truth" but his response to it was not automatic. So with us; we accept the Truth not because we are brought up in it but because we choose so to do. This does not mean that our upbringing is unimportant. Far from it. Some have argued that since the child eventually has to decide for himself he should be given the opportunity to know and experience both the way of life associated with the Truth and that found in society around. Then, it is said, the decision is made with a full understanding of what is

involved. Some parents almost apologise to their children for imposing restrictions and discipline and encouraging such habits as the daily reading of the Bible when the child has not chosen such a way of life. Such attitudes overlook two things. In the first place there is only one right choice and the making of that right choice is tremendously important; everything must be done to encourage the choosing of the good and refusing of the evil. Secondly, in making the choice whilst we are free agents we are by no means unbiased. Left completely to ourselves we would almost certainly make the same choice as the majority. Right influences, right guidance and above all right example are tremendously important in helping us to make right decisions.

However, whatever our background, the time comes when we are faced with a decision. To some that time comes in their early teens; to others much later. There can be no rules governing this. Perhaps at the time one is hardly conscious of making a choice. To those who accept the Truth it is simply the obvious thing to do - they cannot conceive of any other choice. To those who turn their backs on the Truth it often appears to be a case of drifting. Whatever appearances might suggest, the fact is that a definite choice has been made; a choice just as real and as far-reaching as was that of Moses when he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season".

The choice is between two rapidly diverging paths - to choose one is to reject the other and to continue to move further and further from it. The apostle Paul, in that chapter which invariably forms part of the baptismal service, emphatically presents the alternatives. "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" John presents the same alternatives in different words: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him". James is even more forthright: "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God". Again and again we are presented with two alternatives. If we ever get to a stage when the choice is blurred, when there is no obvious dividing line, when the paths converge, then the Truth has been lost.

If young people are not presented with this clear choice; if, foolishly, older ones seek to make their message more acceptable by offering them “the best of both worlds” then they are not offering them the Truth. They are not offering them a way of salvation but a way of death. They are not doing them a service: they are deceiving themselves and misleading our youth. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”. This was Christ’s call to discipleship then. That call has not changed and it clearly implies a choice between self and service.

Why do we make this choice? What prompts us to accept one way and reject all others? Probably we could give no simple reason. We accepted what we had been taught; we became convinced it was true; we appreciated that we ought to obey; we wanted to share with our family and friends the privileges of the Truth, to give them pleasure, to give God pleasure by being baptised. At the time we might not have been able to say exactly why we decided to take this step. But as time goes on we shall find the need to be able to say exactly why we did what we did. As we find the Truth brings difficulties, as it involves us in decisions and sacrifices, as we find the need to take a firm line with ourselves and others, we may well seek for a clearer answer to the question - why did I choose this way of life? This reaction is a healthy one for it shows the Truth is making a real impact on our lives. We are conscious of having made a choice and of the need to abide by it. When the question presents itself in this way our answer will depend on our knowledge and experience.

When we are young and, as most are today, well educated, the simple fact that what we believe is undoubtedly true is perhaps the best way of reassuring ourselves. We look at all the solid evidence there is to prove that God exists and that He has spoken to us in the Bible. We look at the evidence for the accuracy and reliability of the Bible to be found in archaeological discoveries. We consider the evidence for inspiration to be seen in the fulfilment of prophecy. We look at the remarkable history of Israel; we dwell on the certainty that Christ rose from the dead. Such evidences, which are regularly explored in our public lectures, can leave no doubt that what we believe is true and that

we have no alternative but to follow the way of life required by that belief.

As our experience of life changes so we build on this basic conviction. We appreciate the Truth more and more as a way of salvation; we appreciate our very real personal need for that salvation. As that appreciation grows so our love for our Saviour develops and matures and our desire to please him who gave so much for us becomes the controlling influence in our lives. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5.15-16). As the sufferings of life affect us so the hope of the gospel becomes the more real: the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth become not just simple first principles but the only answer to our need and the needs of the world. The hope of a perfect life in that kingdom with the full and never-failing health and vigour of immortality assumes a reality which it cannot have when we are enjoying the vitality and freshness of our youth. When our appreciation of the Truth has grown in this way we can have no doubts at all about the wisdom of our choice and no lack of incentives to shoulder the full responsibilities of that choice.

This leads us finally to consider the consequences of our choice. These will be developed in the following chapters, but we cannot think of choosing the way of the Truth without considering the consequences of so doing. The word "consequence" suggests counting the cost rather than considering the benefits of the Truth. It is as well to count the cost. "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish it" (Luke 14.28-30). These words of Jesus follow immediately after the words we quoted earlier: "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple".

We have dwelt particularly on facing up to the responsibilities of our choice, not because youth necessarily needs reminding of

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these any more than older brethren and sisters but because it is in youth that the demands and restrictions of the Truth make their greatest impact at a time when its benefits may not be so well appreciated. Yet those benefits are very real. If the Truth restricts it also guides. It certainly limits our freedom but it frees us from many of the doubts and uncertainties of youth. The path we are treading is certainly a narrow one but we know where it is leading and we know where we are going. We know that it will lead to the complete realisation of the object for which God created us - to give honour and glory to Him. Only in the way of the Truth can we do this and only in doing this can we find true fulfilment.

We have made our choice; we must now make every other decision in life in the light of that choice. If we drift, we drift with the tide and the ebb and flow of human standards will get us nowhere. To change the figure slightly, if we are content to swim with the current we shall land up on the barren rocks where all human endeavour is wrecked. The words of Joshua must surely express our determination: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; ...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24.15).

David made the same choice and expressed the same determination: "I have chosen the way of truth; thy judgements have I laid before me. I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Psalm 119.30-32).



## **Building a Character**

Having chosen to accept God's offer of salvation we were "baptised into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit for the remission of our sins". Our decision to be baptised marked the beginning of a new process. Jesus likened

baptism to a new birth (John 3.3-7). After baptism our life became as new as that of a new-born babe and totally different from all that had gone before.

Outwardly it may not have appeared so. Yet the fact remains that we were born again and such a re-birth must surely, though sometimes rather slowly, lead to an entirely new way of life. After the excitement of the day of our baptism we begin a slow development; in the same way as the new-born babe begins to build a body so we begin to build a character. It is a process which can be just as exciting and as full of interest as the development of a baby, and just as frustrating. Both processes are accompanied by many pitfalls yet it is certain that a loving Father takes as much interest in our development in the Truth as do any parents in their child.

The word "character", though much used amongst us, does not in fact occur in the Authorised Version although it is found in modern versions. There is a very simple reason for this, a reason which stresses the essential idea behind the word. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the King James' version was agreed on this word was not used in our sense at all. Our use of the word is essentially a figurative one which came later. The word "character" was first introduced into the English language in connection with the early printing trade. It was derived (via French and Latin) from the Greek *charakter* from *charassain* meaning to "cut " or "engrave". It was first used in English to describe the instrument used for engraving blocks for printing. Later the word was applied to the marks made by that instrument - the characters. Shakespeare used the word "charaktery" to describe a writing or an impression. Figuratively the word came to describe the impressions received or conveyed by an individual, his or her characteristics, and this led to the broad use of the word "character" to indicate the whole mental and moral make up of a person.

The original Greek word *charakter* does in fact occur once in the New Testament where it is said of Christ that he was "the brightness of his (God's) glory, and the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1.3). The original Greek for "express image" is the word *charakter*. The Revised Version margin renders it

“impress” and the Revised Standard Version and New English Bible as “stamp”. A related Greek word *charagma* occurs in Revelation where it is translated “mark” (Revelation 14.11 “the mark of the beast”).

Why go into all this? Because it emphasises one point very forcefully. A character is an impression made on a person. Character begins to be formed as soon as a child is able to receive and respond to external influences and impressions. One of the worst results of modern educational ideas of self-expression is that a child is so busy expressing itself that it receives no impressions from others. It grows up without character, little better than an animal. Characters are made not born. They are the result of true education, not self-expression.

But what sort of character are we to develop? Christ bore the “impress” of his Father. Paul says of those called according to God’s purpose: “Whom he foreknew he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8.29 R.V.). The word here translated “image” means simply “likeness” but it proves the point we want to make. If we are to be like God’s son we have to take the same impression as he did, the impression of his Father’s character. Similarly to the Colossians Paul wrote, “seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him”. These words take us to the very heart of God’s purpose in Creation and emphasise how fundamental to our calling is the formation of character. That purpose was expressed in the words: “Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness”. Fashioned from the clay man received the physical and mental impress of the Elohim. The moral and spiritual impress he had to develop. This was to be his character, formed by faith and obedience under conditions which were designed to test both.

The formation of character is then fundamental to our calling in Christ. When the time comes it is all that will survive death. When we stand before Christ it will form the basis of his judgement. If acceptable, our character will be perfected and perpetuated in a perfect body in a perfect environment. This will mark the end of a process which commences as soon as we begin to respond to God’s Word. Paul describes this process and its

consummation beautifully: "We all with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3.18 R.V.).

In forming character every one of us has equal opportunity and equal responsibility. However young, or however old, whatever our circumstances, our abilities, our temperaments, our knowledge, our education, whatever the state of our health, the formation of character comes as an equal challenge to all. The emphasis must be on forming character. What stage we have reached clearly depends on many factors, such as age, experience, environment, the effort put forth, and to some extent our natural tendencies. But the actual process of *forming* character is common to us all. Character *building* gives the right emphasis. We recognise the need to develop; we accept the challenge to do so.

We should also recognise that any building in the early stages of its development is almost certainly going to be ugly. To the casual passer-by it may just appear a repulsive muddle and mess. Only the architect can see the beauty of the final building in these early stages. Here is a process which begins in our youth and continues to the end of our probation.

How then do we set about building a sound firm character? Character is built in the ordinary everyday affairs of life; an obvious fact but one easily lost sight of. The challenge of character formation is there where we least expect to find it and where we are least prepared for the test: in our family life, in our everyday contacts with our neighbours and people at work, in our association with our brethren and sisters, in the seemingly trivial, casual things of life. It is here that character is formed and revealed. The great moments in life we can prepare for, the casual moments reveal our intrinsic worth. This is probably what Jesus had in mind when he said: "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement". He surely did not mean that every casual word would be held against us at the judgement seat. It has been suggested that by "idle" he meant "unpremeditated - the spontaneous word which reveals our true character.

How can we see to it that in these ordinary circumstances of life we develop good sound characters? A list of some of the essential requirements follows. It is put forward as a basis for further thought and application. The first two form an essential foundation whilst the last three are important because they are exercises in the Truth in which we all engage as a matter of habit but which, if entered into with a full appreciation of what we are doing and why, must have a powerful effect on our characters. Appended to each item will be found one or more quotations from the Scriptures, using the New English Bible where this seems more forceful, even if the translation is rather free.

- (1) CONVICTION. "Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see" (Hebrews 11.1). This total conviction of the truth of what we believe and the worthwhile nature of what we are trying to do is essential. Any doubts, and we shall lack the incentive to devote ourselves completely to the task in hand. Conversely, full conviction means that we shall be willing without question to accept the demands made upon us and the discipline required.
- (2) HUMILITY. "He called a child, set him in front of them, and said, I tell you this: unless you turn round and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18.3). We must be willing to listen and to learn, to accept God's Word absolutely without question and with no reservations. We should be willing to listen to counsel from brethren and sisters of knowledge and experience. We must be ready, where necessary, to "turn round" and change our ways. Only in this way can we make any progress at all. For every one of us, building this character is more important than anything else in life. We ought to be able to swallow our pride and press on. We must also remember that it is *our* character and *our* destiny that are at stake. We should be able to overlook the bad example of others, even of older ones. Certainly we cannot make their bad example an excuse for our weakness.
- (3) DETERMINATION AND SELF-DISCIPLINE. "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the

air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9.26, 27). It needs determination to discipline oneself as Paul did. Such self-discipline is sadly lacking in most people around us, young and old. They see no need for it. They recognise no principles which would compel self-discipline, they see no need to deny themselves anything which pleases them. We cannot please ourselves in what we say and do. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16.24). Paul listed the positive qualities God expects to see in us: "The harvest of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5.22). Such self-control and self-denial is only possible where there is complete conviction. Only such conviction will enable us to stand aside from the licence of the world. This leads us to consider:

- (4) RIGHT AND WRONG INFLUENCES. "Everything the world affords, all that panders to the appetites, or entices the eyes, all the glamour of its life, springs not from the Father, but from the godless world. And that world is passing away with all its allurements, but he who does God's will stands for evermore" (1 John 2.16,17). "Happy is the man who does not take the wicked for his guide nor walk the road that sinners tread nor take his seat among the scornful; the law of the Lord is his delight, the law is his meditation day and night" (Psalm 1.1,2).

We are surrounded by wrong influences. The way of life and conversation of people around us, the books and magazines they read, the great majority of television programmes, much that comes over the radio or appears in newspaper articles; none of these can help us in the slightest in the development of sound characters. We cannot avoid all such influences, but we would be utterly foolish to expose ourselves to them more than is absolutely unavoidable. We shall naturally be inclined towards such things; it will require effort and self-discipline to refuse them. The only real answer is to expose ourselves on all possible occasions to right influences and to ensure that where we have full control of our environment, as for example

in our homes, right influences prevail. Chief amongst these must be the Word of God, next must come attendance at meetings, and that not just for social contacts but to listen to and think about what we hear. Always think positively and try to extract as much from addresses as possible. Such an effort in itself will prove a valuable contribution to character building.

- (5) CONTROLLING OUR THOUGHTS. “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4.8). Here is a challenge indeed, a challenge which few of us, young or old, rise to as well as we might. Unsavoury thoughts are continually presenting themselves to our minds. Can we, as Christ did, reject them at once, or are we tempted to dwell on them? To contemplate them means almost inevitably that in time we put thought into action, and if we persist in dwelling on such thoughts gradually our sensitivity to the wrongness of those thoughts will disappear. The only complete answer is to follow the counsel of Paul and endeavour to fill our minds with things that are pure and lovely and of good report; not at all easy in our present environment. By our contemporaries we shall be thought “softies” and “goody-goodies” but we are not interested in their assessment of our characters, only in God’s view of the matter.
- (6) DIFFICULTIES IN LIFE. “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us” (Romans 5.3 R.S.V.). Here is an example of the use of the word “character” in a modern version and whilst it may not be a literal translation (neither is the A.V. “experience” for that matter) it is a very suitable choice for it emphasises that suffering has a profound effect on our character. So far we have considered the effort we have to make. But it is not within our power to develop wholly acceptable characters. We need help and God’s help often comes in the form of trouble of one kind or another. “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of

righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 5.11). The emphasis must be on being rightly exercised. We are never too young to learn from the difficulties of life. Mercifully we are often cushioned against trouble in our youth but let us see to it that when we do come up against it we respond in the right way. Even troubles which result from our own folly can still be turned to good account under the overruling hand of God.

Finally we stress three positive and powerful influences for good in our lives.

- (7) READING. “Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind” (2 Timothy 3.16,17). “To you, young men, have I written because you are strong; God’s word is in you, and you have mastered the evil one” (1 John 2.14). “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119.9).

These passages speak for themselves. Nothing can replace the reading of the Word, carefully, regularly and systematically. Traditionally, Christadelphians have always followed the tables prepared by Brother Roberts. It may not be the only way of systematic reading but it is a tradition of inestimable value for it establishes a bond of fellowship between us; it is a discipline we all share and in which we support and encourage one another. If we ever cease to be a Bible-reading community then all hope will be lost.

- (8) PRAYER. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1.5). Prayer is, however, more than asking; it is an act of communion with God. We cannot possibly engage regularly and sincerely in such communion without our character being profoundly affected. We cannot concentrate our minds on seeking God’s forgiveness and praying for strength to overcome and then make no effort ourselves.

- (9) REMEMBERING CHRIST. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Corinthians 11.28). Regularly, Sunday by Sunday, we meet to remember the one who gave all for us. We listen to the exhortation, engage in collective worship and examine ourselves. Our characters must be profoundly affected by all this.

These then are some of the principles governing the formation of a good character. Finally we should remember that both our environment and our natural inclinations are against us. We need to make a tremendous effort and use every help we can. We also need to be prepared to stand alone - certainly in the world and sometimes even in the ecclesia. Our natural tendency is to conform; very few enjoy being different, especially when, as in this case, we are likely to be despised for what we are.

The rewards of a good character in this life may be few though some will respect us and employers may well value us. Our reward must await the future and that reward will be, in essence, the perfecting of that which we have tried to achieve in this life: "...till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ".



### **In the Family**

Family life is of God, a fact which is recognised in all Divine dealings and laws. It is the basis on which God is working out His purpose; it is the subject of some of the most beautiful scriptural figures and analogies. It is within the family circle that most of us make our first contact with the Truth and take our first steps in our walk in the Truth. The family is the basic unit of society: when that unit breaks down society flounders. This is what is happening in our modern western world and it is a trend which must not be allowed to affect family life in the Truth.

Marriage was instituted by God and is the basis of family life: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh". From the love and union of husband and wife springs the love and unity of the whole family, and upon the development of a family from this union rested the entire Divine purpose. From the beginning God's promises were dependent on the formation of a family, for all spoke of the development of a seed. When God would provide a Saviour He gave His Son. Again and again God is likened to a father who loves, cares for and disciplines his children. His purpose is described as the bringing of "many sons unto glory". Christ taught us to pray "Our Father ..." and the writer to the Hebrews said, God dealeth with us "as with sons". Such allusions, and they could be multiplied many times, show clearly how the concept of the family lies at the very heart of the Divine purpose.

In the world around us patterns of life which have been accepted for centuries are being continually questioned and frequently dismissed as mere customs and traditions which have evolved and are still evolving so that the patterns are not necessarily the best way for man to live in society. The concept of the family is one such pattern which is being questioned in theory and denied in practice. With the lowering of the standard of family life those qualities of love, respect, discipline and obedience which are first developed in the family are being lost to society, which, as a result, is in danger of disintegrating completely. It is easy for us to drift into similar modes of thought without realising that in so doing we are in fact departing not from human traditions but from Divine principles.

Let this family unit be preserved amongst us as God intended it should be and as it is clearly portrayed in the Scriptures. Let each member of that unit occupy his or her rightful position as clearly defined in the Scriptures. Husband and father, wife and mother, sons and daughters; all have their responsibilities clearly set out. Only by accepting those responsibilities can we expect to enjoy the many blessings and the happiness which God intended His people should find in their family life.

Character begins to be formed in family life. Despite the closeness of family ties and the natural love and the

responsibilities this brings it is very easy to become careless in our conduct towards each other. We need to remember that once we accept the Truth our relationship with all others in the Truth, including our own family, undergoes a fundamental change, takes on a greater depth and brings greater responsibilities. It is however very easy to forget this. We can be very careful in our conduct towards others, especially our brethren and sisters, and find ourselves careless and even unkind in dealing with our families. We tend to excuse ourselves; at home we expect to relax and just be ourselves. There we expect to be able to express ourselves freely, to say just what we think and to behave as the mood takes us. It is inevitable that the strain of self-discipline breaks down from time to time, and when it does so it is probably at home. But if we are continually giving way to our natural feelings we are not really allowing the Truth to influence our family life as it should and we are probably putting unnecessary strain on family ties. There is a responsibility resting on every member of the family, young and old, to ensure that the high standards of the Truth find full expression in the close circle of the family.

The greatest responsibility must rest on the parents. They are the ones with experience, the ones who have had time to allow the Truth to mould their characters and control their temperaments, the ones with the knowledge and understanding to know what is right and to wisely apply that knowledge. They should set the example of love, patience, common-sense, love of the Truth and diligence in all its activities. There are more commands concerning the duties of husbands, wives and parents than there are for the younger members of the family. These chapters are addressed primarily to youth but perhaps our young people could spare a thought for the difficulties facing their parents in trying to carry out their obligations wisely when so many around them are renouncing the responsibilities of parenthood.

The basis of the family is love - love emanating from the head of the family and permeating all its parts; natural love at first but developing into love for and in the Truth. But love needs to be directed and this is the purpose of commands. Commands in themselves cannot compel obedience, they can only direct a mind pre-disposed by love to obey. This applies to all of us in all

aspects of life but nowhere more than in the home. The love of parents in the Truth must find expression firstly in shouldering their responsibility to bring up their children to honour and obey God; a responsibility which the children should understand and accept. In stating this obligation Paul balances it with a warning against being unnecessarily provocative: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6.4 R.S.V.). Discipline is necessary and throughout the Scriptures there is considerable emphasis on the responsibility of parents to maintain this. The book of Proverbs is notable in this respect: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it". "Withhold not correction from the child". "Chasten thy son while there is hope" (Proverbs 22.6; 23.13; 19.18). In the letter to the Hebrews the writer noted with approval that "the fathers of our flesh corrected us" and Paul writing to Timothy laid down one of the qualifications of a bishop as "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (Hebrews 12.9; 1 Timothy 3.4).

Why stress this obligation of the parents in such a chapter as this? Because it is easy for youth to rebel even after accepting the Truth; they should remember the obligation their parents have before God and accept such discipline where the parents consider it necessary, even if it is irksome and seems sometimes to operate unfairly. Discipline is by no means the only duty of parents but it is one which receives considerable emphasis in the Scriptures and which must be accepted whatever the attitude of those around us. There is equal emphasis on the duty of children to submit to it: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and thy mother; which is the first commandment with promise". "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord". "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old". "A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent" (Ephesians 6.1 and 2; Colossians 3.20; Proverbs 23.22; 15.5). This is a feature of life which the apostle knew would be sadly lacking in the last days when children would be "disobedient to parents" (2 Timothy 3.1 and 2). For young brethren and sisters, however, it is particularly important because of the example set by

their elder brother. At the age of 12 he went to Nazareth with his parents and was "subject unto them".

Clearly, as we pass from childhood to youth and take on the responsibilities of the Truth the parent/child relationship changes. Discipline becomes less necessary, reasoning together takes its place and a common respect for the same principles brings understanding and a sympathetic working together to the same end. The break-down in communication between parent and child which so often accompanies adolescence would be unknown if there were a sincere effort on the part of both parties to show full respect for all the principles of the Truth. We think of other commands which are just as important to family life as to ecclesial life: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another". "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing" (Romans 12.10; 1 Peter 3.8). We expect upsets and frictions in family life due to the very intimacy of life together and the great variations of temperament within the family, but the Truth teaches us that natural feelings must be controlled. We ought not to excuse ourselves; the experience of family life is a valuable part of the development of character, and characters are formed by conscious effort, not by giving way to the feelings of the moment. True "love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ...love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13.4-7 R.S.V.). Youth tends to be self-centred, obsessed with its own needs and problems, but Paul has commanded us, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others" (Philippians 2.4).

One of the symptoms of the present-day breakdown of family life is the readiness with which young people leave home, frequently setting up their own homes or sharing a large house or flat with other young people. The modern educational system is partly responsible for this trend but it has undoubtedly been accelerated by the boredom of much home life. For many the advent of television has almost destroyed home life and young people are glad to escape from an environment they find dull and frustrating.

This should not be true of family life in the Truth, and before leaving home, for whatever reason, we should examine our motives thoroughly and if we still decide to go - perhaps for education or to find employment - let us be sure we are going to be near an active meeting where there are brethren and sisters willing to help us, to offer hospitality and possibly even to accommodate us. To leave home merely because we are discontented or want to be independent means we are rejecting Divine principles governing family life and exposing ourselves to grave dangers in an ungodly world.

The Truth should be a great blessing to family life. In a home where the Truth is loved and honoured, where all are actively engaged in its work, where its commands are respected, where hospitality is extended; in such a home there need be no boredom or frustration but a happy activity and an interesting life. Not all are privileged to live near a meeting where such activities can be enjoyed. For some this presents many problems but they can be and have been overcome. In these days of modern transport it must be possible to get to meetings from time to time. Some families have travelled nearly 100 miles on a Sunday to attend a large meeting for the especial benefit of younger members of the family. Recorded addresses can be easily obtained and made the basis of study and discussion. Friendships can be built up with families in larger ecclesias and hospitality exchanged. It may even be that in such circumstances good can be served by the young person leaving home for a time to live and work amongst brethren and sisters elsewhere. The saying, "Where there is a will there is a way" is very true of such circumstances, always remembering that our steps are ordered of the Lord and that if we commit our way unto Him, He will direct our paths.

Finally, in all our relationships, and not least in our family life, let each of us try to remember that we are all members of a much wider family: "Now are we the sons of God". As members of the family of God we have unique responsibilities and privileges. The Truth, appreciated as it should be, and the counsel of the Scriptures heeded and faithfully followed, provide the foundation for a happy and robust family life. Enjoying this, we may well feel moved to say with the inspired writer of the Proverbs: "Through

wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established”.



### **In the Ecclesia**

What is the ecclesia? Do we really appreciate all that is conveyed by this title? Does our conduct in the ecclesia reflect such an appreciation? What are our responsibilities as younger members of the ecclesia? What contribution has youth to make to ecclesial life? These are the sort of questions we have to consider in this chapter.

We use the Greek word *ecclesia* in preference to the English translation “church” because it conveys the idea of a gathering of people, a people called out and called together. The ecclesia is made up of individuals each one of whom has been called by the gospel. Paul described the ecclesia as “the house of God,...the pillar and ground (R.S.V. bulwark) of the Truth” (1 Timothy 3.15), “the temple of God” (2 Corinthians 6.16) and as “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12.27; Ephesians 5.29,30). Such words show clearly the importance of the ecclesia and of our position in it. They emphasise that ecclesial life, as well as being a great privilege, brings responsibilities to God because we are the temple of God, to Christ as the head of the body and to our brethren and sisters who are members of the same body. The words “pillar and bulwark of the Truth” stress the need for firmness and strength in ecclesial life.

All the above passages show the unique nature of this ecclesial relationship. The ecclesia cannot be compared with any other human society for although its members are still “in the flesh” its origins and its aims are Divine. The youngest of its members must recognise this origin and share its aims. The ecclesia is a

body of people bound to each other and separated from all others by belief of the Truth. The link between us lies in the fact that each one of us has appreciated and gratefully accepted God's offer of salvation through Christ. Each one of us has been "bought with a price" and has accepted the obligation of that purchase: "Ye are not your own, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6.19-20). Every time we meet to break bread we are reminded of this fact and our conduct in the ecclesia should reflect this appreciation. Such a community as this cannot be governed by laws and regulations. Some rules are necessary to govern procedure and to ensure that gross errors of principle and practice are excluded, but they can never ensure a healthy and robust ecclesial life. On the contrary where rules are multiplied ecclesial life suffers because individual responsibility is undermined. The health of an ecclesia depends on the voluntary acceptance by its members, young and old, of the principles of the law of Christ and an honest endeavour to live up to those principles. "For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only use not freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another" (Galatians 5.13 R.V.).

So far all we have said applies to every member of the ecclesia. What of youth: has it any particular part to play, any particular responsibilities? Are there any commands specifically addressed to young brethren and sisters? Have the principles already mentioned any particular bearing on youth in the ecclesia?

Young people in an ecclesia are important and their effect on ecclesial life can be considerable. They are noticed, sometimes critically, more often with gratitude, always with concern. We may suggest three reasons for concern for youth in particular. Firstly, declining standards of life around us have affected youth very greatly. Our young people have grown up in an environment totally different from that of earlier generations. One cannot help but be anxious about the effect this can have on their own characters and their contribution to ecclesial life. Some of the trends observed do little to allay this anxiety. Secondly, history shows consistently that revealed truth has always been gradually corrupted and that this has happened as each succeeding generation has moved a little further from the original standard. Anxiety is reasonable and not necessarily a reflection on this

generation in particular. Thirdly, in the absence of Christ, in a few short years the responsibility and burdens of the Truth will fall upon the shoulders of present-day youth.

For these reasons concern is inevitable and it is not surprising if that concern sometimes appears as a hypercritical attitude on the part of the old towards the young. The same considerations also explain why older brethren and sisters are suspicious of change: new ideas, new trends, up-to-date fashions, modern leisure habits and so on. In the light of past experience, experience which youth does not have, such suspicions are often all too well founded.

So we look at youth in the ecclesia. In what follows it may seem that we are trying to put old heads on young shoulders. To some extent this is true and must be so. Those who are sufficiently mature to accept the Truth must take their position in the ecclesia very seriously. At the same time it would be foolish to say anything which would discourage the high spirits, enthusiasm and overflowing energy which must always be the invaluable contributions of youth to any human activity. Such energies, however, need to be channelled into activities in harmony with the sanctity of ecclesial life.

Of fundamental importance in ecclesial life is the personal character of each of its members. We considered this question of character building in an earlier chapter but we stress it again in particular relation to ecclesial life. We quote some of the words of Paul addressed to two young men concerning their life in the ecclesia:

“Train yourself in godliness”. “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity”. “Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves. Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds”. “So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart” (1 Timothy 4.7 and 12; Titus 2.6,7; 2 Timothy 2.22. R.S.V.).

Our personal character is an individual matter but it has a profound effect on ecclesial life. That is true of the youngest of us.

Next, our conduct in the ecclesia should show respect for the ecclesia itself. Paul described the ecclesia as the "house of God". A consciousness of this must affect our conduct in the ecclesia. Our general bearing, our conversation, our dress, will reflect our respect for the "house of God". Our way of life will be characterised by "reverence and godly fear". It is surely unthinkable that we should appear in the meeting in slovenly dress or with an uncared-for appearance. We must also consider the feelings of all who make up this "house of God". On this very matter of consideration for others Paul wrote: "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour ...Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10.24 to 11.1 R.S.V.). It is natural for youth to be somewhat self-centred and self-opinionated but the Truth teaches us to control our natural tendencies.

An important aspect of our conduct in the ecclesia is our attitude towards older brethren and sisters, and in particular the brethren appointed to speak and exhort in the ecclesia and to administer its affairs. There is much emphasis on this in the Scriptures: "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father". "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5.1,17). "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder" (1 Peter 5.5). These verses form part of the general teaching of Scripture that respect is due from the young to the old. It is true that first century conditions were somewhat different from those of today. Then the elders were sometimes directly appointed by the apostles and often possessed the gifts of the Spirit. Nevertheless the principle must still apply. In our day these brethren have been appointed by a majority of the ecclesia and it is part of our respect for the ecclesia to respect its decisions and those appointed by it. Experience is worthy of respect, especially experience in the Truth, for it involves sacrifice, trial and the bearing of considerable burdens. How is this respect to be shown? One would not wish to

put the clock back to conditions as they were, say 30 years ago, when the elders were often held in such awe as to seem almost unapproachable. That was part of the general atmosphere of the times. Equally it would be quite wrong to go to the other extreme so often evident in society around us. Respect is shown by being courteous and considerate, by listening to what the older ones have to say, both in public and private, and by showing deference to their wishes. Such respect is due to older sisters no less than to brethren.

We believe most ecclesias have found a happy relationship between young and old and where this is not so it is probably as much the fault of the old as the young. There must be a "generation gap" as the principles set out above clearly show, but not the gulf of lack of communication, misunderstanding and disrespect so often conveyed by this expression. The "them and us" attitude so common around us can have no place at all in the house of God. In encouraging a right relationship the elders have as big a responsibility as the younger. Elders have the responsibility of exercising authority and giving firm guidance based on sound scriptural knowledge and experience but not in an overbearing, dictatorial way. Speaking brethren have a responsibility to "reprove, rebuke, exhort" but "with all longsuffering" (2 Timothy 4.2). There cannot be an easy going, tolerant acceptance of all youth's ideas and trends but a continual, carping criticism is no way to raise their standards. Youthful idealism will respond to firm leadership, to clear counsel well supported from the scriptures, provided that it is exemplified as far as is humanly possible in the lives of the elders.

One of the commonest sources of friction between young and old lies in the contrasting attitudes to "new ideas". Youth is energetic and restless, physically and mentally. Many today have their minds developed and stimulated by higher education. It is not easy to direct youthful energies into wholesome channels and to satisfy these physical and mental cravings of vigorous youth. New ideas may be of a practical nature, for example, for preaching the Truth, or to do with scriptural exposition. Whatever they are, if, after thinking about them carefully, any should feel they could offer a valuable contribution to ecclesial life and duty then suggest them to an older brother or sister. If you like, speak to several and

be prepared to listen to their comments, favourable and unfavourable. Do not just dismiss unfavourable remarks as arising from prejudice. Do not dismiss "old ideas" as mere tradition. On matters of exposition "new ideas" will almost invariably be regarded with suspicion for the reasons given earlier in this chapter. Yet at the same time we must all recognise that the Scriptures offer an inexhaustible source of knowledge. The more we read those Scriptures the more we become convinced of the absolute truth of those "first principles" accepted by us all. There can be no tampering with these. But within this framework there is room for much study and exposition. Jesus said, "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). Of "things new" we must be quite sure that they are not only scriptural but also profitable and edifying.

Finally, we turn to the question of work in the ecclesia. The greatest mistake we can make is to stay on the fringe of ecclesial life. We must get involved in every activity that we can. There can be no doubt that the most important task of young brethren and sisters is to prepare themselves for future responsibilities. This they can best do by private reading and study and by attendance at every possible meeting. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2.14). Reading must include the writings of Brother Thomas and Brother Roberts for from them we can best learn how to expound the scriptures and how to draw out and apply the practical lessons they contain. It is impossible to over estimate the importance of reading and studying as much as we can whilst we are young.

Other duties will vary from one ecclesia to another. The giving out of literature advertising the Truth has always been considered a work to which the young can devote themselves. Today some feel it is a very inefficient way of advertising the Truth but until some other means can be found which is more efficient and which involves individual effort this work must go on..... From time to time groups of brethren and sisters have gone out delivering literature in areas where the Truth has never been preached. This is a work which could well be extended.

Let young people not underestimate the value of a letter or visit from them to sick or elderly members of the ecclesia. The pleasure given by such a visit is out of all proportion to the time and effort involved. Old people like to be remembered by the young. Other simple duties need doing and doing efficiently. Many young brethren and sisters have cars; they are often freer than older ones with families and a great deal of good work can be done. Given a willingness to look for work and the preparedness to undertake anything with a willing heart there is a tremendous amount that can be done.

In conclusion, may we all, young and old, take heed to the exhortation of Paul: "For I say unto you, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another" (Romans 12.3-5).



### **In the World**

In all these chapters we have tried to stress the principles underlying our way of life. As we have said several times, our position in the Truth is not governed by mere rules and regulations. Our way of life springs directly from the things we believe; from that faith we confessed before we were baptised. We are governed by principles: principles of belief first and then principles of conduct consistent with that belief. To neglect the latter is effectively to deny the former.

What then are the principles underlying our relationship with the world? What do we mean by "the world"? How are we placed in

it? What is to be our attitude towards it and what sort of response can we expect to find from this world?

When we speak of “the world” we mean, in general, all that surrounds us. People, circumstances and conditions outside the narrow circle of the Truth make up the world. There seems to be a tendency to react against this attitude; to regard it as rather old-fashioned and self-righteous. In fact, however, this use of the expression is a perfectly scriptural one and if we allow ourselves to forget this we shall place ourselves in a dangerous position. Consider a few verses out of the many we could quote from the writings of John alone. Take some words of Jesus first:

“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15.19).

“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17.14-16).

In his first letter John wrote:

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3.1).

In all cases the original Greek word translated “world” is *Kosmos* and it is a useful exercise to take down a concordance and turn up all the passages where it occurs in the writings of John. This will give you a very clear conception of what the world is and how we stand in relationship to it. Basically, the word means “order, arrangement or system of things”. In its broadest sense it comprises the whole of this present order but because this order is almost entirely based on human concepts arising from human thinking, the thinking of the flesh, it applies particularly to this order in its alienation from, and opposition to, God. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world

passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever". Because this is the nature of the world, therefore, John says: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2.15-17).

In these words we have a clear assessment of the world and of our position in it. A great gulf exists between ourselves, as the servants of God, and the world by which we are surrounded. There can be nothing in common between these two classes. This has been true from the days of Cain and Abel. In God's sight the world has always been sharply divided into two opposing camps: the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the children of light and the children of darkness, those who walk in the spirit and those who live according to the flesh, those alienated from God and those who have become reconciled to Him; one group related to death, the other to life. Between these two groups there can be no real agreement and no compromise.

These are the basic principles we all accept and which we understood to a considerable degree when we made the decision to accept the Truth. We accepted that thenceforth we would be part of a small minority alienated from the majority in almost every aspect of life. How do these principles work out in practice? We have to live and work in this world, to mix with people in it and even be on good terms with them; in a phrase we often use, in the world but not of it. How can we live like this? To a considerable degree this is a matter for our own conscience, guided by such principles as we have set out, but the purpose of these chapters is to give practical guidance.

Clearly the first requirement is that we should be in this world only to the extent that is absolutely essential. The command: "come out from among them, and be ye separate ... and touch not the unclean thing" has to be applied literally and physically. This means we shall escape from "the world" as much as we possibly can, being in it only to the extent that is absolutely essential. If we are at work this presents no great problem. We can serve our employers conscientiously and diligently for the required number of hours and then leave for our homes. If we are students the situation is not quite so simple. We shall have to put in extra

hours of study; facilities at our place of study may tempt us to stay on there but we would be well advised to study at home as much as possible. We may be away from home, though this is to be avoided if possible. If it is unavoidable then we shall be well advised to look for "digs" rather than live in or find a room. Sharing a flat has become very popular amongst young students but is out of the question for a brother or sister of Christ. They would find themselves in a totally alien environment the whole time and would find this an almost intolerable strain on their faith.

The student away from home faces a severe test anyway and every effort must be made to protect our faith and way of life by keeping ourselves to ourselves as much as possible and seeking the company of brethren and sisters to the utmost extent that time and opportunity permit. Once we begin to break down the barriers we shall find it increasingly difficult to know where to draw the line. If one elects to leave home then both the young student and the parents will have to shoulder the extra strain and responsibility involved. Better to give up our studies than find the strain imposed too much for our faith.

Knowing what the world is, it is evident that its social life is right out of the question. What do we do with our lunch hours? They can provide an excellent opportunity for profitable reading. What about after hours? Are we tempted to linger, to accept the invitation to "come and have a drink" - very popular amongst young people today? Are we tempted to want to show ourselves "with it" and not too "square"? If we are, let us remember the principles considered earlier. If its social life is out of the question then its entertainments are even more so. The world is based on the "carnal mind" and especially is this true of the modern world of entertainment. We cannot conceive of any brother or sister sharing in them. The world needs them, we do not. The world only has the present with its insatiable desires; we have the hope of total and permanent satisfaction in the future. Even its cultural interests and activities have their dangers for they can easily turn us from the primary aim of our lives and once we lose sight of this we are in a very weak position. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God" must be our controlling motive. It is distressing to see parents introducing television into the home, often with the plea that "the children need it". It is another barrier broken down; we have

brought the culture and entertainment of the world into our homes, the very place where we should be able to escape from the world and take refuge in the things of the Truth.

However we cannot escape from the world all the time. It was not God's intention that we should. How then are we to conduct ourselves? Paul said we should be "blameless and harmless children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" (Philippians 2.15 R.V.). Let us always try to remember that we are aliens in this world, "strangers and pilgrims". "Here we have no continuing city". That this is so should be obvious to all by our conversation and way of life. We must not be afraid to be different for if separation means anything at all it means being different; different in the things we talk about; different in our views on almost every topic of conversation; different in our habits, our attitude towards other people; different in our dress. "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed" wrote Paul.

We are not different for the sake of being different but because the difference arises inevitably from our position in the Truth. We think of scriptural examples: Daniel immediately springs to mind. Almost alone in an alien environment he was totally uncompromising, absolutely firm and determined in the stand he took; hated by some, but highly esteemed by others. We think of Jesus: "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners". We think of Peter and John: "they (the Jewish leaders) took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus". It should be obvious, especially in this modern world, that we are Christ's and "have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts". It should be obvious in our attitude towards other people and especially to those of the opposite sex, young and old. It should be obvious in our conversation and the way we dress; our whole demeanour should show that we are "a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2.9).

Conformity is no part of our calling in Christ. We have come across those who advocate conforming as much as we can in order to show people that we are not cranks but perfectly normal human beings and that despite our peculiar beliefs we still have

much in common with everybody else. To adopt such an attitude is, effectively, to deny Christ. "Lights in the world", "the salt of the earth", "a peculiar people" - this is the way the Scriptures describe our position. We must preserve an awareness of this fact, not in any spirit of self-righteousness but with the humble conviction that we are a greatly privileged people and, as such, must shoulder our responsibilities. People must see that there is complete consistency between what we preach and what we practise. They may laugh at us, think we are fools, stupid innocents, but what does it matter if the only real fault they can find with us is that which they found with Daniel: "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God".

Such a way of life will not be easy; it will be more difficult for some than for others but the more we read the Scriptures the more we shall become convinced that this is the only way of life open to those who would please God. Let us never forget the very serious words of James: "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4.4).

We have spoken generally of our non-conformity with the world. It surely goes without saying that the unpleasant things in the world must be rejected completely: the foul language, the obscene stories, literature and pictures, the sensual dress, the undue familiarity between the sexes. All these are commonplace in the modern world and we can only turn our backs on them completely. If we are made to feel uncomfortable, does it really matter? When we accepted the Truth we knew it wasn't going to be easy. We recall the words of our hymn, "There is a battle to be fought, a victory to be won". The Truth is a challenge. In no sphere of life is this more true than in our contact with the world. The world is there to be overcome "for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world". In this battle let us find strength in the assurance of the one whom we have decided to follow: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world".

You will have noticed we have quoted many scriptural passages. This is deliberate. There will be times when you will wonder, is this really the life the Truth requires of me? There will be those who

will advocate and even set a lower standard. Let the Scriptures be your guide.

Another way in which we shall have to show our difference in this modern world is in our attitude towards our jobs and our employers. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men". This means conscientious work, no time-wasting, a willingness to take responsibility, absolute honesty and openness, respect for those over us. Again, we stress, we must be completely unmoved by the attitude of those around us.

We have necessarily stressed our separation from the world but, of course, we have responsibilities to those around us. Our first responsibility is to let our light shine by word and deed. Again, some find this more difficult than others. The real answer is to try to remember that, whatever *they* might think, *we* know that we have something of inestimable value to offer. Our way of life must be completely consistent with the message we offer. It is no good talking about the early coming of Christ if we appear to be just as engrossed in the things of this life as are our neighbours. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven". Our next responsibility is to "do good unto all men". We are limited in what we can do, firstly by our need to preserve our separation and secondly by the demands which the Truth makes upon our time. Yet we would be wrong to so isolate ourselves that we appear to be oblivious to the needs and anxieties of those with whom we work. We may not be able to do a great deal of active social work for the reasons just given but it is surprising how comparatively little things are appreciated - the kind word, the sympathetic enquiry, the ready ear to listen, a short visit to one in hospital, a brief note or small gift; these little things which amongst ourselves are commonplace often mean a great deal to people in the world.

In all this let us not forget the example of the one we profess to follow. Jesus was in the world, mixing with all types and conditions of people, sharing their meals, kind, considerate, doing good to all yet always separate from them. He did not mix to enjoy their way of life but to help and to shed the light of the gospel; he made no compromise at all with the evil in the world but rather reprovved it. Let us consider him; "Consider him that

endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds". Let us try to see our Master in our position; we shall find decisions easier and we shall know that inasmuch as we try to follow his example he is with us in all our efforts: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world".

One final thought. Apart from our obligations to preach the Truth and do what good we can, our attitude to the world must be very largely a negative one - a question of abstaining from evil. We cannot, however, live a life of negatives. Separation from the world can only be positively achieved through total involvement in the Truth by a life of active service and determined character building. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good".



### **Courtship and Marriage**

*"I always felt that marriage was a something which lay in my path, as a wall that had to be climbed, or a bridge that had to be crossed, before I could enter upon the earnest work of life".*

So wrote Brother Roberts in his autobiography. He was married on his twentieth birthday to a sister eight years his senior; a thing, he said, they never regretted. Some further words of his are worth quoting: "Thinking of John and Jesus, 'they were eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake', as also Paul; but there is variety in the tools used as well as in the work of God. In my own case (if I have been a tool) I felt it was inevitable that I must, like Peter, 'lead about a sister - a wife'".

From their earliest days in the Truth, young brethren and sisters are very much aware of each other's presence in the ecclesias. This awareness brings its pleasures, can be exciting yet is often disturbing. It springs very largely from our natural make-up. Knowing the Truth we have learnt to be suspicious of natural

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feelings uncontrolled by the Word of God. Yet at the same time we know that this natural affinity between man and woman was implanted by God when He formed woman as He did. We also know that this affinity has been perverted and abused from very early days. We know this from our reading of the Word and from our knowledge of life around us.

What course then are we to adopt if we want to please God and find happiness for ourselves? There are four possibilities before us.

We can:

- 1) Just follow our natural instincts.
- 2) Follow the ways of many people around us.
- 3) Follow the advice, and, we hope, the example of a previous generation.
- 4) Be guided by the Scriptures.

The first two we can dismiss. They are not possibilities for those who have been baptised into Christ. We know the Truth - we know what our natural instincts are. We know that people around us are very largely controlled by these. Most modern young people know nothing else. Here then we have no guidance.

What of the third possibility? The problem here is that on some matters, and on this matter particularly, there is a strong tendency to feel that the views of the previous generation are old-fashioned - the result of a Victorian style upbringing and a somewhat puritanical attitude towards relations between the sexes. All of us are to a considerable degree the products of our age. Ways of thought and action ingrained in us when young become part of us. We hold to them as something stable in an unstable world. Every generation has tended to question the accepted ways of an older one but none more so than this. The question is, how far are accepted standards a reflection of scriptural principles? So we are left with the last possibility as the safe course to adopt - be guided by the Scriptures.

First we will look at marriage, what it is and its place in God's plan for the human race. Then we shall be able to see the friendship and courtship which precede marriage in a right perspective. Our

view of the nature of marriage must affect our whole attitude towards the relationship between man and woman, boy and girl..... We can summarise the main points as follows:

- (1) Marriage was instituted by God (Genesis 2.24).
- (2) Its prime object is companionship, the woman being formed to help the man (Genesis 2.20).
- (3) The way she was formed emphasised the unique nature of this relationship; far removed from the mere mating of animals (Genesis 2.21-23).
- (4) Marriage was intended to bring joy and blessing into this life. Out of many references see for example Proverbs 5.18 and 19; 18.22; Isaiah 62.5; Revelation 19.7.
- (5) Marriage was clearly defined by God. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2.24). This definition is important. A man takes a woman and leaving his own family circle establishes with her a new bond, a new home and the beginnings of a new family. The man and his wife form a new and permanent relationship which now takes precedence over all other family ties and which excludes all others from the sublime intimacy of their union. This is marriage as divinely constituted. Anything less than this is not marriage according to God's law.
- (6) Only within this bond can the full intimacy of relations between man and woman even be contemplated. Outside marriage such relations are fornication or adultery (Hebrews 13.4 R.V.).
- (7) The transgression of Adam and Eve affected particularly their physical relationship. (Compare Genesis 2.25 and 3.7).
- (8) Human nature uncontrolled by God's law has perverted and abused this physical bond between the sexes. This is evident from Scripture, from history and from the world by which we are surrounded.
- (9) Marriage can only be restored to anything approaching its full beauty by observing Divine principles.
- (10) The marriage bond can only be broken by death<sup>1</sup> (Matthew 19.6; Romans 7.1-3).
- (11) Marriage can only be "in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7.39; 2 Corinthians 6.14).

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<sup>1</sup> or fornication (Matthew 19.9)

- (12) Within marriage the relative positions of husband and wife are clearly defined (Genesis 2.16; Ephesians 5.22-33).

Now, of course, when a young brother and sister are first attracted to each other they do not immediately think of marriage. There are, however, other principles which affect them from the very first time that a young couple “go out” together and indeed from their earliest contact in the ecclesia. Foremost amongst these is the simple yet profound fact that they are both children of God..... The young brother is not just another boy or the sister another girl. Each has been individually called to be a brother or sister of him who died for each one of us. Each has a unique dignity and is entitled to the love and respect that such a position demands. Each should endeavour by dress, demeanour and conduct to uphold that dignity and attract that respect. Such dignity is by no means incompatible with lightheartedness and fun as occasion permits but it does give us a fundamental standard by which to measure and control our ways, our words and even our dress. And it gives us a firm basis on which to build a more intimate relationship.

It is natural to seek to attract the attention of the opposite sex. A pretty face, an attractive figure, a manly voice, good features; these are certainly not to be despised; they are God’s gifts but to be used with discretion. “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised” (Proverbs 31.30). “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement” (Ecclesiastes 11.9). We cannot please ourselves how we behave, how we attract another. One of the opposite sex who seeks to attract, or is attracted by, a superficial and perhaps sensual appearance is not likely to prove the best of life-companions. At the same time it is recognised that many young people pass through such a phase and emerge none the worse for it.

Casual relations are common in the world. In the Truth friendships do not always ripen into love, even love does not necessarily lead smoothly to marriage, but we can never play fast and loose with each other’s feelings, and never be casual in our bestowal of

tokens of affection. A boy's feelings are all too quickly aroused, a girl's can quickly run very deep - to play with such feelings is not consistent with true love and respect for each other. It is not consistent with our position as children of God.

Don't be in a hurry to rush these early stages of budding romance. We all vary: some are married within a year and "live happily ever after"; others stay good friends for a long time and then quite suddenly feelings deepen. The early months of developing friendship and closeness can be a delightful period of growing discovery and understanding with the freshness and relaxed approach of youth and without the complications of deep emotional involvement which comes later.

Do not exaggerate the importance of sexual feelings and do not let thoughts dwell on physical contact and lovemaking. When the time comes for their full experience in marriage they will be all the more wonderful for having been kept in the background during courtship. This will not be easy when sexual feelings are continually being stimulated by our environment, when it is natural to respond to that stimulation and when we are continually being told by the world that what is natural is acceptable. Again, we stress, we know what the Scriptures say about the natural feelings. They must be brought into subjection to the will of God. It is a pity the word "self-control" does not occur in the Authorised Version for it expresses just what is required in our lives. It occurs in modern versions as a translation of a Greek word meaning "self-restraint, continence". For example, we read in the Revised Standard Version that Paul "argued about justice and self-control and future judgement" (Acts 24.25); he listed "self-control" as one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5.23). Again he wrote, "Do you not know that in a race all runners compete but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things" (1 Corinthians 9.24-25). Modern psychology labels self-control "repression" and tells us it is harmful to our personality. Many believe this because it suits them so to do. We must repudiate all such ideas as expressions of "the carnal mind", coming from that heart of man which "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked".

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Such is our natural variation that some will need to exercise more self-control than others but the same standards apply to us all and all will need to take positive steps to avoid circumstances, surroundings, literature, music and dress which will stimulate our natural feelings. Remember, sexual relations outside marriage are contrary to God's law; we ought not to expose ourselves to temptation to break that law. Concentrate on spiritual values and real companionship and all will be well.

Much of this might seem a rather negative approach to courtship. Where is the wonder, the joy, the spontaneity of love between boy and girl? Must we be so busy exercising restraint and self-control that the sheer delight of being "in love" is taken from us? Certainly not, but we have felt it necessary to stress this aspect in the light of modern circumstances. Once we have accepted these Divine standards and determined in our hearts that, with God's help and the prayerful co-operation of each other, we will hold to them, then we will find temptation greatly lessened and we shall feel free to enjoy the beauty which true love in the bonds of the Truth brings into our lives.

What can we say positively? Let friendship and companionship develop naturally into love one for the other. Keep the idea of companionship before you all the time, sharing interests and activities, aims and ideals. Above all share the Truth. Keep your companionship within the circle of the Truth. Meet as much as possible in the company of brethren and sisters (young and old) and your own families. This is where we show our true characters and come to appreciate each other's worth. Work together in the meeting; take an interest in each other's activities - the sister in the brother's studies of the Word and preparation of addresses, the brother in the sister's tasks. Share such activities as visiting the sick and the aged. When alone together give the reading of the Word its rightful first place. Under modern conditions there are many opportunities to be alone together but it is a great mistake to become too engrossed in each other. This is not the way to true love and real happiness. The happiness we derive from each other's company is enhanced by sharing that happiness with others. Keep spiritual values and ideals to the fore and the things of which we wrote earlier will find their rightful place.

In all relations with each other try to preserve the standards of courtesy, kindness and gentleness which Christ's commands require. Especially does this require the boy to show tenderness and respect for the girl, and, equally important, the girl to graciously accept such expressions of regard. Again this is not easy in our modern environment. Acts of respect and courtesy once freely given and graciously accepted have fallen into disuse. Concepts of "the gentler sex", with the man to support and cherish have given place to "equality of sexes" and "woman's lib". These are not scriptural attitudes and life together will be the richer for the observance of "old-fashioned" courtesies.

So our companionship develops. We become engaged, we plan our marriage. As we read the Scriptures daily the many references to the delights of marriage take on a new meaning. As we read the commands and principles relating to marriage and the Divinely ordained position of husband and wife we long for the day when we shall have the opportunity and privilege of applying them: the husband to love his wife "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"; the wife to submit to her husband "as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5.22-23). In such principles we have the true basis for real happiness together. Life together will bring its problems but where there is mutual respect for each other and true humility and a desire to please God and attain the Kingdom, in the very overcoming of these problems characters are strengthened and love deepened.

Two final points. Marriage is not an end in itself. It is an experience limited to this life. It must be seen as part of our preparation for the future and its joys as one of those things added to us if we "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness". But though this unique relationship will pass, the companionship which is the essence of true marriage will be extended to embrace all the perfected children of God "that they all may be one".

Finally, we must all be aware that every experience of life, joyful and sad, could be interrupted at any moment by the coming of our Master. In courtship and early marriage our thoughts are very much on the things of this life. Yet we must try always to keep all present experience in its right perspective. When the writer was courting it was war-time and the days of indiscriminate bombing in

South London. Life was very insecure; when we said our goodbyes we literally did not know whether we would meet again in this life. That is still true but easily overlooked. This is not a morbid thought: it is a thought designed to help us keep life and all its experiences in a right perspective. We look, above all things, for "the marriage supper of the Lamb". As we find God-given happiness in love and marriage now, let us not lose sight of the joy to come:

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready".



### **Leisure**

Man's need for a change and a rest from everyday toil was recognised by God in the beginning and ample provision for such rest was incorporated into the law given to His people Israel. Once a week the Israelite rested on the seventh day, once a year in the seventh month he enjoyed seven whole days break from routine and once every seven years a whole year passed without his engaging in his normal labour of tilling the fields. However, the Israelite could not just please himself what he did during these periods of relaxation; the nature of his recreation was clearly defined. The rest should have given him great pleasure and sent him back to his labours refreshed but only the spiritually-minded amongst them would have really appreciated it. For most such God-given rest became a burden because they could not please themselves. Yet it was never God's intention that His provision should be a burden. It was His desire that man should appreciate the great benefit to be derived from resting on the Sabbath day and seeking to please God as he did so. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable;

and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isaiah 58.13-14).

These words immediately challenge the general attitude towards leisure. Surely, it will be said, the essence of leisure is being able to do just what we want to, to seek our own pleasure, to escape from restraints, to "let our hair down" and "do our own thing". This is true for most people but it cannot be true for those who really appreciate the Truth. For most people their leisure is a way of escape from the responsibilities of life; for many their leisure hours are the most important part of their lives. They feel free to indulge anything they fancy. We are not in this position - we cannot expect to be and should not want to be. As we have said several times in the course of these chapters we know what human nature is and we know where its natural instincts will lead us. When it relaxes and casts off restraints it will inevitably turn to evil. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?". We are not free to just please ourselves: "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in you spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6.20).

No matter where we are or what we are doing our lives are controlled by this principle: we are not our own, we are God's, purchased by the precious blood of Christ. We cannot just lay the principles and requirements of the Truth aside and when we have satisfied our cravings return to them. Every form of leisure activity must acknowledge God. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10.31). "In all thy ways acknowledge him" (Proverbs 3.6). "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (2 Thessalonians 5.18). Any activity for which we cannot honestly give God thanks must be highly suspect, to say the least. Ideally, even our "pastimes" should have a positive contribution to make to our spiritual life.

In the light of such principles as these some of the forms of recreation in which some brethren and sisters, young and old,

engage, must be highly questionable. A minority are questioning basic concepts of our way of life in the Truth in the mistaken impression that they are merely traditional views. Some are challenging the need for separation, forgetting the fundamentally evil character of our nature and natural desires, denying the need to submit at all times to the rigid nature of the commandments of Christ. There have always been such. We must not allow the views of a minority to be taken to represent the whole nor to undermine firm scriptural standards. If we do we shall finish up like Israel in the time of the Judges: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes".

In the second chapter of this booklet it was stressed that in accepting the Truth we had made a deliberate choice. That choice affects every aspect of our lives and our leisure time is no exception. We cannot have the best of both worlds. Under modern circumstances all of us, young and not so young, need reminding of this. We have been called to self-denial not self-indulgence; called to come out from the world completely and not go back into it whenever we feel like it; called to "touch not the unclean thing" and be always in readiness for the coming of our Master. "But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites" (Matthew 24.48-51).

The Truth does not call us to gloomy asceticism but it does control the way in which we enjoy ourselves. We should learn to be grateful for that control; it spares us much of the anxious craving and disillusionment experienced by those around us and leads to real happiness and contentment.

Clearly our leisure will be limited. The Scriptures lay great emphasis on diligence both in the service of God and in the things of this life. "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5.15,16 R.V.). "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich. He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest

is a son that causeth shame" (Proverbs 10.4,5). "The sluggard burieth his hand in the dish; it wearieth him to bring it again to his mouth" (Proverbs 26.15 R.V.).

On the question of the right allocation of time to leisure and the right use of that time no two people would agree. There can be no hard and fast rules and we cannot judge one another. Some can maintain an intensity of activity which would result in a nervous breakdown in others. What is relaxing to one induces strain in another; what "recreates" one almost destroys another. We are all individuals with varying needs and temperaments yet we must all bring ourselves into subjection to the principles of the Truth. We cannot make our temperaments an excuse for going contrary to those principles. One may be tempted to indulge himself in a way which is no temptation to another but again he cannot excuse himself for readily giving in to that temptation. Again our circumstances vary tremendously: some are members of large ecclesias with ample opportunity for shared activities, others are in isolation. Some prefer to be alone; others cannot bear it. We cannot therefore make rules and cannot judge one another but there are clear principles to which we are all responsible.

We will now look at various forms of leisure activities and try to apply scriptural principles to them.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE. All need exercise, yet modern life is largely sedentary. Social clubs with the facilities they offer are out of the question. For those in or near large ecclesias Saturday presents an opportunity of getting together for walking and for games. More could be done by young people themselves to organise such activities. There can be no doubt that walking with its opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the country, to reflect and to converse, is the ideal form of exercise. Christ and his apostles must have spent many hours walking; not as a leisure exercise, truly, but nevertheless it presented opportunities for conversation and reflection which we sadly lack. Walking can be enjoyed all the year round but otherwise winter activities present a problem. Few have the space and facilities for suitable indoor games. Some have found country dancing enjoyable although this has given offence to others. In the opinion of the writer the danger lies not so much in this particular form of dancing as in the extension

of such activities to include undesirable forms. Much modern "dancing" is highly objectionable and some older forms were little better. Physical exercise is important but let us not forget Paul's words: "Bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4.8 R.V.).

READING. This is a common leisure occupation with young people around us - especially those who are students. They read anything and everything from the most abstract works on philosophy to the most depraved novels. Most of such reading matter can have no place at all in our lives. It is written to satisfy the needs and desires of minds which are totally alienated from God. They will undermine the influence of the Truth in our lives. We face an uphill task in acquiring and developing a taste for spiritual things. Every time we pick up literature designed merely to please "the carnal mind" which is "enmity against God", we take a step backward and make it that much more difficult for ourselves to develop spiritually. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8.5). "All that is true, all that is noble, all that is just and pure, all that is lovable and gracious, whatever is excellent and admirable - fill all your thoughts with these things" (Philippians 3.8 N.E.B.). If we remember such principles as these we shall be very careful what we pick up. If we develop a real love for God's Word and a taste for books which help us to understand and appreciate that Word the more, we shall find other reading matter at best shallow and at worst repulsive. If we are content merely to indulge our natural tastes we shall not develop spiritually and "they that are in the flesh cannot please God".

MUSIC. This has nearly always played an important part in the lives of God's servants and we know that it will do so in the future. It would be foolish to pretend that so-called "classical" music is the only acceptable form. In any case such music is a development of the last 400 years or so. The music of the Scriptures would have been totally different and probably sound quite unmusical to our ears. What music we enjoy is very much a matter of taste. That being said, we are not left without guidance in the development of our taste. Much of the popular music so beloved of young people must be unacceptable because, as with the literature they read, it

appeals to the worst in human nature. The words are suggestive or at best trivial. Its rhythms and the movements associated with those rhythms are not conducive to spirituality. Its associations, for example, the discotheque, are far removed from the atmosphere of the Truth. We need to be selective; we need to know why we choose one thing and reject another. This applies to every aspect of our lives and not least to our leisure activities. Young people particularly need to remember that modern music, like modern literature, has developed in an age that is almost totally devoid of spiritual values. It can only be an expression of the carnal mind and must be regarded with the greatest suspicion.

RADIO AND TELEVISION. These can be very insidious in their influence and are as great a danger to the old as to the young, if not greater. Thirty years ago the radio was greatly frowned upon by brethren and sisters; many still reject it completely as being a worldly influence they would rather keep out of the home. Television is rejected by most because its influence is more powerful than that of sound alone and because so few of its programmes have anything to offer the servant of God. At best they can become complete time-wasters, at worst gradually lead us to acquire tastes and habits which squeeze out the Truth. As with reading, we shall be wise if we avoid all forms of seeing and hearing within our control which will not help us in our battle against the mind of the flesh. Furthermore, we must not deceive ourselves into indulging our natural tastes in the privacy of our own homes whilst hypocritically criticising others for activities in the world. We must never forget that all such "entertainments" are designed for those who have neither the knowledge nor the hope that we have.

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES. Many find an outlet for their energies in practical activities - "do-it-yourself" projects. Young brethren in particular enjoy playing with their cars or their "Hi-Fi". Some turn to and help their parents with decorating and structural work in the home. Such activities have the advantage that they are useful in later life and can be turned to good practical account on behalf of others. Many young people are already active in this way and there is scope for further activity and organisation. Working together with those who share our hopes and ideals is a happy and useful way of spending our leisure hours. Others take up hobbies

like photography and sailing. Wholesome as they may be, all such activities need watching; they can consume a lot of time and money - both assets given us by God primarily for use in His service.

This last point brings us back to general principles. We must put first things first. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness". We are not here to please ourselves. We are runners in a race - to look back means almost certain failure; we are soldiers on service - "no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Timothy 2.4). "Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2.12). This may seem a hard approach to the question of leisure but we are convinced that it is the only scriptural approach. If we are to make a success of life in the Truth, and there is no point in obeying the Truth unless we have this as our primary aim in life, we must put these principles first, above every other consideration.

Our real leisure is to come: in the Kingdom. This fact alone must help us both in allocating time to and deciding the nature of our relaxation now. What do you think will be the pleasures of the Kingdom? How do they compare with what you are enjoying now? Are they compatible?

Like many of the problems of youth this one of leisure very quickly solves itself. Within a few years the pressures of life increase, we marry and have homes and families, we become more and more involved in the work of the Truth, we find little time for leisure activities and when we do we find it in the wholesome joys of family and ecclesial life. We shall still have our temptations, still need to watch our step, but the opportunities for indulging ourselves will be less. Moreover we should be so developing spiritually that we are no longer so disposed to indulge ourselves but become an example to the next generation in both word and deed.

Finally, let us never forget the example of our Master. Consider his diligence, his self-denial, his sacrifice; consider his form of "recreation": "And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray". Sometimes he invited his disciples

to join him there: "Come ye apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat" (Mark 6.31). In the midst of our modern complex and sophisticated life let us not lose sight of the essential simplicity of Jesus' call:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls".



### **Future Development**

In looking to the future there are three aspects we must consider:

- (1) Our own personal development.
- (2) The preservation of the Truth and ecclesial life.
- (3) The almost certain cutting short of our lives by the coming of our Master.

Looking at the first aspect we pick up a point stressed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter. We have made a definite choice and deliberately set our feet on a clearly defined path. There can be no going back. Either we make a success of our life in the Truth or we are dismal failures - we cannot retrace our steps; neither can we compromise. "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other". Given the necessary determination and faith in God we can and must succeed. But we have to have a strong desire to succeed and be prepared to bring every aspect of our lives into subservience to that overwhelming desire. "One thing I do", wrote Paul, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus". He added, "Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained" (Philippians 3.13-16 R.S.V.).

Here Paul writes of “those of us who are mature”. This is the modern rendering of the Greek word usually translated “perfect” in the Authorised Version. We quote, from the Revised Standard Version, some of the passages where it occurs: “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ, and go on to maturity” (Hebrews 6.1). Paul summed up his aim in preaching Christ: “Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me” (Colossians 1.28,29). Such striking words show the importance Paul attached to this development to maturity. He said his fellow-worker, Epaphras, had the same aim, “always remembering you earnestly in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God” (Colossians 4.12). Paul spoke of “building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4.12,13).

Here is a great ideal set before each one of us: the mature manhood of Christ. Each one of us by the very name we bear makes a public declaration to be his follower. We can only claim to be his followers if we are making an honest effort to follow his example. Probably none of us thinks sufficiently on the life of Christ with a view to copying his way of life. Yet this is the ideal after which we must strive: the mature manhood of Christ. Such development to maturity is essential. We cannot stand still; still less can we go backwards. We must move forward, continually responding to the daily influence of the Word of God, growing closer and closer to the life of the one we have chosen to call our Master.

It is a lifetime’s work and the sooner we start the better. It is an individual matter; we must pursue a determined course guided by the Scriptures. We may be guided by the example of some and warned by the example of others but in the end it is the individual standard which will matter, for each of us must answer for ourselves. It means effort and self-discipline but its rewards lie in stability and confidence in our personal lives, in greater closeness and harmony in family and ecclesial life and, in God’s mercy, in

the completion of the process when we are made to conform perfectly to the image of God seen in Christ.

So we turn to the second aspect. In the absence of our Master the future history of the Truth rests in the hands of the youth today. Young and old must remember this. It should mean that the young will rise to this responsibility by preparing themselves for it. It should mean that the older ones will not simply stand on one side, holding up their hands in horror and refusing to trust youth to do anything. It should mean that these older ones will set the highest possible standard themselves and help and encourage the young to follow that example. Mutual confidence is the key to successful ecclesial life and development but to build up such confidence calls for diligent application on the part of all.

In contemplating the future of the Truth we must never lose sight of the fact already stressed in these chapters: history is all against us. Divine Truth has always been corrupted by man. If we learn from that history our generation could be an exception and the Son of man will find the faith on the earth when he comes. If we ignore that history and fail to make the tremendous effort required to uphold the high standards of principle and practice set out in God's Word the result is a foregone conclusion.

History teaches that there has always been a trend towards making the Truth easier and more acceptable to ourselves and to others. Paul expressed this very clearly in relation to the judaizing brethren of the first century. They wanted to make the gospel more palatable to the orthodox Jews by preaching circumcision and adherence to the law. Paul wrote, "I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased" (Galatians 5.11). The Truth must always be offensive to the natural mind whether that mind be in others or in ourselves. "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1.23,24). Paul's warning to Timothy is as relevant today as it was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but

having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths" (2 Timothy 4.2-4 R.S.V.).

We have quoted the Revised Standard Version firstly because it uses the word "teaching" rather than "doctrine". Doctrine we associate with a system of belief, the first principles of the Truth. Teaching covers practice as well. The danger to doctrine is perhaps not so great today as it has been in the past though we must beware of any tendency to make it less important or be less searching in our instruction and examination of those coming into the Truth. The danger to practice is very real. As traditional patterns of life are rejected by people around us and especially by young people we must remember that for us many of these patterns are not just traditional but are firmly based on scriptural principles and as such must be upheld. We have said this before and dealt with specific points in earlier chapters but it must be stressed again. Secondly we notice that phrase - "wander into myths". To wander suggests to move aimlessly without any real sense of purpose or direction. This is just what life in the Truth should not be. We must know what we are doing, why we are doing it and where we are going. We do not want teachers "to suit our own likings" but men who will tell us the truth and uphold it in their own lives.

Youth passes - gradually we take on more and more ecclesial work. We discharge our duties faithfully, whatever they are; our responsibilities increase. Before long, if we are developing as we should be, we find ourselves taking on the responsibilities of exhorting others. Immediately the question arises, what sort of standard are we going to set? Are we going to compromise and be afraid to come out firmly on the side of strong principles and sound practice? Are we going to apologise for the Truth and our traditional way of life or are we going to uphold it by unqualified acceptance and preaching of the word? If we set a high standard, as we should, will our own way of life support what we say? These are questions which should cause us much heart-searching as we take on the responsibility of guiding others.

Those who have chosen to obey the Truth must know that they have accepted a hard way of life. If we seek to escape this fact

we must inevitably lose the Truth ourselves and at the same time discourage others. Life in the Truth is by no means all self-sacrifice but it is only through such sacrifice that we can experience and appreciate its very real joys. We must never forget that we have made a deliberate choice - to go back on that choice or to seek to blur its reality by compromise is to effectively nullify that choice.

So we turn to our final point - the almost certain cutting short of our lives by the coming of Christ. How real is our sense of imminence of Christ's return? How aware are we of the need to be prepared at any time to meet Christ? As we pursue our varying activities how conscious are we of the fact that any one of them could be interrupted by a call to judgement? These are questions we can well ask ourselves.

There are several reasons why the reality of Christ's coming can become blurred; why we can pay lip-service to the concept of Christ's return yet in our way of life deny it. We suggest a few:

- (1) We have been proclaiming the imminence of his coming for over a hundred years.
- (2) Most signs of his coming have now been present in the earth for 25-30 years - more than the life-time of those to whom these chapters are particularly addressed. We can expect no more dramatic developments until the final stage - a stage we may not be here to witness.
- (3) The general unbelief and materialism by which we are surrounded.
- (4) Our innate tendency to find the things which we can see and experience far more real and more demanding than those which we cannot see.

In this matter of preparedness those who are older may well be guilty of setting a bad example. There are many opportunities for them to devote unnecessary time, money and effort to the things of this life, thereby suggesting to the young that their hopes and affections are not set so much on the coming of Christ as they would like to think they are. It is being said, Christ may not come for another hundred years. This is being said not so much in unbelief as in a mistaken attempt to be realistic and to forestall

disappointment. It is, however, a highly dangerous way of thinking and completely contrary to the whole spirit of New Testament teaching.

Everything that Christ and his apostles said concerning his second coming conveyed a message of extreme urgency and hourly readiness. The fact that the hour of his coming was unknown was not a reason for anticipating delay but for more urgent preparation. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24.42-44). Jesus repeated these words on several occasions. Paul wrote similarly: "Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night - but ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all children of light, and children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as others, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5.2-6).

The very fact that we do not hear such passages quoted as much as we used to suggests that they may have lost the significance they had. Apparent delay in the realisation of His declared intentions has always been an essential part of that test of faith necessarily imposed by God on His servants. We think of men like Abraham, Noah, Daniel. They had to wait, they had to maintain their faith that God's declared intention would be realised and they had to expect it at any moment. Waiting but ever ready is the difficult position God's servants have always been expected to adopt. We cannot count on any future in this order of things. We must, of course, make reasonable plans for the future but always with an acute awareness that we may never see that future. "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow" (James 4.13,14).

Youth around us suffer from a deep-seated feeling of insecurity. Consciously or sub-consciously they fear the future, consciously or sub-consciously they hide their fear by being engrossed in the

present. For many the saying "Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" has a very literal meaning. We are privileged to know where the world is going. We know that many of its fears will be realised but we also know that beyond the turmoil and terror lie the peace and contentment of the Kingdom. We may not see mature years. We may not have to take on ecclesial responsibilities. We may be called on to leave all this very day. But we prepare for our future life in the Truth and by so doing ensure that whenever that life is interrupted by the return of our Master, we shall be ready.

This, surely, is the right note on which to conclude, for if every one of us, young and old, were really devoting our lives to preparation for Christ's return and living in daily expectation of it many of the problems, misgivings and errors of life would disappear. We would be busy developing our characters by reading and application, family and ecclesial life would be the more united and robust by virtue of the common aim, many of the temptations imposed by our surroundings would be less real, life would be altogether simpler and would really reflect the essential spirit of our calling, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness".

When Christ returns, we do not want to find ourselves like that miserable servant scabbling about in the earth looking for his unused and unfruitful talent, appearing before Christ with his despicable excuses: "Lord, I know thee that thou art an hard man ... and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine". Rather let us be amongst those who have from the earliest days of their life in the Truth used the talents and opportunities all have been given, so that our Master may say to us: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord".

E. J. Toms

## **APPENDIX**

### **Military Service**

In times of warfare or conscription the British government makes provision for conscientious objectors to appeal against active military service. To do this they have to register as conscientious objectors and appear before a tribunal to state their personal objections and to receive the verdict of the presiding judge.

In the 2nd World War (1939-1945) one of those judges put the situation clearly and fairly:

“We have to ascertain what is in the minds of the applicants, to appraise the genuineness and sincerity of their views, to plumb the depths of their convictions..... by getting to understand the background of the lives of each of those who come before us.....”

Each individual appearing before the tribunal has to answer for himself or herself, although they are usually permitted to take along an older person who can vouch for their honesty and sincerity. It is therefore important for the appellant to be fully conversant with the reasons for objection to military service. The examination by the panel usually falls into two categories: (1) details of the religious-based objection; and (2) details of the appellant's manner of life.

Our religious-based objection demands that we have a good grasp of the Bible's teaching prohibiting the use of force and demanding a caring and conciliatory attitude towards causes of antagonism. We shall need to be well acquainted with such passages as the following:

- 1) “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20.13). Be prepared to be tackled on the many Old Testament instances where killing is commanded by God. There is a need to differentiate between man's desire to kill (which is forbidden) and God's command to kill His enemies - see Revelation 17.14 as a good example of Jesus leading his army against evildoers. Note also that, in Matthew 5.21/22, Jesus places the command not to kill on a much higher plane than the

merely physical - it is essentially a matter of cultivating a non-belligerent attitude of mind towards others.

- 2) The teaching of Jesus is clear for those who are his disciples. He commands "love your enemies, do good to them which hate you" (Luke 6.27/29). He also said that "they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26.52).
- 3) Apostolic teaching is just as clear. "Recompense to no man evil for evil.... live peaceably with all men.... avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12.17/21).
- 4) The Old Testament also gives clear guidance. "Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee" (Proverbs 20.22). The Old Testament also teaches that we should exercise compassion instead of belligerence: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee" (Proverbs 25.21/22) - a concept held up by the apostle Paul for Christians to adopt (Romans 12.20).
- 5) The words of Jesus in John 18.36 provide a positive view for our abstaining from the world's warfare. "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.... but now is my kingdom not from hence".

Of equal weight with the above declarations of religious belief is our testimony to the type of life we live consonant with such a belief.

Recognising that "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Daniel 4.17), we do not involve ourselves in warfare for fear of being in opposition to God's intended outcome of the conflict. For the same reason we do not vote in local or parliamentary elections. Neither do we wish to become a part of any "official" civil defence organisation, although we raise no objection to helping in a purely private capacity where there is a need. We do not seek employment in the police force or engage in any activity which requires the use of force against others. It is just as well to steer clear of employment in the Fire Service as in times of hostilities it is possible you could be faced

with difficult decisions. It should be our aim to keep as far away from the war machine as is humanly possible.

It has been said that “the greatest argument in favour of the exemption of any Christadelphian conscientious objection is that the principles of Godly living are seen in every part of the objector’s life”. This is perhaps the most important element in our objection, and is certainly a sector which will receive close examination at the tribunal. We need to be able to say that we have been regular attenders at ecclesial meetings, perhaps referring to the ecclesial register for verification.

Another area needing attention should be our attitude towards the laws of the land. We should be model citizens in our obedience insofar as the demands do not conflict with the law of God. Brother Roberts once said, “The Truth teaches us to be the most obedient subjects in the realm”, and whilst we claim exemption from military service we should be able to show that we do not flout other laws we are expected to obey - for example, the laws denoting the speed limits on our roads and the payment of taxes. Examine the teaching contained in these passages of scripture; Romans 13.1/7; Titus 3.1; 1 Peter 2.13/17. Alongside these we should notice the conditions contained in the following passages: Daniel 3.16/18; Acts 4.19 & 5.29. We should be able to show that we follow the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 22.21 - “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s”, always recognising that the commands of God take precedence over those of men.

Another important area concerns our peacetime occupations. With our knowledge of the scripture so far referred to, we should not go blindly into any occupation that is likely to conflict with our profession of objection to military service. This is today more difficult than in earlier years, for even doctors and nurses have been drafted to the scene of military conflict to tend to wounded soldiers. Even seemingly innocent occupations can be a hazard. We well remember a claimant at one tribunal (not a Christadelphian) who worked in Birmingham producing nuts and bolts for the motor car industry. During the war these nuts and bolts were diverted to the manufacture of tanks and yet the claimant remained in his employment. He claimed he was

responsible only for the manufacture of nuts and bolts, their use being of no concern to him. He was refused exemption and drafted into the non-combatant service. The judge decided that, as his conscience did not extend to tank-building, he could have no conscientious objection to making roads for soldiers to march on, or cooking meals for soldiers to eat, etc.

We should also be prepared to make a stand against being drafted into the non-combatant services as cooks, road builders, bridge erectors etc. Any part of the armed forces requires its members to wear army uniform and to swear allegiance to the Crown. We are "soldiers of Jesus Christ" and owe our allegiance to him alone (see 2 Timothy 2.3/4).

In times past, especially in the First World War, service in the armed forces was mainly male orientated. During the Second World War women had their own sections of the fighting force and many were drafted into the combat arena. Today it is not unusual for women soldiers to be on the front line engaging in total warfare. These circumstances have come about as the result of the modern outlook on sexual equality, and our young sisters need to be aware of the dangers of such thinking, and take their stand now against such unscriptural ideas. This frame of mind will prepare them to face up to the inevitable problem should this country mobilise its forces against enemy attack.

All in all, our lives should be devoted to "seeking first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6.33). We should have as our priority the "denying of ungodliness and worldly lusts", enabling us to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2.12). We should capture and maintain the attitude of the faithful of old who "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11.13). Let us remember that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3.20 RV) and that "here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come", even that city whose "builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 13.14 & 11.10).

S. F. Taylor