

FALLING AWAY FROM STEADFASTNESS.

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing that ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." – 2 Pet. 3:17.

THIS exhortation applies to the Lord's consecrated people living at the present time. The proof of this is found in the context: the Apostle has just been portraying some of the events connected with the day of the Lord in which we are living – the "Day of Vengeance." In verse ten he has pointed out that the present age will end with the dissolution of the symbolic "heavens" and the symbolic "earth," which, as we have elsewhere shown, signifies the utter disruption of the present social and ecclesiastical order. In verse thirteen he points out that we are looking for a new order of things, and not hoping either to patch up the old order ourselves, or that others will succeed in patching what the Lord has declared "shall pass away." And now in our text he refers to "these things." In the eleventh verse he points out that those who have such expectations should be separate and distinct from all other people in the world, saying, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" And then in our text and in the verse preceding it, he points out that at this particular time the Adversary will get advantage of certain ones, will beguile them, get them to wrest the Scriptures, and thus to deceive themselves to their own destruction; – to their loss of present light at least.

Finding thus that the Apostle is particularly addressing ourselves, let us indeed give earnest heed to his counsel; for we well know that we live in what the Apostle Paul calls that "evil day." – Eph. 6:13.

We notice further that the Apostle is not addressing the worldly, nor even the average nominal Christian; but he specifies that his warning is to the "beloved," who already had attained to "steadfastness." This implies that they had become rooted and

grounded and built up, both in the knowledge and in the love of God; for only such ever become steadfast. Does it surprise us that the Apostle should address such a developed class of Christians and warn them of their own personal danger of falling into the "error of the wicked?" It does strike us as peculiar, and we are inclined to think that there must be some hidden meaning in the expression – "error of the wicked."

It would be past comprehension that such a class as the Apostle has just described should be in great danger of falling into such errors of the wicked as blasphemy, or murder, or arson, or theft. We must look the matter up more carefully, and see whether or not the translators have given us a faithful rendering of the Apostle's words. We find that they have not, and that the word *wicked* is too strong: the Greek word is *athemos*; according to Prof. Young's Analytical Concordance (undisputed authority) it signifies "*unsettled*," [R2218 : page 276] or "*lawless*." Now, the passage seems more reasonable. There is danger, we can readily see, that those once established in the truth might be so led away as to become unsettled, and to wrest the Scriptures, "handle the word of God deceitfully," and thus become lawless in the sense that they would set aside the Word or Law of God, and take instead thereof a twisted interpretation which would the better suit some theory of their own. Such a wrong course the Apostle points out would surely *unsettle* them, and eventually mean the destruction of their spiritual interests; and that they would go into "outer darkness" in respect to "present truth." "Beware, lest *ye also*, being led away with the error of the *unsettled*, fall from your own steadfastness."

The Apostle's language not only points to the present time, but seems to imply that there would be previous fallings away or siftings, which he calls "the error of the wicked" – literally, "the delusions of the unsettled or lawless." The implication seems to be, that the not settled ones would first be shaken out, and that subsequently there would come a still more insidious trial which would test even the "steadfast." We inquire therefore, have there been, during this "harvest" time (whilst we are waiting for the dissolution of the present order of

things and for the establishment of the new order of things) – have there been such siftings or fallings away by delusions which have affected those not settled? [R2219 : page 276]

We answer: Yes, there have been several: we might recount some of these. First of all came a shaking directly upon the subject of the ransom: Certain lawless ones, "heady," rejected the testimony of the Lord's Word, denying the Lord having "*bought us*" with his own precious blood. They would accept Christ as an example *only*, and claimed to be able to follow that example, and that they needed no sin-offering to compensate for their imperfections, inherited or personal. This the Adversary's first move was remarkably bold, yet it found adherents who were not rooted and grounded upon the testimony of the Lord's Word. Then came the "flat earth" theory, whose advocates strangely concluded that the shape of the earth is a part of the gospel; the result was that certain others of the unstable were "led away" in that delusion, by not settled leaders who wrested certain Scriptures to their own confusion and to the extinguishment of what light they had enjoyed.

Then came another delusion in effect teaching the old doctrine of Universalism, – that God would finally force eternal salvation upon all men and even upon Satan himself. This theory of course also denied the ransom; because to have admitted that the condemnation to death pronounced in Eden could not be set aside without a ransom, *a corresponding price*, would logically have implied that disobedience under the second trial, secured by the ransom, would similarly bring an everlasting punishment – everlasting death – from which there could be no resurrection. Hence, this theory boldly denied the ransom, wrested or twisted the Scriptures which speak of the Second death as "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord," handling this and other Scriptures so deceitfully as to declare that the Second death would be a great blessing to all upon whom it would come. Of course none but *unstable* souls could be beguiled by such open and arrogant perversions of the Word of God.

But, still another sifting came for the "unlearned" and unsettled, not thoroughly furnished with the whole armor of God; this was the teaching that God is the author and instigator of all the sin, crime and wickedness there is in the world; and that after he shall become weary of evil doing he will reform, change his course and incite all mankind to righteousness and holiness, as he now (this theory claims) incites the majority to sin, etc. Of all the theories which the Adversary has brought out in this "evil day," this one seems to be the most blasphemous. So-called "orthodoxy" is certainly quite blasphemous enough, in claiming that God, after permitting his creatures to be "born in sin and shapen in iniquity" (which he had nothing to do with bringing upon them), claims that, as a punishment for sins which they could not avoid, the vast majority of the human family will be imprisoned in a flaming hell of unspeakable torture, and divinely provided with everlasting life, so that they shall never be able to escape those sufferings by death, and that the devil will be similarly supplied with eternal life (but free from pain) for the purpose of torturing them; and that fuel for the torture will to all eternity be provided by divine power. We say that this is extremely blasphemous of the divine character, yet it is as nothing at all in comparison to the teaching which claims that God is the instigator, the first cause, of all the sin and crime and wickedness in the world. This theory also wrested some Scriptures to its support, just as Spiritism and Christian Science do. Of course, only those who had never become thoroughly rooted and grounded in the truth could ever be "led away" by such a blasphemous delusion as this.

The Anglo-Israel question, and communistic and social questions, "led away" from the truth, and into more or less darkness and confusion, some others who were not well rooted and grounded in the knowledge of the fact that all present institutions will go down, and that the new order of things to be introduced will not be of human institution, but the work of God through the glorified Christ. **[R2219 : page 277]**

But the Apostle comes in our text to a time *after* such delusions had "led away" those not established or settled; and his warning is given to the *steadfast*. The implication seems to be that the Adversary has more subtle delusions before us than any of those in the past; and that the fully consecrated of the Lord's people may need to be more than ever on guard against "the wiles of the devil." – "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things [that all of the affairs, reforms, etc., of the present time will avail nothing, and that all the present institutions will pass away, and that God is about to establish his own Kingdom in his own way; – and knowing further, that just at this particular time there will be a special sifting and testing of those who are in the light], *beware lest ye ALSO, being led away* with the error of the wicked [the *unsettled* or *lawless* who do not bow implicitly to the Lord's Word, but wrest it to establish theories of their own], fall from your own steadfastness."

(While the "siftings" specially affect those who have been brought by the Lord into the light of present truth, yet in a more general way and along different lines slightly different siftings are in progress with the nominal church as a whole. Each denomination is being shaken, and the theories of Evolution, Spiritism, Christian Science, Theosophy and Moralism are making great inroads upon all who have named the name of Christ, even if they have not come into the light of the "harvest" truth. Unsettled, lacking the knowledge of the divine Word and plan, *necessary in this evil day*, the whole nominal church is gradually losing its faith in the Bible, under the lead of its most able ministers, who, blinded to present truth, and unable to rightly divide the Word of truth, are generally coming to hold the opinion, that their own ideas respecting truth ("higher criticism") are superior to the Scripture presentations.)

The Apostle in our text cautions that we beware against being "*led away*." The word here rendered "led away" occurs in only one other place in the Scriptures (Gal. 2:13), where the Apostle Paul says, "Barnabas also was *carried away* with their dissimulation." The

words "*carried away*" give the same thought as "led away" but a little more strongly: they imply that the danger to the steadfast will be along some line which would *sweep away* or *carry away* their judgments from the fixed statements of the divine Word, through personal preference, or sympathy, or through the influence of some one held in respect or esteem. Let us all therefore be on guard, that whoever may, consciously or unconsciously, become the instrument of the Adversary, and seek to lead us away from the sure testimonies of the Lord's Word (whether congenial to our natural tastes or uncongenial), we may *not be "carried away"* but that we may be more determined than ever that

—

"To our Lord we will be true
Who bought us with his blood.
Only Jesus will we know,
And Jesus crucified."

While we see that the danger to the majority of God's people will be through being "*carried away*" by sympathy, influence, etc., we must remember that this implies that there will be certain *leaders of thought* whose conduct will tend to carry away the others. It is not necessary for us to suppose that these leaders into error will knowingly and intentionally get wrong themselves, and carry away numbers with them into their delusions and lawless disregard for the testimony of the Lord's Word, wresting its statements. We may rather assume that in a majority of instances these leaders will be themselves deceived; as the Apostle expresses it — "deceiving and being [themselves] deceived." — 2 Tim. 3:13.

All who seek to teach the divine plan to others are exposed to peculiar temptations, so that the honor of serving the Lord and his people demands a correspondingly larger measure of the graces of the holy spirit, as well as of knowledge. The tendency of knowledge, as the Apostle points out, is merely to puff up, make vain and conceited, and to become a temptation of the Adversary, to draw away followers after

them. (Acts 20:30.) Whoever therefore would be an instructor of others, a mouth-piece of the Lord, should cultivate all the various graces of the holy spirit, including meekness; that these combined (Love) with knowledge, may build up himself as well as build up those to whom he ministers. "Knowledge [alone] puffeth up, but Love buildeth up." – 1 Cor. 8:1.

Let us not forget that there is a way, and one way only, whereby we may *insure* ourselves against falling into any of these traps of the Adversary. This insurance is not secured wholly by knowledge, altho knowledge is a very important element in it: it is secured chiefly by obedience to the principles laid down in the Lord's Word, and illustrated in the life and character of our Lord and his apostles. The same Apostle who addresses us this caution against falling from our own steadfastness, tells us in the same epistle (1:5-12), "If ye *do these things*, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

What things? Does he give us the particulars of this work of grace that will so *insure us* against falling that we shall receive the great prize? Yes. He tells us that it is by continually adding to our stock of the heavenly graces, – "Add to your faith fortitude, [**R2219 : page 278**] and to fortitude knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience, and to patience [**R2220 : page 278**] piety, and to piety brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness Love; for these things being in you and abounding, they will not permit you to be inactive or unfruitful in the knowledge [personal intimacy, acquaintance] of our Lord Jesus Christ....Therefore, brethren, give the more earnest heed that you may make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things ye shall never fall."
