

WHAT THE WORD VOW SIGNIFIES

IT seems evident that a few ordinarily bright brethren have missed their education as respects the meaning of the word "Vow"; or else, that our great Adversary, opposed to the Vow recently suggested in these columns, is using every means to confuse their minds, to disorder their judgment in respect to it. The said few appear to be awfully distressed by the Vow and protest vociferously against it, against those who take it, and against the Editor for advising it. Their arguments are amusing, ridiculous and self-contradictory; but with all their brightness these brethren fail to see this. We pray for them a still wider opening of the eyes of their understanding, and in harmony with our prayers we proceed to discuss this subject, condescending to details which should be quite unnecessary; our excuse is, love for the brethren, and a clear realization that they are taking a wrong stand, supporting a wrong standard, and overlooking the fact that there are but two Princes or Leaders – the Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness.

The Vow suggested had a small beginning, but the Lord's providence led up to its general presentation to the Church and our advice that all of the consecrated of the Lord's people take the Vow – not as a new consecration but as bringing their original consecration up-to-date – as drawing tighter the girdle of consecration which holds to us our bridal garment and "girds up the loins of our minds," making us the more ready and the more strong from day to day in the fight of this "evil day." It may be helpful to some to be informed regarding the leadings of the Lord in respect to this Vow. Hence we will state the matter briefly:

Some of the dear friends naturally and properly are very jealous of the Truth and of the influence and reputation of those

who represent it – especially the "PILGRIMS," all of whom should be noble characters, and, we believe, are such – of far higher than average standing amongst Christians and ministers. We may add here that we exercise a great deal of care in the selection of these representatives of the Society serving the Lord's work – that they shall be moral men, consecrated saints, humble, clear in the Truth, and of some ability in its presentation.

The Pilgrim service during the last year has been represented by some twenty-five men of this stamp, and our confidence in them is represented by our endorsement and appointment of them to the service of the Truth. However, we received from dear Christian friends criticisms applying to several of these dear Pilgrims, not criminal, not sinful, but suggestions that they should be warned to be still more discreet toward the opposite sex, more careful than other ministers, since the Truth and its servants are looked upon most critically, often maliciously. These letters, received with appreciation, we acknowledged, assuring the dear friends that it is our desire that all who bear the vessels of the Lord's House in connection with the service of the Present Truth, should not only speak and think along the highest planes but in conduct also should be "blameless"; and that we were sure that no evil was in any way intended, and that our bringing the matter to the attention of the Pilgrims would be all that was necessary.

The fact is that those who receive the Truth in the spirit of it feel a warmer affection for each other than could result from any earthly relationship. It is not our thought that this spiritual oneness is wrong or that it should be set aside or quenched. It is indeed the spirit of Christ in the members of his Body. We do think, however, that outsiders cannot understand this, [R4263 : page 315] and hence that the deportment and language and letters between the friends should be so seasoned with grace and wisdom that our most critical opponents would pronounce them "blameless." Furthermore we do not forget that the Lord's people, "new

creatures in Christ Jesus," have "this treasure in earthen vessels," all of which are more or less imperfect through the fall. We have learned that some are weaker in one respect and others in another and hence, as the Apostle says, "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves." (Rom. 15:1.) Hence our true love for others of the Lord's people ought to produce in us great self-restraint and uprightness lest we injure the weaker, of whose weakness we properly may not know. These undisputed facts should appeal to all of the Lord's saints in favor of self-restraint to the last degree.

As an illustration of the unwisdom complained of we cite one instance which may be as instructive to others as it was to ourself. A noble brother in the Truth came to us saying, "Brother Russell, do you approve of the Pilgrims kissing the sisters? I was much shocked to see one kiss a sister." We replied, No, Brother! While we find no mention in the Scriptures that kissing would be a sin, we do feel that for the Pilgrims to practice such familiarity would be to lower their influence and endanger the interests of the Truth. Did you speak to the Pilgrim on the subject according to Matt. 18:15? He answered, "I did do so, but thought that as the Pilgrim represented the Society it was my duty also to mention the matter to you as its representative" – relating the circumstance. We replied, I assure you, dear Brother, that the Pilgrim you name is a very honorable man, and the kiss was surely not thought of by him as anything either sinful or impure. But I am glad that you are so particular, and I am sure that when I call the matter to the Pilgrim's attention he will fully agree to the unwisdom of the course, however pure his motives. The Brother replied, "Yes, the Pilgrim told me that the Sister was one with whom he had been very intimately acquainted for a long time, and that his kiss was merely a greeting. I accepted his statement of the matter, Brother Russell, though I cannot understand it, for I assure you that I could not have given the kiss without improper feeling."

That statement was a revelation. Our mental cogitation was, How differently people are constituted. One might kiss a thousand without an impure thought or sentiment; another would be injured by a single kiss. We realized, as never before, how careful the Lord's people should be to lift all of our standards high enough to protect the very weakest, and to avoid everything that might have even the appearance of evil. We saw at once how a kiss that to one person would be as innocent as the shaking of hands might to another be a very different matter. This thought helped us to appreciate why some regard kissing as representing an impurity, whereas others, differently constituted, would [R4264 : page 315] never think of such a thing except by such a lesson as this. Another lesson we drew was on the danger of misjudging one another. "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged."

Not long after this, meditating on all these facts, and calling to mind as well that our own conduct had been evil-spoken of, we thought up the Vow for ourself and for one Pilgrim specially needing it, and later thought of its value for all of the dear Pilgrims. Another matter which influenced us in the preparation of the Vow was the general view the Lord seemed lately to have been giving us respecting the peculiar trials, difficulties, besetments of the last seven years of the Harvest period and the accumulating evidences that during this time Satan and all of the fallen angels will be permitted of the Lord in various ways to assault the whole world along the lines of Spiritism, Hypnotism, Occultism, etc., the general tendency of all which will be to lead to gross immoralities. We said to ourself, Surely we are in the special time foretold by the Word of God as the "Hour of temptation," "That evil day," etc., in which, "if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived"; and in which surely "Every man's work shall be tried so as by fire." (I Cor. 3:13.) The Spirit of the Lord said to us through these Scriptures, and this mental picture of things at the time before us, It will surely behoove every child of God, and especially every public minister of the Truth, to

look well to the straightness of his paths and to walk in extreme circumspection. It was under these influences that we prepared the Vow, as representing a very high standard of Christian living.

We had it written out in duplicate, and sent copies to all the Pilgrims just before our journey to Britain, at the time having no thought of publishing anything respecting it. Later on we reflected that if the dear friends who had written us in criticism of some of the brethren could know of the Vow and perceive how the slightest indiscretion, either real or apparent, would be guarded against by it, they would have an increased confidence in every member of the Pilgrim force. We concluded for this reason to publish the Vow and to give the names of those who had made it their Vow to the Lord.

Just at this time we received Brother Hollister's letter referring to a carelessness between brothers and sisters in their greeting, which was sometimes so genuine and hearty as to be liable to be misunderstood by others of the Church and by the world. Believing that the time is ripe for such a stand and the exhibition of a high standard, we published that letter with our approval and comments as introductory to the submitting of the Vow and the names of the Pilgrims taking it. After the matter was in type, but before it went to press, we got a letter from a Colporteur brother and Church Elder, who said he had seen a copy of the Vow in possession of a Pilgrim, told of his appreciation of it, and that he at once made it his own before the Lord. We took this as a hint from the Lord, for it appealed to our judgment as representing his Will – then, on the proof-sheet we added the suggestion that all Colporteurs take the Vow and all Elders and Deacons of Churches. A little later came the thought, "Are not all of the Lord's people representatives of God, who are offering sacrifices – his ambassadors and ministers of the Truth? And would not this Vow prove a blessing and assistance to all, male and female?" Our judgment of the Lord's Will confirmed the

thought, and thus the matter reached you in the June 15th TOWER.

The suggestion was not that you take this Vow to us or to each other, but that you make the Vow to the Lord, and that we would be glad to know of the step having been taken and to have a word to that effect from any pleased to inform us. The promptness of the responses and the assurances from many of increased blessing in their hearts and nearness to the Lord have convinced us that the Lord guided in respect to the preparation and circulation of that Vow. Likewise a small but vigorous opposition to the Vow, and a [R4264 : page 316] desire to fight it and to hinder some from taking it, suggests to our minds that the Adversary is displeased with the course we have taken and that he is more or less blinding and, we fear, stumbling a few and, to some extent, suggesting and putting before their minds light as darkness and darkness as light. Indications are that the Adversary will make this a case of sifting amongst the consecrated. Of course none but the consecrated can take the Vow, hence a considerable number in sympathy with it but not consecrated may be disinclined to take it; but we warn them that while it is entirely proper for them to count the cost and decide on their own course of action, they will, by opposing it, get under the wrong banner and in support of the wrong Prince and be thereby injured.

THE STANDARD DICTIONARY'S DEFINITION

To vow is (1) to *promise* solemnly; especially to promise to God. (2) To *declare* with assurance or solemnity; to aver; to avow.

The noun vow is thus defined: (1) A solemn *promise* to God. (2) A solemn *engagement* to adopt a certain course in life, pursue some aim, observe some moral precept or surrender one's self to a higher life of holiness; (3) also a pledge of *faithfulness* as marriage vows; (4) a solemn and emphatic *affirmation*.

As showing the confusion of thought on the subject we remark that some have endeavored to set forth that a vow is an oath and hence that our Lord Jesus prohibited making of vows when he said, "Swear not at all." Nothing can be farther from the truth. In that very connection our Lord was saying, "Let your Yea be Yea; and your Nay, Nay; for whatever is more than these cometh of evil." A vow is merely a Yea or a positive affirmation. A vow is not to be sworn to, for that the Lord prohibits. The vows of his people are to be as sure and truthful as though backed by an oath.

Another brother writes us, "If the Vow were published as a *resolution* I would have no objection to it whatever in any way, and would be most happy to be enrolled in the list of resolution-takers." The Vow is a resolution, not to one's self, but to the Lord. Note in the above definitions the Synonyms – promise, declare, engagement, affirmation. A vow is a covenant. But the term covenant is not as favorable and does not express the matter as thoroughly as the word vow; because the term covenant is generally used as respects a matter having two parts, a giving and a receiving, dependent one upon the other; as for instance, in business a firm covenants or contracts to ship goods of such a quality and kind at such a time, in consideration of such a price to be paid for them.

Thus, also, the New Covenant between God and men has requirements on both sides, and The Christ, the Mediator, stands good as the intermediate to guarantee both sides of that covenant. There is one covenant, however, which corresponds exactly to a vow, namely, the Abrahamic Covenant, because it is a one-sided covenant. In it God made all the promises and made no condition, and hence no mediator was needed for it. In a word God *vowed* that, in Abraham and through Abraham's seed all the families of the earth would ultimately receive a blessing. No conditions are mentioned. It is a definite agreement. In addition to

the vow God bound it with an oath, which definitely shows that a vow and an oath are two separate and distinct things.

The Vow which many of us have taken and which we earnestly recommend to all, is a statement to the Lord of our willingness and *determination by his assisting grace* to follow a certain course of conduct, which, we believe, will be pleasing to him and advantageous to ourselves and to others. Surely the eyes of misunderstanding which see everything amiss in such a course are crossed by prejudice or ignorance or some element of darkness.

THE WATCH TOWER IN OPPOSITION

Here we are met with the astounding proposition that ZION'S WATCH TOWER has always opposed vows. One dear Brother has sent us six pages of quotations, but his quotations are all wrong because misapplied. The WATCH TOWER never had a word to say against the making of vows to the Lord. On the contrary, it has urged that they be made, and has declared that none could expect to receive the holy Spirit and be begotten thereby to a new nature unless he first vowed to the Lord a full surrender and full submission of himself, "Even unto death." Similarly the Apostle Paul urged the same vow, saying, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." The Apostle did not mean that we were to go to heaven and there give our bodies to the Lord, but he did mean that by some *vows* we should consecrate our earthly talents, powers, privileges, opportunities to the service of the Lord. Does not the Apostle urge the Baptismal Vow and show its necessity, saying, "So many of you as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3.) What is this but the urging of the Vow, the consecration vow? When the Apostle wrote, "If we be dead with him we shall also live with him," and again, that

we should "bring into captivity every thought of our minds in obedience to Christ," was he not in these and in all his various public writings urging the fulfilment of our consecration vows, our baptismal vows?

What we have opposed in the nature of vows are those which are the most common amongst men and amongst professing Christians – namely vows to one another. In these, we believe, there lurks a great danger to Christian liberty. Presbyterians vow to each other to support and uphold their profession of faith and church organization. Methodists do similarly and [R4265 : page 316] so do all denominations and secret orders of all kinds. These vows are injurious because they are not on the proper basis. All our covenants or vows should be made with the Lord. Our responsibility should be realized to him and not to men. "Pay thy vows unto the Most High." – Psa. 50:14.

There is one exception to these vows made to our fellow-creatures which we have never opposed, but upheld, namely, the *marriage vow*, by which each member of a married couple binds himself for life to the other.

Following the custom of our Lord and the apostles throughout the New Testament we quote from the Old Testament Scriptures on the subject of vows. As the Prophet David frequently represented The Christ, Head and Body, so his vows represented those of Christ and the Church. In one sense our vows may be considered from two different standpoints: (1) That we will put off the old man with his affections and desires, and (2) that we will put on the new man, which is renewed in righteousness. We may divide this vow or covenant or engagement into several more; as the Apostle says, "Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, strife; and put on all these: kindness, meekness, long-suffering, love." [R4265 : page 317]

Every spirit-begotten child of God has surely vowed all these vows and others, whether he thinks of them in this itemized form or not. We perhaps more frequently speak of the entire transaction as one – as our Consecration Vow, our Baptismal Vow; because this vow takes in and includes everything that we have and are or shall have or possess – even unto death. The vow of the Christian in response to the Apostle's appeal, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service," is all-comprehensive. In it he gives away every right, every liberty, every choice, and agrees with the Lord that his own will shall be dead and the divine will accepted in every affair of life and in respect to all his words and thoughts and doings. Thus we see that a Christian, as the Apostle has expressed it, is a bond-slave in the most absolute sense. No slave could have less rights, less freedom, since these are pledged to the extent of ability to bring even the very thoughts of their hearts into conformity to the will of their Master.

In view of the foregoing, it can readily be seen that the Vow we have suggested, if in line with this, is really a part of it and merely stated afresh for emphasis, to bring the matter up-to-date, and to impress it upon our minds. If it can be shown that the items recited are a "reasonable service," that the doing of them would glorify our Father and our Lord, that they would be helpful to others of the household of faith or to ourselves, then we are bound to take this Vow – all consecrated Christians would be bound to take it, so soon as they should perceive in it the qualities specified. For such to fail to take it would be for them to fail to keep their Baptismal Vow. And they would be bound to announce the Vow publicly if convinced that the announcement of it would be helpful to others or to themselves.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE VOW

Let us make no mistake. Let us not deceive ourselves nor others. If we have any objection to the Vow let us not deceive

ourselves as to *what* it is and what it is not. It is a prime requisite of a Christian that he be honest, that he deceive not himself and that he understand that his Creator cannot be deceived. The Vow naturally divides itself into several parts, which, for convenience, we will number, and as we read these let us jot down which of them we object to – which of them is in opposition to the Scriptures – which of them would be dishonorable to God or injurious to ourselves or to others.

(1) Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. May thy rule come into my heart more and more, and thy will be done in my mortal body. Relying on the assistance of thy promised grace to help in every time of need, through Jesus Christ our Lord, I register this Vow.

(2) Daily will I remember at the throne of heavenly grace the general interests of the harvest work, and particularly the share which I myself am privileged to enjoy in that work, and the dear co-laborers at the Bible House at Allegheny and everywhere.

(3) I vow to still more carefully, if possible, scrutinize my thoughts and words and doings, to the intent that I may be the better enabled to serve thee, and thy dear flock.

(4) I vow to thee that I will be on the alert to resist everything akin to Spiritism and Occultism, and that remembering that there are but the two masters, I shall resist these snares in all reasonable ways, as being of the Adversary.

(5) I further vow that, with the exceptions below, I will at all times and in all places, conduct myself towards those of the opposite sex in private exactly as I would do with them in public – in the presence of a congregation of the Lord's people.

(6) And so far as reasonably possible I will avoid being in the same room with any of the opposite sex alone, unless the door to the room stand wide open.

(7) Exceptions in the case of Brethren: wife, children, mother and natural sisters. In the case of Sisters: husband, children, father and natural brothers.

OTHER OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

One brother says, "I cannot take that vow. I am afraid that I cannot keep it." We ask which part of it could a consecrated child of God not keep, if he is keeping his Baptismal Vow and hopes to hear the Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." "Another says, I do not need the Vow." The dear brother who has this opinion is mistaken. He is the very one who does need it. The Apostle carries this thought when he says of himself, "When I am weak, then I am strong"; for by antithesis when one feels strong and self-confident and needing no assistance he is then weak. Indeed, we have come to the conclusion that nearly as many fail on their strong points as on their weak ones, because, less on guard in respect to them, they are the more easily entrapped by the Adversary.

Another writes that we should not *force* the Vow upon the Church. We have not done so, nor shall we do so. We have neither authority nor wish to do so. A vow made under compulsion would not be of any advantage, but on the contrary, an injury. We have commended this Vow because it is part and parcel of our original Baptismal Vow – a re-statement of it, brought up-to-date with a view of stirring our pure minds by way of remembrance. The fact that there is any opposition engendered by it is an evidence that some had forgotten their comprehensive Baptismal Vow. We have the Apostle's word as our justification for urging this Vow, and in his language will say that "We beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your body a living sacrifice,

holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."
– Rom. 12:1.

If any Scripture can be quoted against the Vow in any one of its seven items, we will be glad to have it brought to our attention. One brother quotes a Scripture against the Vow and fails to see that it is in harmony with it and against him. It is Prov. 20:25. "It is a snare for a man to devour that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry." The brother who offers this as an objection claims to have already made the all-comprehensive Baptismal Vow. He thus devoured that which is holy, and is *only now making inquiry about it*, and surprised to see that the portion we have suggested as bringing it up-to-date was not understood by him, not comprehended. He is at the present only making inquiry, only informing himself in respect to his original vow of twenty-five years ago. No wonder if this matter prove a snare to him, as the proverb says – not by setting him wrong and out of harmony with his original vow, but by showing that he is wrong and has been wrong and out of accord with it until now. It would be a blessing to that brother if he would make thorough inquiry now and register afresh this consecration vow. If he made the vow and now makes inquiry about it, and finds it greater and more comprehensive than he at first supposed, let him not break it, but thank God, and resolve in the language of the Psalmist, "I will pay my vows unto the Most High." – Psa. 50:14. Now a word to such, from the wise king. "When thou vowest a vow unto God defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed. Better it is that thou shouldst not vow than that thou shouldst vow and not pay." – Ecccl. 5:4,5. **[R4265 : page 318]**

LIFT UP A STANDARD FOR THE PEOPLE

In Isaiah's prophecy we read, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against

him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord." – Isa. 59:19,20.

The context, for instance verses 17,18, distinctly describe the time in which we are living and the years of trouble before us; and in our judgment the Lord has guided, at this due time, to the lifting of this Vow amongst his people as a high standard for them, for their protection.

Our 1909 motto will be, "My Help Cometh from the Lord." This help comes to us now; primarily through the death of our Lord; secondarily through our becoming his disciples and sharing his death. And this Vow is emphasizing this covenant to death and drawing to our attention some of the snares of the Adversary. It will surely prove a valuable aid to all who are seeking to make their calling and election sure. **[R4266 : page 318]**

We notice that this text is variously rendered in the different translations, but the one furnished in our Common Version seems to fit all the conditions better than any of the others. The stress of difference affects the word "standard." The Hebrew word is defined by Young's lexicon – "To cause to flee, lift up an ensign." Strong's lexicon amongst other definitions gives, "To be displayed, make to flee, put to flight, lift up a standard."

The Revised Version renders it, "For he shall come as a rushing stream which the breath of the Lord driveth."

Leeser's translation reads, "For there shall come distress like a stream which the spirit of the Lord urges forward."

Young's translation renders it, "When come in as a flood doth an Adversary, the spirit of Jehovah hath raised an ensign against him."

On the whole we decidedly prefer the reading of our Common Version, and note its harmony with the statement of the Prophet a little further on, "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people." (Isa. 62:10.) Whether these Scriptures refer to the Vow now lifted up as a standard amongst the consecrated, or whether they refer to something else, none can dispute the fact that the Vow represents a very *high standard* of Christian living, which few would have the courage to attack as in any sense of the word injurious.

We decidedly urge the Lord's people on to victory as overcomers of the world, the flesh and the Adversary. Enrolled as soldiers of the cross we recognize this high standard as of the Lord's providence. Nevertheless, let not an unkind word or reflection be uttered against any who temporarily or permanently may be unable to see the standard or be fearful to accept it as a part of their vow to the Most High. It is not for us to judge one another in connection with the Vow or otherwise, but for us to seek to assist and encourage one another in every way possible. It is written, "The Lord will judge his people."

PUBLISHING THE NAMES OF VOWERS

A few have objected to the publication of the names of the vowers, but only one of these has notified us that he has taken the Vow. True, we very rarely publish any names, but this is not because there would be anything wrong in our keeping, for instance, a list of those declaring their Baptismal Vows. On the contrary, it might frequently be a very convenient list to have. It, however, would not claim to represent all of God's people nor that all on the list would come off victorious. So with those who take this Vow and whose names appear on our list. The name there will in no sense imply that the victory has been won, but merely that these persons have taken this solemn Vow; and that all their

Church brethren and the world and their families may know just where they stand, and see this high standard they lift up, under the present conditions of distress, before themselves and each other and the people. The list, however, will not purport to be a list of the "little flock." Oh no! Far be it from us to draw the line or to judge our brethren.

Nothing in the Scriptures intimates that our vow to the Lord must be kept secret. Indeed our Baptismal Vow we are required to symbolize or profess publicly. To the contrary, also, David, in one of the Messianic Psalms in which he prophetically speaks for Christ, says, "I will declare thy name amongst my brethren. In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee," and adds, "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will *pay my vows before them that fear him.*" (Psa. 22:25.) In Psalm 116 the prophet twice declares that his vows shall be made public, saying:

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now, *in the presence of all his people.*" And as though the vow referred to symbolized death to self and the world, as well as to sin, the Prophet continues, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" – his holy ones. (Psa. 116:14,15-18.) Again he says, "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praise unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling?" – Psa. 56:11-13.

However, dear friends, in the interest of these brethren whom it would offend let us forego the publishing of these names, at least until the necessity for so doing is more apparent. Take the Vow, solemnly, to the Lord, and live it every word and every day. It will surely draw you closer to the Lord to exercise such a scrutiny of every act and word and thought. It will help you to realize what it

is to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and under the shadow of the Almighty. No harm can come nigh that dwelling place.

Continue to advise us, if you please, when you take the Vow. We will preserve an alphabetical list which may be of some use some time.

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