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LED AWAY BY THE ERROR OF THE WICKED

"HE that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." – I John 2:9-11. [R4326 : page 40]

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing 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.

As love is declared to be the distinguishing characteristic of all who have the Spirit of Christ, so lack of love may be considered the distinguishing characteristic denominated the "error of the wicked."

Our Lord emphasized the fact that supreme love of God is the first duty of all his creatures, and love for the neighbor as for ourselves a closely allied one. But speaking to the Church, to the consecrated, to those hoping to be "members of his Body" in glory, he said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love *one another* even as I have loved *you*." – John 13:34.

We are forced to the opinion that the Lord guided to the presentation of "the VOW" for the very purpose of making it a trial and test amongst those professing to be his disciples and enjoying the light, blessing, privileges of Present Truth. Of course, we had never surmised that that little Vow, or solemn promise, or resolution to God would have had such an effect; nevertheless, had we known at the beginning what we now know, by our Lord's assisting grace, we would have done nothing different from what we did.

In presenting the matter, we had in view solely the assistance of the Lord's dear flock – to help them draw nearer to the Lord, who is our refuge and habitation, so that in the "evil day," already begun, no harm might come nigh them, because safe in that Dwelling-Place. We saw the hawk, the Adversary, plotting for the stumbling of many, especially of the saints. We did what we could for their relief, as kindly and as wisely as we knew how, and with prayer to the Lord for the wisdom from above.

ANGER, MALICE, STRIFE – EVERY EVIL WORK

We well knew that only the fully consecrated could be expected to take the Vow and that they would not be a majority, even on the select lists of the WATCH TOWER. We expected, too, that some of the consecrated might hesitate for a time to give up their liberty to so full an extent – because some might not see, as we do, the necessity for so drastic a Resolution, for so tight a binding of the sacrifice to the altar – though this would seem to be the demand of our Consecration Vow, if necessary.

But we surely were surprised by the effect of the Vow on some few of the brethren. What they saw in it that provoked them to anger, bitterness, hatred, strife, evil-speaking, evil surmising, slanders and wolfish backbiting, we cannot see.

The effect of the *suggestion* of the Vow seems to have operated on these brethren as an emetic – not that they took it, but that even looking at it led them to belch forth cruelly, bitterly, slanderously, against it, and particularly against us for presenting it. The noble esteem in which we held these dear brethren made the shock to us all the more severe. According to the Scriptures, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." But, in advance, we had no suspicion that such ugly, cruel sentiments, such unkind suspicions were in their hearts to come out. Evidently the Lord, who searcheth the heart, knew just the effect

the Vow would have, and evidently he guided us unwittingly to its presentation, as a part of the testing which he wished to bring upon his people at this time.

Note here that it is not the Vow, nor anything which we have written concerning it, that is causing the division which is rapidly taking place, and by which a small company of those whom we loved (and still love) are alienating themselves from us, and, we fear, from the Lord, and from the light of Present Truth. Remember, that in no sense of the word did we at any time suggest that the taking of the Vow should be a *test* of brotherhood, nor of saintship even. We stand by the thought which we have already made prominent – that the Lord's people are free and that no one has a right to put a yoke of bondage upon his brother, either to take the Vow, or not to take it. We merely *advised* the Vow, as we still do, just as we advised the original Consecration Vow in the language of the Apostle, "I beseech you, brethren, present your bodies a living sacrifice." – Rom. 12:1.

Similarly we urge this as in full accord with the spirit of the Lord's Word, and related to our original covenant to be dead to sin and self, and to everything that would hinder a brother in the narrow way, or hinder the progress of our Master's cause; yea, more, that we would sacrifice all to assist his cause and to protect and assist the brethren. Let it be noticed that the split is coming from those who oppose the Vow. They are not opposing an attempt to force it upon them, for no such attempt has been made. They are opposing this feature of Present Truth, trying to hinder others from taking the Vow – forcing an issue on the subject and arousing, so far as their influence goes, an evil, malicious spirit, antagonistic to the Vow and the channel through which it came.

To this end circulars are being printed and scattered abroad to poison and to prejudice the minds of all **[R4327 : page**

40] who will come under the influence. As there are but two Masters, which are these serving? Our question is not, Which do they *say* they are serving? nor, Which do they *think* they are serving? We say to God's people, Judge for yourselves what sort of spirit is this which is seeking to cause division amongst the followers of Christ, and that is willing to hint "all manner of evil" and to surmise and to back-bite? We do not believe this is the Spirit of Christ. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Are their fruits grapes or thorns? We ask these dear brethren to search their own hearts and to determine this question. "His servants ye are unto whom ye render service." (Rom. 6:16.) We are firmly convinced that they are serving the cause of the Adversary – ignorantly. We sorrow for them; we pray for them. We endeavor to set the matter forth in these columns in its true light for the protection of the Lord's dear sheep against that evil influence and for the recovery of any of those dear brethren who have not yet gone so far as to be irrecoverable. We use great plainness of speech that, as the Apostle suggested, "We may pull them out of the fire." – Jude 23.

NOT IGNORANT OF HIS DEVICES

We believe that our common Adversary has had to do with the stirring up of this matter and that the Lord will evidently overrule it as one of the "all things" for the strengthening of those who are truly his. Already we are receiving many letters telling of greatly increased blessing as a result of this very shaking up. Still our hearts yearn over the dear brethren who are making shipwreck of their eternal interests in so foolish a manner. If they did not wish to take the Vow, they had a perfect right to use their own judgment and liberty. But why should they hinder others from the use of their liberty? Why should they set themselves in antagonism and allow such bitterness to develop in their hearts, such unbrotherliness, as some of them have manifested?

We can only suppose that our great Adversary has been injecting evil into their minds, and that the Lord is permitting it, possibly because there was some wrong condition of heart there, which neither they nor we previously [R4327 : page 41] discerned. But alas! that they do not discern their own condition, and go to the Lord and purge themselves of the evil thoughts and surmises, and make amends and return into fullest fellowship with the Lord and with us all. It is not for us to judge their hearts and to say what evil was there, perhaps for months or for years before the sight of the Vow acted as an emetic. It is not for us to judge them, condemn them, for the pride and ambition, or the nursing of secret faults. It is ours only to note and reprove their present bitterness of spirit, which is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord, and to apply the Apostle's warning, "Mark them which cause divisions amongst you; *and avoid them.*" (Rom. 16:17.) We are not to render bitter words for bitter words, slander for slander, nor reviling for reviling. It is not for us to smite them, either physically or with the tongue – nor even in our thoughts, but rather to pity them and to pray for them. Avoiding them does not mean excommunicating them, nor any other unkindness. It merely means what it says – "Avoid them." If a brother stumbles into some filth and rejoices in it and glories in its stench, and will not permit us to assist him out of it, our best plan is to "hold our noses" and go our way and avoid him, until he gets cleansed from the filth, or at least until he invites us to assist him so to do. Our avoidance of him for a time may be the very best lesson we could give him of our detestation of his attitude, his condition.

LED INTO SIN AND INTO DARKNESS

Darkness is a synonym for the condition of those in sin – those out of harmony with God; for God is Light – "In him is no darkness at all." Where the leading away by the Adversary is a doctrinal deflection, it may, or it may not, lead to a wrong spirit.

We know of a great many people whom we believe to be in great doctrinal error, who, nevertheless, maintain a spirit of kindness. We know of many worldly people who have a much keener sense of justice and right, not to mention love, than have some who have deflected from the Truth. But while doctrinal errors are dangerous, and should be avoided, it is still more serious a matter to lose the spirit of Love – the holy Spirit. He who loveth not his brother loveth not God. He who hateth his brother and back-biteth him is not under the control of the spirit of God, whatever may have been his professions or his past relationship to the Lord and to the Truth.

So then, of all dangers that beset the pathway of those who are seeking glory, honor and immortality, none is more dangerous than to be "led astray with the error of the wicked" into lovelessness. This is quickly followed by antagonism to the truths which should be held and thus into antagonism to the God who should be served, and to whom the brethren are related, and who declares that whatsoever is done against them is done against him. Those "led astray with the error of the wicked" into a reprobate condition of mind, of heart, are sure to get into doctrinal darkness. Hence we must not be surprised if some of those who have manifested a bitter, loveless spirit, and who have been harrying the Lord's flock in a back-biting and wolfish manner and endeavoring for some time to stampede the stragglers and to corral them for their own purposes should become more and more dim and uncertain in respect to the Truth and unable to follow the light further.

The Lord declares that "the path of the just is as a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But as a right condition of heart is necessary in order to get onto this shining path, so a wrong condition of heart would surely take us off of the shining pathway and into the darkness which so generally prevails all about us. This also, we may concede, is a

part of the Adversary's program of opposition to the Lord and the harvest work.

While greatly rejoicing in the further clearing up of the subject of the Covenants, as set forth heretofore in these columns and further elaborated in this and recent issues, we have, nevertheless, the sorrowful thought that it may mean the passing on of the light before those who are walking in the light, and the leaving of some of our dear ones in a measure of darkness, which will increase day by day, as they either turn aside or go backward, or even fail to advance – "walking in the light." Yet what can we do? We dare not stop. We must go on, whither the Captain of our salvation leads. Much as we love those who stop, or those who turn aside, it is for us to say, "Where he leads I will follow." This does not signify that every one of the Lord's followers will see this matter of the Covenants immediately, in the same clearness and fulness as do we, and as we have tried to express it. Indeed, some never see great truths with the same clearness as do others, and yet are following on, their hearts leading more rapidly than their reasoning faculties can follow; nor does it signify that we are putting tests upon the flock. The Lord has been putting these tests before us, all through this harvest time, and leading us from knowledge to knowledge and from grace to grace, as we followed his leading.

STRENGTHEN THE BRETHREN

Already we hear of circulars being sent about which oppose the Vow and admonish the friends that Brother Russell is endeavoring to lead the Church away from the Ransom, away from the precious blood of Christ. The argument is that when we say that the New Covenant is not in operation yet, but is to be a New (Law) Covenant between God and the Jewish nation, which will be sealed at the close of this age and be in effect throughout the Millennium, to bless Israel, and through Israel all the nations

– this, we are told, is denying the Ransom, denying the blood of Christ. How foolish! We would accredit even the babes in Christ with more knowledge and a better logic on the subject than this. Surely a film or mist of some kind is coming "over the eyes of understanding" of the dear brother who presents this illogical proposition. It is a fact that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he arose from the dead the third day and that he appeared in the presence of God for us. Those facts stand, regardless of whether they are connected with one Covenant or another Covenant or no Covenant. You and I, dear reader, believed in the death of Christ as our redemption price before we had any knowledge of the Covenants.

We were justified by faith in the precious blood, and not by our knowledge or ignorance of the Covenants. And this is in harmony with the Apostle's statement that we are justified freely through his blood and have the remission of our sins. Nor is your justification and mine dependant even upon our understanding of the philosophy of the Ransom and the Atonement based upon it. We were justified by our faith before we understood the philosophy, and our justification still rests upon our faith and not upon the philosophy. But our faith has been made more clear, more substantial by the philosophy. Ask yourself the question, "Where did I get the philosophy of the Ransom and the Atonement, in which I now rejoice?" And, Where did the dear brother who sends out this circular letter get his knowledge of the Ransom and of the Atonement? It all came from God and it has come in this harvest **[R4327 : page 42]** time, because it is God's due time to make it known.

If there are other publications on the face of the earth which present the true philosophy of the Ransom and the Atonement, outside of those published by the WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY, we have no knowledge of them and would be glad to be informed respecting them. If there are any

other publications on earth which have so clearly and so persistently and so logically set forth the value of the precious blood and the philosophy of the redemption, we would be glad of the fact, and would be pleased to know of them and their authors. [R4328 : page 42]

Be not deceived, dear friends. Such blindness and confusion are of the Adversary. Remember that for years we have been explaining that we are in the harvest time, and must expect the wheat to be threshed and winnowed and "sifted like wheat." If now you feel a shaking think first for yourself and your own safety. Hold fast to what you have already attained, and, through the agency of the Vow, or in any other manner possible, draw still closer to the Lord. Bind your sacrifice to the altar. If some lose their hold and seem likely to be shaken out – and these same ones you dearly love and of them expected better things, love them still, but not with the weakness which encourages them in wrong. Rather remember that "faithful are the wounds of a friend," and in love reprove them.

The "shaking" (Heb. 12:27) which is now due to take place in the house of God is a part of the same which will ultimately extend to the whole world, causing a great time of trouble, setting every man's hand against his neighbor. The Apostle declares this, assuring us that everything that can be shaken will be shaken out, so that ultimately, both in the Church and subsequently in the world, only "those things which **cannot be shaken** will remain." The same spirit of bitterness and wolfish back-biting will ere long reach the world and set every man's hand against his neighbor. Under another figure the Apostle explains the same situation, saying that "Every man's work shall be tried so as by fire," and only the developed characters will stand. Let us watch and pray and labor for this character which will have the Divine approval and be acceptable to him forever. Naturally, and properly, these "siftings" are severest upon those

who have been most favored of the Lord. "Who shall be able to stand?"

A SIMPLE TEST OF "THE VOW"

If your mind is in any degree agitated by this question, we suggest a very simple method whereby you may test it, reach a conclusion, and henceforth have your mind at rest on this subject. It is this: First, ask the Lord for wisdom to know his will, to see things from his standpoint; second, take the latest statement of the Vow on the New Calendar, or in TOWER, and read it item by item, slowly, thoughtfully. At the conclusion of each item, think over it carefully and judge of its contents by asking yourself two questions – Is this in harmony with the teachings of God's Word and pleasing to him? Then ask, Would it be pleasing to Satan if I should make that Promise, Resolution, Vow, to the Lord? and then ask, Would it probably be helpful or injurious to me to so resolve? Do this with each paragraph. Reach your decision and consider the matter settled forever.

Our opinion is that nearly all the most earnest of the consecrated class will conclude that God is well pleased with each of those seven provisions and that singly and collectively they could do you no harm, but might do you much good, besides the influence of the action upon others. We believe, also, that your conclusion will be that Satan would be very much displeased to have you make this fresh loop upon your sacrifice, binding it to the altar. If this is your conclusion you will, undoubtedly, promptly raise your heart to the Lord in prayer, saying, "O Lord, I thank thee that in thy providence this Vow has been brought to my attention, as an assistance in making straight paths for my feet – an assistance to greater carefulness respecting my conduct as thy representative amongst men. And, now, Lord, I do solemnly promise Thee that I will observe all the provisions of this statement, to do them to the extent of my ability, relying

upon thy promised grace to help in every time of need, through the merit of my dear Redeemer."

More than 5,500 of our readers have notified us that they have taken the Vow and tell us of special blessing and nearness to the Lord since taking it. We know of only three who have since turned opponents to it. They are quite prominent brethren. We fear they decided without proper consideration. As the Scriptures say, This is to their shame. (Eccles. 5:4.) Let this be a warning to others, not to follow their course, but to "sit down first and count the cost."

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