



The Scriptures Contain the Keys

“Peter used the keys of the kingdom of heaven given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ. When he had accomplished this work, he no longer retained the power of the keys. They were transferred to the multitude of the believing Jews and Gentiles. The Spirit had revealed the mystery of the kingdom, and the fellowship of the mystery, by the mouth of Peter on Pentecost, and at Caesarea; so that the keys became the common property of all believers. The Lord ‘who hath the key of David, hath opened, and no man can shut.’ He hath set before the Gentiles ‘an open door, and no man can close it,’ so long as the scriptures are in the hands of the people.” — Elpis Israel, p. 208.

FROM the time sin entered into the world, Yahweh intervened to guard against mankind seeking eternal redemption by any means other than that which He would determine. For this reason he prevented the man and woman from partaking of the Tree of Life by placing “the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24, NASB).

Yahweh’s action set a precedent which has never been revoked, and which must be endorsed and upheld by all who claim to serve Him “in spirit and in truth.”

Since the dawn of history, God’s faithful servants have been required to guard and defend the ways of righteousness and truth, and to admit to an intimate association therewith only those who endorse its precepts and principles.

Abel was the first to take such a firm and uncompromising stand in maintaining and upholding the Truth

(Gen. 4:4, 8; cp. Heb. 11:4).

Peter issued a stark warning to the brethren of his day: “There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies... and many shall follow their pernicious ways” (2Pet. 2:1-2). Paul expressed similar warnings on more than one occasion: “After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). If such single-minded dedication to the cause of Yahweh had not been maintained by the faithful throughout the ages, the Truth would have become corrupted beyond recognition, and the way of salvation lost to mankind. For this reason, Brother Thomas stresses the example of the apostles: “They permitted no one to have access to the water (*i.e.*, for baptism) unless they believed he was a

proper subject" (p. 207).

This is as it should be. How can any individual commence a life devoted to God-manifestation unless he possesses a clear and concise knowledge, and a whole-hearted conviction concerning the purpose of the Truth in his life?

It is not difficult for any person to learn the basic doctrines of Scripture and to give satisfactory answers to questions prior to baptism; but to understand the *moral* principles which require believers to "love righteousness" and "hate wickedness," and manifest a way of life in accord with these ideals, is equally essential.

The Responsibility of Baptism

Are these matters treated with the same degree of gravity and responsibility as witnessed in earlier generations? Tragically, some either leave the Truth or have fellowship withdrawn from them, because they have either not been taught with sufficient emphasis, or have not clearly understood, the standards of spiritual morality incumbent upon all who would follow "in the steps" of the Son of God.

John the Baptist had no false concepts concerning the moral obligations and accountability which rested upon all who would "take up" their cross, and "follow" Christ (Mat. 16:24). When Pharisees and Sadducees came out to be baptised by John, he rightly refused them. He told them it was necessary that they "bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance" *before* he would accept them for baptism (Mat. 3:8, NASB). John certainly understood the principle: "By their *fruits* ye shall know them" (Mat. 7:20).

The apostles, says Brother Thomas, "were sometimes deceived, but that was not their fault." Hence apostolic words of caution were pronounced, such as Jude's declaration that "certain persons have crept in unnoticed" who,

whilst professing the Truth, were "ungodly persons" (Jude v. 4, NASB).

Concerning "paidorhantists" (infant sprinklers) and others who were prepared to be baptised but who did not understand the Truth, Brother Thomas states that "it cannot be said" that they "make too little of water"; rather, their "great offence against high heaven" is "making infinitely too much of it." In other words: "It is not water, but faith" which they need to acquire *first*. For baptism to be efficacious, there must be a true understanding and conviction concerning "the heart-purifying faith and conscience-cleansing name of Jesus."

God-dishonoring "baptism" is seen in its most absurd and sacrilegious form when "they require no faith, no repentance, no confession, to qualify their subjects for the water and formula of the Name. They ask only a suckling of eight days, with godfathers and godmothers, whose characters are not even inquired into, to answer questions, which oftentimes they do not understand, and oftener have no intention to conform to the requirements of; or, dispensing with these godless gods, give them the infant with a proxy parental faith in the dogmas of a sect, and it will suffice."

Such is the wickedness of a religious system which claims to be "Christian." Christadelphians should never forget that this system arose

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through the corruption of the Truth, which had been propounded in its purity in the first century ecclesias. From the days of Cain to the epoch which led to the flood; from the wilderness wandering to the overthrow of the kingdom of Israel; from the prophets after the exile to the times of the apostles and beyond, men have sought to impose their own aims and objectives upon the truth of God's word. The results of such foolishness has always proven disastrous, so far as the body of believers has been concerned.

Draw Nigh to God

Is not constant vigilance imperative to maintain the purity of the Truth in every generation?

Although Yahweh is a God of great "forbearance," "the time shall at length come when His patience will have an end" (p. 208). Paul gave great encouragement to all who steadfastly remain loyal to apostolic teaching: "To you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them *that know not God*, and that *obey not the gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ... When he shall come to the glorified in his saints" (2Thes. 1:7-10).

With an aptness born of mature understanding, Brother Thomas concisely summarised God's attitude towards mankind: "Them that honor God, He will honor..." This statement is in complete harmony with the words of James: "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you" (Jas. 4:8). David gave this same advice to Solomon: "And thou, Solomon my son, *know thou* the God of thy father, and *serve Him* with a perfect heart, and *with a willing mind*: for Yahweh *searcheth all hearts*, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; *if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee*; but if thou forsake Him, He will

cast thee off for ever" (1Chron. 28:9).

Such fidelity in Yahweh provides great strength and encouragement for all who strive to honor Him according to His will.

The majority of mankind are not of the disposition described by James and David. They remain either in ignorance of the Word of Truth, or choose to reject Yahweh and His revealed will; therefore, "they who seek honor one of another, and desecrate His name, are fattening their hearts for the day of slaughter." It is tragic that it should be so, for God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" desiring only that "the wicked turn from his way and live." He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (Eze. 33:11; 2Pet. 3:9).

Nevertheless, it is true in the main that "men have not yet learned the lesson, that all they are called upon by God to do is to *believe His Word and obey His laws*. He requires nothing more at their hands than this. If they neither believe nor do, or believe but do not obey, they are evil doers, and at enmity with Him. He asks men for actions, not words..." (p. 87).

Only One Way to Eternal Life

Thus Peter addressed Cornelius and his household: "He that *feareth Him*, and *worketh* righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:35).

God has not provided "many paths" whereby His saving grace might be found. He does not accept men and women merely because they are sincere. Sincerity is not, and never has been, a substitute for understanding and obeying the Truth of His Word. There is "none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The Name, Yahweh, or *Yah-hoshua*, embodies the doctrines of the atonement and God-manifestation, for it signifies: "*He Who will Be (manifested in a multitude of*

the redeemed) is the One who saves."

Cornelius and his household understood these divine requirements. "They all believed the words of Peter, awaiting his commands." Upon the basis of their correct understanding of the gospel message, Peter "ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:48, NASB). The Greek word, *prostasso* ("commanded," AV) is derived from *pros* ("toward") and *tasso* ("to arrange") and signifies "to prescribe, give command." The word occurs only seven times, and six times is rendered "commanded."

Brother Thomas comments: "After this manner Peter used the keys of the kingdom of heaven given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ. When he had accomplished this work, *he no longer retained the power of the keys*. They were transferred to the multitude of the believing Jews and Gentiles... so that the keys became the common property of all believers."

These words pose some awesome questions.

Questions About Present-Day Responsibilities

Where, today, does the responsibility rest for the faithful continuance of this mission? Undoubtedly, with the Christadelphian Community.

How is the Truth to be preached — within and without the ecclesia — in these closing days of the twentieth century? Is the zealous and uncompromising disposition of the pioneering Christadelphians to be discarded as something of an embarrassment in the modern world? Is the Truth to be taught with a bias towards a changing society, thereby giving patient consideration to the worldly ways and pathetic spiritual values of modern man? Are the demands of the Truth to be lessened, to conform to prevailing attitudes?

Is there anything wrong with the way in which Brother Thomas set

down his exposition of the Word of God nearly one hundred and fifty years ago? Do we need something more up to date? Should we be teaching a "modified" form of the beliefs and practices of the early Christadelphians? "What is Truth?"

An enormous obligation rests upon members of the Brotherhood to whom has been committed the responsibility of caring for the flock, faithfully guiding it towards the kingdom, as well as forthrightly preaching the Word to an unenlightened world. However, such responsibilities do not rest only with a few. Every brother and sister must bear their individual responsibility to uphold and maintain the purity of the Truth: in their lives and those of their families; and in their encouragement of their brethren and sisters to do likewise.

There is an urgent need, as the end of the age draws nearer, to "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees"; to "make straight paths" which lead to the kingdom, lest those for whom Christ has died be "turned out of the way" (Heb. 12:12-13).

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Brother Thomas rightly asserts that "the power of the keys" has been "transferred" to the believers," so that the keys became "the common property of all believers."

How will believers in these closing days of the Gentiles use this "power" which resides in the Word of God? Will they use it profitably and effec-

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tively? Will they appreciate and zealously fulfil the responsibilities which God has placed upon them? If not, the result will be inevitable: The Truth will become blended with the philosophies and ways of the world, so that professing believers will not be truly loyal to either the Truth or the world.

"The scriptures contain the keys," says Brother Thomas. Therefore, "let the people help themselves, if they would that God should aid them" (p. 209). "He asks men for actions, not words; for He will judge them 'according to their works' in the light of His law, and not according to their suppositious feelings and traditions" (p. 87).

Elpis Israel was originally written for the unenlightened. However, as brethren and sisters of this present era — whether they be of few years in the Truth or many — read and study this

remarkable exposition they will be constantly impressed with the compelling exhortations which are to be found on almost every page, and which therefore provide a source of great strength. Every *enlightened* person will be encouraged to open and study their Bible with renewed vigor; to set their minds steadfastly to the task of "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pet. 3:18) that they might earnestly prepare themselves for the coming of the Lord and at the same time become a source of encouragement to others.

The day of the kingdom is near at hand. May all believers concentrate their minds and endeavors towards anticipating the joy which will be experienced on that day, by all who have observed the divine terms and conditions for eternal salvation. — *J. Ullman*.

From the Pen of Various Writers

FOR Eve to generate evil thoughts of temptation within her mind without the interposition of an animal reasoning to excite her latent propensities — would require that from the beginning God created her with such reasoning condition so that of her own accord she was already manifesting carnal thinking before the intercession of the serpent. If that were so, it would mean that God formed her with a carnal mind, which is defined as "enmity against God" — a suggestion that is blasphemous. — G.E.Mansfield.

BEFORE THE SON OF GOD sent forth his apostles to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in his name, "he opened their understanding that they might understand the scriptures". If thou wouldst gain the knowledge of the wisdom of God which is so inestimable, and which is contained in the word they preached, thou must also be the subject of the same illumination. This is indispensable; for there is no obtaining of this commodity except through the scriptures of Truth. — J. Thomas.

THE IDEA that "a man must understand the prophetic times of Daniel, in order to be constituted one of the wise or justified" will not be entertained by those who know the Scriptures. The apostles were justified and from them the times and the seasons were withheld (Acts 1:7). The Thessalonians were justified, and they so little understood those "prophetic times" that they expected Christ to be manifested in their day (2 Thes. 2:1). Those prophetic times were expressly "shut up and sealed till the time of the end" (Dan. 7:4), when accomplished history would reveal their bearing to those contemporary with the end, and interested in their expiry — R. Roberts (1870).

WOULD ANY EMPLOYER be pleased with a half-hearted, insincere service? Would he tolerate us if we attended when it suited us, and refrained when it did not? Or if we mixed a service of him with a service to his competitors? No more will the Lord accept us if we serve him at our convenience, or try to mix his service with that of the world. — E. Wilson.