

Christian Behavior

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Christian Behavior --Part 1

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The history of the entire English-speaking world may be traced by an examination of the English language.

Words of both Anglo-Saxon and Latin derivation had been introduced into our language at different periods, under different circumstances, and as the outcome of extraordinary events. Consequently, the epochs and stages of the history of Britain, Canada, Australia, and the United States of America, may be followed by word studies in English.

Different terms are employed by different trades and professions. If these terms are studied, an understanding of the operations of the trades and professions may be obtained. An understanding of the nomenclature of the sciences provides considerable information as to their purpose and relations.

The Spirit of God uses certain language, certain terms, in connection with the return of the Lord Jesus; an understanding of this language will reveal much of the doctrine relative to the second coming of our Lord Jesus. There are some terms in this connection which are used in a technical sense; there are some very common words which have been adapted to this special purpose. Some of these later are used in a negative form, others in a positive form. The Christian's behaviour in view of the return of the Lord Jesus is indicated by certain verbs employed in dealing with the subject.

Seven positive verbs have been chosen for this study. These intimate the believer's attitude to the event itself, to the Lord, and to fellow believers. Not only will the meaning of these verbs be examined, but their immediate contexts will be surveyed.

Of these seven chosen verbs one was used by the Lord in speaking to His disciples; four were used by the Apostle Paul in addressing epistles to three apostolic churches; one was used by Paul in a letter to a spiritual son, Titus, and one was used by the Apostle John in writing to the divine family in the letter we call his First Epistle. These verbs, therefore, apply to a very large cross-section of New Testament believers. In our studies, may we of the present find ourselves among those Christians of the past.

To Believe (John 13:36-14:4).

The disciples were worried over the prediction of the Lord that He was about to leave them. His words to Peter baffled them all: "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." His words at the beginning of John 14 were intended to be as balm to soothe and heal their wounded spirits.

"Let not your heart be troubled," said the Lord Jesus. He knew what it was to be troubled; He was at the tomb of Lazarus (11:33), and even in the Upper Room when He made reference to His betrayer (13:21). He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

He, then, reminded them of His Father's house and its form of construction. Under the temple there were many apartments in which the priests lived during the periods

in which they engaged in their priestly ministry. Those mansions, as they are called in the King James Version, were but temporary abodes. He used these as an illustration that such a place was not suitable for His redeemed; He was going away, by way of the cross and tomb, to prepare a special place for them. That place we now know is inside the veil (Heb. 10:19-26). Having said that, He enjoined upon them this exhortation, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." There is some difficulty here relative to the moods used in the Greek; if we accept our King James Version, the first clause is in the indicative mood and the second in the imperative. The meaning is simple. Although God, being a Spirit, had not been seen by any one of them, they had always believed in Him; He their Lord was going away and would soon also be invisible; they were to believe in Him for He too was God. The verb tense suggests that they were to go on believing in Him. Their faith was to be as strong during His absence as when He had been present with them. The only proper attitude for the Christian between the ascension and the advent of Christ is to keep on believing.

The verb to believe is rendered in John 2:23-24 by the verb to commit. The life of the believers in view of the Lord's return should be characterized by a constant complete committal to the Lord Jesus.

To Abound (1 Cor. 15:58).

This verb means to exceed a number, measure or rank, and thus to overflow. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul had proved the fact of the resurrection by the rising of Christ from among the dead, and had predicted the resurrection and transformation of the saints at the

return of Christ. Because of the resurrection and all it implies of eternal bliss, Paul exhorted the Christians at Corinth to be steadfast in purpose, immovable in holy determination, and to abound in the work of the Lord.

It might well be said that an abounding work is the manifestation of an abundant life. The Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as having come that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

An abundant life is one characterized by health.

Spiritual health manifests itself in an abundant joy and abundant sacrifice (2 Cor. 8:2), and in an abundant labour (2 Cor. 11:23). The Christian in good spiritual health will always be willing and ready to exceed any measure in His devotion, love and service for Christ.

The labour movement in the world demands a decrease of work and a shortening of working hours. The imminence of our Lord's return demands that the Christian exceed both the degree and the time; that he should always abound (exceed in measure) in the work of the Lord. The verb tense here implies that the Christian is to keep on being steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; the Christian is not to decrease his zeal or service.

To Stand Firm (Phil. 4:1).

To stand fast might have been translated to stand firm; it means to persist, to maintain, and according to the context of Philippians four and one, suggests a maintaining of Christian unity in view of the coming of the Lord. The adverbial conjunction with which chapter four opens links the coming of the Lord mentioned at the close of chapter three with Paul's exhortation in its early verses.

At the end of the third chapter the saint is directed heavenward to contemplate the glorious transformation of the physical. Chapter four opens with the admonition to stand firm in view of such a wonderful event. The exhortation, given in the active imperative mood, is followed by an illustration, the opposite to standing firm. Two sisters at Philippi had deviated from the fellowship they had once enjoyed.

While conditions in that church were not the same as in the church at Corinth, nevertheless, there was disagreement hurtful to the testimony. Disagreement and contention provide the soil in which division flourishes. It has been ever since the days of the apostles; it certainly is today. A paraphrasing of Paul's language here might prove helpful: Join yourself, True Joiner-Together, to these two women for they joined themselves to me in my struggle with the gospel, and help them to be rejoined.

There have been several conjectures as to who Paul's true yoke-fellow really was. Some have suggested that she was his own wife, but this is very questionable. Since the words are in the feminine, Dr. Robertson has suggested that the passage actually is a play upon the name of a third sister, Secegus. Whoever she was, her influence made her a true yoker-together. "Blessed are the peace makers." How we need them today, especially in the light of our Lord's return!

The churches of the saints need to implement the exhortation of this Epistle relevant to oneness of mind (1:27). We are quite accustomed to so called team work on the athletic field. The Apostle apparently had this in

mind as he exhorted the Philippians to strive together for the spread of the gospel.

Euodias and Scntyche had so done in former times, but disagreement had parted them. Paul would have them reconciled in order that they once more engage in team work for the Lord, and this, especially in view of the Lord's return.

With the conditions before them, Paul exhorts all the saints at Philippi, and ourselves also to stand fast in the Lord.

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A Word Study

It has been proved that in the vocabulary of any people their history is revealed. Furthermore, an individual betrays himself by the language he uses. His misuse of words marks him as either ignorant or careless; while his mastery of words indicates the standard of his education and culture.

The believer, in a similar manner, may demonstrate his knowledge of the Bible by the phrases and terms he employs in Christian conversation. He may even reveal his hope for the future by the habitual practice of using truly prophetic expressions.

Let us consider more of those verbs which indicate the proper behaviour of God's people in view of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To Wait (1 Thess. 1:9-10)

In English to wait means to remain in readiness, to be alerted and watchful, to continue in expectancy. The verb tense used here means to keep on waiting.

The word here employed by Paul occurs only this once in the New Testament, and intimates to wait for one whose coming is known or foreseen, and also embodies the ideas of patience and trust.

A contrast to this is given in Matthew 24:48, where an evil servant says in his heart, “My Lord delayeth his coming,” and because of this attitude he abuses others and indulges himself.

This is possibly one of the first references in the New Testament Canon to the return of Christ (Chronologically speaking). It may be that the reference in the Epistle of James antedates it by a few years. At any rate, Thessalonians is the earliest writing of the Apostle Paul. How important it is to notice that from the first days of New Testament revelation, God would have us go on waiting for His Son from Heaven.

The Lord’s supper is not only a commemoration of the death of Christ, but it is an anticipation of the second advent of the Lord.

In the former part of this first chapter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle writes about the three Christian graces in an abstract way, “Your work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope.” In verses 7-10 he writes of these same virtues in a concrete way; the Thessalonians had turned to God from idols (faith), to serve the living and true God (labour), and to wait for His Son from Heaven (hope).

To Comfort (1 Thess. 4:18).

The Greek word “harpazo” means to rapture, to snatch away. Actually the rapture implies the full act by which the Church will be snatched by divine force from earth to Heaven. In the rapture proper are involved the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the translation of the living, and the uniting of both to meet the Lord in

the air. These words of explanation were given by Paul to comfort the people of God.

One can readily appreciate the grief among the saints at Thessalonica. There was the distress of misunderstanding, the sorrow of bereavement, the regret that possibly their deceased friends would not participate in the second advent of Christ, and consequently only a faint hope of any reunion with departed saints. Paul's words to them were divine balm to troubled hearts. Not only was his Epistle to comfort them, but they in turn were to repeat his statements among themselves and thus comfort one another.

The word comfort here is the verb form of the noun "parakletos" used in regard to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. The verb has a threefold meaning: to encourage, to console, and to exhort. It contains the ideas of cheer and support. These we are to do for one another in view of the Lord's imminent return.

To Look (Titus 2:13).

The Greek verb "prosdchomai" used here primarily means to receive to oneself, and, therefore to anticipate. It seems to imply the receiving of the future now as if it were a fulfilment. The return of our Lord should be so real to our souls that it should be viewed as a certain accomplishment.

There are those who see in this paragraph the two stages of the Lord's return. These they see in what is considered "the blessed hope" and "the appearing in glory of our great God and Saviour." That such an understanding is not the intent of the passage may be seen in the absence of the definite Greek article before

the second part of the statement. The passage probably should read, "Looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

Christ's coming should be so certain in our hearts that we should consider it as a factual fulfilment of His promise. We should be daily looking for the confirmation of His advent in His sudden appearance.

To Abide (1 John 2:28).

To abide, in the conception of John, means to dwell continuously in one place. In this passage, John in addressing spiritual infants (Vs. 18-28) warns them of the tendencies of the last times, about the lies of the anti-Christ, and about those who would seduce them. He tells them also of the wisdom of the indwelling Spirit to teach them all necessary things, and how they should abide in Him. Finally, his exhortation implies to keep on abiding in Christ so that when He appears spiritual fathers will not be ashamed of their own spiritual children in the presence of the Lord.

The concept of abiding in Christ was particularly strong in John's mind and heart. He uses it in both his Gospel and Epistles. The Lord Himself exhorted the disciples to abide in Him for sustenance; here the young are exhorted to abide in Christ for preservation from evil. He who abides in Christ by the Holy Spirit is not seduced by false teachers.

Having looked again into the Perfect Law of Liberty, and having considered some of its interesting terms relative to the second advent of Christ, may we continue therein, and not be forgetful; may we be doers of the Word that we may be blessed in our deeds.