

Our purpose is to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” and to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

OLD PATHS ADVOCATE

“To continue speaking the truth in love,” “endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” “keeping the ordinances as delivered.”

“Thus saith the LORD, ‘Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the Old Paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls’ (Jer. 6:16). ‘And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell in’ (Isaiah 58:12).

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NO. 9

THEY THINK IT STRANGE

By Billy Dickinson

Great continuity is found throughout the epistle of 1 Peter and the message it proclaims. It was written during a time when persecution had risen to great intensity and Christians were in need of encouragement and comfort. Even by the time you get to chapter 4, there is a discussion of what it means to be “partakers of Christ’s sufferings” and the reasons why they were despised by the world. Please take note of this observation by the apostle: “Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:4). Yes, the early church was despised by people of the world because they were obviously “not of the world” (John 17:16). In other words, many things about their self-discipline and refusal to participate in pagan practices were looked upon with contempt and a threat to “doing as the heathen like to do” (Goodspeed).

Indeed, people have always treated with scorn and derision things they don’t quite understand or that are different from the norm. That is why, even in this modern age, when true Biblical Christianity is witnessed by the world, it receives the same kinds of reaction—surprise, contempt, false accusations, and even fear. While that is unfortunate, it also serves as a good sign that we are following in the footsteps of our Savior! “Woe unto you,” Jesus declared in Luke 6:26, “when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets.” However, let me emphasize that we are not referring to being different just for the sake of being different. No, to the contrary, the point is that when people see true discipleship in our lives (as defined by Jesus), they will surely see an obvious difference. Let’s notice some various

ways and areas of life where that is true.

Total Dedication

Surely most professed followers of Christ will admit that true discipleship demands dedication to Him in all things. After all, Jesus made it plain that He must come first in our lives: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37-38).

While no one can deny that this was the high standard He gave, it’s one thing to preach it, but quite another to practice it! That’s why when it is carried out in a practical way, people of the world are shocked to see what all it involves. Christians, for example, have the responsibility to assemble on the first day of the week to eat the Lord’s supper with a scriptural congregation (Acts 20:7). That’s why when brethren go on vacation, they make it part of their planning to be at a faithful congregation for that purpose. Worldly minded people, who have no problem “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25), do not have a conscience in the matter, while others are content simply to worship at any “church of Christ” even if they know nothing about that church. To them it’s all about convenience, not conviction, and they think that being on vacation exempts them from assembling to “eat of that bread” and “drink of that cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28) in remembrance of what our Savior did for us on the cross.

Here’s a good question to consider: If you don’t have enough commitment to faithfully attend the assemblies of the church, how would you have enough faith to die for the Lord if necessary? It all comes down to what is most im-

CONTENTS

Vol XCI No. 9



ADVOCATE

They Think it Strange.....	1
All Things According to the Pattern.....	3
Corporate Worship.....	5
The Assurance of Eternal Life.....	5
Old Present-Day Words.....	6
Remember the Lord...And Fight!.....	8

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portant to us in life—“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and thieves do not break through and steal: For where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also” (Matthew 6:20-21).

Purity of Doctrine

Some don’t understand why we believe in strict adherence to the word of God, refusing to add to it or subtract from it. They find it strange that when it comes to the commands of the gospel, we insist that they are necessary to salvation. That’s especially true when it comes to water baptism. One preacher, for example, argued that baptism cannot not put a man “into Christ” because it’s a physical act. First, that is a plain denial of what the word of God declares because Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 says we are “baptized into Jesus Christ.” However, that preacher’s real problem is that he fails to understand that baptism is not a *mere* physical act—it is actually an act of faith to a divine command of God unto salvation. Galatians 3:26 makes that clear: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” But when and how does that take place? Verse 27 gives the answer: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Also, when it comes to our worship, some find it strange because it’s primitive and simple in design. That’s because we choose to offer unto God only that which is authorized in His word. It is out of respect for the authority of the scriptures that we seek “not to go beyond the things which are written” (1 Corinthians 4:6, ASV). We do our best to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9), and that enables us to worship God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

On a personal note, I want to say that I was honored when Don King added me to the “editorial staff” of the OPA several years ago. As I write this article, news of his recent death is causing sadness in the hearts of so many across the brotherhood. We owe Don a debt of gratitude for his willingness to keep this effort going for 90 plus years, because the need to point people back to the “old paths” (Jer. 6:16) is so desperately needed in our world of liberalism and religious division. Yes, we still believe that doctrinal purity is necessary to having fellowship with God and maintaining scriptural unity among the saints. If

you doubt that, consider Paul's exhortation in 1 Timothy 4:16: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

Purity of Life

Finally, some are shocked by the transforming power of the gospel because it produces a change that they do not understand or appreciate. That is the point of 1 Peter 4:3-4: "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you." Yes, real conversion had taken place in the hearts and lives of those first century Christians, and it was obvious to everyone who knew them! When the world can't see a difference between a professed Christian and the way unbelievers live their lives, something is wrong. Dear brother and sister in Christ, is there anything about you that the world finds strange? Do you refuse to wear immodest apparel, for example, that causes you to stand out when you're walking through the mall? When a group of your friends share a filthy joke, do they think you are being "prudish" for walking away? When your boss expects you to tell a "white lie" for him on the job, do you stand your ground regardless of the consequences? The point is that when we are committed to purity of life, we will often be misunderstood, but it's better to be pleasing to God than popular with men.

Editorial

ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN

By Rick Martin

In Hebrews 8:5 we see that Moses was instructed to make all things according to the pattern when building the Tabernacle. Today, many ridicule the idea of a pattern for the work of the people of God.

When someone speaks of the New Testament pattern, they are referring to a concept of a pattern that includes a belief and acknowledgement that the Scriptures are divinely inspired and that they apply to all generations. The scriptures have

all authority. If one rejects this basic belief, then they are saying the Word of God is irrelevant and man is just drifting.

The concept of a New Testament pattern includes the idea that the scriptures provide the guidelines to know the will of God and how to carry out that will in everyday life and worship. These guidelines tell us the boundaries for what is acceptable and what is not. It gives the specific requirements of what must be done and a sense of how these things are to be done to please God. Where a pattern can be identified and followed there is no need for guesswork and mistakes.

Patterns are valuable in almost every aspect of life. Patterns are important when baking a cake, making a dress, or building a house. Jesus left a pattern that Christians might "follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Patterns are very helpful. What is wanted and decided by one party can be carried out by all. This is the purpose of a pattern. In the Old Testament, there are some verses that explicitly teach the concept of a pattern. The Lord began the idea of a pattern with Abel. The Lord clearly specified animal sacrifices and not vegetation. So began the pattern of animal and blood offerings, and it was continued by Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Offerings with blood were essential in God's covenant with Israel.

God gave Noah specific instructions on how to build the ark. Moses, in building the tabernacle, was given instructions by God. God gave Joshua exact instruction on how to take the city of Jericho. He also gave David a blueprint for the Temple.

Had these men done any more or less than what God had set forth or, had they in any way altered or substituted in the plan they would come under the condemnation implied in the warning from Hebrews 8:5—"Make all things according to the pattern."

All these examples teach us that God wasn't content merely to request that these men do a certain thing. He was not going to depend upon the accuracy or inaccuracy of their knowledge. He told them exactly *what* was to be done and *how* it was to be done. He wasn't content just to say, "build it" or "do it"—He gave exact details. God has always given a pattern for his people to imitate.

In 2 Timothy 1:13 Paul says, “Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” Paul is giving Timothy a pattern or picture, or a sketch or diagram set forth in words which can be described as sound or valid. Timothy was to hold to and follow the pattern.

Because the scriptures are God’s inspired and eternal word, our goal must be to follow the Bible as closely as we can. The directions or patterns that are given must not be looked upon as being outdated or irrelevant, even though they may be unpopular with the world’s way of thinking. They must not be changed or abandoned for ways that are more consistent with a modern, secular society.

We must be Bible Christians not cultural Christians. Some have allowed the culture of the time to sway and to determine how the Word will be interpreted. Many have seen how the world does things, and like Israel of old they have a desire to be like the nations around them. People of the book must keep their eyes on the word with its inspired direction and pattern, and honor and follow it to its precise details.

It is still God’s will that we seek to know and do, and we prove our love for him when we follow his commands—“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23).

The patterns and the teachings found in the New Testament are essential to identify and separate the Church of Christ from false religious groups. One of the things that we must be concerned about is our worship and is there a pattern that we must follow.

It is easy to say what you do in worship is unimportant, just so long as you worship. This is certainly the attitude of the majority, because people today do anything and everything imaginable and call it worship. Jesus teaches that what one does in worship is important, and if one offers worship that is of human origin it is worthless—“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).

If worship is so important to our spiritual well-

being, would God forget to leave us instructions about its proper observation today, when He was so specific about it in the two previous dispensations? God has not left us without a pattern concerning worship.

We have a pattern for our singing Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. We should sing without the use of an instrument. Our objection to instruments in worship is not out of a desire just to be different. It is because in churches led by men who were filled with the spirit, no instruments were used in worship. There is nothing to authorize their use.

We have a pattern for observing the Lord’s Supper. It must be observed on every first day of the week because we have an example of a pattern in Acts 20:7. We are also given a pattern of how we are to observe it, in the examples found in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and 1 Corinthians 11. We see the Lord used one cup containing fruit of the vine and one loaf of unleavened bread. This is the pattern that must be followed.

We also have a pattern concerning the teaching. We observed that the teaching done in the Bible was always done in an undivided assembly. We have Old Testament examples as well as New Testament examples. In 1 Corinthians 14 we are also told that the teaching should be done by men because women are to be silent in the assemblies of the church.

We also have a pattern for contribution—1 Corinthians 16:1-2. These verses tell us when, who, what, how much, and why. There is no command given for doing it on any day except the Lord’s Day or for doing it in any other way.

We also have an example of disciples continuing in prayer—Acts 2:42. Prayer is a command of God, and it is an important part of the Christian’s life. It should be part of our worship.

What some want to pass off as worship today is nothing more than entertainment designed to appeal to the senses of men, who have more interest in satisfying their own appetites than they have in worshipping God. We know that over the years the church has been divided over man’s insistence on following his own ways, rather than observing God’s pattern.

God planned from the beginning of time for men to be pattern-keepers, but from the beginning pattern rejectors began to appear. Man's pride over and over again has led him to spurn heaven's directions. Let "all things be done according to the pattern"! Rick Martin, teacherrmartin@gmail.com

CORPORATE WORSHIP

By Melvin Blalock

Corporate worship is essential to pleasing God. God requires His people to assemble for worship. Some have dismissed the worship assembly of the local church as being non-essential. A major function of the local congregation is to come together for worship.

The first church continued in worship. We find this recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42). The church continued in the apostles' doctrine (or teaching). They also continued in fellowship. These new converts were together in fellowship. Their fellowship was evident as they gathered to break bread. It was the practice of the early church to come together to break bread. Notice Acts 20:7, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..." The first century church gathered on the first day of the week to break bread, (that is, partake of the Lord's Supper).

It was also in the assembly on the first day of the week that they were instructed to give of their prosperity. The Apostle Paul instructed the Corinthians, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The collection for the saints was to be taken care of in the church assembly on the first day of the week. The assembly of the local congregation for worship is essential to the spiritual health of its members.

Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having

our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:22-25). Those who have confessed their faith and had their bodies washed in pure water (water baptism) must continue to assemble. In the assembly we are to consider one another to stir up love and good works. While we can pray, read our Bibles, and sing songs of praise in a private setting, this will never replace the required assembly of the saints. Melvin Blalock

THE ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

By Frank Brancato

As a society, we often spend a large percentage of our income on insurance policies, warranties, and guaranties, all for the purpose of covering every contingency in life. We know that life itself is uncertain and many things are beyond our control. Some even seek out mediums and astrologers in an attempt to gain some insight into the otherwise unknown future. But, as we live in such a world, the child of God has the great assurance of eternal life. John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may *know* that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13). The word "know" in this passage means "to know for certain" or "to know absolutely." John was not teaching a doctrine of "once saved, always saved," nor was he teaching that the child of God cannot lose his salvation. John was simply telling us that Christians can have the confident assurance of eternal life, if we break away from sin, and live obediently to the word of God.

However, the reality is that Christians are imperfect people living in an imperfect world, and we are going to sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). John also assures us that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This confession must include godly sorrow and repentance, and not just

reluctant admission. When we confess our sins to God in such a manner, He not only forgives us but even removes the contamination of that sin. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). In this passage, Jesus meant mourning over sin which is godly sorrow and repentance that leads to forgiveness. And when we have that knowledge of being forgiven, we are comforted.

To have the assurance of eternal life, we must also live in obedience to the word of God. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whosoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know we are in Him" (1 John 2:3-5). The phrase, "the love of God is perfected in him" has caused many commentators to disagree. Is this "love of God" man's love for God, or God's love for man? It seems that the context would support man's love for God, but isn't it both? Our love for God, and God's love for us, is "perfected" by our obedience. Our obedience shows the proof of our love, and also allows God to "perfect" His love by giving us eternal life. Christianity is about living godly lives that manifests itself in righteous behavior. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). Now transformation is not perfection, it is a dominating direction that will last a lifetime.

One of the most practical passages regarding the Christian life comes from the pen of Peter with the "Seven Christian Graces" (2 Peter 1:5-7) He then assures us that if these things are in us and abound, we will neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if we do these things we will *never* fall. He then concludes his thought with the words that describe our eternal reward, "For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11).

When it comes to God's promise of eternal life, we must never be arrogant or conceited. But we can and must have the confident assurance that an abundant entrance into the everlasting king-

dom awaits us if we are faithful. May we ever be faith driven and not fear driven as we continue to strive to make heaven, and be determined to take as many people with us as we possibly can.

OLD PRESENT-DAY WORDS

By Stanley R. Owens

Jeremiah, the Prophet of God, prophesied for around 40 years. He prophesied under the good King Josiah, and also under Josiah's son the wicked King Jehoiakim. I have said many times that reading the Book of Jeremiah is a lot like reading the daily newspaper or listening to the news. Although these words are old, they fit very well into our present day. They are "Old Present-Day Words"!

In chapter one of the book that bears his name, Jeremiah mentions different kings including Zedekiah, the final King of Judah. If there was not another section other than the one in this first chapter of the book of Jeremiah, it would be a great section from which to learn some powerful lessons.

When we read about the Lord calling Jeremiah for his prophetic office, we learn that God has a work for all of us to do. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:9, "For we are laborers together with God." We sometimes sing the lyrics of the old song "There is room in the kingdom for you, my brother, there is work that we all can do." There are some things that you are able to do that I am not capable of doing; there may be something that I can do that somebody else is not able to do. But there is room for all of us. In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus gives the Parable of the Talents. Our Savior requires that we perform to our capacity. God does not demand equal performance with everyone, but He does demand performance according to our ability. The Lord can take us where we are and lead us to greater and higher levels of understanding and servitude in His Kingdom.

We can also learn from these passages about the sanctity of life. Jeremiah says in 1:4-5, "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

There are more than one million children ripped from their mother's womb and murdered every year. That is sad beyond any description. The Bible says in Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." God

says Jeremiah was a person before he was born, before he was formed in the belly. Luke 1:41 tells about a meeting between the mother of John the Baptizer and the mother of Jesus. It says, “And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb.” How can a “non-life” leap in the womb?

I heard about an event several years ago that concerned a man who was arrested by the government in Florida for destroying 118 turtle eggs. During the trial the man said “They were just eggs, they were not alive.” But the government correctly said that life was in those eggs, and they fined him \$118,000. And yet, some of the same people in our government, and other places, will argue that it is OK to allow a human baby to be murdered. In Jeremiah, we learn of the sanctity of life.

We can also see from the first chapter of Jeremiah that although our abilities are limited (and all of us are limited in one way or the other), with the Lord we are able to do as Paul said in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” We need to learn to overcome whatever limitations we have put on ourselves and trust in the Lord.

Jeremiah 1:6-8 says, “Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.”

Remember what Moses said when the Lord first came to him in Exodus 4:10—“O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant.” The Lord eventually became upset with Moses for all of the excuses he was making. When Moses finally accepted his role, what a great leader he became, and what great things he was able to be a part of. We all can do something. As has been said many times, what would you do for the Lord and His Kingdom if you knew you could not fail?

From this chapter we also learn that God’s Word is Inspired. Jeremiah 1:9 says, “Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.”

The thoughts and the Words in Scripture are in-

spired. If I did not believe that, I would quit getting into pulpits. I would not even claim to be a member of the Church. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

The things in the Word of God did not come from what men have learned in schools, or from various writings of philosophy. It came from God. It is “God-breathed.” Second Timothy 3:16 says that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” This God-breathed word is the same idea as when God created the first man Adam in Genesis 2:7, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” This inspired word is able to lead us to a life in Christ. It shows us the way for our soul to live eternally in Heaven. With the Word of God in our minds and our mouths, we are able to boldly proclaim the truth just as Jeremiah did.

Jeremiah 1:10 says, “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms.” This statement lets us know that God has authority over nations. All are all under His control. We also learn from this verse that it is right to do both positive and negative preaching. It seems most people only want to hear positive things today, yet we cannot have positive without there being a negative. Notice what the Lord continues to tell Jeremiah in verse 10—“...to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.” Please pay attention to the fact that there are four negatives and two positives listed here. I am not saying this is the percentage of preaching that should be done, but we certainly cannot shy away from doing either one.

We are facing a mammoth apostasy today. It is not something that is *going* to happen; we have been in the midst of it for quite some time. But the truth is not going to be destroyed. “Heaven and earth shall pass away,” Jesus says, “but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). When all is said and done, although it may grieve us to see what is going on in today’s world and in the Church, we can remain optimistic because Truth is not going to fail. May we be uplifted and encouraged by these “Old Present-Day Words” from the book of Jeremiah. 8432 Cox Rd, West Chester, OH 45069

WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE...

REMEMBER THE LORD...AND FIGHT!

by Jerry Dickinson

“And I looked, and arose, and said to the nobles, ‘Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons and daughters, your wives, and your houses.’ And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me. So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing” (Nehemiah 4:14-18, 23).

“Remember the Alamo!” Those were the stirring words shouted by the Texicans as they rode across the marshy plain in a surprise attack on the Mexican army under the leadership of Santa Anna. The Mexican army, including Santa Anna, was caught by complete surprise and fled in panic and disarray as Sam Houston and his soldiers overwhelmed the Mexican forces. Even Santa Anna fled and was subsequently captured, and as the price for Houston sparing his life gave Texas their independence from Mexico. I can imagine the fear and panic that struck through the hearts of the Mexican soldiers when they heard the words, “Remember the Alamo!” The Children of the East must have experienced the same dreadful panic when Gideon’s little army blew their trumpets and broke their pitchers and shouted, “The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!”

Remembering what you are fighting for can dispel your fear and give you the courage to fight. Nehemiah had inspired the Jews to begin the difficult, and seemingly impossible task, of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They faced terrible obstacles. First there was all the rubbish – the burned stones and endless piles of dust still there after all the years. The Babylonians were experts at leveling cities and walls. They would tear down every stone and they ploughed up the foundation. Then they would plough up the ground again until even a great city like Jerusalem, including Solomon’s stupendous Temple, was nothing but rubbish. Nehemiah, however, convinced the people that God would bless them and they could succeed. The Bible says the people, “had a mind to work” and they began to build and sure enough the walls began to be rebuilt at an incredible pace.

Seeing the progress being made enemies soon made their presence known. At first they mocked and ridiculed the workers but to little avail. Then they made threats of violence and began to organize to attack the workers and stop the work. This caused fear and consternation among the people, but Nehemiah urged them to carry on the construction and to also be prepared to fight if necessary. His exhortation was, “Remember the Lord ... and fight!” God is great and dreadful, he reminds them, and if you will do your duty and fight, the victory is assured. What a great lesson and reminder for us today as builders in the kingdom and soldiers of Jesus Christ. We too are mocked and ridiculed, and if that does not stop us it may be that violent threats will be ours to endure. It has happened to our brethren in the past—and it may happen to us in the future. We must keep on fighting the good fight of faith (unlike in Nehemiah’s day ours is a spiritual warfare and we are building and fighting spiritually, not carnally) and at the same time keep building up the cause of the Captain of our salvation.

“You therefore must endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Timothy 2:3, 8). Notice Paul says that as good soldiers we should “Remember Jesus Christ!” Note other translations of this statement.

“Keep your attention on Jesus Christ as risen from the dead and descended from David.”

“Keep your mind of Jesus Christ!

“Meditate on Jesus, the Messiah!”

“Never forget that Jesus Christ has risen from among the dead.”

Paul is admonishing us, when we are faced with enemies and obstacles as soldiers of Christ, to keep our focus and attention on our Leader and Captain, who has been raised from the dead, which assures us the victory is sealed and secure. We must have our building trowel in one hand as we teach and build up the church, and our spiritual sword in the other hand ready to fight any and all enemies of our Savior and His kingdom. Remember Jesus! If we do that we will not quake or fear no matter the threat. “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever” (Isaiah 26:30). The words “perfect peace” are literally “Peace, Peace” in the Hebrew. Think about that. There is double peace if we keep our mind and attention on the Lord. Let us heed the call and challenge. “Remember the LORD ... And fight!”