



LESSON EIGHT

The Inoculator

Scripture Reading:

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-26

- 2:1 You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus;
- 2:2 And the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also.
- 2:3 Suffer evil with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
- 2:4 No one serving as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please the one who enlisted him.
- 2:5 And also if anyone contends in the games, he is not crowned unless he contends lawfully.
- 2:6 The laboring farmer must be the first to partake of the fruit.
- 2:7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.
- 2:8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, of the seed of David, according to my gospel,
- 2:9 In which I suffer evil unto bonds as a criminal; but the word of God is not bound.
- 2:10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the chosen ones, that they themselves also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.
- 2:11 Faithful is the word: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;
- 2:12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us;
- 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.
- 2:14 Remind them of these things, solemnly charging them before God not to have contentions of words, which is useful for nothing, to the ruin of those who hear.
- 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth.
- 2:16 But avoid profane, vain babblings, for they will advance to more ungodliness,
- 2:17 And their word will spread like gangrene, of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus,
- 2:18 Who concerning the truth have misaimed, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and overthrow the faith of some.
- 2:19 However the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are His, and, Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.
- 2:20 But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels but also wooden and earthen; and some are unto honor, and some unto dishonor.
- 2:21 If therefore anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared unto every good work.
- 2:22 But flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.
- 2:23 But foolish questionings and those arising from an untrained mind refuse, knowing that they beget contentions.
- 2:24 But a slave of the Lord ought not to contend but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, bearing with wrong;
- 2:25 In meekness correcting those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth,
- 2:26 And they may return to soberness out of the snare of the devil, having been caught alive by him, unto His will.

QUESTIONS:

SECTION 1:

1. What is grace?
2. What is the “thing” that was referred to in verse 2?
3. As a soldier, what must one be freed from?
4. What is the important matter for a runner to win the race?

SECTION 2:

1. What is the most important characteristic of a farmer?
2. Explain verse 13 concerning His faithfulness?
3. What does it mean to cut straight the word of the truth?
4. What does the “truth” in verse 15 denote?

SECTION 3:

1. What does the word “profane” in verse 16 denote?
2. How did the apostle Paul describe the ones who teach differently?
3. What does the word ‘foundation’ refer to in verse 19?
4. What are the two-sided seals of this firm foundation?

SECTION 4:

1. What does Paul mean by the expression “a great house”?
2. What are the two things we need to cleanse ourselves from in order to be a vessel unto honor?
3. What was Paul’s charge to Timothy in verse 22?
4. What does the expression “the snare of the Devil” in verse 26 indicate about the opposers of the truth?

-----[SECTIONS 1 & 2] -----

We have pointed out that the subject of 2 Timothy is inoculation against the decline of the church. In

this message we shall consider five specific titles given to the inoculator in 2:1-15. These titles are a teacher, a soldier, a contender (an athlete), a husbandman, and a workman. If we read these verses carefully, we shall see that Paul regarded Timothy and his other co-workers as those who should be teachers, soldiers, contenders, husbandmen, and workmen.

-----[SECTION 1] -----

I. A TEACHER

In 2:1 Paul says, “You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.” The word “therefore” refers to chapter one. Paul’s exhortation in 2:1 is in view of what has been mentioned in the preceding chapter. Based upon what he has just written to Timothy, Paul now goes on to encourage him to be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. Paul did not charge Timothy here to be empowered in knowledge or in gifts. He charged him to be empowered in grace. The apostle himself had experienced the empowering of grace in life (1:9-12). Now he exhorts Timothy to be empowered in the same grace. This grace is God’s provision in life for us to live out His purpose. Instead of being discouraged, Paul was empowered in grace, even though he was in prison. He realized that grace is nothing less than the processed Triune God—the Father embodied in the Son and the Son realized as the indwelling Spirit. Second Corinthians 13:14 indicates that grace is the very Triune God Himself: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (lit.). Grace is not a thing; it is a unique Person, the living, divine Person of the Triune God processed to be the all-inclusive, life-giving, indwelling Spirit. This Spirit now dwells in us as our grace. We all can be empowered in this grace in the indwelling Triune God processed to be our enjoyment.

The more we are empowered in this grace, the more able we shall be to teach others. Thus, in verse 2 Paul goes on to say, “And the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also.” The things to which Paul refers here are the healthy words in 1:13. The healthy words, after being committed to faithful men, become the good deposit in them (1:14). This word indicates that if someone...has a deposit of the Lord’s healthy words, he should train the faithful

ones, the trustworthy ones, that they also may have a good deposit from the Lord, thus making them competent to teach others.

Paul realized that Timothy had received a good deposit, that he had been taught and nourished with the riches of grace. Therefore, he charged Timothy to commit these things to others who would be faithful and competent to carry on the same ministry. This indicates that more than one person is needed to carry on the riches of God’s New Testament economy...Then those who have received these riches will be able to commit these things to others. Imagine what the situation would be if the Lord had ten thousand saints filled with His good deposit, spreading the riches of His economy throughout the earth. No doubt, this would hasten the time of His glorious appearing.

In 2:1 and 2 Paul is burdened to charge Timothy, one who had received such a good deposit, to pass on the riches of grace to others. Then there would be many teachers, many ministers of Christ, to spread the riches of God’s New Testament economy.

II. A SOLDIER

In verse 3 Paul continues, “Take your share in suffering evil as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” The apostles considered their ministry a warfare for Christ, just as the priestly service was considered a military service, a warfare, in Numbers 4:23, 30, 35 (lit.). Whenever we minister Christ to others, we find ourselves in a battle. Hence, we should not only be teachers committing the deposit to others, but we should also be soldiers fighting for God’s interests.

Verse 4 says, “No one serving as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of life, that he may please the one who enlisted him.” The word for life here in Greek is *bios*, indicating the physical life in this age. To fight a good fight (4:7) for the Lord’s interests on this earth we must be cleared of any earthly entanglement. The matters of our material, physical life should not entangle us as we are endeavoring to minister Christ to others. This ministry is a fighting, and the fighting requires that we be free from entanglement. On the one hand, the priestly service is a ministry to God; on the other hand, it is a warfare against God’s enemies. As the priests were bearing the ark of testimony, they had to be prepared to fight against those who might attack this testimony.

III. A CONTENDER

In verse 5 Paul likens Timothy to an athlete contending in the games: “And if also anyone contends in the games, he is not crowned unless he contends lawfully.” At the same time Timothy was to be a teacher and a soldier, he was also to be an athlete. A soldier must fight to win the victory, whereas an athlete must contend lawfully to receive the crown.

It is important for a runner in a race to run fast. That is not the time for him to exercise patience...But when it comes to running the race to win the crown, we should not wait. On the contrary, we should run to reach the goal.

-----[SECTION 2] -----

IV. A HUSBANDMAN

Verse 6 continues, “The laboring husbandman must be the first to partake of the fruits.” Here Paul likens Timothy to a husbandman, a farmer. Just as a soldier must win the victory and an athlete must receive the crown, so a husbandman must partake of the fruits, the food. This requires patience. As athletes we should be quick, but as farmers we need to be patient. If out of impatience a farmer would pluck up the tiny sprouts, his crop would be ruined. Likewise, if he drives his cattle too much, he may hurt them. With both crops and livestock, farmers must learn to have patience.

Verses 7 through 14 are related to Paul’s charge to Timothy that he be a husbandman. After telling Timothy to consider what he says and that the Lord will give him understanding in all things (v. 7), Paul goes on to say, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from among the dead, of the seed of David, according to my gospel.” The word “raised” in verse 8 indicates Christ’s victory over death by His divine life with its resurrection power. The expression “seed of David” indicates Christ’s dignified human nature exalted and glorified along with His divine nature. The words “my gospel” indicate that Paul’s gospel was the glad tidings of the living Person of Christ, who possesses both the divine and human nature, who was incarnated to be the Son of Man and resurrected to be the Son of God, as indicated in the parallel portion, Romans 1:1-4.

Paul says that he suffered evil “unto bonds as a criminal,” but that “the word of God is not bound” (v. 9). In spite of all the opposition by human

efforts that were instigated by the enemy, Satan, the bonds of the apostle released the word of God, giving it free course and making it more prevailing.

In verse 10 Paul continues, “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the chosen ones, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” The “chosen ones” denotes the believers in Christ, who were chosen by God the Father before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) and selected from mankind for salvation. The apostle endured all sufferings for our sake that we also may obtain salvation as he did.

Immediately after charging Timothy to be a husbandman, Paul speaks of suffering. This indicates that a husbandman must be one who is able to suffer and endure. As a farmer, he must learn not only to suffer, but also to die.

In these verses Paul not only speaks of his own sufferings, but he also presents the Lord Jesus as a pattern of one who suffered, died, and was resurrected.

Verse 12 says, “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us.” Enduring is related to life in this age, and reigning with Christ, to the coming age. If we deny Him, He will deny us; that is, He will not acknowledge us (Matt. 10:33; Luke 9:26).

Verse 13 continues, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” The word faithful in this verse refers to the Lord’s faithfulness to His own word. If we are faithless, the Lord will remain faithful, for He is not able to deny Himself. If we become faithless to Him, although He remains faithful, He cannot accept us as faithful by making Himself unfaithful, that is, by denying Himself, by denying His nature and His being.

In verse 14 Paul says, “Remind them of these things, solemnly charging them before the Lord not to have contentions of words, which are profitable for nothing, to the ruin of those who hear.” By “these things” Paul refers to the charge that faithful, competent men, to whom the good deposit has been committed, should be not only teachers, but also soldiers, athletes, and husbandmen. Like the Lord Jesus during His life on earth, they need to be patient and have endurance. The Lord suffered with patience, and He endured. After He was put to death, He was resurrected. Based on this,

Paul says that if we die with Him, we shall live and that if we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him.

V. A WORKMAN

In verse 15 Paul says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth.” Here Paul indicates that the inoculator is to be a workman. As a carpenter, this workman must cut straight the word of the truth. This means to unfold the word of God in its various parts rightly and straightly without distortion. Just as a carpenter has the skill to cut wood in a straight way, so the Lord’s workman needs the skill to cut straight the word of truth. This is necessary because in the decline of the church so many truths are twisted and presented in a warped, biased form.

“Contentions of words” (2:14), “profane babblings” (v. 16), the eating word of gangrene (v. 17), and “foolish and ignorant questionings” (v. 23) are often very much used by the Devil (v. 26) in the down current among the churches to produce contentions (v. 23), to ruin the hearers (v. 14), to promote ungodliness (v. 16), and to overthrow people’s faith (v. 18). Hence, there is the need of the word of the truth rightly unfolded to enlighten the darkened ones, inoculate against the poison, swallow up the death, and bring the distracted back to the right track.

Among Christians today, only the superficial aspects of the truth are not twisted. Virtually all the deeper things of the truth have been distorted. Concerning these things, many have not cut the word of truth straightly, but cut it in a way that is curved and biased. Therefore, we should be not only teachers, soldiers, contenders, and farmers, but also workmen, carpenters, cutting straight the word of the truth. The truth here does not merely denote biblical doctrine; it refers to the contents and the reality of God’s New Testament economy. The main elements of this truth are Christ as the mystery of God and the embodiment of God and the church as the mystery of Christ and the Body of Christ. We all need to learn to cut straight the word of truth with respect to Christ and the church.

Certain of the Brethren teachers interpret Paul’s word about cutting straight the word of truth to mean dividing the Bible into various dispensations: innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace, and kingdom. The Bible can be understood according to these dispensations.

However, arranging the Word into dispensations is not what Paul means in 2:15 about cutting straight the word of the truth. As used in the three books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, the word truth has a specific significance: it denotes the contents of God’s New Testament economy...As workmen, we should learn not merely to divide the Bible into dispensations. This is too superficial. We must learn to unfold the word of the truth concerning God’s economy. If we would do this, we need to consider carefully Paul’s use of the word truth in these three Epistles. If we consider these books carefully, we shall see that truth here denotes the reality of the contents of the New Testament economy of God. Therefore, to cut straight the word of the truth is to unfold without bias or distortion the reality of God’s economy revealed in the New Testament.

-----[SECTION 3] -----

I. AVOIDING PROFANE, VAIN BABBLINGS

A. Advancing to More Ungodliness

As a contrast to verse 15, Paul goes on to say in verse 16, “But avoid profane, vain babblings, for they will advance to more ungodliness.” The word profane denotes that which touches worldliness and is touched by it; it refers to what is contrary to being holy. The profane, vain babblings Paul charged Timothy to avoid advance to more ungodliness, to a situation which is contrary to godliness, contrary to the manifestation of God in our daily life and in the church life.

B. Spreading as Gangrene

In verse 17 Paul goes on to say, “And their word will spread as gangrene, of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus.” The Greek word rendered spread may also be rendered feed or eat. Literally it means “will find pasture,” as in John 10:9. The word for pasture in Greek is the medical term for the consuming progress of a mortifying disease (Alford). Hence, its meaning in this verse is to spread.

The word gangrene denotes an eating sore, a cancer. Paul uses such a strong word to describe those who teach differently. He tells us that their word not only advances unto more ungodliness, but that it spreads as gangrene which consumes the flesh and causes part of one’s body to die.

According to our observation, this has been the situation among certain dissenting ones.

C. Hymenaeus and Philetus

1. Having Misaimed concerning the Truth

Speaking of Hymenaeus and Philetus, Paul says in verse 18 that concerning the truth they “have misaimed, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and overthrow the faith of some.” The word misaimed means to miss the mark, swerve, deviate. Paul does not say that Hymenaeus and Philetus misaimed concerning doctrine or teaching; he says that they misaimed concerning the truth, concerning the reality of the New Testament economy. They swerved from the truth by saying that the resurrection had already taken place. This is to claim that there will be no resurrection. This is a serious heresy, for it denies the divine power in life (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thes. 4:16; Rev. 20:4, 6).

2. Overthrowing the Faith of Some

In verse 18 Paul also says that by having misaimed concerning the truth Hymenaeus and Philetus overthrew the faith of some. Faith here is subjective and refers to the act of believing. This subjective faith, our believing act, is very much related to the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 10:9). As we have pointed out, this subjective faith involves an organic union between us and the Triune God. For one’s faith to be overthrown is to have this inward organic union damaged in some way. Some among us can testify of having had this organic union temporarily cut off by hearing the words of those who taught differently. Inwardly these ones realized that the organic union within them had ceased. That was the overthrowing of their faith.

II. THE FIRM FOUNDATION OF GOD AND ITS SEAL

In verse 19 Paul declares, “However, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are His, and, Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.” Many Christian teachers claim that the foundation here refers to Christ. It is true that in 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul says that Christ is the unique foundation. Apart from Him, we do not have any other foundation. Nevertheless, if we consider verse 19 according to the context of the chapter, we shall see that the foundation here does not refer to Christ as the foundation of the church, but refers to the church as the foundation, or base, of the truth. Verses 14 through 18 give instruction

concerning how to deal with heresies on the negative side and how to handle the truth on the positive side. According to the context of verses 15, 18, and 25, the foundation here does not refer to Christ as the foundation of the church, but to the church as the foundation of the truth. This corresponds to “the base of the truth,” which holds the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), especially the truth of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 4:33).

The *church* is built with the divine life in Christ, a life which is indestructible, unconquerable (Heb. 7:16; Acts 2:24), and able to withstand decline into death from any source. Hence, the church is the firm foundation of God that stands forever against any heresy. No matter what kind of heresies may come in or how extensively the gangrene may spread, this firm foundation stands.

The church is built on something eternal and divine—God’s life with His nature. For this reason, not even the gates of Hades can conquer it. Because it is built on the indestructible and unconquerable eternal life, the firm foundation of the truth stands...Hence, the church is the firm foundation of God standing in the eternal life.

Paul says that this firm foundation has “this seal.” The seal has two sides. On the Lord’s side it is: “The Lord knows those who are His.” This is based on the Lord’s divine life, which He has given to all His believers and which has brought them into an organic union with Him, making them one with Him and causing them to become His. On our side it is: “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.” This is the issue of the divine life: it enables us to depart from unrighteousness and keeps us blameless in His holy name. The church as the firm foundation in the divine life bears such a two-sided seal, testifying that the Lord’s divine life has made us His and has kept us from things which are contrary to His righteous way.

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III. A GREAT HOUSE

Verse 19 indicates definitely that the ones exposed in verses 16 through 18 are not the Lord’s. Their evil doings are a strong proof of this.

In verse 20 Paul continues, “But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen, and some unto honor, and

some unto dishonor.” The word “but” at the beginning of this verse indicates that it stands in contrast to the definition in the preceding verse concerning genuine believers.

What does Paul mean by the expression “a great house”? In this great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen ones, and some unto honor and others unto dishonor...The house of God defined in 1 Timothy 3:15 and 16 is the genuine church in its divine nature and essential character as the foundation of the truth, whereas the great house here refers to the deteriorated church in its mixed character, as illustrated by the abnormally big tree in Matthew 13:31 and 32. In this great house there are not only precious vessels, but also base ones. Thus, we cannot believe that the great house in this verse refers to the church as the house of the living God in 1 Timothy 3:15. The great house is certainly not the house of the living God. The house of the living God is the great mystery of godliness and also God manifest in the flesh...Furthermore, this great house is equal to the big tree in Matthew 13...How great today is this abnormal house! Just as many unclean birds lodge in the big tree, so in the great house there are vessels unto dishonor, wooden and earthen vessels. In the genuine church, however, there are only gold and silver vessels.

A. Vessels unto Honor and unto Dishonor

Honorable vessels are of both the divine nature (gold) and the redeemed and regenerated human nature (silver). These, like Timothy and other genuine believers, constitute the sure foundation to hold the truth. Dishonorable vessels are of the fallen human nature (wood and earth). Hymenaeus, Philetus, and other false believers are of these.

B. Cleansed from the Dishonorable Vessels

In verse 21 Paul goes on to say, “If therefore anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared unto every good work.” To cleanse ourselves is to “depart from unrighteousness” (v. 19), as an outward evidence of the inward divine nature. The word “these” in verse 21 denotes the vessels unto dishonor, including those mentioned in verses 16 through 18. We should not only cleanse ourselves from anything unrighteous, but also from the dishonorable vessels. This means that we must stay away from them. Hence, we must cleanse ourselves from the unrighteous things and

from the dishonorable vessels of wood and earth. If we cleanse ourselves from these negative things and negative persons, we shall be vessels unto honor, sanctified, useful to the master, and prepared unto every good work. Unto honor is a matter of nature, sanctified is a matter of position, useful is a matter of practice, and prepared is a matter of training.

IV. PAUL’S CHARGE TO TIMOTHY

A. Fleeing and Pursuing

Verse 22 continues, “But flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Timothy should beware not only of outward corruption among the churches, but also of inward lusts within himself. He must avoid the outward corruption and flee the inward lusts. Furthermore, he should pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Righteousness is toward self, faith is toward God, and love is toward others. Peace is the consequence of these three virtues.

B. Calling On the Lord

To call on the Lord out of a pure heart is to “name the name of the Lord” in our prayer and praise to Him. The Lord’s seekers must be those who call on His name...Thank the Lord that we are with those who call on Him out of a pure heart. With such believers we may pursue the virtues of righteousness, faith, love, and peace.

C. Refusing Foolish and Ignorant Questionings

In verse 23 Paul says, “But foolish and ignorant questionings refuse, knowing that they produce contentions.” The Greek word rendered foolish may also be rendered stupid. The word ignorant denotes that which is uninstructed, undisciplined, untrained, that is, not subject to God, but following one’s own mind and will (Darby). The word produce means to engender, to beget. We must refuse such foolish questionings, for they have their source in Satan, the serpent. Many years ago I read that someone suggested that the serpent may have stood up in the form of a question mark when he talked with Eve. He questioned her with the words, “Hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1). All foolish questionings originate with the serpent. Thus, we should refuse foolish and ignorant questionings, questionings which beget contentions. These questionings always arise from an evil, serpentine source.

D. Not Contending

In verse 24 Paul goes on, “And a slave of the Lord must not contend, but be gentle toward all; apt to teach, bearing with wrong.” When people wrong you, you should not be troubled. Instead, as a slave of the Lord, you should be gentle and bear with the wrong.

E. Correcting Those Who Oppose

In verse 25 Paul continues, “In meekness correcting those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth.” Paul’s use of the word repentance indicates that with the opposers of the truth it is the heart and conscience which are in question. The truth is the revelation of the living God and His economy—His heart’s desire. To receive the divine revelation, the heart and conscience need to be rightly exercised toward God. The heart should be turned to Him, directed solely to Him, and the conscience must be pure and void of offense before Him. Otherwise, one might be carried away as a captive by the Devil and fall into his snare (v. 26).

In verse 25 Paul again refers to the full knowledge of the truth. Paul does not speak here of the full knowledge of the Bible or the full knowledge of doctrine and teaching. He emphasizes repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth. The inoculator must bear the burden to correct with meekness those who oppose in the hope that they may be enlightened, repent, and return to the full knowledge of the truth.

It is possible that those who repent “may return to soberness out of the snare of the Devil, having been caught by him, unto His will” (v. 26). According to Vincent, to return to soberness means to become sober again, to awake out of a drunken stupor. Paul’s use of the expression “the snare of the Devil” indicates that the opposers of the truth, being short of the adequate knowledge of the divine revelation, have been captured and kept in a snare by the Devil. The enemy of God occupies their reprobate mind with error and shuts God out, just as he did with the Pharisees (John 8:42-45). They need to return to God in their heart and have a thorough dealing in their conscience.

The pronoun “him” in the phrase “having been caught by him” refers to the Devil. However, “unto His will,” literally translated “unto the will of that One,” refers to God, mentioned in verse 25. Hence,

it means toward God’s will, for God’s will, to do God’s will.

Suppose some approach you with the intention of arguing about a certain doctrine or practice. Instead of entering into an argument with them, present God’s dispensation to them. In order to do this, you need to be familiar with the contents of God’s New Testament economy. All the *believers* should be trained...to present the full knowledge of the truth, to share with others the reality of the contents of God’s New Testament economy.

It is our hope that others may be enlightened and also come to the full knowledge of the truth.