

BE AN EXAMPLE

The Apostle Paul had special affection for Timothy. He wrote: *“To Timothy, my dearly beloved son... I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see thee...”* (2 Tim. 1:2-4). One factor that might have endeared Timothy to Paul was Timothy’s love and zeal for the gospel, as Paul went on to write: *“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned (sincere; without hypocrisy) faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also...”* (2 Tim. 1:5).

And so it was that Paul assigned the young Timothy a challenging task: *“As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do”* (1 Tim. 1:3-4). *“These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth; but **be thou an example** of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”* (1 Tim. 4:11-12). The ministry with which Timothy was charged required his personal conduct to be exemplary.

In the King James Version, the above quotation from 1 Timothy 4:11-12 lists six aspects of conduct to which Timothy was to pay particular attention: his word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith and purity. It is suggested that every Christian today should pay particular attention to their conduct so that they too will be *“an example of the believers”*.

His word

Paul’s first exhortation to Timothy was that he be an example in word, that is, in his speech. The Christian’s manner of speaking reveals much about their inner being as Jesus declared to the Pharisees: *“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”* (Matt. 12:34). The words that one speaks indicate the condition of their heart and hence Jesus went on to declare: *“For by thy words thou shalt*

be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (verse 37). The justification to which Jesus referred was not justification to life: the only means by which anyone can be justified to life is faith in the blood of Jesus Christ: *“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”* (Rom. 3:24-26). *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:10-12). The challenge that confronted Timothy was to ensure that his speech did not give any of his observers grounds to defame the Faith.

Likewise the condemnation to which Jesus referred in Matthew 12:37 (Greek: *katadikazo*) was not a condemnation to an eternal destiny but rather the adverse judgment made by other men. This condemnation is mentioned only four times in the New Testament: Matthew 12:7, 37, Luke 6:37 and James 5:6. Matthew 12:7 reads: *“But if ye had known what this meaneth, ‘I will have mercy, and not sacrifice’, ye would not have condemned the guiltless...”*; the condemnation to which Jesus referred was the judgment the Pharisees had levelled at Him for eating the ears of corn on the Sabbath day; it is not a condemnation additional to the condemnation inherited from father Adam.

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Thus the standard to which every Christian is to strive is that their speech will not give fuel for any adverse criticism by other men; the words that one speaks are the basis on which fellow man makes judgments about the fidelity of the gospel. In that vein the impression given by Jesus' words is not surprising: "... all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth..." (Luke 4:22). Jesus was totally pure in heart, his words reflected that purity, and exemplified the standard for which the Psalmist prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10).

The Apostle Paul's letters to the other churches also exhorted them to exercise control over their speech: "Let no corrupt (worthless) communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29); and "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6). To Titus Paul wrote: "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works... **sound speech**, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:7-8).

Another aspect of a Christian's speech is that it should be simple, plain and honest, without any intention to deceive with false praise: "For our exhortation was not of deceit... But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness..." (1 Thess. 2:3-5).

While the Christian must exercise continuous diligence and watch-care over their speech they should not be discouraged by unintentional lapses because every one fails at times: "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (James 3:2).

Conversation

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men..." (2 Cor. 3:2-3). Just as mankind makes judgments based on what a person speaks, likewise with what they do. Every person's conduct is visible to everyone with whom they come in contact, and either consciously or sub-consciously their observers will make judgments about them. In Ephesians 5:8-16 the Apostle Paul gives some clear instructions regarding Christian conduct: "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light... have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them... see then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil".

Likewise the Apostle Peter wrote: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake... For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:11-15). Peter's instructions are clear: Christians are to be honest and law-abiding, not with the idea of reaping any reward in the present time but so that the ministry may not be blamed.

Peter went on to explain that such conduct will necessitate a change from that in which his readers engaged when they were in darkness: "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" (1 Pet. 4:3-4). One challenge of the Christian is to withstand the surprise that others will express at their changed 'life style'.

There is yet another aspect of Christian conduct: the Christian is not to do 'good works' in an endeavour to attract praise from men, as was the practice of the Pharisees: "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments" (Matt. 23:5). The Christian is not to seek praise and honour at the present time; mankind in general will not praise the Christian's 'good works' until the "day of visitation" (which is still future), and at that time the praise will be given to God, not man.

One source of strength that helps the Christian 'make the change' and stand apart from activities in which they engaged before their consecration, is to remember the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18: "... ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty".

Charity

Paul also exhorted Timothy to be an example "in charity". The first aspect of being an example in "charity" is to love all believers, whatever their background or circumstances, and Timothy was to be an example in that regard. Jesus told His disciples: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one

another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35). One of the most powerful witnesses of Christian discipleship is the love that believers have for each other; if it is absent the Adversary will seize upon its absence and trump it as evidence that the Christian faith is phoney.

In general it is easy to love fellow-believers. However the love that is to be exercised amongst the believers extends to “*forbearing one another in love*” (Eph. 4:2): no-one in the flesh is perfect and such forbearance includes “putting up” with any annoying and irritating traits in fellow believers.

Exercising love to all the believers also includes an acceptance of those who are in poor material circumstances. The Apostle James gives clear instructions regarding the exercise of love towards all believers regardless of their material wealth: “*For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and you have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, ‘Sit thou here in a good place’; and say to the poor, ‘Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool’: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?’*” (James 2:2-4). James continues to point out that such discrimination is sinful and does not fulfill the royal law to “*love thy neighbour as thyself*” (James 2:8-9).

Another aspect of love is not to deliberately offend anyone, to the extent of denying oneself if another would be hindered by an action. In apostolic times this principle embraced eating different kinds of food due to the prevalence of food that had been offered to idols and which was afterwards available for human consumption. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died*” (Rom. 14:15).

Christian love (Greek: *agape*) includes benevolence and is to be extended to non-believers: “*And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you*” (1 Thess. 3:12). As Jesus taught His disciples: “*For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect* (that is complete, loving both believers and unbelievers) *even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*” (Matt. 5:46-47). God’s love embraces all mankind, believers and unbelievers alike and the Christian is to practice the same love toward all.

Spirit

According to the King James Version, the next aspect listed in 1 Timothy 4:12 in which Timothy was to be an example is “*in spirit*”. However it is uncertain whether those words are authentic: they are retained in the New King James Version but are omitted in the Revised Version, the American Standard Version, the New International Version and the Diaglott, and therefore they will not be addressed in this article.

Faith

However there is no doubt that Timothy was to be an example in faith—the question was **how** was his faith to be an example?

The answer is contained in Paul’s exhortation to him: “*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ... Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry*” (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Not being ashamed of his ministry but “preaching the word” was an example of his faith. He was to be as a bishop, holding “*fast the faithful word*” as Paul exhorted Titus (Titus 1:9). To do so was an example of faith.

Purity

The setting of an example in purity also presented Timothy (and continues to present all Christians) with a difficult challenge: “*unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure...*” (Titus 1:15). If those whom Paul describes as “*defiled*” wish to deem another’s actions as impure they will do so regardless of the nature of the actions. The only precaution any Christian can take is to “*abstain from all appearance of evil*” (1 Thess. 5:22), that is, abstain from everything that anyone can reasonably deem to fall short of “Christian standards”. However there is ‘no guarantee’ that allegations will not be made: what may seem to be pure to the Christian may be deemed sinful by another if the other is determined (predisposed) to deem them so. In such situations one may be comforted by remembering that “*all things are open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do*” (Heb. 4:13), and that “*... the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7). Christians everywhere may repeat the words of David’s prayer: “*Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart. For Your loving kindness is before my eyes, And I have walked in Your truth*” (Psa. 26:2-3 NKJV).

VISIONS, DREAMS AND REVELATIONS

The Bible is the greatest book the world has ever known. It was written by people who were inspired by God. It contains the answer to every question of importance to mankind. It records the past, describes the present and predicts the future. It explains why mankind is on the earth and where he is going. It explains what is wrong with the world and how it will be rectified. No other book is so powerful, so harmonious or so prophetic. Its pages record the visions, dreams and revelations that God has given to His servants to enable them to achieve His purposes.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines a VISION (3) as “*something seen or presented to the mind otherwise than by natural ordinary sight in the normal waking state*”; a DREAM as “*a succession of images or ideas present in the mind during sleep*”, and a REVELATION as “*something revealed or disclosed, especially causing astonishment*”.

Visions

The first vision recorded in the Bible is in Genesis 15:1-5: “*After this the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward’ ... And Abram said, ‘You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir’. Then the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir’. He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them’. Then He said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’” (NIV). Abram saw a vision and heard the word of the Lord; he did not see God, he did not see an angel of God, he only saw a vision. The purpose of the vision was to tell him that he would have a son, and also that his offspring would be innumerable, like the stars of heaven.*

The vision that God gave Abram was the springboard for much of Abram's faith, and it is recorded because it should give encouragement to His people: “*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*” (Rom. 15:4 NIV). In this vein the New Testament books of Acts, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, James and

Peter all mention the faith of Abraham as part of their exhortation to Christians.

Dreams

A second method by which God has instructed His people is dreams, and the Scriptures contain more than seventy instances of Him using dreams. The Lord appeared unto Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, Solomon, Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel by way of dreams and at the time of Jesus' birth God spoke to Joseph by dreams on four separate occasions.

Joseph's first dream is recorded in Matthew 1:18-25: “*This is how the birth of Jesus came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son and you are to give Him the name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins’ ... When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife; but he had no union with her until she gave birth to a Son. And he gave Him the name Jesus” (NIV). God used a dream to instruct Joseph such that he complied with His plan and hence facilitate the birth, as a human being, of Man's redeemer.*

Joseph's second dream from the Lord came after some wise men from the East had offered their gifts to the new-born King. They had followed His star in the East and enquired from King Herod as to His whereabouts. Matthew 2:13 (NIV) reads: “*When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up’, he said. ‘Take the child and His mother, and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him’. So he got up, took the child and His mother during the night and left for Egypt*”; a distance of some 400 km. Again God used a dream to direct Joseph and so fulfill the words of the prophet Hosea written more than 800 years

previously: “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son’” (Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:15). Such records should strengthen the faith of every Christian.

Joseph's third dream occurred when he was in Egypt: “After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead’. So he got up, took the child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there”. (Matt. 2:19-22). Joseph’s fear was justified because Archelaus was a cruel tyrant.

God gave **Joseph a fourth dream** to instruct him what to do. The dream is recorded in Matthew 2:22-23: “Having been warned in a dream (Joseph) withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, ‘He will be called a Nazarene’”. Again the Lord gave directions to Joseph by means of a dream so that the details of His plan were fulfilled.

Revelations

A third supernatural way in which God has communicated His will to His earthly servants is revelations.

The term “revelation” is translated from the Greek word ‘*apokalupsis*’ which, according to Dr. Strong, means “*a disclosure*”. The book of Revelation is often referred to as “The Apocalypse”, “*which God gave him (Jesus Christ) to show his servants what must soon take place*” (Rev. 1:1).

The Apostle Paul received revelations as he explained to the Galatians: “*I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*” (Gal. 1:12). The revelation he received gave him the confidence that was necessary for him to carry out the work that God had chosen him to do. He explained to the Ephesians: “*Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace*

that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation ... in reading this then you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:2-5 NIV).

In 2 Corinthians 12:1- 4 the Apostle tells a little about the revelation he received: “*I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know ... I know that this man was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell*” (NIV). Paul does not give any other details of the revelation— he was “*caught up*” to the “*third heaven*” which he associates with “*Paradise*”. From 2 Peter 3:5-7 it may be deduced that the third heaven is the age to come “*wherein dwelleth righteousness*”; the first heaven and earth were destroyed by the flood of Noah’s day, and the second heaven is the “*present heavens and earth*” which are “*being kept for the day of judgment ...*”.

One can speculate regarding what Paul saw in the revelation of the third heaven that was given to him. Maybe he saw vast numbers of people from every nation and kindred and tongue drinking the waters of the river of life and partaking of the tree of life in order to live forever (Rev. 22:1-2); maybe he saw “*the redeemed of the Lord ... coming with singing to Zion with everlasting joy upon their head*” (Isa. 51:11), or maybe he heard the mighty chorus of voices singing “*Hallelujah, for our Lord God almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come and His Bride has made herself ready*” (Rev. 19:6-7).

Assurance

And so the testimony is that, whether it has been by visions, dreams or revelations, the Lord has watched over His servants and has provided them with all the evidences they have needed to accomplish His will. Likewise today, “*He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself ...*” (1 John 5:10), even though their experiences might not include visions, dreams or revelations as He gave to some of those who have served Him in earlier times.

THE SAMARITANS

There are more than 130 references in the Scriptures to either the Samaritans or to the region of Samaria. Some examples are Jesus' instruction to His disciples that they were "*not to go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans*" (Matt. 10:5 NKJV); at Jacob's well it was a Samaritan woman to whom Jesus revealed His authority and power (John 4:5-29); He remained in Samaria and preached to the Samaritans for two days; many Samaritans believed on Him (John 4:39-43); one of the lepers whom Jesus cleansed was a Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19); the story of what is widely referred to as "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" (the purpose of which was to teach the Jewish lawyer how he had strayed from the correct interpretation of the Law, Luke 10:25-37); Jesus' advice to His disciples that they would be "*witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8 NKJV); it was to the Samaritans that Philip "*preached Christ*", and when "*the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them*" (Acts 8:14).

Samaria had its origin in the days of Omri, one of the kings of Israel, in about 925 B.C., after the nation of Israel was divided into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

The Division of the Kingdom

When King David died, his son Solomon became king over Israel: "*So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David... Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was established greatly*" (1 Kings 2:10-12). However King Solomon contravened God's commandment and married non-Israelite women (1 Kings 11:1-3), who, when he was old, "*turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen'*" (1 Kings 11:4-13).

God used human beings to accomplish the rending of Israel: "*Now the LORD raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was a descendant of the king in Edom*" (1 Kings 11:14); "*Then Solomon's servant, Jeroboam the son of Nebat,*

an Ephraimite from Zereda... also rebelled against the king" (1 Kings 11:26). Jeroboam's rebellion was significant—Solomon had made him "*the officer over all the labor force of the house of Joseph*" (1 Kings 11:28) and thus he was one of Solomon's prominent servants, and his rebellion was also directed by God through the prophet Ahijah (1 Kings 11:27-39). Jeroboam's rebellion angered Solomon who "*therefore sought to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt...*" (1 Kings 11:40), leaving Solomon to continue as king over all Israel.

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam succeeded him (1 Kings 11:43). Rehoboam rejected the petition of the Israelites for relief from the burden that Solomon had imposed on them, refused the advice of the "old men", accepted the advice of the "young men" and increased the Israelites' burden (1 Kings 12:1-15). Rehoboam's action was not his own—he merely acted as God directed him: "*So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat*" (1 Kings 12:15 NKJV). Israel rebelled against Rehoboam's harsh decision and "*departed into their tents. But as for the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them*" (1 Kings 12:16-17). Thus the nation of Israel was divided into two camps and "*so Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day*" (1 Kings 12:19).

When Jeroboam learned that Solomon was dead he returned to Israel. The record reads: "*When all Israel heard that Jeroboam had come back, they sent for him and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel. There was none who followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only*". Thus also was fulfilled the prophecy that God would leave Solomon's son with one tribe over which he would be king (1 Kings 12:20 NKJV).

Jeroboam's transgression

Although the Israelites had rebelled against Rehoboam and installed Jeroboam as their king, Jeroboam became afraid that they would return to Rehoboam. In an attempt to replicate the worship with which the Israelites were familiar he set up two golden calves, appointed priests from tribes other than Levi, and introduced Israel to the worship of strange gods (1 Kings 12:26-33).

The City of Samaria

Successive kings ruled over the ten tribes of Israel while other kings ruled over Judah (1 Kings 15), until "*in the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri*

became king over Israel... And he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; then he built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill” (1 Kings 16:23-24 NKJV). The name Samaria means ‘lookout’, which is consistent with it being on a 91-metre (300 foot) high hill about 68 kilometres north of Jerusalem, and 40 kilometres east of the Mediterranean Sea (it was near the present day city of Nablus in the West Bank region of Palestine).

Smith’s Bible Dictionary states that, “from the date of Omri’s purchase, B.C. 925, Samaria retained its dignity as the capital of the ten tribes, and the name was given to the northern kingdom as well as to the city... The possessor of Samaria was considered *de facto* king of Israel”. Thus the ten tribes of Israel under the kingship of Omri were the first “Samaritans”.

The Region of Samaria

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary states in part: “the territory surrounding the city of Samaria, approximately within the lands allotted to the tribe of Ephraim and the western portion of Manasseh, became known as Samaria. It consisted of attractive fertile land, bounded by the Valley of Jezreel on the south and Mount Carmel on the north. Its rich alluvial soil produced valuable grain crops, olives, and grapes. Samaria engaged in commerce with neighbouring Phoenicia as well as the nations of Syria and Egypt.” However such trade with those nations corrupted the people such that the prophets strongly condemned the wickedness of Samaria (Hosea 7:1; 8:5-7).

The Assyrian assault

The prosperity of the region attracted invaders and although successive kings added to the fortification of the city of Samaria, it fell to the Assyrians in 722-721 B.C., when many Israelites were deported to Syria, Assyria, and Babylonia. (2 Kings 18: 9-12)

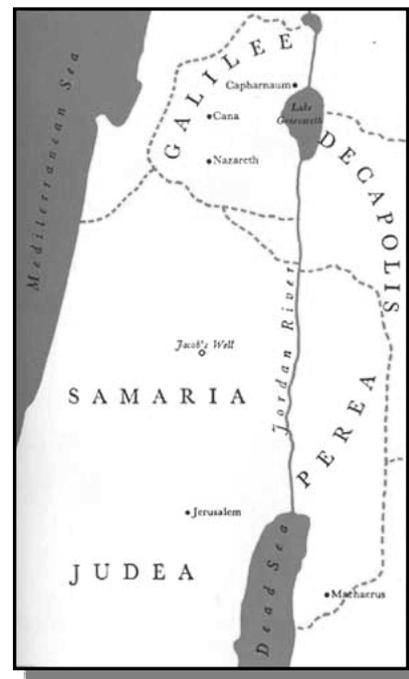
Sargon (a king of Assyria) replaced the deported Israelites with foreign colonists (2 Kings 17:24). These newcomers intermarried with the Israelites who had remained in Samaria, adopted the name ‘Samaritans’ and attempted to settle the land. “*They did not fear the Lord, and the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them*” (2 Kings 17:25). In despair they sent to Assyria for “*one of the priests*” who would “*teach them the rituals of the God of the land*” (2 Kings 17:27). Thereafter the Samaritans worshipped the God of Israel, but they also continued their idolatry, worshipping the pagan gods imported from the foreign lands (2 Kings 17:29). The Samaritans therefore were a “mixed race”, contaminated both by foreign blood and the worship of foreign gods.

Samaria in New Testament times

In the time of Jesus, the region of Palestine west of the Jordan River was divided into three provinces: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea.

The district of Galilee had been known as such from at least the time of Joshua (Joshua 20:7). The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Geoffrey W. Bromiley) states that: “when the monarchy was divided, Galilee became part of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:20)”. Thus the region of Samaria was situated between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south, which meant that the shortest route between those two provinces was through Samaria. Hence it is written: “*When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John... He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria*” (John 4:1-4). It was during that travel that He met and preached to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, and the record testifies that her attitude and reaction were consistent with the history of the Samaritan people.

Thus is evident the significance of the other instances that mention the disciples’ preaching to the Samaritans: Acts 1:8 (that they “*would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria*”); Acts 8:5: (“*Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them*”—Christ as opposed to their foreign gods); and Acts 8:14 (“*When the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John*”—the Samaritans had been converted from the worship of foreign gods). Also, ‘The Parable of the Good Samaritan’ (Luke 10:25-37), and the specific mention of the churches of Samaria in Acts 9:31, gain greater significance.



“... AND CALLED THEIR NAME ADAM”

Genesis 5:2 is a verse of Scripture that is translated quite differently in various versions of the Bible. The different wording gives rise to at least two different meanings, and to those two may be added a third, derived from the meaning of the Hebrew words from which the verse is translated.

In broad terms, the translations may be classified into two groups: one group includes the KJV, ASV and RV, and the other group includes the NKJV, GNB, NIV, RSV and Young's Literal Translation.

In the KJV, Genesis 5:2 reads: *“Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created”*. The ASV and RV also include the clause *“...and called their name Adam...”*.

The translations in the other group use a variety of words, but the meaning in all translations is the same. Some translations in that group read:

- NKJV: *“He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created”*;
- GNB: *“He created them male and female, blessed them, and named them ‘Human Beings’”*;
- NIV: *“And when they were created he called them man”* (A note in the margin states that the Hebrew is “adam”.);
- RSV: *“Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created”*;
- Young's Literal Translation (Robert Young also compiled Young's Analytical Concordance): *“... and calleth their name Man...”*.

The translation *“...and called their name Adam...”*, used by the first group, may be interpreted to mean that the purpose of Genesis 5:2 is to name the first human beings as the generation of “Adam”, whereas the second group may be interpreted to mean that the purpose of the verse is to distinguish mankind from the other life forms on the earth.

A third interpretation may be derived from the word “their” being plural whereas “Adam” may be singular.

The name “Adam”

The meaning of the first group, that the purpose of the verse is to give the first generation of human beings the name “Adam”, is consistent with the context—Genesis 5:1 reads: *“This is the book of the generations of Adam”*, (the same word “Adam” as in verse 2), and the rest of Genesis 5 lists Adam's direct descendants, from Seth down to Noah (verse 32).

Such an interpretation is clear and consistent with the lists of other “generations”; for example Genesis 6:9-10 lists the generations of Noah: *“These are the generations of Noah... And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth”*; and Genesis 10:1: *“Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth...”*. Thus Genesis 5:2 may be interpreted to simply list the name of the first generation of human beings as “Adam”.

Mankind: a distinct species

However the NKJV, GNB, NIV group of translations indicate that the meaning of Genesis 5:2 is to declare that Adam and Eve are distinct from fish, fowl and beast. Such a translation is consistent with the record of creation: *“And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth’”* (Gen. 1:26). Mankind is the only species that was made in the image of God and was given dominion over the other species, thus the species ‘mankind’ is separate from all other species. Thus the NKJV, GNB and NIV etc. translation of Genesis 5:2 is consistent with Genesis 1:26.

However the question is, which meaning is the intended one? Ascertaining the answer requires consideration of the meaning of the word “Adam”.

Meaning of “Adam”

Strong's Concordance defines “Adam” as: “(#121): the same as #120, Adam, the name of the first man; also of a place in Palestine” (the “place in Palestine” is mentioned in Joshua 3:16).

Except in Joshua 3:16 and Deuteronomy 13:6 (where #121 is translated ‘son’), #121 is always translated ‘Adam’ in the KJV and refers to the first man. One example is Genesis 2:19: *“And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof”*. The only other verses where #121 occurs are: Genesis 2:20, 21, 23; Genesis 3:8, 9, 17, 20, 21; Genesis 4:1, 25; Genesis 5:3, 4, 5; 1 Chronicles 1:1; Job 31:33. Thus it is concluded that the meaning of “Adam” in Genesis 5:2 is the first man and not the human species.

It is realised that such a conclusion differs from the meaning given by the translations in the second group (NKJV etc.) and is not adopted lightly. It is

recognized that it differs from the understanding reached by many eminent scholars, for example, the publisher's prelude to the NKJV reads: "Commissioned in 1975 by Thomas Nelson Publishers, 130 respected Bible scholars, church leaders, and lay Christians worked for seven years to create a completely new, modern translation of Scripture, yet one that would retain the purity and stylistic beauty of the original King James. **With unyielding faithfulness to the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts**, the translators applied the most recent research in archaeology, linguistics, and textual studies...". In view of such an extensive effort and such noble objectives, it is difficult to differ with their conclusion. Nevertheless the exhortation in this matter is the same as it is regarding the Sabbath: "...*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*" (Rom. 14:5), and it is emphasised that the purpose of this article is not to criticize any Work but to present the results of some research that was undertaken in an attempt to ascertain the intended meaning of Genesis 5:2.

Their name

A third interpretation of Genesis 5:2 arises from the KJV translation, that God "*called their name Adam*". The word "their" is plural and may suggest that, despite God recognising them as two separate beings, He also regarded them as one—"Adam".

The consequences of such an understanding are far reaching because they may be understood to mean that Eve was counted in with Adam in everything that he did.

The two words '*their name*' are a translation of one Hebrew word (Strong's #8034) which is defined as: "shêm (*shame*), a primitive word... an *appellation*, as a mark or memorial of individuality; by implication *honor, authority, character*". Young's Concordance agrees that the Hebrew is "shem" and defines its meaning as "name, renown". Each of the meanings given by Dr. Strong are exemplified in various verses, for example: "individuality" - Genesis 4:25 ("*called his name Seth*"); "honour" (or renown) - Numbers 16:2 ("*men of renown*"); "authority" - Genesis 26:25 ("*called on the name of the Lord*"); "character" - Job 30:8 ("*children of base men*"). Thus the various uses of "shem" vindicate Dr. Strong's definition.

Another consideration in trying to establish the legitimacy of the understanding that Eve is included in everything that Adam did, is that a group may be referenced by just the name of the leader. One example is Moab, referenced in Genesis 19:37 and Exodus 15:15: "*And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day*". In that verse the reference is

to a single person, but in Exodus 15:15 the word "Moab", the name previously given to an individual, refers to a group of his descendants: "*Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling...*". In the same way that more than one person is embraced by the name "Moab", so also the name "Adam" may be used to refer to more than one person (Adam and Eve) without inseparably uniting them as one person in every instance.

Another example of a single name being used to refer to more than one person is the name "Israel". Initially the name "Israel" was ascribed to Jacob only (Gen. 32:28), but later the word is used to refer to the nation of Israel, two instances being 1 Samuel 28:19 and Romans 9:6.

Thus the name "Adam" in Genesis 5:2 does not necessarily mean that only one person is meant.

Adam and Eve

Another consideration that affects whether the reference to "Adam" in Genesis 5:2 means that Adam and Eve were regarded as one, is that Adam and Eve are mentioned separately in only nine verses in the Bible: Eve is mentioned by name in four verses and as Adam's wife in five verses. The five verses in which Eve is referred to as "Adam's wife" are: Genesis 3:8, 20, 21; Genesis 4:1, 25, and the instances where 'Eve' is mentioned by name are: Genesis 3:20, Genesis 4:1; 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:14.

The only instances where Eve is identified by name separately from Adam refer to her womanhood or to her being deceived—that she is referred to by name in the texts that relate to the garden of Eden, and that she was deceived but Adam was not deceived, indicate that Adam and Eve are to be regarded separately in the transgression, the purpose of the distinction being that, although Eve "*was in the transgression*" (1 Tim. 2:14), it was Adam's transgression that led to Man's condemnation and it is for Adam's transgression that Jesus died. That it is Jesus alone who paid the ransom price for humankind is stated in verses such as 1 Peter 2:24: "*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree...*", and 1 Timothy 2:5-6: "*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*" (noting that it was the man Christ **Jesus** who gave Himself a ransom for all; those who "*suffer with him*" (Rom. 8:17) are never ascribed the name Jesus.

Two other points that must be considered to exhaust this subject are Genesis 2:24: "*Therefore shall a man... cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*", and the meaning of Strong #120, but space does not permit that study in this article.

GOD, JACOB AND JOSEPH

Were it not for an understanding of God's overarching purpose, the story of Jacob and Joseph would be heart-rending.

Joseph's birth

Jacob loved Rachel, the second daughter of Laban, and served him seven years in order to gain her as his wife (Gen. 29:18). However the custom was that Laban could not give Rachel to Jacob until the elder daughter, Leah, was married (Gen. 29:26). Laban betrayed Jacob which caused Jacob to unknowingly take Leah to wife. After Jacob had served Laban a further seven years Laban gave Rachel to Jacob. However Rachel was barren whereas Leah had borne Jacob four sons (Gen. 29:31-35).

Eventually Rachel conceived and gave birth to Joseph. Genesis 37:3-4 records that "*Israel (previously Jacob—Gen. 32:28) loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him*".

Jealousy

Joseph's brothers' jealousy lead them to fabricate his death and to sell him as a slave to the Ishmaelites/Midianites who in turn sold him into Egypt (Genesis 37:12-36).

One can only try to imagine the distress that the news of Joseph's apparent death caused Jacob:

- He had served Laban 14 years to gain Rachel's hand in marriage, but initially she was barren;
- God gave her a son in Jacob's old age, whom Jacob loved more than his other sons;
- Now his son (Joseph), by the woman he loved most (Rachel), was dead.

Hence it is understandable that "*Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, 'For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning'. Thus his father wept for him*" (Gen. 37:34-35).

Joseph in Egypt

However "*the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him... and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand... and he left*

all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat" (Gen. 39:2-6).

Famine

Genesis 41 records Pharaoh's dreams of the kine and the corn. Joseph was the only one who was able to interpret the dream and he told Pharaoh that the dreams foretold what the Lord "*was about to do*" (verse 25, 28)—to bring seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.

During the seven plenteous years Joseph stored the surplus food which enabled him to provide food during the seven years of famine. The famine was widespread and so Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food: "*And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands*" (Gen. 41:53-57).

Genesis 42:7-8 records Joseph meeting his brothers when they came to Egypt: "*Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, 'Whence come ye?' And they said, 'From the land of Canaan to buy food'. And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him*". It was a very emotional scene for Joseph: "*And he turned himself about from them, and wept...*" (verse 24).

Joseph demanded they leave Simeon in Egypt as surety until they brought their youngest brother Benjamin to Egypt to prove they were genuine. Jacob was distressed by Joseph's demand that Benjamin accompany them to Egypt: "*And he said, 'My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave'*" (Gen. 42:38). Nevertheless eventually Jacob agreed to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt and when Joseph met them the emotion was overpowering: "*Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, 'Cause every man to go out from me'. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, 'I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?' And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, 'Come near to me, I pray you'. And they came near. And he said, 'I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before*

you to preserve life... God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God..." (Gen. 45:1-16).

Genesis 45:17 - 49:33 records that Jacob went to Egypt, met Joseph and prospered until his death.

God's purpose

It might be difficult to understand how God, who loved Jacob (Rom. 9:13), could allow him to suffer such heartbreak during his life—did God really love him?

Alternatively it may be assumed that the events of Jacob's life were not extraordinary and that such misfortune and heart-break are experienced by many in the world. In other words, all the events in Jacob's life may be deemed to be 'natural'—it would be 'natural' for Jacob to love one of his wives more than the other; Rachel's barrenness was not unique; in view of the circumstances it would be 'natural' for Jacob to love Joseph more than his other sons; it was 'natural' for Joseph's brothers to be jealous of him; and it would be expected that the Lord would protect Joseph in Egypt (indeed it might be assumed that the Lord reacted to Joseph's brothers' action of selling him as a slave and nullified their spite by making Joseph prosperous).

However while all of those explanations are plausible, the truth is that the Lord was not reacting to their action but, unknown to Jacob and Joseph's brothers, He was working out His own purpose as Joseph stated plainly to his brothers: "God did send me before you to preserve life... God sent me before you to preserve you... it was not you that sent me hither, but God".

The Apostle Paul explains that such events are not merely stories but are "written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

There are several things Christians should learn from the record of the lives of Jacob and Joseph:

- ◆ **God dealt with them individually to achieve His purpose;** and so there is no reason to doubt that He may elect to deal individually with any other person;
- ◆ **God blesses whom He will,** as exemplified by His choosing of Jacob above Esau. His purpose in doing so was to show that His "purpose according to election might stand", and hence it is written: "... I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth,

nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:15-16)

- ◆ Such an understanding reminds the Christian that it is by God's grace that they rejoice in their calling and that it is not of their own doing (1 Cor. 1:26-27; 1 Pet. 2:9). However such an understanding does not relieve anyone whom God has called from the requirement to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling" in order to make their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10);
- ◆ It is not beyond God's ability to exercise individual watch care over all whom He has called, as He did in the lives of Jacob and Joseph, even though they did not realise it;
- ◆ The Christian may have full confidence that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28), in exactly the same way that all things worked together for good for Jacob and Joseph and for the whole nation of Israel;
- ◆ The lives of Jacob and Joseph testify that God's ways are higher than Man's ways as Paul declares: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Rom. 11:33-34).

THE PRESENT FINANCIAL SPASM

"All financiers must ultimately agree that the present financial spasm was directly caused by selfishness on the part of the bankers, etc., and nearly all the wealthy are either directly or indirectly bankers or bank directors. Shrewd bankers realize that their business prospers in proportion as the volume of money currency is small in comparison to the amount of business.

Because they make their money on interest and discounts, and it is to their advantage to have the public short of money and needing to borrow. The scarcer money can be made without injuring prosperity and promoting a panic the greater will be the demands made upon them by borrowers, and the greater their profits."

WatchTower; January 1, 1908

Entered into Rest
Harry Marlor
17/7/25 - 17/10/08

On arrival in Australia in 1951 from Cheshire, England, Harry and his wife Anne settled in South Australia. They attended the Adelaide Class until they moved to Queensland in 1989, where they attended the Brisbane class. Sister Anne and her family are in our prayers.

LOVE IS NOT EASILY PROVOKED

“Charity... is not easily provoked” (1 Cor. 13:4-5 KJV), is a clause that might be interpreted to mean that, in extreme circumstances, it is acceptable for a Christian to be provoked; the proviso being that it not be “easily”. Such an interpretation may be considered to be consistent with Romans 12:18: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”; in that both verses acknowledge that there are limits to the tolerance of human beings and consequently, in extreme circumstances, a Christian is excused if they succumb to the weaknesses of the flesh.

However there is some doubt whether the word “easily” in 1 Corinthians 13:5 is authentic: the New King James Version, Revised Version, American Standard Version and Wilson's “Emphatic Diaglott” all omit it and translate the clause: “Love... is not provoked...” To those translations may be added the marginal comment in the Companion Bible: “There is no word for ‘easily’. The statement is absolute.” W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* states that “the word ‘easily’ in A.V. [Authorised Version] represents no word in the original”. If the word “easily” is omitted from 1 Corinthians 13:5 the verse does not give any allowance for the weakness of the flesh but declares that love does not allow anyone to be provoked under any circumstances: the clause imposes the same standard as Jesus exemplified: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet. 2:23).

Provoked

There are several Greek words in the New Testament that convey different aspects of provocation, however they will not be examined here because to do so would be likely to obscure the theme of 1 Corinthians 13:5— that the Christian who is cultivating the fruits of the spirit is not to yield to provocation.

However it is worthy of mention that the context of each passage in which provocation is mentioned determines the sense in which it is to be interpreted. Acts 17:16 reads: “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was

stirred [“provoked”] in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry”. Paul’s provocation was not one of anger but one of love: he was agitated because he saw the futility of their ways and his love for them stirred him to “dispute” with the Jews in the synagogue: Paul’s motivation was wholly virtuous.

Provoking to good works

Hebrews 10:24 reads: “consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works”. The thought here is to incite to good works, to call forth love in others, to exert an influence favourable to righteousness and is thus to be encouraged; whereas the thought in 1 Corinthians 13:5 is that of not being roused to anger as inferred in both the New International Version (“... is not easily angered”), and the Emphatic Diaglott (“is not provoked to anger”).

Likewise Ephesians 4:31-32 reads: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you”. The absence of bitterness, anger and evil speaking, and the cultivation of tenderness, will not allow one to provoke another.

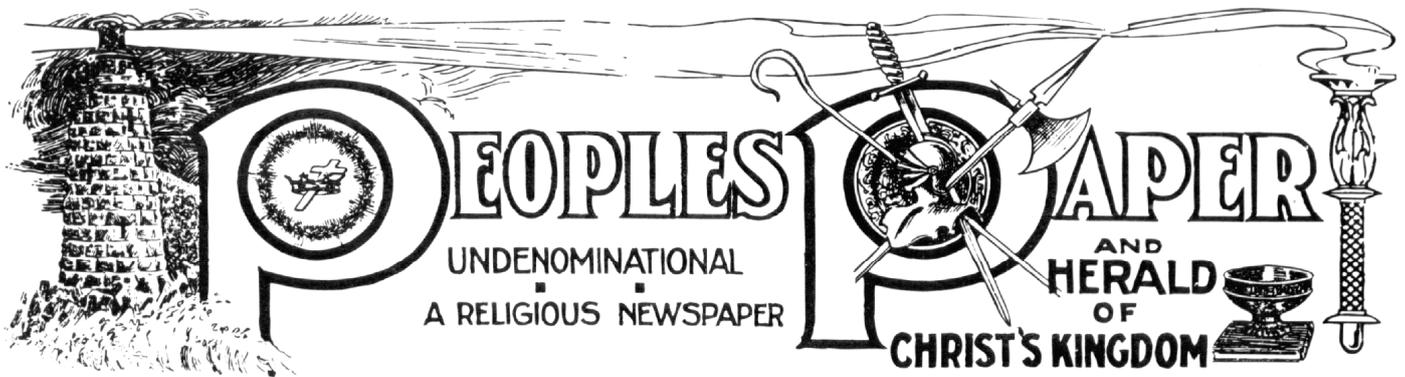
Antidotes

One antidote that assists the Christian to suppress the temptation to be provoked when they are unjustly criticised is to remember that the whole world is suffering the blight of sin, and therefore all accusers are to be pitied rather than opposed—it must be remembered to always leave all things to God: “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor. 4:5).

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While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord's Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported



HE DESPISED THE SHAME

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

At this time of the year it is appropriate that the Christian focus on the sacrifice of their Lord and Master who came down from heaven and gave His life that they, and all mankind, might have life: *“...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10); “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51).*

Jesus’ life on earth subjected him to scorn and derision, but as Hebrews 12:2 states, He despised the shame because of the joy that was set before Him.

Previous glory

The humiliation and shame He endured is better appreciated when it is remembered from whence He came: He was with God at the very beginning (John 1:2); He was *“the beginning of the creation of God” (Revelation 3:14); “the firstborn of every creature” (Colossians 1:15); “the only begotten son of God” (John 3:16); “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15); “the Word” (Greek: logos—John 1:1) of God; and it was by Him that God “made the worlds” (Heb. 1:2).*

While it is impossible for the human mind to fully appreciate the grandeur of His position before He came to earth, the Apostle Paul explained that something of the power of that realm can be gleaned from an observation of the wonders of creation. He wrote: *“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead...” (Rom. 1:20).* Human beings who take time to observe the wonders of the world around them marvel at its splendour: its intricate design and beauty are beyond human explanation. It is as the Psalmist wrote: *“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that*

thou art mindful of him?... O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Psa. 8:3-9).

It is from the lofty heights of the Divine Realm that Jesus came to earth to give His life a ransom for all. He came to earth to redeem human kind, a stratum that is lower than the angels whom He had previously created: *“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3); “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).*

Motivation

The merit of His action in coming to earth may be better appreciated when it is also remembered that He did not come to earth for His own glorification—He sought only to glorify His Father’s name and then to return to the glory that He had with His Father before He created the world: *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:4-5).* Thus it is evident that His motivation was totally without any thought of self-aggrandizement; it was purely because He loved the human creation. He voluntarily gave His life for its redemption: *“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.*

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No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself..." (John 10:17-18).

Nevertheless, after He came to earth, God gave Him assurance that He was doing His Father's will. One instance was at His baptism: *"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'"* (Matt. 3:16-17). The dove and the voices were evidences that His Father was "with Him", and, to the human mind they would have been a great assurance—such an assurance might have been a powerful factor that gave Him the strength that was necessary for Him to endure the shame that awaited Him.

Mission

Although Jesus did not come to earth with any thought of self-glorification, He understood perfectly why He had come, the work that God had planned for Him, and His reward when He had faithfully completed that work.

Concerning His knowledge of what lay before Him, He said: *"'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me'. This he said, signifying what death he should die"* (John 12:32-33). He knew that He would be crucified (*"lifted up"*), and it was the thought of the joy of drawing all men unto Him and redeeming them from the curse of sin and death that (as the writer to the Hebrews states) enabled Him to "despise" (discount; count as worthless, overlook) the shame He was to suffer.

Ridicule

Before He reached the humiliation of His crucifixion, Jesus endured much railing and ridicule. However, just as prophesied, none of it provoked Him: *"He is despised and rejected of men... yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth"* (Isa. 53:3).

One instance of Him being ridiculed was when He raised Jairus' daughter: *"While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, 'Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master'. But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, 'Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole'. And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, 'Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth'. **And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead"*** (Luke 8:49-53). It is difficult to ascertain whether Peter, James and John

joined in the derision, but if so it probably was only a temporary lapse of faith on their part; nevertheless the incident was an example of the derision He endured. Jesus did not rebuke the people but merely commanded *"that they should tell no man what was done"* (Luke 8:56).

Desertion

Desertion was another experience that added to His shame: *"and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not"* (Isa. 53:3). One instance that exemplified the fulfilment of this prophecy is recorded in Mark 14:48-50: *"And Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled'. **And they all forsook him, and fled"***. As might be said in today's language, "when the chips were down" His friends deserted Him.

Perhaps the most testing moment of all was Peter's denial a short time later: *"And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, 'And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth'. But he denied, saying, 'I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest'. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, 'This is one of them'. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, 'Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto'. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, 'I know not this man of whom ye speak'. And... the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, 'Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice'. And when he thought thereon, he wept"* (Mark 14:66-72). That instance and was a dreadful experience for Peter—he denied his Lord—and it was a very testing time for Jesus because one of His devoted disciples had denied knowledge of Him. Nevertheless Jesus did not rebuke Peter.

Crucifixion

When it came to the time of His crucifixion it is recorded that: *"...they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him"* (Matt. 27:28-31). Matthew describes the colour of the robe as scarlet whereas Mark describes it as purple. The

difference is insignificant because both colours were used in the curtains and veils of the tabernacle (Exod. 26:1, 31, 36; 27:16), and in the High Priest's garments (Exod. 28:6, 8, 15, 33). In Jesus' day purple was a sign of prosperity and authority: "*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day*" (Luke 16:19). The point to be noted in the case of Jesus' crucifixion is that they put such a garment on Him, mocked Him, and then took the garment off Him: the garment was a symbol of royal authority and the fact that they put the robe on Him during their mockery and removed it immediately afterwards emphasized the shame He endured.

The ignominy He endured during the final hours of His sacrifice is dramatically recorded by Mark: "*And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, 'Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross'. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe'. And they that were crucified with him reviled him*" (Mark 15:25-32).

Concerning the physical act of crucifixion, Smith's Bible Dictionary (page 129) reads: "It was unanimously considered the most horrible form of death. Among the Romans the degradation was also a part of the infliction, and the punishment if applied to freemen was only used in the case of the vilest criminals. The one to be crucified was stripped naked of all his clothes, and then followed the most awful moment of all. He was laid down upon the implement of torture. His arms were stretched along the cross-beams, and at the centre of the open palms the point of a huge iron nail was placed, which, by the blow of a mallet, was driven home into the wood. Then through either foot separately, or possibly through both feet together, as they were placed over the other... Then the "accursed tree" with its living human burden was slowly heaved up and the end fixed firmly in a hole in the ground. The feet were but a little raised above the earth. The victim was in full reach of every hand that might choose to strike... Such was the death by which Christ was doomed."

The ignominy that was heaped upon Him persisted to the end, being crucified between two thieves: "...*he made his grave with the wicked...*" (Isa. 53:9).

Reward

It might be beyond the natural human mind to grasp the magnitude of God's purpose in requiring His only begotten Son to suffer to such an extent: "*Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*" (Isa. 53:9-12). The only factor that enables us to at least partly understand why God subjected Him to such terrible suffering is the glorious future that God has in store for Him.

The promise is that "*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied*". In view of the terrible suffering He endured, one can only speculate about the full meaning of God's promise to Him and His glorious future: "...*will I divide him a portion with the great*". God has already given Him a reward in that He has promoted Him to the highest level other than God Himself: "*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name...*" (Phil. 2:9). The details of what He will receive as His "*portion with the great*" are something about which, at this stage, the believer can only speculate. Nevertheless it was not the thought of self-aggrandizement that motivated Jesus, but the joy of drawing all men unto Him.

Such a view of God's majesty, and the reward He has given to His faithful One so far, should be enough to spur on all those who have been given the opportunity to be joint heirs with Him and to share in His glory (Rom. 8:17). As the Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians: "*The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all*" (Eph. 1:18-23). With such a wonderful hope, it is with joy that the Christian remembers Him at his time.

THE LAMB'S WIFE

Marriage may be regarded as one of the most important events in a person's life. For the Christian it is doubly so because it reflects God's plan for mankind in both an individual and a collective sense.

In the **individual sense** it represents the fulfilment of God's purpose in creating woman: "*And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him'...And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*" (Gen. 2:18-24). In spite of the glory and power that Adam possessed—he named every living thing and whatever he called them became its name, even unto this day—all his needs were not met: he needed a companion. God created woman to provide that companion. God's creation was perfect and the qualities that God gave the woman made her the perfect companion for the man. Thus is seen the unsurpassed degree of companionship that a man should derive from a woman and likewise the woman from the man. The all-consuming interweaving of their beings is summarised by the simple statement: "*they shall be one flesh*".

In the **collective sense** marriage pictures the future marriage of Christ and the Church. The Apostle Paul describes the church as a chaste virgin who is preparing herself for her marriage: "*For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*" (2 Cor. 11:2).

Prerogative

In Old Testament times the initial action towards marriage was taken by the man, not the woman, and the suitor's request was submitted to the woman's father for his agreement. Some examples are Jacob's appeal to Laban for Rachel's hand and Laban giving Rachel to Jacob (Gen. 29:16-21); the rules of servanthood ("*If his master have given him a wife*" - Exod. 21:4); and Saul's dealings with David regarding his daughter Merab (1 Sam. 18:17-19). The point to be appreciated is that it was not the woman's prerogative to initiate the giving of herself to the man and it was the woman's father's prerogative to give her or not give her to the man (which practice has been perpetuated in Western marriage ceremonies by the

bride's father being asked to declare publicly that he "gives this woman to be wed"). The protocol is consistent with Jesus choosing His disciples and not vice-versa: "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...*" (John 15:16).

One example of the extended protocol in which the son's father directed whom his son should marry was Abraham directing whom Isaac should marry: "*And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, 'Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac'*" (Gen. 24:1-4).

The extended application applies to the church. God chooses the members of His Son's bride as Jesus declared in His prayer: "*I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word...I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me...*" (John 17:6-9).

Thus it is evident that it is not the prerogative of any human being to choose to be a member of Christ's bride; it is by God's grace that anyone is given the opportunity: "*But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him* (1 Cor. 12:18); "*But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*" (2 Thess. 2:13); "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Eph. 2:8-10). Consequently those who have been invited to be the Lamb's wife should not regard the invitation lightly, but should realise the opportunity that has been extended to them and grasp it firmly.

Preparation

There is a period of preparation for a secular marriage during which the bride prepares her wedding garment and conditions her mind for her new role. There is also a period of preparation for the church to be the Lamb's wife: "*And I heard as it were the voice of a*

great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: **for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready**'" (Rev. 19:6-7). "Making herself ready" is the work of the chosen ones during this life-time.

In order for the two to become "one flesh", it is necessary for the bride to be perfect because the bridegroom is perfect: "...Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not..." (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

Revelation 14:1-5 declares that the 144,000 are to be pure and guileless: "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads...These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God". It is with that standard in mind that the Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called...That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:1, 22-24). To that end the Apostle also wrote: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).

The honour shared

The great hope of the Lamb's wife is that she will share in the work of restoring the human race to perfection: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified...For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:16-18). "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21). "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was

given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4). "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

Whithersoever He goeth

Revelation 14:4 (quoted above) records that one quality of the members of the 144,000 is that they "follow the Lord whithersoever he goeth".

Such devotion was exemplified in Old Testament times by Rebekah's willingness to leave all and go with Abraham's servant to be Isaac's wife, even though she did not know where that might lead her. Additionally she did so in spite of opposition from her family: "And her brother and her mother said, 'Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go'. And he said unto them, 'Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master'. And they said, 'We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth'. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, 'Wilt thou go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go'" (Gen. 24:55-58).

Likewise Ruth was so devoted to Naomi that she committed herself to follow her wherever she might go. Although Ruth's relationship to Naomi was not a marriage relationship, it demonstrates the standard that Christians must emulate: "And Naomi said, 'Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way...And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, 'Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law'. And Ruth said, 'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me'. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her" (Ruth 1:11-18). Ruth's example and commitment to Naomi, to go with her wherever she might go, even to the point of dying where she would die, exemplifies the commitment required of every Christian.

Jesus' disciples also left everything and followed Him: *"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men'. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him"* (Matt. 4:18-22).

The examples of Rebekah, Ruth and Jesus' disciples should strengthen the Christian's resolve to follow their Master wherever He leads.

Unto death

The marriage commitment is intended to last until one finishes their earthly life. That commitment reflects the commitment that Christ has for the church—*"...he hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee'"* (Heb. 13:5)—and exemplifies the devotion required of all who will be part of His bride: *"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10).

May each one who has been invited to be one of the Lamb's wife, strive earnestly so that when the marriage of the Lamb comes, they might be found worthy to enter in as a member of His Bride.

SEEK YE FIRST

God has blessings in His store-house for all the families of the earth, but the special blessing of glory, honour, and immortality that is reserved for those who love Him supremely far exceed His blessings for the world in general.

To love Him supremely means to love Him more than houses or lands, business or wealth, family or kindred or self: *"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"* (Matt. 10:37).

Christians must realise that: *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (Matt. 6:24): a choice is required.

If they do not choose the Lord and His service, they will be counted as placing the interests of their natural man first, contrary to the Lord's exhortation: *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness..."* (Matt. 6:33).

It must also be remembered that those who have forsaken all to follow the Lord must not look back: *"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62). The Christian's strength may be renewed every day by remembering that their reward in heaven is eternal—it will not fade away— *"...and so shall we ever be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4:17).

THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH

Psalm 19:14 is a verse of Scripture that expresses the desire of every Christian: *"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer"*.

The Christian should be particularly conscious of the words they speak because *"... that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man"* (Matt. 15:11).

The tongue is an unruly member of the body: *"...If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things... Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body... Every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and*

hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:2-10).

The contrasts described in those verses are stark: the size of a horse compared to the size of the bit in its mouth; the size of a ship and the force exerted by the wind on its sails compared to the size of its rudder. Human beings are able to control those forces but they are unable to prevent their tongue from expressing words that are contrary to their will. Consequently every effort must be made at all times to ensure that one's words are *"always with grace, seasoned with salt"* (Col. 4:6), and thus they seek to emulate Him of whom it is said *"that they all wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth"* (Luke 4:22). Nevertheless one should not be overcome by unintentional errors because perfection is not a thing of the past, but of the future.

THINGS TO BE REMOVED AND THINGS TO REMAIN

“And this word, ‘Yet once more’, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:27).

The latter part of the year 2008 saw the world plunge into a time of what some economists and financiers are calling “an unprecedented economic collapse”. So widespread is the effect that it has been called a “Global Financial Crisis” and accrued the acronym “GFC”. Some economists are equating its potential impact on human well-being to that of the great depression of the 1930s, and are suggesting that its effect is due not only to the degree of the collapse but also to the speed with which it has occurred.

In such times it is profitable to be reassured that all the events in the world are indeed under the control of the Creator and Master of the universe, and that all events are part of His plan for planet earth and for mankind. The Christian should not be apprehensive because “*we have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*” (2 Pet. 1:19). The Christian must firmly grasp that assurance because many friends and acquaintances around them might be apprehensive. Of that time Jesus prophesied: “*Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken*” (Luke 21:26). It is a time that warrants sober thought.

The current crisis—the “GFC”—might be part of the fulfilment of the prophecy recorded in Hebrews 12:26-27: “*Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven’. And this word, ‘Yet once more’, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain*”. Those two verses refer firstly to the shaking of Mount Sinai in Moses’ day, then to a subsequent shaking in which the things that may be shaken will be removed.

The first shaking

The first shaking occurred during the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. It was a fulfilment of prophecy even though the period between the prophecy being given and fulfilled was only three days: “*In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And the LORD said unto Moses, ‘Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee... Go unto the*

people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai’... And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. And he said unto the people, ‘Be ready against the third day’... And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled... and Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly...” (Exodus 19:1-18).

The second shaking

The incident at Mount Sinai was dramatic and impressed the Israelites with the realisation that God was watching over them.

However its significance extends beyond the nation of Israel—it fore-shadowed God’s direct involvement in and control over the affairs of mankind.

THINGS TO BE REMOVED

The Scriptures identify the things that will be removed as a result of the second shaking. They include Babylon, pride, war, and “*heaven and earth*”.

Babylon

Revelation 14:6-8 describes the removal of Babylon: “*And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters’. And there followed another angel, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication’”.*

The removal of Babylon is significant because Babylon represents an influence that is contrary to the righteous rule that God is going to establish in the earth: “*And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, ‘Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the*

inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication'. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration” (Rev. 17:1-6). Revelation chapter 18 gives more detail about Babylon’s sins and her removal; suffice it to mention here that she was drunk with the blood of saints, that is, she had murdered the Lord’s followers.

Pride

Pride in all its forms, both individual and national, will be removed.

Isaiah 2:11-12 speaks of individual pride: *“The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low”.*

One characteristic of the nations that become dominant is that they become proud and consider themselves capable of “ruling the world”, as Isaiah wrote: *“Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength: For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust...”* (Isa. 26:4-6).

War

War is another characteristic of the current world that will be removed when God shakes the nations the second time: *“Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. **He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth...”** (Psa. 46:2-11). War and its implements (that is, weapons) will be*

destroyed as the prophet Isaiah’s also wrote: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, ‘Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths’: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, **neither shall they learn war any more**”* (Isa. 2:2-4). The prophecy is that the nations will willingly go up to “the mountain of the Lord” to learn of His ways, thus the concept of an earth without war is consistent with what will be the over-riding disposition of the nations at that time.

Heavens and earth

The present heavens and earth will be removed as the Apostle Peter wrote: *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Pet. 3:9-13).

The heavens and earth referred to by Peter in those verses are symbolic because God’s purpose in creating the physical earth is stated in Isaiah 45:18: *“For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, **he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited...**”*. The earth abiding forever is consistent with one of God’s early promises to Abraham—to give “all this land” to his seed that they may inherit it “for ever” (Exodus 32:13).

Process

Hebrews 1:10-12 gives some indication of how the current heaven and earth will be replaced: *And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all*

shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail". The expression "fold them up" might indicate that the process will involve them being gathered together, which in turn might be reflected in the fact that the present financial crisis is "global".

The concept is endorsed by the words in Isaiah 34:1-4: "Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies...And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree". The statement "the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll" might also give some indication of the process by which the heavens will be removed—a scroll was rolled together from both ends—but whether that detail is intended is a matter to ponder. Nevertheless the concept of the nations being rolled together is one that may properly be applied to the nations in the 21st century—all the nations are woven together in a tight fabric of trade and commerce such that they are interdependent; a fact to which the current financial crisis gives testimony.

THINGS THAT WILL REMAIN

In stark contrast to the above, the prophet Daniel, when interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, spoke of a kingdom that will last forever: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

The prophet Haggai referred to the shaking of Mount Sinai in Moses' time and then went on to give a glimpse of the benefits that will flow after the second shaking: "In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying... 'According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come...and in this place will I give peace...'" (Haggai 2:1-9). The prophecy told not only of the shaking of all nations that was yet future, but also that after that shaking He would give peace.

The Christian can take great comfort from the fact that once the Lord has replaced the current world order

with His righteous kingdom where "they shall not hurt nor destroy" (Isa. 11:9), evil will be no more. The prophet Nahum declares that there will not be need for a third shaking because "...he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:9).

Timing

2 Peter 3:9-13, quoted above, spurs Christians on to not lose faith in the promises that a time is coming when those things that cannot be shaken will remain. The preceding verses 3 to 8 give some clues as to the signs that will indicate that the time is near: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation'. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day". Many of those signs are evident in the world today: there are numerous scoffers who have no faith in the Biblical promises and whose irreverence was foretold by Jesus (Luke 18:8). They are also willingly ignorant of the record of the flood of Noah's day and the evidences of its occurrence, preferring instead to believe in the conjectures of so called 'science'.

The situation in the world in 2009 indeed closely resembles the conditions described by Jesus: "And there shall be...upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity...men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for **the powers of heaven shall be shaken**. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and **lift up your heads**; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:25-28). Maybe the present global financial crisis indicates that God is shaking the heavens and the earth again in this, our day.

Whether or not that is so should not be alarming because a time is coming when: "he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten...", because God has said: "I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind..." (Isa. 65:16-18).

SAND AND STARS

Symbolic language is used in many books of the Bible, one reason being to make it easier for the reader to comprehend the idea being conveyed.

Principles

The use of a symbol is beneficial only if the reader is familiar with the symbol, and more particularly with the specific characteristic of the symbol to which reference is made. Further, not all aspects of the symbol might be applicable to the new concept and, if that is the case, application of those other aspects might lead to incorrect conclusions. These two principles become apparent when some uses of symbols in the Scriptures are considered.

One of the early uses of symbolic language in the Bible that illustrates these principles is Exodus 16:11-31: “*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ‘I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God’. And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, ‘It is manna’: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, ‘This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat’... And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey”*. The Israelites did not know what the manna was and so they compared its qualities with things with which they were familiar. Their action in making the comparisons illustrates the first principle of symbolic language—that the reader must be familiar with the symbol.

The Israelites compared the characteristics of the manna to three different things, each comparison reflecting only one characteristic of the manna:

- they compared its size to hoar frost;
- they compared its colour to coriander;
- they compared its taste to honey wafers.

They did not compare the size or colour of the manna to the size or colour of wafers, nor its taste, thus exemplifying the principle that only some (or one) of the characteristics of each substance was applicable.

Another example which illustrates that only the relevant characteristic is to be applied is the instructions regarding the bowls on the candlesticks: “*And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold...*

Three bowls made like unto almonds in one branch” (Exodus 25:31-33). The shape of the almond was the only relevant characteristic—the material to be used was gold.

Abstract concepts

The examples of the manna and candlesticks relate to concrete articles, that is, articles that may be touched. Symbolic language is used to convey the characteristics of abstract concepts also.

One example of a symbol being used to convey an abstract concept is given in Psalm 39:11: “*When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth; surely every man is vanity”* (Psa. 39:11). A person’s beauty is an abstract concept—it cannot be physically handled—and in this verse its consumption is compared to a moth. However the symbolism is not clear: is it to the work of a moth or to its nature? The **work** of a moth is the symbol used in Job 13:28, Isaiah 50:9 and Isaiah 51:8, however it is its **destructive nature** that is referred to in Isaiah 27:18, Hosea 5:12, Matthew 6:19-20 and Luke 12:33. Consequently whether the lesson in Psalm 39:11 is that a man’s beauty will eat him up, or whether his beauty will disappear gradually in a progression of holes, of fly away quickly, is unclear. Maybe one clue might be given in the clause: “*every man is vanity*”, from which it may be concluded that the intended inference is that a man’s beauty is temporary.

The Parables

The kingdom of heaven is an abstract concept and Jesus used parables (symbolic language) to convey various aspects of it, the first parable being the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-9). The meaning to be attached to each component of the parable was unclear and so Jesus explained their meaning and their relationship to the kingdom (Matt. 13:18-23).

The second parable related to the tares in the field (Matt. 13:24-30). Again the disciples did not know what the symbols meant so Jesus explained their meaning (Matt. 13:36-43).

However no explanation is given for some of the other parables and in those cases the reader is left to derive the meaning. One example is the parable of the grain of mustard seed: “*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and*

lodge in the branches thereof” (Matt. 13:31-32). Several different meanings have been ascribed to the components of this parable: the mustard seed; the field (is it the same as in the parable of the sower?); the significance of the herb becoming a tree; the birds; and the branches.

Number

“Number” is an abstract concept and several different symbols are used in the Scriptures to convey the concept. Two symbols are used in Judges 7:12: “*And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude*”. The only characteristic the grasshoppers and the sand had in common was that they were large in number—in all other ways they were different.

Sand

In Judges 7:12 (quoted above), the sand by the sea side is used to convey the concept of a multitude as it is also used in some other verses: Genesis 32:12; 41:49; Joshua 11:4; 1 Samuel 13:5; 2 Samuel 17:11; Job 29:18; Psalm 139:18; Isaiah 10:22 (interpreted in Romans 9:27); Jeremiah 33:22; Hosea 1:10; Hebrews 11:12; Revelation 20:8. However the symbolism of sand is not always that of a multitude; it is also used to convey the characteristics of weight (Job 6:3; Prov. 27:3); extent (1 Kings 4:29-30); lack of form (Matt. 7:26); quality of absorption (Hab. 1:9); and endurance (Isa. 48:19). **Thus the symbolism of an object cannot automatically be transferred from one instance of its use to another.**

Stars

Another symbol that is used to convey the concept of a multitude is the stars of heaven. In nine instances the reference is to events on the earth, not in the heavens, and thus it is their number and not their location that is the relevant characteristic. The nine instances are:

- Genesis 15:5 (verses 7, 8, 13, and 18-21 show that the promise relates to the inheritance of Abram’s seed in the land; there is no indication of any reference to heaven);
- Genesis 26:4 (“countries” and “nations” relate to the earth);
- Exodus 32:13 in which Moses calls upon the Lord to remember His promise to Abraham to make his seed as the stars of heaven and to give them the land;
- Deuteronomy 1:10 in which Abraham’s seed is related to the stars of heaven “*in that day*”, that is it referred to that time and not a future time;
- Deuteronomy 10:22: as for chapter 1:10;
- Deuteronomy 28:62 relates to the number of Israelites in times past;
- 1 Chronicles 27:23 refers to David not selecting

- men of Israel who were under 20 years old;
- Nehemiah 9:23 relates to the exodus from Egypt;
- Nahum 3:16 relates to the sins of Ninevah.

None of the nine instances quoted above relate to a heavenly location, even though the symbol is a heavenly body: the symbolism relates to number.

Sand and stars together

The symbols of sand and stars occur in the same verse in only two verses: Genesis 22:17 and Hebrews 11:12. Some authorities suggest that Hebrews 11:12 is a quotation of Genesis 22:17, and if that is correct, there is only one verse in which both the symbols sand and stars jointly occur. Genesis 22:17 reads: “*That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies*”.

The only characteristic that grains of sand and the stars have in common is their number: in all other respects they differ—the sand is on the earth, the stars are in the heavens; sand is visible during the day whereas the stars are visible at night; mankind can touch the sand but not the stars; the sand may be washed by the waters of the sea but the stars are not; the stars emit light; the sand reflects it.

Difference not similarity

It may be proposed that the lesson to be learned from Genesis 22:17 is not derived from the similarity of the sand and the stars but from their difference, that is, that the sand relates to that part of Abram’s seed that will inherit the earth and the stars refer to that part of Abram’s seed that will be in the heavens. While there is no doubt that the church is part of Abram’s seed—“*And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*” (Gal. 3:29)—and that the glorified church will be in the heavenly realm—“*And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*” (1 Cor. 15:45-49)—the question remains whether the symbolism in Genesis 22:17 may be properly used to support that aspect of God’s plan.

Revelation 7:9 is one verse that may be deemed to infer that the expression “*stars of heaven*” in Genesis 22:17 refers to the spiritual seed of Abraham: “*After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands...*”. However it is acknowledged that there are different interpretations of that verse, some issues being the location of the Lamb at the time to which the vision relates (Matt. 25:31-32; Rev. 21:4), and the meaning of “before” (Rev. 20:12).

LOVE THINKETH NO EVIL

“*Love...thinketh no evil*” (1 Cor. 13:5) is a statement that may seem superfluous: how could anyone plan (“think”) to do evil to someone they love?

Nevertheless the Apostle Paul included the sentiment in his letters to the churches at both Rome and Corinth—to the Romans he wrote: “*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour...*” (Rom. 13:10).

Both of the above statements refer to the person who contemplates an evil action—the ‘perpetrator’. However the recipient also (that is, the ‘victim’) of an evil deed is “*not to think evil*”, and there are at least two ways in which such love may cause a victim to react: disbelief and forgiveness.

Disbelief

Love may prevent a person from acknowledging that another has committed an evil deed, that is, their love is so deep that they cannot “*think any evil*” of their loved one. Consequently they refuse to believe that the action occurred. Such may be the case with a parent when their child commits a misdemeanour; they may find it very difficult to admit that their child has done anything wrong, and so they defend their child against all accusations. When finally confronted with a situation that they cannot deny, the parent may make excuses by attributing the cause of the misdemeanour to some circumstance or influence that is beyond their child’s control.

Forgiveness

While a refusal to think evil of a loved one is praiseworthy, it might be a form of denial or “refusal to face the facts”. The Christian is to face reality and doing so calls up the requirement to forgive. Forgiveness constitutes another, and higher, level of “*not thinking evil*”.

Forgiveness primarily involves acknowledgement of the sin or error, that is, it does not allow one to “close one’s eyes” to the event and refuse to believe or acknowledge that the action occurred. To acknowledge (that is, admit) that an evil has been done, and to exercise love in that situation, requires the one offended against to regard the offending action as a weakness of the flesh of the perpetrator, regardless of whether the perpetrator acted deliberately or unintentionally.

Stephen’s action when he was being stoned to death is one example of love that exhibited forgiveness: “*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord, lay not this sin to*

their charge’. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:59-60). Stephen was conscious of the evil that was being done to him—he realised that what was happening to him was unjust. Yet he was able to rise above it, lovingly think no evil of his executioners and ask the Lord not to lay the sin to their charge. Stephen was able to forgive his executioners because he was able to believe that they were acting in ignorance and their action was consistent with the present evil world.

This highest level of love is also exemplified by God’s dealings with mankind: “*To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them...*” (2 Cor. 5:19). The word translated “*imputing*” is translated from the same Greek word as the word “*thinketh*” in 1 Corinthians 13:5. The Greek word is “*logizamai*” — Strong’s #3049—which means “to take an inventory”. To “take an inventory” means to keep a record, in this case a record of deeds done, and the verse states that God has not kept an account of mankind’s evil deeds. However that does not mean that He has ignored them: in His due time He will recompense evil as Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:8: “*In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*”.

God not thinking evil

The Apostle John wrote that “*God is love*” (1 John 4:16). It might be difficult to accept that “*God is love*”, and has not “*thought evil*” because He has punished some nations harshly, and will yet punish all nations. The seeming contradiction is resolved by the fact that God is working out a grander purpose for His creation as Solomon wrote: “*And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith (profited thereby)*” (Eccl. 1:13). It is with a still higher level of love that God is dealing with His human creation—it is not the Christian’s province to “*recompense evil for evil*” (Rom 12:17), not to think, impute or keep a record of any actions that may be justifiably classified as evil, but to forgive, not just once, but “*seventy times seven*” (Matt. 18:22).

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While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord’s Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported.



REASONING WITH GOD

“Come now, and let us reason together”, says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18 NKJV).

Human experience testifies that conversation with another is stimulating, and it is in that vein that the thought of “reasoning together” is an exciting one. There are several factors that make it exciting, one of which is that at least two minds are involved; one is not alone. Another factor is that those involved are addressing a common concept and have the same objective: either to ascertain the truth of an issue or to identify the best solution to a problem. A still further stimulating factor is that reasoning together has the potential for those involved to gain knowledge which, in itself, can give great satisfaction.

Each of the factors listed above applies to any reasoning process, including Christian fellowship—fellowship being the interaction of two minds as Paul and Timothy expressed in their letter to the brethren at Philippi: *“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons... I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now...” (Phil. 1:1-5 NKJV).*

Objective

As mentioned above the objective of any reasoning process is to achieve unanimity of understanding, as the apostles went on to exhort the Philippians: *“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:1-2).*

However, over and above the objective of achieving like-mindedness, Christians strive to ascertain the truth, as did those at Berea: *“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11 NKJV).*

Isaiah 1:18

Notwithstanding the objectives mentioned above, the expression “reason together” in Isaiah 1:18 does not include the idea of two minds working together to come to a common conclusion.

The Hebrew word from which “reason together” is translated (Strong’s Concordance number 3198 yâkach), is defined as “a primitive root; to be right (that is, correct); reciprocally to argue; causatively to decide, justify or convict”. It occurs 59 times in the Old Testament and several English words are used to translate it: appoint, argue, chasten, convince, correct, correction, daysman, dispute, judge, maintain, plead, reason, **reason together**, rebuke, reprove, reprover, surely, “in any wise”.

In none of the instances where the word occurs, other than Isaiah 1:18 and possibly Job 13:3, is there any thought of two minds bargaining together, but rather that **one mind is dominant** and either instructing the other or deciding an issue. Some examples from the New King James Version are:

- Genesis 24:44: *“...let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son”;*
- 2 Samuel 7:14: *“If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him...”;*

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- Job 5:17: “Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects...”;
- Isaiah 2:4: “He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people...”.

The thought of God’s mind being superior to Man’s mind is consistent with the supremacy of God above His creation, as Isaiah proclaims: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). The Apostle Paul quotes and expands on the prophet’s words: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of god! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has become his counsellor? or who has first given to him and it shall be repaid to him? for of him and through him and to him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36).

Context

From the outset, the book of Isaiah is not one of mutual reasoning but of rebuke. Its opening verses record the wilful errors of the Israelites: “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: ‘I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider’. Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward” (Isa. 1:1-4 NKJV).

The prophet goes on to declare that God was aware of their hypocrisy in continuing to offer sacrifices: “‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?’ says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood’” (Isa. 1:11-15 NKJV).

The following verses may be difficult to fully comprehend because they constitute a stark contrast to

the preceding verses: “‘Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together’, says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken’” (Isa. 1:16-20 NKJV).

Thus the meaning of “reasoning together” in Isaiah 1:18 is not as one reasons in the secular world, but is the same as in the other instances where the Hebrew word occurs, that is, of One being, who is superior to the other, instructing the subordinate one to take notice of and be subject to the decree. In effect God is telling Israel that, even though they had sinned grossly in times past, they were not beyond redemption and, if they washed themselves, He would regard them as pure, even as white as snow or wool.

God’s grace

Such forgiveness illustrates the magnitude of God’s grace. Indeed, maybe it is so great that it is difficult for the human mind to accept that He can be so gracious. However other prophets also testify of God’s grace.

Jeremiah is one such prophet: “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD’, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For **I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more**”. Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): “If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the LORD, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever”. Thus says the LORD: “If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the LORD” (Jer. 31:34-37 NKJV). The authority of the assurance given in those verses is so great that no human being can sensibly question it: God is going to “forgive their iniquity” and “remember their sin no more”; the edict is given by Him “who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night”, and He who controls the sea. It is only if those ordinances fail that He will “cast off all the seed of Israel”. Just as the ordinances of the sun and the moon will never fail, neither will God’s promise to forgive the sins of Israel.

Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel also records God's forgiveness of Israel and how their previous sins do not negate His covenant with them.

Ezekiel 16:1-14 records God's dealings with Israel in their infancy and how He blessed them and made them to *"thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful"* (verse 7). Indeed He goes on to say: *"Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you", says the Lord GOD*" (Ezek. 16:14 NKJV). Nevertheless they were not fully appreciative of God's blessings and verse 15 records that they *"... trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it"*. Such was their sinfulness that God regarded them worse than Sodom (verse 48). Nevertheless God has promised that He will forgive their sins completely: *"So I will lay to rest My fury toward you... and be angry no more"* (verse 42). *"Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you...Then you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done", says the Lord GOD*" (Ezek. 16:60-63 NKJV). Surely God will

punish Israel for all their waywardness, but His promise is also sure that He will honour the covenant He made with them when He formed them. Thus the prophet adds confirmation to the promise given to Isaiah that He will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.

Thus the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel both confirm that, although Israel has sinned terribly, God is going to disregard their sins completely. The invitation to Israel recorded in Isaiah 1:18 is not for them to reason with God as human beings reason together, but rather to "get the matter straight"—though their sins be as scarlet and crimson, He will forgive them completely and regard them as white as snow. ■

ERRATUM

The previous edition of the Peoples Paper (Volume 92 No. 2, April-June 2009) contains an incorrect reference.

On page 10, right hand column, paragraph beginning: "One example of a symbol...", line 12 refers to Isaiah 27:18. The reference should be Job 27:18.

Additionally the first word of line 12 was intended to be "transient" and not "destructive" as printed.

Any inconvenience caused is regretted and the editor wishes to thank those who pointed out the error. ■

CONVENTION PRAYER

"Our loving heavenly Father, we come again into your presence and that precious and all-prevailing name, the name of your dear Son and our Lord and Saviour. We ask for your blessing upon the services of this Convention, that they may be honouring to Thee and edifying to each one here—that they be the grand statement of our faith and determination as individuals and as a group of your people to press on in the narrow way, seeking to follow in the footsteps of Him who went before.

We would ask that you guide us throughout by the administration of your Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds, not only in those who speak, but of those of us who listen to the message of truth that will go forward. We ask that each of our speakers be indeed blessed of Thee and guided in what they bring to us, that it may be edifying and helpful and give us renewed zest, as it were, for the coming year.

We ask, too, that those of us who listen may have attentive hearts and minds to pick up what gems of truth no doubt will be amongst the words that are spoken to us from your Word of truth, that wonderful mine of truth, of gems and riches beyond compare.

We would ask, too, that our service might not be the end but may be the beginning of the next stage of our walk in the narrow way and that the times of refreshing will be strengthening and enable us to fulfil those vows of consecration which each of us personally has made to do.

So just again we ask for the guidance and blessing of your Holy Spirit on this occasion. We remember those who are not with us, those who would like to be here, those who are kept away by illness or physical problems, problems of distance, and so on. You know their circumstances and we ask that they, too, may feel in some measure that they are with us in spirit.

We ask again for your guidance and blessing upon all that is undertaken in your name. Here may we prove the power of prayer to strengthen faith and banish care. Here help our souls to rise; reveal Thy glory to our eyes.

Hear our prayer and answer according to your perfect will because we ask in that all-prevailing name of Jesus Christ. Amen." ■

DECLARING THE END

“... I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.’” (Isaiah. 46:9-10).

The statement in Isaiah 46:9-10, *“declaring the end from the beginning”*, indicates that there never has been, nor never will be, any doubt that God will accomplish everything He wishes.

Jehovah

Jehovah, the LORD, the self-existent one, can make that declaration because He is pre-eminent, that is He is before all and above all. He is the One who has been *“from everlasting”* and will be *“to everlasting”* (Psa. 90:2). He is the all-powerful One, the Lord God Omnipotent (Rev. 19:6). Isaiah 40:25 reads: *“‘To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?’ saith the Holy One”*. Daniel declared: *“Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness ... I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me ...”* (Dan. 2:20-23).

Daniel’s statement that God *“removeth kings, and setteth up kings”*, indicates that God exerts control over individuals. In view of the fact that He created the universe it might be difficult to accept that He would involve Himself in such minute affairs as those of one king on the earth. However that is the case.

Nebuchadnezzar

One king over whom God exercised direct control was Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel chapter 2). Daniel 4:35 records Nebuchadnezzar’s conclusion after he had experienced God’s over-ruling: *“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”* Later Daniel declared to Belshazzar that God had given his father his kingdom: *“O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour”* (Dan. 5:18).

Pharaoh

Pharaoh was another king whom God controlled. Moses was commissioned by God to approach Pharaoh and ask him to release the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. Since Moses was carrying out God’s command, the natural mind might expect that Pharaoh

would have agreed to the Israelites’ release. However God had a greater purpose, and He told Moses in advance what He was going to do: *“And the LORD said unto Moses, ‘When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go’”* (Exod. 4:21). Pharaoh reacted as God had told Moses: *“And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness’. And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go’”* (Exod. 5:1-2).

Throughout the subsequent events that preceded the exodus God continued to declare beforehand what He would do to Pharaoh and how Pharaoh would react. One instance was Aaron’s rod becoming a serpent: *“And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods. And he hardened Pharaoh’s heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said”* (Exod. 7:10-13).

One argument that might be proposed by the natural mind to deny God’s direct involvement with Pharaoh is that Pharaoh’s “natural disposition” was to be a ruthless despot and that was why God used him. The only verses that suggest that Pharaoh hardened his own heart are Exodus 8:15 and 9:34: *“But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said”*, and *“... when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants”*. However such statements are at variance with all the other references of God’s dealings with Pharaoh: Exodus 4:21 (quoted above), 9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10 and 14:8. All of those verses state that it was the Lord who hardened Pharaoh’s heart and consequently to assume that God used Pharaoh because he was naturally a ruthless despot is assuming something that is not stated in the Scriptures. The

Scriptures do not give any details as to how God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and since He has limitless powers it is not beyond His power to have directly controlled Pharaoh. One interpretation of Exodus 8:15 and 9:34 is that they record the effect of God's control as it appears to men. In any event, the fact remains that Pharaoh acted precisely as God foretold and so he fulfilled God's purpose.

Since the nation of Israel was God's chosen people (Deut. 7:6) it might be bewildering that God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he did not agree to God's request as conveyed by Moses. God's purpose in hardening Pharaoh's heart is recorded in Exodus 9:16 and is cited by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9:17-18: "*For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, **that I might shew my power in thee**, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth'. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, **and whom he will he hardeneth**'*". Thus God used Pharaoh to not only show that He controlled individuals in order to achieve His purposes but that He also devised the events so that they would demonstrate His power. It might be difficult to believe that God, the creator and ruler of the universe, would harden Pharaoh's heart just to show His power, however whether or not it is difficult to believe is immaterial because that is the plain statement of Scripture.

The Garden of Eden

God "knew the end from the beginning" before Adam and Eve transgressed in the Garden of Eden. In order to understand the situation it is necessary to understand the hierarchy in God's creation.

The angels

The angels are of higher rank than mankind: "*What is man... thou hast made him a little lower than the angels*" (Psalm 8:5).

2 Corinthians 11:14 ("*Satan ...is transformed into an angel of light*"), and Revelation 12:9 ("*And the great dragon...Satan...was cast out...and his angels were cast out with him*") at least imply (although not categorically state) that Satan is an angel and therefore of higher rank than Adam and Eve, even in their perfection before they transgressed.

Eve deceived

Genesis 3:1 reads: "*Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, 'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'*". (Revelation 20:2 identifies the 'serpent' as '*the devil and Satan*'.) Satan **deceived** Eve: "*And Adam was not deceived, but **the woman being deceived...***" (1 Tim. 2:14). There are two parties in an act of

deception, one being superior to the other. The superior one convinces the inferior one to believe something that is untrue. Thus Satan was able to deceive Eve because the angels are above mankind in God's hierarchy. Eve's deception was no fault of hers—she was subjected to the wiles of a spirit being whose station was above hers. In summary the situation was:

- God had established the angelic realm above the human realm;
- God had created Satan a spirit being; an angel;
- God had created Eve a human being;
- God had created Adam, gave him his desire for a helpmate, and created Eve to be that helpmate.

Thus it is no surprise, even to the human mind, that God would know the end from the beginning, that is, that Satan would be able to deceive Eve.

It may be speculated that it was Adam and Eve's natural disposition that caused them to sin, however there is no Scriptural support for such a contention.

Jesus

Indeed Jesus' coming to earth to be Man's redeemer was planned by God before He created the world. It is another example of God knowing the end from the beginning: "*Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you...*" (1 Peter 1:20). Thus it is evident that the transgression in the Garden of Eden was foreknown by God; indeed it was part of His plan as testified by Revelation 13:8: Jesus was "*the lamb slain from the foundation of the world*".

The church

The call of the church is another example of God "knowing the end from the beginning": "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... According as he hath chosen us in him before* (Greek: pro – in front of, before) *the foundation of the world...*" (Eph. 1:3-4). The statement "*he hath chosen us before the foundation of the world*" shows that God had pre-determined to call human beings to be members of His church, which in turn shows that God foreknew that Adam would transgress, that Jesus would overcome the temptations of Satan, that Jesus would be resurrected, and that He (God—John 6:44) would call some of mankind to be His sons and joint-heirs with His Son Jesus (Rom. 8:17).

How blessed are those who realise that God knows the end from the beginning and therefore all His promises are sure and steadfast: "*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast...*" (Heb. 6:19). Truly He is able to declare the end from the beginning and to "*... call those things which be not as though they were*" (Rom. 4:17).■

GOD'S SECONDS

The term “seconds” often implies that the object is second-rate or defective, and to regard any of God’s actions or products as “seconds” may be deemed heresy because His standard is perfection: “*As for God, his way is perfect...*” (Psa. 18:30).

However there are at least three parts of God’s plan where the “second” is, or will be, superior or more glorious than the “first”. The instances do not mean that the “firsts” were contrary to God’s plan but rather that they were a necessary preliminary; a prerequisite.

Adam

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 explains that there are two Adams: “*And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit...The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*”.

Genesis 2:7 records the creation of the first Adam: “*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*”. His name was Adam (Gen. 2:19). Adam was perfect: “*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him...And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was **very good**...*” (Gen. 1:26-31). Adam’s subsequent disobedience, by which “*sin entered into the world*” (Rom. 5:12), was a subsequent phase of God’s plan and does not indicate that Adam had any defect.

God’s plan provides for some human beings to become spiritual beings and inherit the heavenly realm and it was in accord with that plan that the first man Adam was of the earth. God sent Jesus to earth to become a man just like Adam. After three and a half years’ trial He proved faithful and was without sin; He was crucified and paid the ransom price for Adam and his race. He is called the **second Adam** because He had the same father as Adam and was therefore perfect but He came to earth after the first Adam; He will give life to mankind and not death, and in that sense He will be more glorious than the first Adam.

Covenants

God’s covenants are another example of God’s “second” being superior to the “first”: “*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second*” (Heb. 8:7). The first

covenant was not deficient—it only required the Israelites to keep it: “*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine*” (Exodus 19:5). The people agreed to keep it (Exodus 19:8), however they failed.

The failure was not due to any fault of the covenant but the weakness of their flesh: “*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*” (Rom. 8:3). The New Covenant will not fail: “*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake...this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel...saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (Jer. 31:31-33).

The first covenant had a specific purpose in God’s plan—it was not superfluous: “*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Gal. 3:24). Christ’s coming meant that there was no further need for the schoolmaster and so the Law Covenant became obsolete: “*But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster*” (Gal. 3:25).

The advents

Jesus’ two advents are another example of the “second” being more glorious than the “first”. At His first advent Jesus came as a baby, was born of a woman and died on the Cross; His second coming will be as a king who will rule the earth in righteousness: “*Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained...*” (Acts 17:31). He will “*put down all authority and power...And when all things shall be subdued unto Him then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him...that God may be all in all*” (1 Cor. 15: 24-28). The Second Advent will bring to fruition the purpose of the First Advent and in that sense it will be more glorious than the first, but the benefits of the Second Advent have been made possible only because of the work of the First Advent.

Thus God’s “seconds” are not inferior to His “firsts” but they are integral parts of His grand plan for the redemption of mankind.■

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

When he was before Felix the Apostle Paul declared: *"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust"* (Acts 24:14-15). The resurrection was central to Paul's hope and it is still central to the Christian's hope today.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote: *"Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty"* (1 Cor. 15:12-14 NKJV). The Apostle's statement means that the resurrection of mankind is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus, and hence Jesus' declaration to Martha is of great significance: *"I am the resurrection and the life..."* (John 11:25).

I am alive!

Jesus' disciples believed that He was the One who would deliver Israel from their subordination to the Romans. Consequently, as indicated by the disposition of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, their faith in God's promises was shaken when He was crucified: *"And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done"* (Luke 24:13-21).

However their sorrow turned to joy when they realised that He had risen from the dead: *"And it came to pass,*

as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:30-34). The fact that He was alive rejuvenated their hope of a Deliverer who would "redeem Israel"; God had previously provided deliverers for them but their deliverance was only temporary (Judges 3:9, 12, 15) and hence they sought a lasting deliverance from their oppressors.

John also saw a vision of the risen Jesus when he was on the isle of Patmos: *"I John...was in the isle that is called Patmos...I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet... And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man...And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death"* (Rev. 1:9-18).

The resurrection hope for the world

Jesus, now the risen Lord, the "one like unto the Son of man" in John's vision, has the keys of hell and of death and has the power to release from death everyone who has died. He knew before His death that He would gain that power: *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die"* (John 12:32-33). The "drawing of all men unto Him" refers to the work He will do when all men are resurrected, as He declared before His death: *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"* (John 5:28-29).

The word "resurrection" does not occur in the Old Testament; it occurs only in the New Testament. It is translated from the Greek word 'anastasis', which, according to Strong's Concordance means "a standing up again, that is, (literally) a resurrection from death...". It is variously translated: raised to life again, resurrection, rise from the dead, that should rise, rising

again. “Anastasis” means a restoration to the life previously held, which for the large majority of mankind means a restoration to life on earth.

The word “damnation” is translated from the Greek word “*krisis*”, the implied meaning of which is justice, and specifically divine law. It is variously translated: accusation, condemnation, damnation, judgment. The meaning of the word is critical because “damnation” is commonly interpreted to mean doomed to a future of eternal misery or obliteration. However the meaning in John 5:29 is that they will be resurrected to a time of crisis: that time will be a time of crisis for mankind (“*krisis*” in Greek equates to “crisis” in English) because there isn’t another redeemer who can rescue them (or ransom them). Paul explained this to Timothy when he wrote: “*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Jesus is the only Mediator and He gave Himself as a ransom price for the whole world of mankind when He died on the Cross. His ransom price will be testified in due time (that is, it will be vindicated) when all mankind is resurrected. However His sacrifice was a “one-off” event and, as stated in Hebrews 10:26, it will not be repeated: “*there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*”. Jesus has paid the ransom price once, He has been resurrected, and He is not going to die again: “*behold I am alive for evermore*” (Rev. 1:18). Consequently those who die a second time will remain dead.

Thus the overall message of John 5:28-29 is that mankind will stand up again (be resurrected) to a time of “crisis”. However the world then will be vastly different from the present evil world in which exploitation and injustice prevail: “*And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible*” (Isa. 13:11); “*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” (John 3:19); “*The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil*” (John 7:7); “*I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil*” (John 17:15); “*Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father*” (Gal. 1:4). The new world will be a stark contrast to the present environment as the prophet Isaiah declared: “*...They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*” (Isa. 11:9), and it is for this righteous world that Christians are waiting: “*Nevertheless we, according to*

his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).

The resurrection hope for the Church

The hope of a resurrection applies to all who have ever lived: the Scriptures do not exclude anyone, except those it calls “*spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots*” (Jude 12). The description in that verse does not apply to the majority of mankind; the implication is that those to whom it applied were professing to be Christians but were phoney. Of particular note is that such a description does not apply to those such as Noah who was “*a just man... who walked with God*” (Gen. 6:9). Indeed it does not apply either to all those mentioned in Hebrews 11 of whom it is written: “*And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect*” (Heb. 11:39-40)—suffice it to say that they have obtained a “good report”.

The “us” referred to in Hebrews 11:40, for whom God has provided some “better thing”, is defined by the opening verses of the book: “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds*” (Heb. 1:1-2). The book of Hebrews was not written for the fathers, but for those who have lived in these “last days”, that is, the days since Jesus' first advent: it is for them that God has provided “some better thing”.

The “better thing”

The “better thing” that God has prepared for “us” is better than anything anyone has imagined: “*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*” (1 Cor. 2:9). John wrote: “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*” (1 John 3:2). Other aspects of the glorious resurrection that is promised to the Christian may be derived from the Scriptures that tell of them being children of God: “*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:26); “*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified*” (Rom. 8:17). The Christian is deemed to be “dead in Christ” (Col. 3:3), and if dead then to have part in the first resurrection (1 Thess. 4:16) and all its benefits (Rev. 20:6).■

OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

Chapters 2, 3 and 21 of Revelation contain several promises of the glorious rewards that await those who “overcome”: they will eat of the tree of life; not be hurt of the second death; will be able to eat of the hidden manna; will have power over the nations; will be clothed in white raiment; will be a pillar in the city of God; will sit with Christ in His throne; will inherit all things.

To these explicit statements may be added the promises of “*living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years*” (Rev. 20:6) and, as a consequence of being part of the “*city of God*”, “*coming down out of heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband*” (Rev. 21:2). Such prospects led the Apostle Paul to write: “*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Rom. 8:18).

Of all those who have suffered for the name of Christ, Paul was perhaps equal to any: “*I speak as concerning reproach...I am...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands*” (2 Cor. 11:21-33). The full impact of the sufferings Paul lists in those verses might be difficult for those living in Western society to fully realize, yet he considered them not worthy of comparison with the rewards that await those who overcome.

Every Christian has shortcomings that they strive to overcome as they travel along the narrow way. Each one’s shortcomings are unique; no two Christians are exactly the same. However maybe there are some obstacles that are somewhat common.

Wanting to be liked

The first is an attribute common to all mankind: wanting to be well regarded—by their friends, their class mates, their employer—in summary, by everyone with whom they have ongoing dealings.

This can be a desirable quality, often prompting to positive, wholesome “above average” qualities, but, as in so many aspects of human nature, it can have a negative influence as well. For young people this desire is especially strong; the pressure of peers to conform and be one of the crowd can become irresistible; personal conviction is required.

But the desire is not limited to young people: it confronts adults as well and challenges them to take a stand for principle. Whether as young people or adult brethren, Christians are not immune from having difficulty, at times, in making the right decision—in discerning between their longing to be liked and their desire to do what is right.

What should the Christian do in these situations? A good guide is their conscience: if they start to feel a tinge of guilt, the time has come to review the principles involved. Feelings of guilt are caused by their conscience warning them that a course of action is contrary to God’s will. Disregarding guilt feelings will surely lead to injury, either morally or spiritually. Phillips’ translation of Romans 12:2 reads “*Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould*”. Another has written: “In a word, conscience is one of the Christian’s most valuable assets; according to obedience to conscience will be their standing before the Lord”. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience...*” (1 Tim. 1:5).

Seeking recognition

The Pharisees were a religious sect in Israel who felt they were superior to all others. They were continually calling attention to their self righteousness; trying to impress others. They were filled with a judgmental attitude against others and continually calling attention to legalistic outward observance of the law. Of them Jesus said: “*Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus, ‘God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess’. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than*

the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14).

In His sermon on the mount Jesus gave some heart searching admonitions regarding seeking recognition: *“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 6:1).*

Jesus continued the sermon and gave three examples that illustrate how people promote their own righteousness: *“Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee” (Matt. 6:2-4).* In other words whenever anyone is involved in a righteous act of Christian service, they should not sound a trumpet to call others’ attention to see what they did. The Lord’s admonition is to keep it quiet, even a secret.

He then gave a second example: *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men” (Matt. 6:5).* Here too the Christian must be careful—public prayers should be simple and brief; from the heart to God. Flowery language and long prayers referring to almost every aspect of the Plan are not needed. Public prayer should never be worded to call attention to knowledge or piety.

Jesus’ third example is in Matthew 6:16-17: *“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face...”. If the Christian fasts they are to “anoint their head” and “wash their face”, that is, they are to look clean, fresh and neat. They are not to try to appear humble and sad calling attention to their great sacrifice. Alms, sacrifice or any service which is done to be seen of men will have little value in the eyes of God.*

Rumours or gossip

Another attribute in which the flesh likes to engage is spreading rumour. James wrote: *“But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8).*

No one is able to tame the tongue perfectly, but the Christian must try to do so because, as James metaphorically expresses it, it is full of deadly poison.

David wrote of his endeavour to control his tongue: *“I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good...” (Psa. 39:1-2).* When he was confronted with wickedness, as well as “keeping his mouth with a bridle”, he also refrained from speaking, even about those things that were good. It is as the old proverb expresses it: “I have often regretted my speech, rarely my silence”.

Comparing oneself with others

Another of the adverse tendencies of our fallen flesh is to make comparisons. Frequently it is an unconscious act that focuses on the weak points of others. Jesus addressed this tendency: *“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, ‘Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye’; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye” (Matt. 7:1-5).*

It is so easy to see the smallest fault in others while not realizing the faults in oneself. If comparisons are made, let them always be in the spirit exhorted by Paul: *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phil. 2:3-6).*

On the other hand, one possible result of comparing oneself with others is to conclude that they are inferior and become discouraged. The Apostle Paul addresses this aspect in 2 Corinthians 10:12-13: *“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves...”. One’s own measure is an invalid measure: the example of Jesus is the only valid one.*

The truths expressed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 should always be kept in mind: *“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit...the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal”. In other words, God's will for each one is different from everyone else—God has chosen to have many members in the body; each one is different, each one has their own part to play and function to perform for the wellbeing of the whole body, so that “no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:29).*

Excuses

Another of the besetments faced by the Christian is that they might feel inadequate to carry out a task that God has given them. In those cases it should be remembered that those who are spirit begotten children of God are given astonishing promises of virtually unlimited strength and abilities: *“They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint”* (Isa. 40:31); *“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to him be the glory”* (Eph. 3:20); *“The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God”* (Psa. 68:35); *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Phil. 4:13); *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”* (1 Cor. 10:13).

Oh! what precious promises!—through the Holy Spirit God has promised to give special strength, powers and abilities of which the world in general does not have any idea; “take it to the Lord in prayer”. There is no excuse for the Christian to say that they are unable to accomplish any task the Lord has given to them to serve Him. Remember Moses! (Exod. 4).

Fear

Everyone has, at some time, experienced fear. Fear destroys inner peace. It takes on many forms but the underlying basic element is fear of failure, whether that is failure in talking to people, falling from heights, illness, what others might think, loneliness, or ultimately death.

There are many assurances in God’s Word that should help the Christian overcome this obstacle which has the potential to prevent them from living a quiet and peaceable life. One of them is stated in Isaiah 41:10: *“Fear thou **not**; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee”*.

Another promise regarding overcoming fear is in Psa. 46:1: *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. **Therefore we will not fear**, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea”*. Oh! that the Christian could have the confidence of the Psalmist: *“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?...Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident...For*

in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion : in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head shall be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD...I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psa. 27:1-14).

May every Christian strive to realize that everything in their lives is beyond their control; they are in God’s hands, for God has promised them that He is overruling every aspect of their lives: *“For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose”* (Rom. 8:28). Yes, indeed, all things! God is at the helm and will work it out for the ultimate good of every one that He has chosen.

The opposite of fear is courage, and it is possible to err in that way also—having too much courage or taking things into one’s own hands. Hence again arises the need for prayer, asking for God’s guidance in everything.

One who exercised faith and acted courageously was Joshua when he was about to enter the promised land: *“Be strong and of a good courage, for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest”* (Joshua 1:7-9). The Christian’s challenge that requires them to exercise courage might not be on the literal battlefield as it was for Joshua, but it will be in the quiet inner tests of faith of daily life. Such tests may be far more subtle than was Joshua’s: it may be as simple as saying “No!”; it might be an inner struggle between right and wrong; it might be standing alone when misunderstood; it might be enduring pain when all alone; it might be when a loved one passes away. Through them all the Christian may hear their Heavenly Father whisper: *“Be thou strong and very courageous”*. God is a very present help in trouble.

The Christian must keep pressing on, for soon they will reap if they faint not, and hear those blessed words: *“Well done, my good and faithful servant: enter thou into the everlasting joys of thy lord”* (Matt. 25:23). Indeed, blessed will be he that overcometh!■

LOVE REJOICES NOT IN INIQUITY

1 Corinthians 13 lists several characteristics of love, one of which is: “*Love...does not rejoice in iniquity...*” (verse 6). In order to grasp the significance of the apostle’s words it is necessary to have a clear idea of the meaning of the words “rejoice” and “iniquity”.

Rejoice

Some psychologists define joy as a deep sense of fulfilment: it pertains to the individual alone and is not something that can be shared with anyone else, although some may be aware that another is rejoicing. Joy is the state of mind that emanates from an innermost sense of satisfaction; when the deepest desires of the heart are fully met.

The Apostle Paul experienced joy when he learnt of the steadfastness of the Christians at Colosse: “*For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ*” (Col. 2:5). It was deeply satisfying to the apostle to hear of the spiritual growth of those at Colosse and the satisfaction was something that he was able to treasure even though he was not physically present with them.

John 16:22 also records a situation where joy will be experienced: “*Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you*”. At that time the apostles’ deepest desires will be fully met and nothing or no-one will be able to take their joy from them.

Iniquity

Iniquity is injustice in any form. It may be an intention to commit an unjust act or the act itself after it has been committed. Iniquity embraces all acts and intentions that are not morally upright or virtuous—it includes all unrighteousness and wrong doing.

For the Christian there are two arenas where the Apostle’s statement is to be applied: their personal conduct and the actions of others.

Christian conduct

In relation to the Christian’s own conduct, there is no place for any iniquitous action, neither contemplated nor committed. In his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul wrote: “*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour...*” (Rom. 13:10), and to the Thessalonians he wrote: “*See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men*” (1 Thess. 5:15). He also urged them to: “*Abstain from all appearance of evil*” (1 Thess. 5:22).

The environment

While the Christian may not commit iniquitous acts nor even contemplate doing so, the Apostle’s statement that love does not rejoice in iniquity has application beyond one’s own personal life.

The deepest desires of those who are motivated by love cannot be completely at peace when they are surrounded by acts of iniquity; that is, they cannot rejoice in the same way that the Apostle Paul rejoiced over the steadfastness of the Christians at Colosse.

Jesus discerned genuine love from insincere love, which is deceit. He told His disciples: “*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves...Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven...Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matt. 7:15-23). Their outward appearance was noble but inwardly they were insincere and hence Jesus called them “workers of iniquity”. Such discernment should remind the Christian of the need for them to “*be as wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*” (Matt. 10:16), as was the Apostle Paul: “*But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion...For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works*” (2 Cor. 11:12-15).

The Christian may be helped to rise above the present distress by remembering that: “*weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning*” (Psa. 30:5). They may always rejoice whenever good is done, regardless of by whom it is done, and to forbear when evil is done, regardless of by whom it is done, as they wait for the glorious appearing of their Lord and Master who will eradicate iniquity forever. ■

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THEY SHALL NOT PLANT AND ANOTHER EAT

One element of God’s plan is His dealing with the nation of Israel, an understanding of which sheds light on several events of the past, gives some insight into present events and enlightens several of the prophecies relating to the future.

One of the early passages of Scripture that reveals God’s dealing with Israel is Exodus 19:3-6: *“And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel”*. God’s promise to Israel that they would be a peculiar treasure was not unconditional but required them to obey His voice and keep His covenant.

God’s reason for choosing Israel to be His treasure was not that they were more worthy or powerful than the other nations, but simply because He loved them: *“... the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers...”* (Deut. 7:6-8).

The record in Deuteronomy goes on to detail the blessings God promised them, provided they kept His commandments. On the other hand, He would be swift and decisive if they failed to obey Him: *“Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack*

to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face... Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee... Thou shalt be blessed above all people...” (Deut. 7:9-14).

The Israelites agreed unanimously to obey Him: *“And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do”* (Exodus 24:3).

Transgression

Nevertheless soon after their miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage the Israelites transgressed and worshipped a golden calf (Exodus 32:1-4).

As promised, God punished Israel for their transgression: *“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;*

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And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass... And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites..." (Judges 6:1-6). The loss of their crops was a severe punishment.

Nevertheless when Israel turned to God He re-instated them as shown when Solomon consecrated the temple: *"Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever..." (2 Chronicles 7:1-22).*

The prophet Isaiah

Isaiah lived approximately 200 years after Solomon built the temple. His prophecy relates to the nation of Israel which testifies to God's continued dealing with them: *"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah..." (Isa. 1:1). In view of Israel's history Isaiah was caused to write: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but **Israel doth not know**, my people doth not consider. Ah **sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers**, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward..." (Isa. 1:2-6). What lamentable statements, particularly in view of God's acceptance of Solomon's consecration of the temple.*

Consequent to their continued waywardness, God punished them again: *"Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them" (Isa. 36:1).*

The sad story of Israel's woes continued—more than 100 years after Isaiah's prophecy, Zephaniah wrote: *"And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil. Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: **they shall also build houses, but***

not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof..." (Zeph. 1:12-13).

Coming further down the stream of time, the punishment of not reaping what they had sown was experienced by Israel in the twentieth century, as recorded by Meyer Levin in his book "**In Search**" (Horizon Press, New York 1950): *"...the harvest came, and we were about one-third of the entire kibbutz in the harvest team... we felt an exhilarating unity in labor, from those who pitched the bundles of wheat onto the thresher to those who stood sweating, half naked, in the exhaust of the machine pitching away the chaff... as we devoured our own bread we felt as though our energy had returned directly to us, through the fruit of our harvest labor... (However) our fields were crossed by a donkey trail, and the comrades were constantly on the watch for Arabs who made a habit of slipping sheaves of grain under their voluminous garments, as they passed. At night, neighboring villagers might try to make more serious deprecations. **During the harvest season a doubled guard circled the fields, while reinforcements slept on top of the threshing machines.** In my turn, I spent a night there.*

*As we sat on the platform of the antiquated thresher, I absorbed many tales of Arab troubles, and came to understand that a chief source of conflict lay in this constant pilfering. **From the earliest days the settlements had had to mount guards to protect their grain and livestock**; the worst trouble came from the Bedouin, the nomad Arabs who camped about in their black tents, and with whom theft was traditional art, admired by the community... While pilfering by neighboring villagers could be fairly well prevented, through constant vigilance and through cultivation of relations with the villagers, the thieving impulse was only checkmated rather than erased. **But nomadic Bedouin coming seasonally to squat near a colony might organize raids and involve local Arab villagers..."** (emphasis added).*

The punishment of their harvest being pillaged by others continues until today as recorded in **The Jerusalem Post** on August 24, 2009: *"Tired of police ineptitude and concerned about the receding Jewish character of the region, a group of farmers and volunteers from the Galilee have formed an organization called the New Guard (Hashomer Hahadash)...Modeled after the original guardsmen, led by Alexander Zaid, who protected the Jewish communities of the region in pre-state Israel at the beginning of the 20th century, the group's volunteers are primarily dedicated to upholding Jewish farming and pasture rights in response **to nightly violations by local Beduin herdsmen...**(emphasis added). "It*

started when I saw the difficulties my father was facing in confronting Beduin herders from a nearby village, who infiltrated his property, cut his fences and stole his cattle,” said the group’s founder, 23-year-old Yoel Ziberman from Tzipori, a moshav not far from Nazareth... Aside from guarding at the outposts, volunteers patrol the dirt roads surrounding the grazing lands.... According to Ziberman’s father, Chaim, most of the farmers and herdsman in the region prefer to pay, rather than face the constant harassment and the expenses involved in fixing fences and making up for losses in cattle and pasture degradation. “What they do is enter into ‘partnership’ with the criminals,” said E. “They either allow them to graze their herds freely, thus in effect giving up large portions of their land, or else they pay out a salary to the local tribal leader, for ‘security services.’” It is noted that this report pertains to 2009.

Lost forever?

In view of Israel’s repeated turning away from God in times past, it might be natural to assume that God’s patience with them has expired and that He has abandoned them forever. Nevertheless that is not the case: the book of Isaiah contains many other prophecies regarding Judah and Jerusalem, including chapter 62:8-9: “*The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, **Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured: But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the LORD; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness***”. Verses 11 and 12 of that chapter define the time when that promise will be fulfilled: “*Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken*”. The prophecy refers to a time yet future when Israel will be called “*a city not forsaken*”, a statement which is in stark contrast to the earlier statements when God “abandoned” His people.

Isaiah 65:17-25 also prophesies of the time when Jerusalem will not be forsaken. The verses declare that it will be when God creates the new heaven and new earth: “*For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth... for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people... And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and*

another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them”.

Other prophets also have written of the blessed future time when Israel will be God’s delight and will prosper. Jeremiah is one such prophet: “*And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD... Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD*” (Jer. 31:28-37). The promise is sure—it is only if the sun ceases to give its light and the regularity of the moon and stars fail that He will not fulfill His promise to watch over them to build and to plant. When they have been disobedient in the past He has punished them but the promise now is that, just as assuredly, He will watch over them to build them up and to plant.

Ezekiel 28:25-26 and Amos 9:14-15 also record God’s promise to Israel: “*And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel... and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God*” (Amos 9:14). Israel will yet enjoy the fruits of their labour. ■

BE STILL

The sermon published below was delivered approximately 55 years ago, before the days of direct dial telephone services, television, home computers, the internet, electronic mail, mobile phones, and cheap flights in jet-powered aircraft, all of which enable people to “keep in touch”. It is printed with the thought that reflection on the situation as seen by one devoted Christian only half a century ago might help those living today to better appreciate the changes that have permeated Western society.

The sermon

“It seems like audacity to try to preach a sermon on ‘Being Still’ in our world of today for it is an age of speed and rush. Most everything tends to turmoil of mind, there seems so much to do and such little time to do it in. City life adds ten fold to these tendencies and most of us find our environments these days either in or bordering close to the noisy bustle of the hub of a city.

Psalm 46:10 is a text that requires interpretation in its context: it has to do with the Millennium and relates to the raging nations as the great battle of Armageddon draws to a close. In angry foment of that time it will be a welcome voice indeed, and how ready will the nations of mankind be then to hear it.

But since we learn that the church is instructed and prepared in Godliness an age ahead of the world it surely is in order to apply the essence of this verse to ourselves now. We need to be still and know that God has all power to execute His plan. There is no need to get in a frenzy about ‘converting the world’.

Maybe too we may stand in special need at this end of the age to be guided wisely in our Class meeting affairs. None can dispute that the tendency is toward fewer numbers in our fellowships—on special occasions such as conventions the numbers may continue to be about the usual over a number years, but it is the Sunday by Sunday attendances that reveal the true state of affairs and where there is deep spirituality. Fewer elders and fewer helpers casts more pressure on the few, and in some cases it might be wise to take stock and ask oneself the question: “what would the Lord have me to do—try to keep up with the whirl of doing as much or more than ever, or cultivate more the spirit of being still and seek guidance to adjust matters more to that end?”. It is good to be busy but not so busy with so many things to do that nothing is done well.

In Psalm 76:8 we are told how the earth feared and was still when God arises to judgement and the

Millennium. The “stilling” of the earth will be an absolute necessity for the welfare of mankind: what richness of thought to the understanding mind does Isaiah 14:7 portray of that day: “*The whole earth is at rest and is quiet*”. The din of this twentieth century world must surely pass away.

Recently I have been interested in reading the view points of a person labouring with intent to assist people to enjoy better health. The thought was expressed that although in moments of relaxation the first thing that the majority do is to turn on the wireless, it is often the worst thing to do. To sit and quietly read is much better.

We have all noticed the tendency of children these days to be “on the go”. I have heard some parents remark (apparently proud of the fact) that “Johnny is always on the go, he can’t be still a minute”. The one I’ve been reading wrote: “The habit of stillness cultivated in childhood will be the basis of true poise in the adult; the child who has never been taught how to be still will be at a great disadvantage when he goes out to take his place in the affairs of the world. Rest, to be effective, means not only rest for the digestive organs, but relief from the shrieking of pop singers over every radio station in the land, National stations included. Children have no escape from these disturbances of the peace. Even where parents are considerate the neighbours carry on their radio programs and week-end parties far into the night.

Where real music soothes and heals, the crashing din of a “pop session” sets up a resistance in the fine mechanisms of the brain, even in an adult, which brings on a greater degree of fatigue, poisoning the blood stream, than many hours of manual labour. Noise, which includes music, stimulates and excites and when continued for too long a period, it reaches a point where it irritates and finally prostrates. As the radio is the chief noise maker in our midst we must place it as public enemy number one in this direction. Whatever advantages have been derived from the doubtful blessing of wireless we have paid for them very dearly in increasing nervous disorders amongst children.”

To Christians I say there is more value than realised by many in attempting as often as possible to carry out the advice of the Psalmist in Psalm 4:4: “...*commune with you own heart upon your bed and be still*”. It is capable of yielding more blessedness at times than listening to someone else preach a sermon. It has been remarked by one, somewhat in lighter vein, that God wanted John Bunyan to write “Pilgrim’s

Progress” so He shut him up in prison. One cannot help wondering how much of Paul’s beautiful thoughts were borne out of reflection in solitude as a prisoner. In the light of their experiences these men in the stillness of their surroundings must have often communed with their own hearts upon their beds as it were.

Whatever may have been the ruling conditions during which great men of the past lived, and when we think of David, Abraham, Moses and many others as shepherds in quiet country environments, we feel sure that we of the present day are more handicapped in exercising the same thoughtful meditation; but that is not to say that it is of less value to a Godly life today, and he who earnestly seeks to order his life so as to have it will undoubtedly be spiritually richer for it.

Some of us at times need reminding that in political and national life the true Christian should not be unduly interested and never an agitator—the temptation is, and often we are rather fonder than we ought to be, to insist on “having our say” regarding this or that political measure and the sponsor of it. We can redeem time here maybe for communing with our heart instead. From 1 Timothy 2:1-2 we conclude that where no principle is at stake we should accept and abide by the ruling power with desire to lead a quiet and peaceable life.

In 1 Peter 3 the early verses are interesting in line with our topic. It is noticed that it chiefly concerns sisters. In this day when cosmetics are used almost universally and when the female community are slaves to “fashion”, here is something for true Christian women to note well—that a meek and quiet spirit is the best of all in God’s sight.

Then we have the well known text in 1 Thessalonians 4:11: “*study to be quiet*”. The concordance gives the meaning of the word “study” here to be “esteem as an honour”; esteem it as an honour to be quiet. Weymouth renders it: “make a quiet life your ambition”. The world today will call you an old fogey, stick in the mud, stick at home that never goes anywhere, but you will be more than compensated in spiritual blessings (and in many cases, physical blessings too). Make a quiet life your ambition, which is the opposite of wanting to have all the say on those occasions when you are in company; times when many grow resentful because they could not get a word in edge-wise. One reason for our zeal might be that we believe that what we want to say will be a witness to our faith in God. However think of the nervous energy you save by not having to try; if you are to speak the Lord will make the opening; if not, we can be content to be ignored”.

The Lord’s hand

There are several instances where the people of earlier times were directly instructed to “be still” and wait on the Lord. In two examples it was necessary for Israel to not be dismayed but to trust God.

Exodus 14:11-14 reads: “*And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, **stand still**, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace*”. It was necessary for the Israelites to “stand still” in order to see the salvation of the Lord. The same situation may well occur in the lives of Christians in the 21st century: at times it is necessary to curtail our zeal and wait on the Lord—give Him time to work out His will—in order to allow the Lord to do His perfect work.

Another instance where it was necessary to allow the Lord to fight the battle is recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:15-17: “*And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; **for the battle is not yours, but God’s**. To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you*”.

The land

Also it was beneficial for the Israelites to rest even the land (let it stand still) for a year: “*And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it **rest and lie still**; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard*” (Exodus 23:10-11).

These instances from old times have been recorded for our benefit: “*written for our learning*” (Rom. 15:4). The benefits have not stopped due to the passage of time; there continues to be great physical and spiritual profit in observing them. May we ponder them.■

LESSONS FROM JACOB'S WELL

Those who live in the Western world in the 21st. century might be unfamiliar with accessing water from a well—with modern reticulation systems all that is required to obtain water is turn on the tap. However that has not always been the case: in Jesus' day water was drawn from a well using a rope and bucket. Some aspects of drawing water from a well may be used as illustrations of the Christian life.

Jesus at Jacob's Well

John 4:1-15 records Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Jacob's well lies near the modern city of Nabilus. In Jesus' day it was called Sychar. When first seen in 1697 by a man named Mondrel it was 75 feet (30 metres) deep, but Mondrel says it was probably dug to a depth of 120 to 150 feet (approximately 35-45 metres), and it held 15 feet (4 metres) of water.

John 4:1-9 reads: *"When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples), He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink (for his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat). Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans".*

It is noted that some manuscripts do not contain the words *"for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans"*, however the concept seems to be consistent with the woman's reaction to Jesus' request and is in accordance with Jesus' instruction to His twelve disciples: *"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matt. 10:5-6).

Who It Is

Jesus continued: *"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water"*. At that stage Jesus did not state who He was but continued to reveal His super-human powers by re-counting the woman's marital status.

By revealing His knowledge of the woman's history Jesus demonstrated that He was indeed *"greater than Jacob...which gave us the well"* (verse 12). In other words He did not outwardly claim to be the Son of God but provided evidence which led the woman to conclude that He was a prophet (verse 19).

Such should be the case with the Christian: self acclamation counts for nothing, as the Apostle Paul was careful to demonstrate: *"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God"* (1 Cor. 2:4-5). His demeanour was the opposite of the scribes about whom Jesus warned His disciples: *"Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts"* (Luke 20:46). The scribes did not verbally demand prominence and admiration, but their underlying spirit was to impose their sense of self-importance by an outward show—a manifestation of their pride.

Living water

Another picture may be drawn from the difference between the water that the woman was able to draw, and the living water of which Jesus spoke. The term 'living water' implies life-giving water. The Greek word for 'living' (zao) means 'to live' or 'to have life'; it occurs more than 140 times in the New Testament and some instances which bear out its meaning are: Matthew 4:4; 16:16; John 4:50-53; Acts 1:3 and Romans 9:26.

One feature of a well is that the inflow is from below—the flowing or active water is beneath the stagnant water that rises inside the well. Consequently, although the water towards the top of the water in the well was fresh water, it was not living water. The water to which Jesus referred was the words of life, the gospel of salvation; eternal life. The implication is that Jesus was able to provide living water—that is flowing, vibrant water. As the Apostle Peter exclaimed later: *"...Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life"* (John 6:68).

Nothing to draw with

As the conversation between Jesus and the woman developed, the woman said: *"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep"*. The woman's statement may be interpreted to imply that drawing water from the well was not something that one could achieve without some equipment, and especially to reach the flowing water which was at the very bottom

of the well. And so it is with those who wish to access the spiritual living water. One of the essential “pieces of equipment” required by the Christian to access the life giving truths of God’s Word is the Holy Spirit: “*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor. 2:9-11). The Christian must have God’s Holy Spirit to draw the life giving water.

The Holy Spirit was poured out first at Pentecost and those who received it were energized (Acts 2:17-18). Those who received the Spirit had their eyes opened to the Scriptures, and thus became a well of salvation; a channel of Divine truth.

On the other hand, without the Holy Spirit, all human effort, regardless of how intellectual it might be, is fruitless. Paul wrote to Timothy: “*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be...ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tim. 3:1-7). Without the Holy Spirit diligent study profits nothing.

Effort required

Another picture that may be drawn from the deepness of the well is that considerable effort was required to haul the water to the surface. The same principle applies to the Christian: “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15). The Christian must be prepared to expend energy in order to obtain the life giving water.

Thirst again

The record continues: “*Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life*” (John 4:10-14).

Jesus declared that the water the woman would draw would quench her thirst in the short term, but that relief would be temporary and she would need to come to the well again to draw water. On the other hand the water that He would provide would satisfy her thirst forever. The duration of the relief from thirst that the water Jesus provides may be considered to reflect the on-going satisfaction that the Christian enjoys from the water of truth. It satisfies the soul such that there is no need to seek refreshment from

other sources: “*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*” (Eph. 4:14), but as Paul declared: “*...I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day*” (2 Tim. 1:12). The water of truth satisfies the Christian’s thirst forever.

However another picture that may be drawn is that, just as the woman had to come to the well repeatedly to draw literal water to meet her daily needs, so the Christian must repeatedly search the Scriptures to refresh themselves with the life giving water. This aspect of Christian endeavour was reflected in the zeal of the Christians at Berea who “*were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). Their search was not a “once off” activity: they searched the Scriptures daily.

The need for continual refreshment is reflected in the exhortation given in Hebrews 10:25: “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*”. Gathering together with those of like mind provides spiritual refreshment and may be considered to be one way for the Christian to visit the well.

This picture is not contradictory to the earlier picture of the satisfying nature of the living water. They are different pictures and each is being used to illustrate a different aspect of the Christian life.

The need for repeated filling with life-giving water is a reminder of a temptation that might face Christians of long-standing; that is, to cease diligent study, especially of things with which they are familiar. However it is wise to heed the Apostle Peter’s words: “*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance...*” (2 Pet. 1:12-13). Thus in the symbolism of the incident at Jacob’s well, it is necessary to continually draw living water from the anti-typical well of salvation in order to keep oneself refreshed and to be able to continue to be a well of living water.

The Christian as a well of living water

John 7:38-39 explains the concept of a Christian becoming a well of living water: “*He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall*

flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”. Thus, as mentioned above, it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that enables one to become a spring of living water and able to refresh others by sharing with them the words of life. When Jesus met this woman the Holy Spirit had not been given to mankind because “*Jesus was not yet glorified*”; no-one was empowered by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and therefore at that time no-one could be a well of living water.

However that is not the situation today and those who are filled with the Spirit should have a desire to be active in the dissemination of the word of truth, as Paul exhorted Timothy: “*Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Indeed the writer to the Hebrews was critical of those who had not progressed such that they were able to spread the gospel: “*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat*” (Heb. 5:12). Some had not progressed and had not become a well of living water; they could not share the gospel message with others.

Neither come hither to draw

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw”. The woman’s request reflected her desire to be relieved of the need to continually draw water from the well, due to the effort required to walk to the well and carry the water back to her home. For the Christian the picture is that they do not need to go to a specific location to draw water—there is no travel burden—because the living water goes with them wherever they go: “*Jesus saith unto her, Woman believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...but the hour cometh when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth...*” (John 4:21-23). The living water of truth goes with the Christian because it dwells in their heart.

Isaiah’s prophecy

The only other instance where the expression “wells of salvation” occurs in the Scriptures is Isaiah 12:1-6: “*And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore*

with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee”.

The prophecy foretells a time when the nation of Israel will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, and will drink of the life giving water that only He can give. The prophet Jeremiah confirms the promise: “*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Jer. 31:31-34).

In that day the nation of Israel will drink of the water of life from the well of salvation in fulfillment of Jesus’ declaration: “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*” (John 12:32).■

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF GENERAL SYNOD HELD AT THE CAMPION RETREAT CENTRE, KEW, VICTORIA ON FRIDAY 12 AND SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER, 2001.

Agenda Item 20: Press Release: Item 6: “It was resolved that this Standing Committee of General Synod.... urges Anglicans and other Christians throughout the country to seek to understand Islam more fully and build closer relationships with Muslim communities”.

[Source: <http://www.anglican.org.au/index.cfm?SID=28%Searchtext=Islam>]

The above press release is not published with any thought of criticism, nevertheless it highlights the significance of Acts 4:10-12: “*...Jesus Christ of Nazareth...there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*”.

GOD'S HIGHER WAY

John 14:27 is possibly one of the most comforting and also one of the most challenging verses of Scripture in the whole Bible: *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"*.

Peace is precious and is something that not only every Christian but also most people in the world hope for and cherish. But in these times it is a challenge to believe that the words quoted above are true—can anyone really be at peace in a world that has been troubled throughout history? In recent years Iraq, the Middle East, Asia and the African continent have been plagued with war; there have been earthquakes in China, tornadoes and cyclones in Burma and the USA. Some parts of Australia have experienced floods while other parts have suffered prolonged drought. Spain has also been in the grip of drought. Human suffering, both in degree and magnitude, has been enormous and therefore it is "natural" for every believer in God to ask "If God is a god of love, compassion and mercy, why doesn't He do something to end the suffering? How can He sit idly by and watch His human creation endure such heartbreak?"

Beyond the human mind

God's purpose in permitting such catastrophes is beyond the natural human mind to understand, although many have tried to do so. Solomon is one who tried.

Solomon was one of the wisest men to have ever lived on the Earth and so it is not surprising that he tried to fathom God's purposes. He wrote: *"I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith"* (Eccl. 1:12-13). Solomon concluded that God has given this "sore travail" to the sons of men for a purpose, that purpose being that man would be "exercised therewith". The primary meaning of the Hebrew word from which "exercised" is translated is "to depress"; it also means "humble". Solomon repeats his conclusion in chapter 3 verses 10-11: *"I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it ... no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end"*.

Although it is beyond the natural human mind to understand God's purpose in subjecting mankind to the present distress, that is not the case with whom He has given His Holy Spirit: *"But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit..."* (1 Cor. 2:10).

The Apostle Paul

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the Apostle Paul wrote: *"For the creature was made subject to vanity ... by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope..."* (Rom. 8:20). Paul clearly states that God deliberately subjected His creation to "vanity" (the present suffering, including death) for a reason. Paul goes on to explain (verse 21) that there will be an end to the present travail: *"because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"*.

God's supremacy

The first step in trying to understand God's purpose in giving mankind the present experience is to understand and acknowledge that God is superior to mankind.

The prophet Jeremiah provides some insight: *"But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens'. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. Every man is brutish in his knowledge ..."* (Jer. 10:10-14). Those verses not only describe **God's power** but they also state that He "hath established the world by **his wisdom**".

God's power

Regarding God's power, the truth of Jeremiah's declaration is undeniable: the "multitude of waters in the heavens" is a resource that causes floods when He sends them to Earth, while at the other end of the spectrum the "vapours ascending from the ends of the earth" bring drought (a lack of water). "Lightnings with rain" describes thunderstorms and His "bringing forth wind" equates to cyclones and tornadoes. The devastation that these "forces of nature" may cause is far greater than that caused by any device that Man has been able to engineer, and it is in that sense that Man is "brutish in his knowledge".

God's wisdom

The second of God's attributes mentioned in the verses from Jeremiah is His wisdom; He made the world "by

His wisdom". That statement is consistent with the fact that when He finished making the Earth He saw that it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). However His wisdom did not stop there but continues to have effect until today and can be seen from a consideration of some of the events that have occurred since creation.

One event that illustrates God's wisdom in His direct involvement in the affairs of men was His raising up of Pharaoh at the time of Israel's release from Egyptian bondage; His purpose in doing so was "to show in thee my power" (Exodus 9:16). That purpose may seem obscure, but nevertheless it is the truth of the matter. The Apostle Paul refers to it in Romans 9:17 in his explanation that there is a **higher purpose** in God's dealings with the human race than is apparent to the natural human mind.

Jesus foreordained

Another example of God's wisdom in His arrangements for mankind which illustrates His higher way is explained by the Apostle Peter: "... forasmuch as ye know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things... but with the precious blood of Christ... who verily was **foreordained before the foundation of the world ...**" (1 Peter 1:17-20). Peter declares that Jesus' coming to Earth and death on the Cross was not something that was added after Adam transgressed, as if something went astray in God's plan, but it was part of God's plan from the very beginning: Jesus was "**foreordained**".

The fact that Jesus was foreordained to be Man's redeemer means that God planned, before the foundation of the world, that Man would sin because sin is the only reason why mankind dies: "*The soul that sinneth it shall die ... But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity ... in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die*" (Ezek. 18:4, 24); "... and so death passed upon all men for that all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). If mankind did not sin and therefore suffer death there would not be any need for a redeemer. However Jesus was foreordained to be Man's redeemer before the foundation of the world; before mankind was created.

God's objective in human suffering

It is God's prerogative to use whatever means He chooses to accomplish His purposes. At the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt He used hardship to keep them humble and to ensure that they would not desert their Deliverer: "*All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God*

led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or not. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God ... Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were... drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint... that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end..." (Deut. 8:1-17).

The magnitude of God's wisdom needs to be fully grasped here. Israel had been in bondage in Egypt for more than 400 years and yet in His wisdom God subjected them to further deprivation in the wilderness. He did so to ensure that they would not take any credit for their subsequent prosperity. As well as that, His purpose was that He might do them "good at the latter end", that is, that it would be to their ultimate benefit rather than necessarily being for their immediate benefit. Thus it is evident that God's purpose was broader and of longer term than what man's mind would have imagined; the nation had already experienced many years in bondage and yet there was more for them to learn so that they would not become proud later. The same principle applies to His dealing with the world of mankind and their subjection to vanity.

The larger scale

God's plan is to deliver all mankind from "*the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*" (Rom. 8:21). His dealings with Israel during their exodus is just one example that illustrates how the imposition of adverse experiences can accomplish His purpose. In Israel's case He imposed deprivation in the wilderness so that they would not turn away from Him in their later prosperity; in the same way mankind today is experiencing a lifetime of suffering. It is the same strategy as He used with Israel but on a much larger scale—indeed it is on a world wide scale. God's purpose in giving this sore travail to mankind for such a long period is that, when "*the times of restitution of all things*" comes (Acts 3:21); when "*the inhabitant shall not say I am sick*" (Isa. 33:24); when "*the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, and the lame man shall leap as an hart, when streams shall break out in the desert*",

when all mankind shall “*come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads*” (Isa. 35:5-10); when there will be “*no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain*” (Rev. 21:3-4), they will **not** lift up their hearts with pride, but will say, “... *Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths*” (Isa. 2:3).

It is at that time that the present “*sore travail*” will have accomplished its purpose. The lesson is so powerful that not only will they say “*this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*” (Isa. 25:9), but they will also

be able to resist the temptations of Satan when he tries to deceive the nations at the end of the thousand year period foretold in Revelation 20:7-8: “*And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together; to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea*”.

It is as the prophet Isaiah declared: “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts*” (Isa. 55:9), and as Paul declares: “*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*” (Rom. 11:33).■

DISCERNING BOTH GOOD AND EVIL

In Hebrews 5:12-14 the writer reprimands the Hebrews for a lack of progress in their knowledge of the Word: “*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”.

He writes that while they should have progressed to be teachers they were still infants and could not digest strong meat. He also states that strong meat is for them who are of full age, that is those who by “*reason of use*” have developed their skills and knowledge such that they are able to discern good and evil.

The act of discerning implies judgment. Strong’s Concordance defines the Greek word (#1253) as “*judicial estimation*”. It occurs only three times in the New Testament: Romans 14:1 (disputations); 1 Corinthians 12:10 (discerning) and Hebrews 5:14 (discern).

One of the first abilities a Christian must develop is to discern good and evil and keep oneself from evil as Jesus prayed for His disciples: “*I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil*” (John 17:15).

Indeed the discernment of good and evil is one of the platforms upon which Christian conduct is built. Paul wrote: “*See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men*” (1 Thess. 5:15); and Peter

wrote: “*For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile*” (1 Pet. 3:10-11). Both of those exhortations require the recognition of evil, consequently it might seem strange that the Hebrews could not discern good and evil.

Maybe the task of discerning good and evil was not as easy as it sounds because the writer was referring to the written words “good” and “evil” and not good and evil acts.

In the Greek language the two words are written thus:

- Καλός (good; English transcript: Kalos); and
- Κακός (evil; English transcript: Kakos).

The difference between the Greek words is just one letter in the middle of each word (English “k” and “l”; Greek “kappa” and “lambda”).

Additionally the difference between the letters “k” and “l” is only two small strokes; changing an “l” into “k”. Thus to discern good and evil in the written word required an eye that was familiar with the words and keenly focused to detect the difference.

The example was powerful to the Hebrews at that time and it is powerful and relevant to the Christian today. Just as it was only those Hebrews whose senses were keenly developed “*by reason of use*” who were able to discern good and evil, likewise it is only those Christians whose spiritual senses are keenly developed by reason of use who are able to discern good and evil in the world today: “*But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*” (2 Cor. 11:2). May all Christians keep their minds exercised by reason of use.■

LOVE REJOICES IN THE TRUTH

In 1 Corinthians 13:6 the Apostle Paul personifies love, that is, he portrays it as a person. Love is not a person and therefore it cannot rejoice in the same sense as a person rejoices. However, by describing its qualities as if it were a person, the Apostle made it easier for his readers to understand his message.

A person rejoices when they are in harmony with their environment, including the events that occur in it. In 1 Corinthians 13:6 Paul wrote *“love rejoices in the truth”* because love and truth are in harmony; love does not rejoice in deception and error. In 2 Corinthians 4:2 Paul wrote, referring to himself and Timothy (chapter 1:1): *“But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God”*. In effect Paul's statement means that it was by truth, and letting it be known that he stood for truth (he *“manifested the truth”*), that he had commended himself to every man. The expression *“commended ourselves”* is another way of saying that his conduct did not allow any allegations of dishonesty to be truthfully leveled at him. In order to do so he had *“renounced the hidden things of dishonesty”* because no one can be both dishonest and truthful.

God, Love and Truth

Love and truth are intrinsic qualities of God. The Apostle John wrote: *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8) and so everyone who is seeking to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16) must develop the quality of love.

The Psalmist wrote: *“Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts...”* (Psa. 51:6). Those who are seeking to please Him must also desire truth in their inward parts. Truth in one's *“inward parts”* implies a desire to depart from evil: *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”* (Psa. 51:7-10).

The harmony that exists between love and truth is also expressed in Psalm 89:14: *“Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face”* (Psa. 89:14). Truth is essential for justice to be executed and love is essential for mercy. Consequently love and truth are integral parts of God's domain.

Endurance

Another of the several characteristics that are common to both love and truth is their endurance: *“For the*

LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations” (Psa. 100:5). Hatred, which is the opposite of love and mercy, will be destroyed when Christ's kingdom is established on the earth: *“When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever”* (Psa. 92:7). The prophet Nahum also declared that iniquity will come to an end and will never again afflict mankind: *“What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time”* (Nahum 1:9). The ultimate endurance is eternity and every aspect of truth tends towards eternity, whereas every aspect of iniquity engenders corruption of both mind and body which ultimately lead to death. God's kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom: *“And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed”* (Dan. 7:14). Love rejoices in the truth because it endures.

The destruction of iniquity

Another characteristic of both love and truth is that they are the instruments by which God will destroy iniquity: *“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil”* (Prov. 16:6). When God judges the earth; when iniquity is purged from the earth; when men fear the Lord; when lies and secret dealings are removed, the prophecy of Isaiah 26:9 will be realized: *“Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength...For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low...he bringeth it even to the dust... The way of the just is uprightness...With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness”* (Isa. 26:4-9). Love rejoices in truth because it destroys iniquity. When the people of the earth learn righteousness, truth will abound and *“love will rejoice”* in full measure. ■

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