

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

It is traditional at this time of the year to make what are commonly called New Year Resolutions. Many people are not completely happy with themselves, they want to improve, and the beginning of a New Year seems to be a good time to initiate changes.

In the secular world, the main focus of self-improvement courses is “goal setting”. The long term goal is reached by breaking the goal down into stages. An example from the business world is that of a salesman who might have been set a goal of \$1M in sales within 10 years. The goal might seem an impossible task but when broken down to a 5 year, 1 year, 1 month and weekly goals, it requires only \$2,000 a week. The goal now appears quite attainable.

Every consecrated Christian must, by virtue of their consecration, have goals. They have presented their bodies as a living sacrifice. They have a goal to daily put down the old flesh, to grow spiritually, to look for and do God’s will, to keep the narrow way and to make their calling and election sure. Making their calling and election sure can at first seem to be an impossible goal. However it is a step-by-step process; as Isaiah 28:10 states it is “*precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little there a little*”.

There is an old saying that ‘New Year resolutions are made to be broken’, which might be acceptable as far as the world is concerned. However for the Christian, resolutions are very serious matters. Their resolutions are binding until their death, and are the foundation for building their Christian character. Without resolutions they are like a ship drifting aimlessly on the sea without an engine, without a sail, and without a rudder. The ship will never get to its destination because it has none. The Christian has a destination; they must set the sail, control the rudder, and keep the engine in good repair. This can only be done by acting in accordance with their resolutions every day.

Psalm 116:12-18 reads: “*What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all*

his people ... I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people”. The sentiments of this psalm must be recalled daily by every Christian; to make resolutions at the beginning of a New Year means nothing unless they are practised daily.

The first thought in Psalm 116:12 is one of complete consecration – a consecration that is born of gratitude for the goodness of God: “*What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will pay my vows to the Lord*”. Recalling this vow of consecration at the beginning of every day engenders holiness; the Christian’s vow must be a daily task, not just something that they did one year ago, or 20 years ago. It must be remembered every day! They carry the fallen flesh with them every day and so the antidote must go with them every day also.

The next resolution that must be a daily objective is sincerity and simplicity of character – “*I will strive to be simple and sincere toward all*”. Saying it and doing it are different things. Simplicity and sincerity are not qualities that may be worn on the outside like an ornament. They are qualities that must come from within. A mere show of sincerity is more distasteful than none at all. Jesus severely rebuked the Pharisees for such hypocrisy: “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so, ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*” (Matt. 23:27-28).

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Jesus' statement is in stark contrast with the description of the bride in Psalm 45 – "*The king's daughter is all glorious within*". It is the heart condition that the Lord is observing. Simplicity and sincerity are truly jewels, but they must shine from within. There is such a thing as "insincere sincerity", just as there is pride in one's humility. Both qualities are untenable in the Christian.

Another resolution that must be remembered daily is "*I will not please and honour self, but the Lord*". An inherent quality in fallen human nature is pride. The glorifying of self - the worshipping of self – is a characteristic of the fallen nature. Christians may fool themselves into thinking that they have put "self down" because they do not share the world's desires to be prominent in the community. But let every Christian look further - how do they act in their relationships with their brethren? "*I will not please and honour self, but the Lord*" must be a resolution that is consciously addressed every day.

A further resolution that requires daily attention is "*I will be careful to honour the Lord with my lips, that my words may be acceptable to all*". It is so easy to gossip, or to speak in an evil way. Such words do not bring honour to the Lord nor do they bring a blessing to others.

Christians must also be careful to honour the Lord with their lips when defending the doctrines of truth. A noble defence for truth is completely destroyed when harshness or vindictiveness is used. The truths being upheld might be pure, but the methods by which they are being proclaimed or upheld might not be honouring to the Lord nor a blessing to the hearer.

Guarding one's words completely is impossible, and such a goal can lead to discouragement. The Apostle James declares: "*For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body ... 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*" (James 3:2, 8-9). James equates the ability to control the tongue with perfection and while that is not achievable in the current fleshly life, it must be the Christian's goal.

The next resolution is also a daily one – "*I will be faithful to the Lord, the Truth, the brethren and all with whom I have to do, not only in great matters but also in the little things of life*". The Christian can be faithful to the Lord by trying to live up to all of His principles and precepts, not just those that appeal to the flesh, not just those that others see, not just those that will bring personal gain – but all of them! Being

faithful to the Lord involves not being ashamed of one's relationship with Him: "*If we deny Him, He will deny us*" (2 Tim.2:12).

How can a Christian be faithful to the Truth? One essential criterion is to know truth from error! Having identified truth and separated it from error, it is necessary to stand up for it and apply its standards and precepts in one's daily life. Such a stand will not make for popularity, but the Christian life is not a popularity contest; it is a lonely way, "*a narrow way that leadeth unto life*" (Matt. 7:14).

What is involved in being "*faithful to the brethren*"? Christians do not choose their brethren – the Lord does that (1 Cor. 12:18). Just as in real life one can choose their friends but not their relatives, so also in the church. God does the calling, God does the drawing, God does the accepting, and God does the begetting. Consequently Christians are not at liberty to exclude anyone. However the warning is that there would be false Christians – "*wolves in sheep's clothing*" - whom the Father has never accepted nor begotten. Such will be manifested by a lack of fruitage (Matt. 7:20). Where the fruits of the spirit are totally lacking and the spirit of the world is obvious, Christians are exhorted to "*come out from among them and be ye separate ...*" (2 Cor. 6:17).

Christians are to be faithful in the little things of life. The Christian life is built of little everyday experiences that in themselves might seem to be insignificant. However it is the seemingly little things that make the Christian life a daily and hourly endeavour. If effort is not made in the little things, character will be sadly lacking when some big experience comes along. It is in the little things that Christians are to be faithful to the Lord, to the Truth, and the brethren.

The final resolution is to trust the Lord completely. A resolution to develop a faith that will place one's life completely in God's care, and which will always wait on Him (Psa. 27:14), is a resolution that every Christian can earnestly make at the beginning of every year. Such a faith is necessary to put all things in His hand, to surrender all to His divine care, and to truly believe that He will providentially overrule all matters for the eternal good of the believer (Rom. 8:28). Such a faith will result in purity of heart, will repel all anxiety, all discontent and all discouragement. Indeed it, and only it, will enable the Christian to "*rejoice in the Lord always, to be careful for nothing, (and) in all things by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let their requests be made known unto God*" (Phil. 4:4-6). "I will neither murmur nor repine at what the Lord's providence may permit because my faith firmly trusts him".

BUY THE TRUTH AND SELL IT NOT

It was the wise man, Solomon, who said "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23). Those words indicate that the truth has value. It is of such value that those who desire to possess it must be prepared to pay for it.

Three questions arise: how does one buy the truth, is it possible to sell the truth, and what is the truth?

The word 'truth' in Proverbs 23:23 is the Hebrew 'emeth' which has many meanings - "trust, certainty, worthiness, establishment" and "to be sure". Thus Proverbs 23:23 may be read as "Buy that which is sure and certain".

After Jesus had said to Pilate "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice", Pilate asked Jesus "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Although Jesus didn't answer Pilate's question directly, John 17:17 records Jesus as saying "Thy word is truth." God's word is truth. It is that which is in harmony with all righteousness and peace. God's word in Jesus' day consisted only of the Old Testament scriptures but was expanded by Jesus' words and the teaching, writings and sermons of the apostles. Finally the sacred record of the truth was concluded when John received and recorded his vision that God gave him on the Isle of Patmos, which is known as the Book of Revelation.

Much in the Bible is historical and much is prophetic. Also a considerable portion may be regarded as "devotional truths". They provide instruction regarding the development of Christian character. There are also doctrinal truths that reveal God's great Plan of the Ages, and that tell of the redemption and restoration of all mankind.

Creation

The fundamental truth upon which all other truth is dependent is the creation of Adam and Eve and their placement in the Garden of Eden, in human form and in the image of Almighty God (Gen. 1:27). His design was and is for mankind to multiply and fill the earth. The Earth is Man's home and they are to dwell there forever (Eccl. 1:4). The Lord confirmed this later when through the prophet Isaiah He said that He had established the Earth and that "He had not created it in vain; He formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18). However Man's continued existence on the Earth depended on his obedience to God's law. The great Adversary beguiled Mother Eve and Adam wilfully transgressed the divine command when he ate the forbidden fruit. The consequence was the death penalty, and it is God's plan that the death penalty be inherited by all of Adam's progeny even though they

personally have not transgressed before they are born (Rom. 5:12-15).

A precious element of God's plan - a part of the truth - is that, prior to Adam's transgression, God had planned Man's redemption and Satan's destruction: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). However God also planned that several centuries would pass before He would enact His promise. The delay adds greatly to the significance of the angel's words "I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10).

The Law and the Ransom

Prior to Jesus coming to Earth, God made a covenant with the natural seed of Abraham, the Jewish nation. The covenant was based on the law given by the hand of Moses on Mt. Sinai. This law offered life to those who would comply with its requirements, however no-one was capable of doing so due to "the weakness of the flesh" (Rom. 7:9, 10). Nevertheless the law accomplished God's purpose in that it proved to mankind that no man could gain life through his own righteousness.

The hope of life for all mankind relies totally on God's provision of a ransom for them. He promised such a ransom through the prophet Hosea: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes" (Hos. 13:14). The Apostle Paul confirmed God's plan when he wrote: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour who will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, for there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (I Tim. 2:3-6). The truth that Jesus is the ransom for all mankind is the hub of Man's hope of life after death.

Resurrection

Another fundamental feature of God's plan is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Apostle Paul declares that Jesus "was delivered to death for our offences and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Jesus' resurrection is a critical part - a vital truth element - of God's plan and Man's hope for a future life. Quoting again from the Apostle Paul: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose

from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and ... ye are yet in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:12-17). In his sermon to the Athenians also, Paul declared that Jesus' resurrection is a vital element in God's plan: "whereby God hath given assurance unto all men by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

The church

Another element of truth that gives great comfort is that the preaching of the gospel throughout the world since Jesus' life on Earth has not been for the purpose of converting the world. Initially the gospel was preached only to the nation of Israel: "*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*" (Matt. 10:5). However God had planned that Israel, on a national scale, would not accept Jesus as their Messiah and that the Gentiles would be grafted into the church as the Apostle Paul explained to the Christians at Ephesus: "*Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel*" (Eph. 3:5-6).

The call to the Christian is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. As such the call is not to popularity in, or compliance with, the world in general, but is a call to holiness: "*Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. 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. 4:1-4).

The call to holiness of the Christian life is one of sacrifice, even unto death as many martyrs have testified. The Apostle Paul ensured that Timothy, his "son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2), fully understood this aspect of the Christian walk: "*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us*" (2 Tim. 2:11-12). However as the verses declare the promise is that there is a reward for bearing such ignominy and scorn; in the resurrection they "*will live with Him and reign with Him*". 1 John 3:2 says that "*we will be like Him and see Him as He is*".

Restitution

When the church is complete the outpouring of the promised blessings of health and life to all the families of the Earth will begin. This will be the time that Peter spoke of when he said there would be "*times of restitution of all things*" (Acts. 3:21). The times of restitution will bring the end of sickness and death and all evil that has been afflicting mankind since the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Such is an outline of the truth. However the question is how does one buy the truth?

Buying the truth

Truth is like a jewel that is for sale and is on display. The jewel can be viewed and admired by all who are privileged to pass by the display case. However each individual will have their own appreciation of its beauty; to many the jewel might not hold any wonder at all. Jesus explained why individuals' appreciation of the beauties of the truth vary: "*He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given ... Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand ... But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear*" (Matt. 13:11, 13, 16). God has empowered some to appreciate the truth and some He has not empowered. Jesus explains the difference as being due to God's calling: "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him ...*" (John 6:44).

It is one thing to appreciate the beauties of the truth but it is quite another to own it. For those who wish to own it there is a price to pay. Just as a jewel has a drawing power to those who are able to appreciate its beauty, so the Bible's message has a drawing power to those who are privileged to appreciate the beauty of the truth that it contains. The Apostle Paul wrote: "*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (1 Cor. 2:10). The drawing power of God's spirit is such that those who are privileged to have received it are motivated to buy the truth, that is to own it for themselves, to have a full conviction about its message and what it means for the world of mankind.

However buying the truth is not a momentary transaction. When a Christian decides to own the truth for themselves they must enter into an agreement that will bind them for the rest of their earthly life. It involves laying down their life in the divine service day by day, year by year, until they have been faithful unto death. That is the cost of the truth.

The ongoing contract means that the truth must

continue to transform their life, and this can only be done in the same way that the Apostle Paul advised Timothy: "*Study (or be diligent) to show thyself approved unto God, a workman needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15). The glorious plan of God is revealed throughout the Bible and His will for His dedicated children is also found there. One of the greatest tests of the sincerity of the Christian's consecration is the maintenance of their loyalty to the Lord's instructions.

Individuals appreciate different qualities of a jewel; some may find particular beauty in its colour, or its form, or its clarity. While the beauty of the jewel includes all of those aspects, the fullness of its beauty will not be appreciated if only one of the attributes is recognised. And so it is with the truth - one aspect of the truth does not reveal its full beauty. It is easy to give undue emphasis to one or two doctrines (aspects or beauties of the truth) or activities that particularly appeal to the individual and to ignore other aspects. Prayer is an essential part of the Lord's will for all of His people, but it must not occupy so much time that attention is not given to other vital aspects. For example the Lord wants us to love one another, and Paul wrote an entire chapter about the quality of love (1 Cor.13). Likewise love should not displace other fruits (graces) of the spirit and Christian activities. Jesus, quoting Moses, said "*man should not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God*" (Matt.4:4).

Basically, the price that the Christian must pay for the truth is that of service. The Apostle Paul referred to his service as "*the ministry of reconciliation*" (2 Cor. 5:18). If the Christian today owns the truth to the extent that they consider themselves to be a member of the church as did Paul, they must also be prepared to be part of this ministry. They must be guided by the word of God with respect to the message that they should give to all people. At the same time they must adhere to the standards of righteousness which the Lord has determined for His church: "*giving no offence in anything that the ministry be not blamed, but in all things proving ourselves as ministers of God - in patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonment, in tumults, in labours, in watching and fasting, by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, and by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God through the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, through honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers yet true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold we live, as chastened yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things*" (2 Cor. 6:3-10).

Those verses are a comprehensive summary of the Christian life and devotion to God, and what it means to be faithful to the terms of the Christian's covenant with God. It demands patience, purity and the proper use of the word of God. There must be an emptying of self and a filling with the Holy Spirit. It calls for sacrifice of self that others might be encouraged in the things of God. The task requires the Christian to "*put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*" (Eph. 6:11). All of the above is included in buying the truth.

Sell it not

The second part of the admonition in Proverbs 23:23 is to "*sell it not*". When one sells something they cease to own it. It is possible to sell the truth, to exchange it for something else. Demas was one who sold the truth, "*having loved this present world*" (2 Tim. 4:10). Consequently the exhortation to the Hebrews should be in the forefront of every Christian's mind: "*We ought to give heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip*" (Heb. 2:1). The thought behind "*slip*" is "*flow by, carelessly pass*". Things are "*let slip*" or "*flow by*" when one does not recognise their value, or does not seize the opportunity to take possession of them. It is in this vein that Christians should not, indeed must not, "*forsake the assembling of themselves together ... But exhorting one another ... And so much the more as they see the day approaching*" (Heb. 10:25).

Earlier in the book of Hebrews the example of Israel during their exodus from Egypt is mentioned to show how the subtle temptations of the world or the temporal needs of the flesh can divert one's zeal from the Lord's purpose for them. The writer sums up the argument thus: "*Let us therefore fear that a promise left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it*" (Heb.4:1). If the Israelites could be distracted from the benefits of their deliverance after spending more than 400 years in slavery, how careful must the Christian be to ensure that they do not deviate from their consecration. Hebrews 6:4-6 contains a solemn warning: "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame*". However, on the contrary, the Christian has the assurance that if they are faithful in doing His will even unto death, they will indeed receive the crown of life.

How momentous is the exhortation to "**buy the truth and sell it not!**"

THE APOSTLE PAUL

The life of the Apostle Paul was indeed an amazing one. It demonstrates the power of God in His dealings with His human creation and reflection on it should strengthen the faith of every Christian.

Heritage

As he testified, Paul was *"a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city (Jerusalem) at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women"* (Acts 22:3-4).

Conversion

Paul's zeal in persecuting Christians before he was converted demonstrates the power of God's calling - *"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel"* (Act 9:15 NKJV). Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is one of the best known narratives in the Bible. While our conversion might not be as dramatic as his, it is nevertheless just as real. The fact that he did not learn from others but received his understanding by revelation contributed to the strength he needed for his future mission: *"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie. Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy'. And they glorified God in me"* (Gal. 1:11-24).

It is significant that Peter was the first apostle Paul saw after his time in Arabia. Notwithstanding Peter's seniority in the apostleship, Paul's conviction was so

firm that he challenged Peter when Peter had acted improperly: *"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, 'If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?'"* (Gal. 2:11-14).

Ministry

Paul was given a specific mission - to take the gospel to the Gentiles, the "heathen", as recorded in Acts 9:13-16: *"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."*

His ministry involved not only taking the gospel to the Gentiles, but also the rebuke of the Israelites, his countrymen. *"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth'"* (Acts 13:46-49).

Paul was conscious of the responsibility of his ministry: *"...Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches"* (2 Cor. 11:28). Nevertheless, in spite of the trials and responsibility that comprised his ministry, the Apostle was determined to labour faithfully to the very last as shown by 2 Timothy 4:9-13. At the time of writing to Timothy, his death was imminent, some of his previous good fellow workers had deserted him, but he would labour on. *"Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica, Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at*

Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments”. Soon he must pass from the scene. Maybe his treasured books would not be esteemed of great value by anyone else when he had finished his course, but they were precious to him until the day came when he could no longer work and declare the truth and his love for his Lord. He knew that in the future he might be deemed a disturber of the peace and a deceiver of the people, but since his conversion he had taken hold of the faith to which he was called. Paul was convinced of His Master whom he had been called to serve, and “for the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for 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).

Trials

During his ministry Paul suffered persecution and faced death many times - “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor. 11:24-27 NKJV). Nevertheless he had been delivered repeatedly by divine intervention - “And out of them all the Lord delivered me” (2 Tim. 3:11 NKJV).

Service completed

However now he knew that he was not going to be delivered any more. Not that the very moment of death had come when he wrote his second letter to Timothy, but it was growing nearer, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand” (2 Tim. 4:6). “The time of my departure is at hand” shows that the Apostle knew that his life would no longer be preserved for future service. The present services were the last he would be privileged to minister in the flesh. One translation renders 2 Timothy 4:6 “I am now **being offered**”; and another “the **last drops** of my life blood are being poured out”. He had fought a good fight, and what a fight it had been. He had met opposition from many, one such was Alexander the coppersmith: “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words” (2 Tim. 4:14-15). The great arch-enemy of course was the Devil himself and his minions of darkness. He met the apostle at every turn with the ferocity of a roaring lion. But the apostle never flinched, he submitted himself to God fully, and resisted the Devil until he cowered from the scene.

One aspect of the true faith that would be lost was the necessity and privilege of suffering with Christ before reigning with Him - “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us (2 Tim. 2:12). “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12 NKJV). The tendency to forsake the truth and align oneself with the world would become a powerful temptation, but it would not overcome Paul. Though he would be buffeted and set at nought during his walk as a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, he would wait with assurance for his vindication and reward.

Reward

Paul was not resisting the end of his life; rather he knew that to “be with Christ ... is far better”. He would bind his sacrifice to the altar to the very last for the God who had showed him the light - “God is the LORD, And He has given us light; Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You” (Psa. 118:27-28 NKJV). Now his course of training was complete and he could look forward to his reward: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

The phrase “at that day” in 2 Timothy 4:8 is very significant and reflects the words of the prophet: “Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey” (Zeph. 3:8). It was the calmness of soul which such Scriptures inspired in Paul that enabled him to bear all things patiently and to judge nothing before the time, as he wrote - “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God” (1 Cor. 4:5). When the time comes for God to bring every work with every secret thing to judgment the apostle knew he would be vindicated: “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil ...” (Eccl. 12:14). “In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:16). As the Psalmist knew, there must be a limit to wickedness - “Lord how long shall the wicked triumph?” (Psa. 94:3). Ultimately, Abraham's words in Genesis 18:25 must be verified - “shall not the judge of all the earth do right?”

Christ had been his strength and might, and thus he could testify that he could “do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). He had finished his course, nothing had moved him away from the ministry he had received from the Lord Jesus; bonds and affliction had been largely his lot, but he saw them as only momentary and he was

finishing his course with joy: *"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 20:24 NKJV). Such was the Apostle's faith and conviction that he was able to write *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* (2 Cor. 4:17 NKJV).

Faithfully waiting

Another very important facet of the one faith that Paul taught diligently was to avoid attempting to rule before the time. He had no thought of converting the world in the present time, but ministered to find the jewels who would be associated with the Saviour at the Second Advent. Like Peter, Paul knew that the heavens and earth of Noah's day were destroyed, and that the present heavens and earth were also doomed to destruction: *"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"* (2 Pet. 3:7). However Paul did not take the authority to himself but He was waiting for the Son from Heaven: *"For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, ... to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"* (1 Thess. 1:9-10). *"Wait on the Lord"* was truly Paul's attitude of heart (Psa. 27:14).

Assurance

Paul was convinced that his reward was assured: *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness"* (2 Tim. 4:8). It was not his yet, but it was laid up for him. He had, from the day when he met Jesus face to face on the Damascus road, enjoyed an **imputed** righteousness; it had been his covering robe, shielding him against all the inherited weaknesses of his fallen flesh. What a boon it had been to him; with it no condemnation could be levelled against him - *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"* (Rom. 8:1 NKJV). But the crown of righteousness **reserved for him** in heaven was one of **actual righteousness**, and his new resurrection body would be capable of sustaining it evermore.

The closing words of 2 Timothy 4:8 should be inspiring to all Christians - *"and not me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"*. The promise is held out not only to Paul, but to all; *"to all them that love his appearing"*. And it is more than a hope; it is an assurance of a crown of righteousness.

The phrase *"love his appearing"* in 2 Timothy 4:8 is worthy of some emphasis. If it referred only to the

Second Advent, Paul would not see it until he is resurrected, nor could any Christians to this time. The word translated *"appearing"* is *"epiphaneia"* which is variously translated in the Scriptures. It means a bright shining, a shining forth, an unveiling. Strong's Concordance defines it as *"manifestation; specifically the advent of Christ (past or future)"*. If the historical (past) aspect is considered, it may refer to the manifestation of Christ to each individual at any time, all who have loved Him and all that He has meant to them - all to whom He has been manifested. Indeed, all to whom the true God has been revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time (to the natural eye he is invisible), but His Son has revealed him, declared him, made Him known - *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* (John 14:9). All who have loved what they have seen of Jesus, and have desired to see a reflection of Jesus in themselves, to be changed little by little into the same image, the same likeness, may also rest in the assurance of their reward - *"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world"* (John 17:22, 24). *"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (2 Cor. 3:18). Hence to the Christian there is an ever-growing revelation to this day. If we are in the day of our Lord's second presence his manifestation is richer now than it has ever been, but the Second Advent is not the criterion by which Paul is telling us any shall be judged worthy of the *"crown of righteousness"* which all true Christians will receive. He is referring to every faithful Christian who has followed Christ in the light that has shined from Pentecost to this day, a light shining more and more unto the perfect day for all the just.

Paul's example should enable us not to doubt our calling. Further, the fact that he was able to forget *"those things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead"*, should also encourage us not to let our earlier lives hinder us in our striving to gain the prize for which we also have been *"apprehended"* (Phil. 3:13).

May we all cultivate and show forth the same courage, diligence and earnest desire to serve our Lord to the end of our days on this earth, as did the Apostle Paul. May we trust in the hope in which Paul also trusted - *"And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you"* (John 16:22).

"... when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

SEVEN TIMES

Our last issue contained an article about King Nebuchadnezzar in which some comments were made regarding certain aspects of Nebuchadnezzar's life. However space did not allow the statement in Daniel 4:25 - that his "*dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field ...and seven times shall pass over thee*" - to be addressed. This article examines whether there is any significance in the period of "*seven times*" for which Nebuchadnezzar was to "*be with the beasts of the field*".

Seven

The Hebrew word translated "*seven*" in relation to Nebuchadnezzar's relegation to be like the beasts of the field occurs only six times in the Old Testament - Ezra 7:14 and Daniel 3:19; 4:16, 23, 25, and 32. However the fact that it occurs only six times is of no significance; Strong's Concordance defines it (#7655) as "*corresponding to #7651 - seven (times)*". #7651 occurs 395 times and there are only three occurrences of the word "*seven*" in the Old Testament where it is not translated from either #7651 or #7655. Dr. Strong defines #7651 as "*sheba - seven - a primary cardinal number:- seven*". Consequently it is concluded that the meaning of "*seven*" in relation to the events in Nebuchadnezzar's life is the common number 7.

Time

The word translated "*time*" in relation to Nebuchadnezzar's relegation occurs only 13 times in the Old Testament, all of them in the book of Daniel. Dr. Strong's definition is "*#5732 - iddan - from a root corresponding to that of #5708; a set time: technically a year*". Young's Concordance defines "*iddan*" as "*an appointed time or season,*" with no mention of it meaning "*a year*". Both Concordances agree that "*iddan*" is always rendered "*time*" (or "*times*") in the King James Version of the Bible.

The issue regarding "*iddan*" in relation to Nebuchadnezzar is whether the technical meaning of "*a year*" as suggested by Dr. Strong is applicable, and therefore whether any symbolism can be justifiably attached to it. In order to come to a reasoned conclusion about this point it is necessary to review each of the occurrences of "*iddan*" in the book of Daniel.

The first two occurrences are in Daniel 2:8, 9. The context is Nebuchadnezzar's response to his counsellors who were unable to interpret his dream. The record reads: "*The king answered and said, 'I know of certainty that ye would gain the **time (iddan)**, because ye see the thing is gone from me'*". It is unlikely that "*iddan*" in this verse means a year, because it seems unlikely that the counsellors would

have sought a year in which to interpret the dream. It seems more likely that the counsellors were seeking merely a delay, that is, more time, possibly an indeterminate period of time, in which to interpret the dream. Thus it would seem that these two occurrences indicate that "*iddan*" does **not always** mean a year.

The next occurrence is in Daniel 2:21: "*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*". "*Times*" is from the Hebrew "*iddan*" and "*seasons*" is from the Hebrew #2166. Dr. Strong defines #2166 ("*zeman*") as "*an appointed occasion*". It is possible to logically interpret this verse as saying that God changes the years ("*iddan*") and the seasons within the years. However while that interpretation might be correct, it is not necessarily correct - an alternative meaning is that Daniel was declaring that God is omnipotent and has control over the times and seasons which He has decreed for the Earth; simply "*the times He has appointed*" (Acts 17:26).

The next two occurrences are in Chapter 3, verses 5 and 15. The context of these verses is the declaration of Nebuchadnezzar's decree that "*at what **time***" the people heard "*the sound of ...all kinds of musick*" they were to fall down and worship the image. The meaning of "*iddan*" in these verses is clearly **not** a year but the instant, the moment, at which the sound of the "*musick*" was heard.

The next four occurrences are in chapter 4 (verses 16, 23, 25 and 32) and are in relation to Nebuchadnezzar's relegation to be as the beasts of the field. In view of the occurrences discussed above, it cannot be declared unequivocally that the time period referred to in these verses as "*seven times*" is seven years, although there is no evidence that makes that interpretation invalid.

An alternative interpretation of the expression "*seven times*" in relation to this incident is **completeness**, as indicated by verse 25: "*they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, ... and seven times shall pass over thee, **till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men** ...*". God's purpose in relegating Nebuchadnezzar to live as a beast of the field was to humble him so that he would acknowledge that God is the supreme ruler; before he was humbled Nebuchadnezzar took the honour for building Babylon to himself (Dan. 4:30). The period of time required (or allocated) to humble Nebuchadnezzar was "*seven times*". Regardless of what meaning is attached to the "*seven times*", there is no doubt that God's purpose was achieved completely: "*And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up*

mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation” (Dan. 4:34). Nebuchadnezzar was humbled and acknowledged God as the supreme being and ruler of the universe.

In terms of outcomes, it is evident that God’s dealing with Nebuchadnezzar pictures or reflects God’s dealings with the whole human race. As explained by Solomon, the human race has been subjected to “*sore travail*” to be “*exercised (profited) thereby*” (Eccl. 1:13). The Apostle Paul also declared “*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope*” (Rom. 8:20). God’s relegation of the human race to a position of relative deprivation (compared to the conditions in the garden of Eden into which Adam and Eve were placed) will completely achieve God’s purpose. Just as Nebuchadnezzar was humbled for the purpose of causing him to acknowledge that God is supreme, and just as he “*blessed the most High*” when he was restored to his former status, so also the whole world of mankind will glorify God when their period of relegation is complete. “*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*” (Isa. 2:3). In this context it is plausible to conclude that the relegation of Nebuchadnezzar for a period of “*seven times*” (seven “*iddan*”) as recorded in Daniel 4 is a picture of God’s dealings with Mankind; during which both learn the lesson that God is supreme. At the end of their “*seven times*”, both will voluntarily and willingly acknowledge that God is the supreme being, and both will have learnt the consequences of disobedience. Both of those times have and will accomplish their purpose completely, but the exact duration of those times might not be included in the picture of the seven times of Nebuchadnezzar’s relegation to be like the beasts of the field.

Some symbolism required

The remaining occurrences of “*iddan*” are in Daniel 7 verses 12 and 25. Verse 12 reads: “*As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season (“zeman” - an appointed occasion) and time (“iddan” - a set time)*”. The dominions of the empires to which these verses relate were not limited to one literal year, and so the meaning of “*iddan*” in these verses means a period other than a literal year, and the technical meaning given in Dr. Strong’s Concordance does not apply. Indeed no two empires existed for the same length of time, and so the terms “*zeman*” and “*iddan*”

does not seem to mean a fixed period of any duration and it is even less likely that “*iddan*” means a literal year.

However it is suggested that the concept of them existing for **their appointed season** and **until their appointed time** is valid. It is God who “*... 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*” (Dan. 2:21). All rulers have only held sway for as long as they have been in accord (indeed accomplishing) God’s purposes: “*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God*” (Rom. 13:1). One example given in the Scriptures is Pharaoh: “*And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him ... for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth*” (Exod. 9:13-16). Some other examples quoted in the Scriptures of some who were raised up to achieve God’s purposes were Nebuchadnezzar himself (Jer. 27:4-6) and Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:23; Isa. 44:28).

The last three occurrences of “*iddan*” are in Daniel 7:25: “*And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times (zeman) and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time (iddan) and times (iddan) and the dividing (a half - Strong #6387) of time (iddan).*”

Hebrew or Aramaic

A factor that determines how the occurrences of “*iddan*” in Daniel 7:25 may be properly interpreted is the language of the Old Testament. Smith’s Bible Dictionary, page 238, says that “*the books of the Old Testament are written almost entirely in the Hebrew language*”. However some other scholars contend that the language was Aramaic. The interpretation of the repetition of “*iddan*” in Daniel 7:25 depends on whether the language was Hebrew or Aramaic. The most common interpretation is the Hebrew, where the second occurrence implies twice the first, so that the wording “*time, and times and the dividing of time*” totals 3½ “*times*” (1 + 2 + ½).

If Dr Strong’s technical definition is employed (“*iddan*” meaning a year), 3½ times equals 3½ years. The Hebrew year consisted of 360 counted days, so that 3½ years is 1260 days. If a further extension is made, that is, the time scale of “*a day for a year*” from Ezekiel 4:6 (where it was given in relation to the iniquity of Israel) is applied, the period of a “*time (“iddan”) and times (“iddan”) and the dividing of time (“iddan”) equals 1260 years*. If the fourth beast

introduced in Daniel 7:7 (and explained a little in verse 23) was the Roman empire (and there is little doubt that history testifies that it was), the prophecy gives great insight into the prophetic chronology of the Bible. However it is necessary, when "giving a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15) to recognise the components of the argument that lead to any conclusion, including this one.

While the deduction in the previous paragraph might seem to be somewhat extensive, when it is combined with the time periods of 42 months and 1260 days in Revelation 11:2-3 (both of which equal 3½ years), the interpretation of "iddan" in Daniel 7:25 as "a year" (360 days) yields a time period that is consistent with the periods specified in Revelation. However it should be acknowledged that the interpretation of "iddan" as meaning 360 years is not derived from a simplistic understanding of the meaning of the Hebrew word "iddan" as it occurs in the Scriptures. However that does not mean that it is invalid.

Other "years"

Other Hebrew words that are translated "year" in the King James Version are "shanah" and "shenah" and between them they constitute almost all occurrences of the word "year" in the King James Version. The difference between them is that one is masculine and the other is feminine. Their meaning is given by such verses as Genesis 1:14: "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years" (Gen. 1:14). The question may be asked why, if Nebuchadnezzar was to be relegated for seven literal years, "shanah" or "shenah" was not used? One possible answer to that question is that, while God knew how long His arrangement would take to completely accomplish His purpose, He did not disclose it because that foreknowledge would have diminished the impact of the lesson regarding His omnipotence. It would be in similar vein to the present era where He has not disclosed a date nor a defined period of time for the setting up of the kingdom - "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matt. 24:36).

Additionally there are numerous instances where the words "shenah" and "shanah" are associated with "month" (for example Ezek. 1:1: "in the thirtieth year - shanah- ... in the fifth month"), and so there is little doubt that the words "shenah" and "shanah" relate to a literal year; the time taken for the planet Earth to make one revolution around the sun. The fact that neither "shenah" nor "shanah" is used in the texts in Daniel indicates that the references in Daniel are not literal years, and therefore some symbolic meaning is meant. This view is also supported by the fact that

there are several other terms that are used to refer to different periods of time, for example "hour", "day", "week", and "month". There are more than 4800 instances where one or more of the terms relating to a period of time occurs in the King James Version. An analysis of all the terms is beyond the scope of this article.

A time and a season

However this article would be deficient if some mention were not made of the verses in Ecclesiastes 3, even though the verses do not necessarily affect the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's relegation. The verses read: "To every thing there is a season (zeman), and a time ("eth") to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace" (Eccl. 3:1-8).

Every occurrence of the word "time" in these verses is the Hebrew "eth" which Dr. Strong defines as "#6256 - 'eth - time, especially (adverbially with preposition) now, when". It is translated by several different English words; the concept is the time at which a specific event occurs. The concept is summarised by the verses that follow: "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it" (Eccl. 3:9-10). The travail that has been given to mankind includes all of the events listed in the verses - birth, death, planting, harvesting, joy, sorrow, etc. All of these experiences are for the exercise (brow-beating, depressing - Strong #6031) of mankind, that they will come to realize that all of their efforts eventually come to naught, and in that sense, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 1:14). Mankind will acknowledge that God is overall.

Summary

Whether one wishes to assert that Nebuchadnezzar was relegated for a period of 7 calendar years, and whether one wishes to believe that the period of "seven times" ("seven iddan") for which he was relegated to be like a beast of the field merely represents the fact that the period of his demise would fulfill God's purposes completely, or whether one believes that the picture accurately portrays the duration of Mankind's "sore travail", is the province of each individual.

LOVE VAUNTETH NOT ITSELF

In the Authorised Version of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:4 reads "love vaunteth not itself". This instance is the only occurrence of "vaunt" in the Authorised Version; the NIV translates 1 Corinthians 13:4 as "it does not boast". Strong's Concordance indicates that "vaunt" and "boast" are synonyms: "vaunt" (#4068) is defined as "to boast" and "boast" (#2744) is defined as "to vaunt". The Concise Oxford Dictionary also defines "vaunt" as "boast", and defines "boasting" as "to speak exaggeratedly and objectionably, especially about oneself; to speak with pride; to be proud in the possession of". Hence boasting and pride are closely related.

Boasting can be destructive

Boasting can be destructive to the Lord's people. Psalm 94:3-4 reads "How long shall all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage." It was the workers of iniquity who were boasting, and they were breaking the Lord's people. Boasting is incompatible with love because love does not break down but builds up (edifies) (1 Cor. 8:1).

Boastful speech

Speech is the most common form of boasting. The Apostle Peter refers to words that are "great swelling words of vanity", which "allure (deceive) through the lusts of the flesh". He declares that these have "forsaken the right way" (2 Pet. 2:15-18). These are similar to those referred to by the Psalmist - they had forsaken the right way and become workers of iniquity.

Boastful words can damage the church by causing divisions. This is explained by the Apostle Paul: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17-18). The Apostle's words should be a warning to all Christians to be wary of those who boast by oratory.

Such a one was Theudus, who "boasted himself to be somebody" (Acts 5:36). The vanity of his boasting is clearly evident because when he "was slain ... all ... as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought". Such also are those to whom Jude referred: "these are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's person in admiration because of advantage" (Jude 16).

In contrast the Apostle Paul was careful not to boast

by oratory - he "came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom ... not with enticing words ... that (their) faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Boastful actions

While speech is the most common form of boasting, actions can have the same effect. The scribes and Pharisees were guilty of such boasting: "Then spake Jesus ... saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat ... do not ye after their works ... all their works they do for to be seen of men, they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues ... and to be called of men Rabbi Rabbi ... but be not ye called Rabbi" (Matt. 23:1-8). Seeking prominence is a form of boasting because it reflects an attitude of superiority.

Showing preference

Likewise showing preference for those of greater affluence is a form of boasting. The Apostle James exhorts "as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say Here's a good seat for you, but say to the poor man You stand there, or Sit on the floor by my feet, have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ... You have insulted the poor ... if you show favouritism you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (James 2:1-9 NIV). The attitude of heart that causes one to show favouritism to the one in fine clothes may be a form of boasting, in that they are deeming themselves to be superior to him that is of lesser estate.

Boasting by knowledge

A display of knowledge can be a form of boasting. If "thy brother be grieved with thy meat now walkest thou not charitably (lovingly). Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15).

Christians are not to boast in any form - not by speech, actions, showing preference or displaying knowledge.

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FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

“Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

At first glance Genesis 1:1 (*“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”*) might appear to record the beginning of God’s dealings with mankind, because the creation of a place in which mankind could live would be one of the first requirements.

However God’s planning for the human race began before He created the Earth. As explained by the Apostle Peter, Jesus *“was foreordained (appointed) before the foundation of the world”* (1 Peter 1:20). In order to understand why God foreordained Jesus to come to Earth to be Man’s redeemer, it is necessary to realise that God deliberately allowed evil to come into the world for *“the sons of man to be exercised therewith”* (Eccl.1:13) and thereby be more willing to embrace righteousness.

However in spite of the fact that Jesus was foreordained before the foundation of the world it was not disclosed to mankind in general prior to the Logos coming to Earth, and indeed it is still not revealed to the majority of the human race. While it was not disclosed to mankind in general, there were some who had some idea that God had already planned Man’s redemption. Disregarding for the moment the statement to the serpent that *“the seed of the woman would bruise his head”* (Gen. 3:15), and over-looking any contention as to whether Adam was aware of that statement, probably the first man who had a glimpse of God’s plan was Abraham. When Abraham was required to offer his son Isaac for *“a burnt offering”* (Gen.22:2), he reasoned that the only way that God could honour His promises (to make of him *“a great nation”* (Gen. 12:2), and *“in Isaac shall thy seed be called”* (Gen. 21:12)), was for Him to bring Isaac back from the dead. Abraham’s reasoning is recorded in Hebrews 11:17-19: *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘That in Isaac shall thy seed be called’: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ...”*.

Another one who had a glimpse of the fact that his redeemer lived was Job: *“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth”* (Job 19:25). However there does not seem to be any clear indication in the Scriptures that Job knew that his redeemer was the Logos, the beginning of the creation of God.

In view of the fact that God’s plan to send His son to Earth was not revealed before Jesus’ first advent, it is understandable that the Apostle Peter wrote that, while He *“verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world”*, He *“was manifest (brought to light, made visible) in these last times for you”*. These *“last times”* began when Jesus came to Earth.

A position of glory

The magnitude of Jesus’ love for the human creation is brought into sharp focus when it is recognised that, as the Logos, He had a position of great glory.

One factor that contributed to His glory was that He is *“the beginning (Greek: arche – first or primary) of the creation of God”* (Rev. 3:14). As the Apostle Paul wrote, He was *“before all things ...”* (Col. 1:17) and Jesus Himself declared *“before Abraham was I am”* (John 8:58). Jesus was therefore conscious that His position before He came to earth was glorious. In His final prayer to God before He was crucified He said: *“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”* (John 17:5).

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Another factor that contributed to His glory was that He was in heaven with God: "*The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven ...*" (Psa. 11:4). Jesus left that throne and came down to Earth as John records: "*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me*" (John 6:38).

Heaven more glorious

Those in the heavenly realm are of the spirit nature, as Jesus explained to the woman at the well: "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24). Spirit beings do not "*have flesh and bones ...*" (Luke 24:39) and are invisible to the natural eye, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus: "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit*" (John 3:8).

The spirit nature is more glorious than the fleshly nature, which also means that the heavenly realm is more glorious than the earthly. The Apostle Paul explains it by saying that "*there are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another ...*" (1 Cor. 15:40). The superiority of the spirit nature over the earthly is explained by the writer to the Hebrews: "*But we see Jesus, who was **made a little lower than the angels** for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man*" (Heb. 2:9). Jesus "*was made flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14), that is, He dwelt among the disciples as a human being. Thus the Scriptures declare that, just as the heavenly realm exceeds the earthly in terms of glory, so also Jesus in His spiritual state in heaven before He came to Earth enjoyed a position of greater glory than did the perfect man Adam; the earthly form is less glorious than the spiritual.

God's agent in creation

A further attribute of Jesus before He came to Earth was that He was God's agent and as such He made the worlds: "*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). John confirms Jesus' role in the creation of the world: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God ... The same was in the beginning with God. **All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made***" (John 1:1-3).

When all three facts regarding Jesus' position before He came to Earth are considered together – the fact that He was the beginning of the creation of God, that

He had a glorious position in the spiritual realm, and His role in the creation of the world – it is evident that He was a mighty One. An understanding of His pre-eminent position in God's plan helps the Christian appreciate Jesus' love for the human race; that from such a high and mighty position He should come to Earth to redeem those whom He had created (as God's agent) from the dust of the Earth.

Mission understood

The magnitude of His love for God and for mankind is further emphasised by the fact that He came to Earth willingly, consciously, with a clear understanding of His ministry and His role in God's plan. He said "*... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10), and "*Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*" (Matt. 20:28). And again: "*I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*" (John 6:51).

Another incident that shows that Jesus knew precisely why He had come to Earth is recorded in Luke 4:16-21: "*He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found **the place** where it was written, '*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*'. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, '*This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears*'. The "**place**" from which He read was Isaiah 61.*

Ordained to suffer

The prophecy in Isaiah 61 quoted above describes the positive side of His ministry; it foretells the blessings of His coming to earth which are yet to be realized – the deliverance of mankind from the death sentence. Isaiah 53:3-6 prophesies the other side, that of His sufferings: "*He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with*

his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all".

The prophet Isaiah was not the only prophet to declare that Jesus would suffer, as recorded in Acts 3:18: "*But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of **all his prophets**, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled*".

In keeping with His knowledge of God's plan, Jesus knew that His fate was to suffer: "*And he said unto them, 'With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'*" (Luke 22:15).

Ignominy of the cross

It was one thing to come down from heaven; it was something else to die for mankind, but the ignominy of crucifixion was something yet again; crucifixion made that sacrifice the greatest sacrifice possible.

One hint of the shame that attended crucifixion is given in Philippians 2:8: "*And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*". Paul acknowledges the fact that His obedience unto death was one thing, but to be obedient "*even unto the death of the cross*" was another and subjected Him to a greater level of humiliation.

It is difficult for anyone today to fully comprehend the scorn and derision that were heaped upon Him; He who was with God before the world was created, He who made the worlds; He who left the glory of His father's throne in heaven to come to Earth to redeem mankind. Matthew records it thus: "*And when they had plaited 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'*" (Matt. 27:29).

The level of derision He endured is further shown by the act of Pilate: "*And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, 'JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS'*" (John 19:19). Yet He endured all the shame and ignominy without bringing any accusation against them, because He knew that His trials were an essential part of God's plan: "*For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*" (Heb. 2:10). Such understanding enabled Him to despise (discount, or overlook) 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*" (Heb. 12:2).

His reward

Jesus did not demand any reward for His sacrifice. All He asked was to be restored to His former glory as recorded in John 17:4-5: "*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*".

However God has given Him a greater reward as recorded in Philippians 2:9-11: "*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*".

Inheritance prophesied

Psalms 2:6-9 foretold Jesus' inheritance: "*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*". Jesus will inherit the Earth and all mankind ("the heathen"); however His reign will not be to perpetuate the present distress, but to restore the Earth to holiness: "*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 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*" (1 Cor. 15:22-25).

The firstfruits who will be resurrected first are those who have consecrated their lives to God's service in the present life, as explained by James 1:18: "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*".

This wonderful component of God's plan is supported by Ephesians 1:4: "*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love*".

The Christian's privilege

It is the Christian's privilege to suffer with Him and also to be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:17). It is also the Christian's privilege to remember Him at this time as He requested: "*And he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me'*" (Luke 22:19).

THE FATHER AND HIS SONS

The Apostle John wrote "*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ...*" (1 John 3:1). It is beyond the power of the human mind to fully comprehend what it means to be regarded as a son of God - a son of the Most High, a son of the creator and ruler of the universe.

The giving of His only begotten Son to die on the Cross as a ransom price for the world of mankind was indeed an act of love on God's part, and that act must not be disregarded nor discounted. However His love for His church, those whom He has chosen to be His sons, is over and above the love that He had, and has, for the world of mankind in general.

He first loved us

The first concept to grasp in trying to appreciate what it means to be a son of God is the realisation that it is solely of His making. The Apostle John expresses it "*He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). In common language it might be expressed as He "made the first move". Those whom He has chosen to accompany His only begotten Son had no input to His plan to have a select band of sons. It is by His own will that God has elected to have these members of the human race as other sons, and to be the members of His church. The sons do not have any right to the position, they have not earned it, and God was under no obligation to deem them thus.

The fact that it was God's plan alone to choose some the human race to be associated with His only begotten Son is declared by both the Apostles Paul and James. Paul wrote "... *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth*" (2 Thess. 2:13), and James wrote "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*" (James 1:18).

Jesus was a chosen Son

The privilege of being deemed a son is brought into sharp focus when it is recalled that God also chose His only begotten Son to be the saviour of the world. The record says "*Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased; I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles*" (Matt. 12:18).

The writer to the Hebrews confirms God's choosing of Jesus in these words: "*For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God ...and no man taketh this honour unto himself but he that is called of God, as was*

Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest but He that said unto him, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee'" (Heb. 5:1, 4-5). It was not Jesus' right to demand to be a high priest - it was totally God's prerogative.

The realization that God **chose** Jesus to perform this critical part of His plan adds significantly to the importance of the concept that He has also chosen present day believers to be His sons, His church. The privilege to be chosen specifically by God just as Jesus (as the Logos) was chosen is a concept that warrants much consideration, as the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace ...*" (2 Tim. 1:9).

God calls His sons

Jesus acknowledged that no one could come to him "*except the Father which hath sent me draw him*" (John 6:44), and that the only reason why He had any disciples was because His father had given them to Him: "*I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world ... thou gavest them me ... I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me ... Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me ...*" (John 17:6, 9, 11).

Holy Spirit

God's special favour to His sons does not end with their calling, He also gives them His spirit: "*Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit*" (1 John 4:13).

The Holy Spirit enables the Christian to understand the things of God: "*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God*" (1 Cor. 2:12).

Knowledge essential

An understanding of God's purpose for His sons is necessary to enable them to develop the characteristics that He has decreed for them. The Apostle Paul wrote: "*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*" (Eph. 1:18). In Romans 8:24 the Apostle wrote "*For we are saved by hope ...*" An understanding of the hope of His calling and the richness of the reward that will be theirs is necessary to enable His sons to develop the fruits of the spirit and to withstand the wiles of the evil one, to the extent

that Paul wrote that this hope is the saving influence of the believer. It is not the ransom for Man's redemption but it provides the motivation to overcome the world. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "*Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*" (Eph. 6:13).

The Apostle goes on to tell the Ephesians that the first item of armour that the Christian must put on is knowledge: "*Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth ...*" (Eph. 6:14). The Apostle Peter describes this motivation as being the means by which the believer escapes the corruption that is in the world. He wrote: "*Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the **knowledge** of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the **knowledge** of him that hath called us to glory and virtue. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge ... For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten, that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. For if ye do these things ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Pet. 1:2-11).

Comfort

The Apostle Peter, as quoted above, wrote "*Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the **knowledge** of God*". As well as providing the motivation to overcome the world, knowledge of God's plan also gives peace to the believer.

The Scriptures also say that peace is a product of receiving the Holy Spirit. John chapter 14 reads in part: "*Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me ... I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth ... I will not leave you comfortless ... Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (verses 1, 16-18, 27).

The Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, gives comfort because it provides an understanding of what God is doing in the world at this time and so it is evident that Jesus and Peter are saying the same thing but in

different words; the two are complementary. The Spirit is required in order to gain an understanding and the peace that ensues may be attributed to either the Spirit as the root cause or to the understanding that is the result of having the Spirit.

For those who are not privileged to have an understanding of God's plan but who ponder the events in the world today - the natural disasters, the conflicts between nations, the sickness and death that prevail - the present woes are indeed distressing. It is as the Apostle wrote: "*For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*" (Rom. 8:22-23).

Sanctification

One of the most precious thoughts relating to God's love for His sons, His church, is that His Only Begotten Son was sanctified for their benefit.

Jesus sanctified, or set Himself apart, for God's purpose so that His followers in His day might also be set apart: "*As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And **for their sakes I sanctify myself**, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ...*" (John 17:18-23). The writer to the Hebrews wrote: "*For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, **in bringing many sons unto glory**, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, 'I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee'*" (Heb. 2:10-12).

Jesus' prayer (John 17 quoted above) included not only those who were with Him during His earthly ministry but also them "*which shall believe on me through their word ...*" All those who have believed on him "*through their word*", that is all believers who have lived during the present Age, have been able to look to His example and from it derive encouragement for their sanctification. What an encouragement that is! The sons who are living in the 21st century are those who have "*believed on Him through their word*" - the word of the apostles recorded for us in the Scriptures.

Victory assured

An understanding of God's gifts to His sons results in the bond between God and them becoming so strong that no one can take them out of His hand: "*And I give*

unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). The Christian, as a Son of God, is safe from all foes while he abides in His hand.

Jesus assured his followers that victory would eventually be theirs even though in the world they would have tribulation: "...but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Consistent with this assurance of victory is the fact that Jesus consoled His followers with the promise that He was going to prepare a place for them: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2), and John 17:24 records Jesus praying to His father for the same outcome: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me".

Correction

God's love for His sons, His church, includes ongoing vigilance and watch care. Jesus said "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:1-2). This metaphor contains several valuable lessons for every Christian. God is the vine dresser and He is the One who does the pruning, the objective of which is to increase the fruitage. It is reassuring to realise that all of God's dealings with His sons are for their ultimate spiritual benefit: "And we know 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).

To this agree the words of Hebrews 12:5-11 (RSV): "And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons: My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines them whom He loves and disciplines all whom he receives ... Now no chastening seems for the present to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby". So the question each Christian, each son of God, must ask themselves is how are they being exercised? Are they learning the lessons correctly? The Lord disciplines every son He receives and that is a manifestation of His love for them.

Called brethren

Another manifestation of God's love for His church is the fact that He regards them as brethren of His only

begotten Son: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). The thought of being regarded as His brethren is one that should motivate every Christian to strive to be an over-comer.

Kings and priests

Yet another sense in which God's love for His sons is exemplified is the fact that they are to be rewarded by becoming kings and priests: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1:6). The office of a priest was, and is, to minister to the people the things that pertain to God and which the people themselves are not entitled to perform. It will indeed be a great privilege and honour to serve the rest of mankind as a priest in this way, together with the privilege and glory that will come with being a king and ruling with Him for a thousand years (Rev. 20:6).

May each one who has been invited to be one of the Father's very own sons walk worthy of the love that He has showered upon them. Never let it be forgotten that the status of being a son of God is a privilege that no-one in the flesh can award, nor can usurp. It is a privilege that God has given to each one individually.

**Our Father knows what things we need
Each step along the way
His eye of love doth never sleep
He watches night and day.**

**He knows, sometimes like ripening grain,
We need the sunshine bright
Again He sends the peace that comes
With shadows of the night.**

**Sometimes our pride would fain unfurl
Ambition's flaunting sail
Ah! Then He knows we need to walk
Humiliation's vale.**

**Sometimes He takes our eager hands
And folds them on our breast
He gently lays our work aside
He knows we need to rest.**

**Sometimes we need companionship
Sometimes the wilderness
How sweet to feel he'll know and give
The state that most will bless.**

**Then let us leave it all with Him
Assured that, come what may,
Our Father knows just what we need
Upon our pilgrim way.**

**Bible Student Hymnal 308
(Based on Matthew 6.8)**

NUMBERING OUR DAYS

Psalm 90 is commonly attributed to Moses, and the sentiments expressed in it may be properly attributed to him. Nevertheless, regardless of how many centuries have elapsed since Moses' day, its message is pertinent to the Christian today, and particularly verse 12: "*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*" (Psa. 90:12).

In order to capture the full import of those words, it is necessary to consider the preceding verses. The purpose of those verses is to contrast the nature of God and the nature of Man in relation to primacy and duration. It is only when those aspects of God's existence are realised that the importance of "*numbering our days*" can be fully appreciated.

Primacy

God's primacy means that He was the first to exist; God existed before the Earth was created. As Psalm 90:1-2 states: "... *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God*". Those few words sum up the creation of the Earth as recorded in Genesis 1:1: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*". As the prophet declares, it was "*the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it...*" (Isa. 45:18).

Duration

In stark contrast to the fact that God exists "*from everlasting to everlasting*", Psalm 90:3 declares that Man "*soon*" "*returns to the dust*" from which he was made (Gen. 3:19).⁽¹⁾ The contrast is expressed clearly in verse 4: "*For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night*" (Psa. 90:4). No human has lived for even one thousand years, yet in God's timeframe 1000 years may be considered to be the same as one day or one watch in the night (i.e. 3 hours) in Man's timeframe. Human beings do not regard a period of 3 hours or 24 hours to have been of a significant duration when it is past; likewise in God's time frame a period of 1000 years is of little consequence because of the duration of His existence. Thus is made clear the relative insignificance of the duration of the examples recorded in Psalm 90:5-6 ("*a night's sleep*" and "*the grass that is cut down and withers*") – one thousand years in God's timeframe is comparable to those events in Man's timeframe.

An individual human being's temporary existence on the Earth, and the subsequent fading from prominence of their endeavours, is recorded by the Wise Man also: "*For the living know that they shall die: but the dead*

know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward: for the memory of them is forgotten" (Eccl. 9:5). It does not matter whether any one individual is a poor man, a priest or a king: it is only a matter of a few generations before their exploits are generally forgotten by those living at the later time. This realisation gives added emphasis to the transient nature of Man. Quoting again from Solomon: "*One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever*" (Eccl. 1:4).

Three score years and ten

The import of the time periods mentioned in Psalm 90:10 - "*three score years and ten*" and "*four score years*" - and the urgency of the exhortation in verse 12 to "*number our days*", is better appreciated when the years are converted into days. The former (70 years) amounts to some 25,567 days (allowing for 17 leap years), and the latter (four score years) amounts to 29,220 days (allowing for 20 leap years). Thus one day is approximately 1/25000th of their life span, that is 0.004%.

The days of youth

When the large number of days that comprise the average human life in the Western world today is considered, it is easy to disregard one's actions in the early days of one's life. The significance of the days of one's youth can be dismissed on the basis that there is a large number of days remaining in which to make amends for any misdemeanours or straying from "*the narrow way that leads to life*" (Matt. 7:14) – a period of one day may be regarded as insignificant in the 15000 to 20,000 that remain. In that context how well it is to remember the words of James: "*Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*" (James 4:13-14). No human being is assured of "*tomorrow*", or even of their next moment; every moment of everyone's life is in God's hands. Consequently how important it is to remember the exhortation of Solomon: "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, 'I have no pleasure in them'*" (Eccl. 12:1). Reverence for God at an early age represents great wisdom from both the aspect of the uncertainty of one's next breath and the temporary nature of youth.

Adulthood

As one progresses through life one accumulates responsibilities, and those responsibilities can divert

one's energy from the things that are eternal. The drawing power of such responsibilities is accentuated by the feeling that, even from middle age, there is still a large number of days remaining in which adequate attention can be given to spiritual matters. One such example is the disciple recorded in Matthew 8:21-22: "And another of his disciples said unto him, 'Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father'. But Jesus said unto him, 'Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead'". The disciple's request indicates that he wished to delay his coming to Jesus until he had divested himself of his earthly responsibilities.

While the example given above illustrates how earthly responsibilities can detract from the Christian's devotion to his Master, on the other hand the Christian is obliged to give proper attention to their temporal responsibilities. The Apostle Paul advised Timothy: "But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). Paul's words are strong words: "he hath **denied the faith**, and is **worse than an infidel**". Consequently every Christian must use their days wisely so that they do not bring dishonour to the Faith by not providing for their own, and yet they must not ignore their spiritual growth. Such a balance requires the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit: the numbering of one's days and the realisation that "my times are in Thy hand" (Psa. 31:15).

There is another aspect of life that requires the Christian to number their days, and that is the time they expend in pursuit of earthly pleasures. Revelling can divert one's attention from the way of the sanctified as the Apostle Peter warned: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. 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" (1 Pet. 4:1-3).

Jesus foretold that similar temptations would exist in the last days of this age, and how important it is for the Christian not to be swept along with the world: "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:38-39). How necessary it is in these last days for the Christian to number their days and apply their hearts unto wisdom, "while we look not at the

things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:15-20).

Old age

As quoted earlier, Solomon (Eccl. 12:1) declared that old age ultimately results in there being no pleasure in one's days. This fact is becoming more evident in these latter days as medical science is able to perpetuate life beyond what was possible in earlier times. However in many cases the days of those who are confined to wheel chairs and nursing homes, unable to care for themselves, are not filled with pleasure. But not so for the Christian; by the time the Christian reaches this stage of their earthly sojourn they may well be full of rejoicing - a conscious awareness that their warfare is nearly over and that there awaits them a crown of glory, as did the Apostle Paul: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). Such a prospect should urge them to hold fast to the things that they have heard in earlier days.

Numbering our days, being conscious of God's everlasting existence and of our temporary existence in this life, combined with a realization of where one is on life's journey, will help all to fulfill the exhortations of the Apostle to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

⁽¹⁾ Some scholars interpret the statement in Psa. 90:3 ("return ye children of men") as a reference to Man's resurrection; the fact that all men, although struck down by death so soon after being born, will return to enjoy the blessings of God's kingdom on Earth. It is acknowledged that such interpretation might be correct. However it seems to be more in keeping with the overall thrust of Psalm 90 that the point being made in verse 3 is the contrast between God's eternity and Man's brevity. God's existence is from everlasting to everlasting whereas Man's existence on the Earth is indeed very temporary - "three score years and ten", or maybe "four score years" (verse 10).

The “Kosmos”

John 3:16 is possibly the best known verse in the whole Bible: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life”.

The basis of the Christian faith is that in the very beginning God created His son, and that “by him He made the worlds” (John 1:2-3; Heb. 1:2). Thus is established the significance of the fact that God gave His only begotten son to be the saviour of the world.

In the King James Version of the Bible the word “world” occurs approximately 285 times, about 240 of which are in the New Testament. The 240 occurrences in the New Testament are translated from 6 different Greek words, the most prevalent of which is “kosmos” (152 occurrences).

The Greek word “kosmos” may be interpreted in a variety of ways. W. E. Vine, in his “Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words” (page 233) says that, among the Greeks, “kosmos” had the meaning of “universe ...owing to the order observable in it”. The Macquarie Dictionary (The Australian National Dictionary) defines “universe” as “all of space, and all the matter and energy which it contains; the *cosmos*”. “Cosmos” is defined in turn as “(2) the world or universe as an embodiment of order and harmony (as distinct from chaos)”. Dr. James Strong’s “Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible” supports the concept of orderliness: “(#2889) - orderly arrangement, that is, decoration; by implication the world (in a wide or narrow sense, including its inhabitants, literally or figuratively [morally])”. Of the 152 occurrences of “kosmos” in the New Testament, in the KJV it is translated as “world” 151 times and “adorning” once - in 1 Peter 3:3: “Whose **adorning** (kosmos) let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel ...”. (The second occurrence of “adorning” in 1 Peter 3:3 is not in the original text but has been supplied by the translators.)

The Universe

The widest interpretation of “kosmos” is “universe”, that is, both the heavens and the earth. Acts 17:24 states: “God that made the world (kosmos) and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ...” The “world” referred to in this verse may be interpreted as including both heaven and earth; the universe. God made both, as stated in Genesis 1:1 - “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”. Isaiah also proclaims God as the creator of the heavens and the earth: “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: I am the LORD; and there is none else” (Isa. 45:18).

The reference to “the world” (kosmos) in Romans 1:20 may also be interpreted as meaning the universe: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the **world** (kosmos) are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead ...” God’s power is invisible, but the things that He has made, both in the heavens and on the earth, are evidence of His might as expressed in Psalm 19:1 “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork”.

Another instance where “kosmos” relates to the universe is Hebrews 4:3-4: “... although the works were finished from the foundation of the **world** (kosmos)”. God finished the creative work of both the heavens and the earth (the universe) during the six creative days as stated in Genesis 2:1-3: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made...”

The definitions of “kosmos” include the concept of order. The word “order” is not used in the King James Version translation of Psalm 8:3-9, nevertheless that Psalm conveys the concept of order in both the heavens and the earth: “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?...For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet. ... O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” The picture conveyed by those words is one of order and not of chaos, which contrast is made specifically in the definition of “cosmos” in the Macquarie Dictionary.

The Earth only

In some other Scriptures the word “kosmos” refers only to the Earth and does not include the heavens. One such verse is Romans 1:8: “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world”. While it is possible to interpret this verse as saying that their faith was spoken of throughout the universe, that is, both heaven and earth, the context of Romans 1:8 indicates that the Apostle is referring to the Earth only: “To all that be in Rome, ... your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world (kosmos)” (Rom. 1:7-8). Paul’s letter

was primarily to the saints in Rome, not to the angels in heaven, and so the "kosmos" he refers to in this verse is likely to be the Earth only.

Another instance where "kosmos" refers to the Earth only and not to the heavens is 1 Timothy 6:7-8: "*For we brought nothing into this world (kosmos), and it is certain we can carry nothing out*". This Scripture may be interpreted as meaning the whole universe, both heaven and earth, because to come into the Earth one must also come into the universe. However the context indicates that the Apostle is reminding Timothy of the dangers of the lusts of the flesh: "*But godliness with contentment is great gain ... But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith*" (1 Tim. 6:6-10). The context relates to the domain where man exists, that is, the Earth.

Yet another example of "kosmos" referring to the Earth only and not the heavens is Matthew 4:8: "*Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world (kosmos), and the glory of them ...*" It would not have been necessary to take Jesus up into "*an exceeding high mountain*" to show Him the heavens; Jesus was taken to the top of a mountain from which He could look down on the Earth below.

A passage of Scripture where both senses (the universe and the Earth) might be meant separately is John 1:9-10: "*That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (kosmos). He was in the world (kosmos), and the world (kosmos) was made by him, and the world (kosmos) knew him not*". The first occurrence of "kosmos" - "*every man that cometh into the world (kosmos)*" - could be interpreted to mean the universe, but it is suggested that, in view of the context, only the Earth is meant. The second and third occurrences - "*He was in the world (kosmos), and the world (kosmos) was made by him*" may be interpreted as being either the Earth only or the universe. However the last reference, "*the world (kosmos) knew him not*", does not refer to the heavens because Mark 3:11 states that the angels knew who He was: "*And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, 'Thou art the Son of God'*".

The human race

In some other instances "kosmos" does not refer to the physical Earth but to mankind living on the Earth. An example of this use is Matthew 5:14: "*Ye are the light of the world (kosmos)*." Jesus' disciples were not the light of the literal world because that is the function of

the sun and the moon: "*And God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also*" (Gen. 1:16). In Mathew 5:14 "kosmos" refers to mankind living on the Earth.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19 also, "kosmos" refers to mankind only and does not include the physical Earth: "*To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world (kosmos) unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ...*" God did not reconcile the physical Earth to Himself, but mankind living on the Earth - the physical Earth is cursed (Gen. 3:17) but is blameless.

A further instance where "kosmos" refers only to the human race, and not to the universe nor to the Earth, is Romans 3:19: "*Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world (kosmos) may become guilty before God*". Paul had "*... before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin*" (Rom. 3:9). It was the individuals living on the Earth who were guilty before God, not the physical Earth.

Unbelievers (the heathen)

In some instances, "kosmos" does not mean the whole human race but only unbelievers. The reference in John 1:10 that "*the world (kosmos) knew him not*" does not refer to the whole human race but to those living on the Earth at that time whom God had not enlightened.

Another example where *kosmos* refers only to unbelievers is John 17:9: "*I pray for them: I pray not for the world (kosmos), but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine*." Jesus was praying only for His followers and not for unbelievers.

Yet another text where "kosmos" refers only to unbelievers is 1 Corinthians 11:32: "*But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned ("katakrisis" - judged against) with the world (kosmos)*". The believers' judgment time is now: "*For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God ...*" (1 Pet. 4:17), whereas the judgment of the world of mankind generally will not be until after they are resurrected: "*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 (present believers) unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (krisis; judgment)*". Believers during the present life are promised a resurrection to life, whereas the world of mankind in general, those who have not been privileged to know Him during this life, will be resurrected to face a crisis time for them - their judgment.

Gentiles only

Romans 11:11-15 reads: *"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world (kosmos), and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness? ...For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world (kosmos), what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"* (Rom. 11:11-15). The gospel came to the Gentiles only because Israel as a nation rejected Jesus as the Messiah, as stated in Acts 13:46: *"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles'".* Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah preceded the Gentiles' admission to the church (Rom. 11:17-18), and in that sense their "fall" became "the riches of the world" (kosmos - Gentiles) and their "casting away" opened the way for the reconciliation of the "kosmos" (Gentile nations).

The social order

Yet another meaning of kosmos is the social order that exists on the Earth. This is distinct from the persons living on the Earth, whether Israelites or Gentiles. John 12:31 reads: *"Now is the judgment of this world (kosmos), now shall the prince of this world (kosmos) be cast out".* Jesus was not saying that the prince of the individuals who were living at that time would be cast out, but rather that Satan, who is the prince of the social order, would be cast out. Likewise it is recorded in John 14:30 that He said *"Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world (kosmos) cometh, and hath nothing in me".* John 16:11 declares: *"Of judgment, because the prince of this world (kosmos) is judged".*

The Apostle Paul used the same terminology: *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world (kosmos), according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience"* (Eph. 2:2). To the Corinthians he wrote, *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world (kosmos), but the Spirit which is of God"* (1 Cor. 2:12). The Galatians also were reminded of the influences of the "world" around them: *"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world... (kosmos)"* (Gal. 4:3). He warned the Colossians also: *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world (kosmos), and not after Christ"* (Col. 2:8). The Apostle James expresses the same thought: *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself*

unspotted from the world (kosmos)" (James 1:27).

The Apostle Peter used "kosmos" when referring to the social order that existed before the flood: *"... 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 (kosmos) that then was, being overflowed with water, perished"* (2 Pet. 3:5-6). The "world being overflowed with water" refers to the flood of Noah's day that destroyed all living creatures except the "eight souls" (and animals) in the ark (1 Pet. 3:20). It is evident that the "world" refers to the social order that existed in the Earth because the heavens were not overflowed with water, nor were the angels in heaven destroyed by the flood.

Material possessions

Jesus also referred to material possessions as constituting the world: *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world (kosmos), and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matt. 16:26). Material possessions of all forms are regarded by some as their "world".

Region of influence

James 3:6 introduces yet another meaning of "kosmos": *"And the tongue is a fire, a world (kosmos) of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature ..."*

The other "worlds"

A similar analysis may be undertaken of the other Greek words rendered "world" in the New Testament. One such verse is Matthew 24:3 where it is recorded that the disciples asked Jesus *"what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"* The Greek rendered "world" in that verse is "aion", which sometimes means "age" and is translated as "ages" in Ephesians 2:7: *"That in the ages (aion) to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"*.

Yet another "world" is the **habitable earth** - the Greek word is "oikoumene". It occurs in Matthew 24:14: *"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come".* The gospel would not be preached in those regions where there weren't any inhabitants.

Summary

The meaning of the Greek word "kosmos" that is appropriate in each instance has to be derived from the context of the passage in which it occurs. The resultant variation of meaning is not "wresting the Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16) but is a consequence of "searching the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10).

LOVE IS NOT PUFFED UP

The latter half of the twentieth century, and now the early years of the twenty-first, have been characterised in the Western world by greater changes in life-style than have occurred at any previous time in the history of mankind. Technological advancements in every field of endeavour have exceeded human expectations. Surely the hand of God is evident in these developments as prophesied by Daniel: "And at that time shall Michael stand up ... and knowledge shall be increased" (Dan. 12:1-4).

These technological developments have brought many benefits to mankind, especially in the fields of agriculture, transport and medicine. For several decades many western countries have had a sure supply of food, and an increasing life expectancy. Additionally, modern medicine has provided pain relief to an unprecedented extent. That is not to say that there is no pain today - there is still much pain, and some of the diseases that still plague mankind inflict great suffering. Nevertheless, compared to previous generations, the current generation in the much of the western world is enjoying a very privileged standard of living.

However such prosperity has been accompanied by a marked decrease in reverence for God. Maybe one cause of this irreverence has been the feeling that Man is now self-sufficient, that "they" can provide all their needs themselves. Another factor might be that the leaders of the Christian religions have not forthrightly preached the truths regarding the future of the world as prophesied in God's Word. Whatever the causal factors, the result is beyond denial and the testimony of Scripture is vindicated: "That in the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, unthankful, unholy, ... heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-4). The attitude of being boastful, proud, heady and high minded is contrary to the fruit of love that the Christian is to develop, as the Apostle Paul simply says "Love is not puffed up" (1 Cor. 13:4).

Effects

The Apostle Paul devoted all of what is now known as 1 Corinthians 4 to exhorting the brethren to not be puffed up. In verse 6 he says "that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another". The thought of one member of the church being against another is totally contrary to the love that should exist amongst the church - "bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Being puffed up one against another destroys the benefit that is to be gained from the "assembling of ourselves together ... exhorting one another ...". It must always be remembered that "the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). There is no room for being "puffed up".

Personal achievements

In 1 Corinthians 8:1 the Apostle identifies one factor that can puff up: "Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth". Christians must ensure that their knowledge of the Scriptures does not puff them up. It is God who has opened their eyes (Matt. 16:17).

Accomplishment can also cause one to be puffed up. One example from Old Testament times is that of Nebuchadnezzar: "The king spake, and said, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?'" (Daniel 4:29-30). Nebuchadnezzar became puffed up and claimed the credit for what God had permitted him to build.

Antidotes

In 1 Corinthians 4:7 Paul reminded the Corinthian brethren "who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" This reminder was particularly important to the Corinthian brethren because they were struggling to correctly understand the spiritual gifts (Chap. 14), and it was necessary for Paul to remind them that it is God who was the Giver.

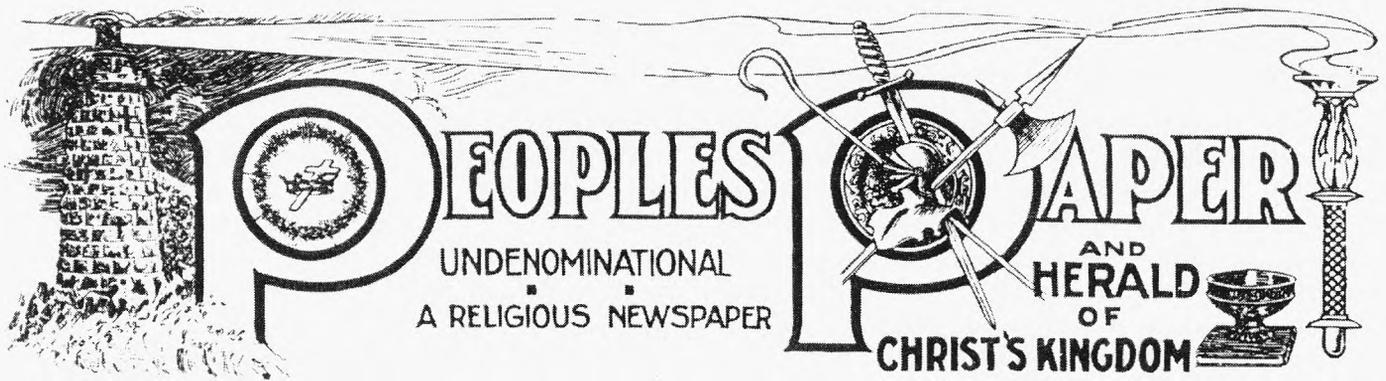
Another consideration is that, as far as possible, Christians should provide for themselves. The Apostle Paul ensured that he did not give the Corinthians any grounds to be puffed up because they had supplied his needs (2 Cor. 11:9-13).

Allowing oneself to be puffed up destroys love because it has the potential to make the other feel inferior and thereby cause division or separation.

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THY KINGDOM COME

"Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven ..." (Matt. 6:9-10). Those words are part of what is commonly called "**The Lord's Prayer**" and are possibly the most frequently recited words in the whole Bible.

Jesus uttered those words to His disciples in response to their request to teach them to pray, just as John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray: *"And it came to pass that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples'. And He said unto them, 'When ye pray, say 'Our Father which art in heaven ...'"* (Luke 11:1-2).

There is no record in the Scriptures of the prayer that John the Baptist gave to his disciples, but the prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples is recorded in the gospels of both Matthew and Luke. The prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples is more important than the one of John the Baptist because Jesus was *"the only begotten Son"* of God (John 3:16).

Authority

As God's only begotten Son, Jesus could speak with great authority. Nevertheless He acknowledged that He was subordinate to His Father, Jehovah God. He said: *"...my Father is greater than I"* (John 14:28).

Anyone who is present at the beginning of any event or arrangement is more aware of the intricacies of the situation. And so it was with Jesus; one possible reason why He could speak with such authority was that He was present at the creation of the world - He was *"the beginning of the creation of God"* (Rev. 3:14). As the Apostle John wrote, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God ... The same was in the beginning with God"* (John 1:1-2). However whether His presence with God at creation was a factor that enabled Him to know exactly what God had planned for the Earth is immaterial: the essential point is that He knew that He had come to Earth to do His Father's will. He said *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the*

will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). He also said *"The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works"* (John 14:10).

Another reason why He could speak with great authority when He was on Earth was that He had received the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit enabled Him to know God's plan, just as it enables Christians to understand God's plan: *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God"* (1 Cor. 2:12). However not only did Jesus receive the Holy Spirit, but He received it *"without measure"* (John 3:34). Receiving the Holy Spirit *"without measure"* infers that He was able to know every detail of God's plan whereas Christians today only *"know in part"* (1 Cor. 13:9, 12). He knew exactly why God had sent Him to Earth: *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:28), and *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

It was that same Jesus who was with God at creation, and who had received the Holy Spirit *"without measure"*, who told His disciples to pray *"Thy Kingdom Come"*. Consequently Christians today may be fully confident that God will honour the prayer that His Son told them to pray.

Our Father

The first words of the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples are *"Our Father"*. The disciples' faith

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would have been strengthened by those words because they inferred that Jesus was grouping them with Himself as one of the divine family. Likewise, for the Christian today the words "our Father" give a feeling of a spiritual depth that is the privilege only a few can appreciate. They impress on the human mind how great a privilege it is to understand and address almighty God as "our Father". That feeling of reverence is increased by the next words of the prayer: "Hallowed (holy) be thy name". Jesus was telling His disciples that they were to acknowledge God's majesty, and that they were praying to the greatest authority in the universe. Thus the words that follow were of utmost importance and reliability.

The desire for the kingdom

The next words are "Thy kingdom come". They express the very essence of the Christian faith: a hope that promises a world that is free from the sickness, strife and sorrow that plague the present world.

According to the Bible it is approximately 6000 years since Adam and Eve were perfect in the Garden of Eden. Since they transgressed God's law, mankind has experienced the consequences of their disobedience as described in Romans 8:20-23: "*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*".

Those verses explain four important aspects of God's plan.

The first aspect is that "*the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope*". The bondage of corruption that has plagued mankind for 6000 years was imposed by God to accomplish His purpose, and that means that the present distress is not beyond God's control but rather that He engineered it.

The great benefit to the Christian that stems from this understanding is that, if God has engineered the present "*bondage of corruption*", then He is able to stop it when it has achieved His purpose. And that is the second point that the Apostle makes in Romans 8:20-23; that **the creation will be delivered**.

The third point to note in the verses quoted above (Rom. 8:20-23) is that "*the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together*". It does not take more

than a moment to realise the truth of that statement - everywhere one looks in the world today one can see strife and tumult, hardship and suffering, even in the Western or so-called "developed" nations. At the time of writing this article, there are strife torn regions in western Europe, Africa, the middle East, and the far East (Asia). These and several other regions are also experiencing "natural disasters" such as floods, fire, tornadoes or drought.

The final point that the Apostle expresses in so few words in Romans 8:23 is that Christians "*groan within themselves waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body*". Christians groan because they empathise with the suffering world and because they realise that the suffering will not end until the kingdom of God is established on the earth.

Deliverance nigh

The thought of God's will being done in Earth as it is in heaven is a very attractive one. However the disciples' question to Him just before He returned to heaven indicates that the disciples might not have realised exactly what His prayer meant. They asked Him "*Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6). They were Israelites and they knew the glory that Israel had enjoyed centuries ago, and they expected Him to restore that glory to them.

It is now approximately 2000 years since Jesus told His disciples to pray in this manner and still God's will is not done in Earth as it is in heaven. The question may well be asked, when will the prayer be answered?

Jesus gave His disciples some clues as to when the kingdom would be near: "*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; 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 21:28).

Many of those signs exist in these early years of the 21st century and so Christians should be encouraged "*to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus ...*" (1 Thess. 1:10).

The suffering currently being experienced by the human creation will end when God's purpose in subjecting mankind to it has been accomplished. Meanwhile the Christian continues to pray "*Thy kingdom come*".

TO SEEK AND TO SAVE

When Jesus was on Earth He declared that He had come to "seek and to save that which was lost". The record continues: "And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:10-11).

Those verses reveal two aspects of the people's belief at that time: firstly, that it would be His kingdom that would recover the qualities and conditions that the people knew they had lost, and secondly, that the kingdom would soon be established. Jesus did not dispute the first point (that it was He who would restore that which they had lost) because it was correct; however their belief that the kingdom was near was incorrect and Jesus considered it necessary to explain by way of a parable that the kingdom was not imminent. He likened the delay to a nobleman who went into a far country, which, in view of the transport available in that day would have inferred a considerable delay.

That which was lost

In order to correctly indentify what Jesus meant when He said that He had come "to save that which was lost", it is necessary to consider the context of the verses.

These words of Jesus were recorded by both Matthew and Luke. However the verses that precede His words differ in the two records: Matthew 18:1-11 records Jesus explaining the need for humility amongst His followers as exemplified by the humility of a little child, while Luke 19:2-9 records Jesus' dealings with Zacchaeus. However there is one lesson that can be learned from both records, and that is the message of salvation – "... it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye ..." (Matt. 18:9) and "This day is salvation come to this house" (Luke 19:9). In the broadest sense the one thing that was lost and which Jesus came to save was eternal life.

Eternal life lost

An understanding of Jesus' words that He had come to "save eternal life" requires an understanding of God's purpose in creating mankind. The Scriptures declare: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ... And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Gen. 1:1; 2:8). Then "... 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'. So God created man in his own

image ... And God blessed them, and God said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it ...'" (Gen. 1:26-31). Those verses speak only of Man's dominion on the Earth and make no mention of his death.

Death

Death entered the scene when Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in contravention of God's commandment: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). The entry of death is the first component of God's plan that must be understood in order to understand Jesus' words that He had come "to save that which was lost".

The second component of God's plan that ratifies Jesus' claim that He had come to "save that which was lost" is that God deemed all of Adam's progeny to be guilty because of Adam's transgression. The Apostle Paul explains it in these words: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The condemnation to death of all men on the basis of Adam's transgression might seem to be harsh and unjust. However God had a grander plan, as Paul goes on to explain: "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so, by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:12-19).

Thus God's arrangement is that, by condemning all of mankind to death because of Adam's transgression, He could justly grant all mankind life because of the righteousness of one man, Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul expounded God's plan to the Christians at Corinth in similar terms: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21-22). The words

"as in Adam all die" are very important, but the words *"in Christ shall all be made alive"* are more important. Every human being can testify to the truth of the first part of the statement: *"all are dying"* - the rich, the poor, the struggling, the kings - all are dying. The last part of the statement - that *"all in Christ will be made alive"* - is yet to be fulfilled and the hope of Christians is that it will be fulfilled. The Christian's faith that Jesus will bring it about is based on Jesus' declaration after He had been resurrected that *"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"* (Matt. 28:18).

Examples of His Power

Jesus' statement that *"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"* gives assurance that the promise that *"all will be made alive"* will come to pass. God's power is infinite and Israel's exodus from Egypt illustrates that power. The record is in Exodus 12.

At that time Egypt was a mighty power. Verses 37 and 38 state that the number of Israeli men that came out of Egypt was *"about 600,000"* plus *"a mixed multitude ... and flocks and herds and much cattle"*, all *"on foot"*. Even with modern means of transport, providing for their travel would have been a mammoth task. However there were several other factors that added greatly to the difficulty of the task. They did not have motorised transport, there was no means of communicating with large groups and there was no infrastructure that would provide for their food and water *en route*.

An early obstacle of a different kind was presented by the Red Sea (Exodus 13:18). However God divided the sea and they crossed on dry land, but when the Egyptians followed, Pharaoh and his army drowned. The Israelites' crossing was a miracle - that is, the power of God in action.

Israel went over the Red Sea into the desert. They were faced with hunger and thirst, however God provided for their needs. For 40 years manna fell from heaven (Exodus 16:35); in the Hebrew language "manna" (*Anlua*) means *"gift of heaven"*. The miraculous feeding of such a large number of people and livestock for a period of 40 years is a miracle that warrants reflection; it is a feat that only God's power could accomplish, and Jesus now has that same power.

Not one person died from thirst during their 40 year trek through the wilderness. When there was *"no water for the people to drink"* (Exodus 17:1), God provided water from a rock, a substance that is normally devoid of water: *"Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel"* (Exodus 17:6). Such

examples of God's power should assure every Christian that He is able to provide for all of Man's needs, and Jesus Christ has been given that same power - *"all power in heaven and in earth"*.

Virgin birth

Another miracle that demonstrates God's power and superiority over the "natural" powers of mankind is Jesus' conception in the virgin Mary's womb, as recorded in Matthew 1:18: *"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost"*. The authenticity of the miracle is attested by the fact that it was prophesied more than 600 years previously: *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"* (Isa. 7:14).

Jesus' miracles

Another miracle that illustrates God's power through Jesus was the feeding of the *"5000 men apart from women and children"*, from only 5 loaves and 2 fishes. The miracle was performed when Jesus was on Earth even before He had been given *"all power in heaven and in earth"*. Not only did *"they eat and were filled"* but 12 baskets were filled with the fragments that remained (Matt. 14:14-21).

Jesus' death

The events that occurred when Jesus died on the cross further testify to God's power: *"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour"* (Matt. 27:45). The darkening of the sun from noon until mid-afternoon exemplifies God's power over every component of the universe that He created, and is similar to His action in making the sun stand still in Joshua's day (Joshua 10:12).

Another event that occurred at the time of Jesus' death and which exemplifies God's power was the rending of the veil of the temple: *"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent ..."* (Matt. 27:51). A man would not have had the strength to do that because the veil was 4 inches (10 cm.) thick. This remarkable event convinced the Roman centurion and the other soldiers who had guarded Jesus that He was the Son of God. Jesus now has the same power that rent the veil.

The events referred to above give Christians every confidence that God has the power to establish the kingdom for which Jesus taught His disciples to pray *"thy kingdom come"*. Because God has given the same power to Jesus, Jesus' statement that He came *"to seek and to save that which was lost"* will not suffer due to a lack of power or authority.

RESURRECTION CHALLENGES

At the present time (the year that is commonly called 2008AD), Jesus' coming to Earth and His death on the Cross have not had any apparent effect or influence on the affairs of mankind - the nations continue to fight each other, people still get sick and die and seemingly "... all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation ..." (2 Pet. 3:4). It appears to be as Solomon said, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever" (Eccl. 1:4).

Nevertheless the Scriptures are clear that Jesus' first advent will have an effect on the affairs of mankind at His second coming ("second advent"): "And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20-21). The work of His First Advent was a prerequisite for the work that He will accomplish when He comes again when there will be "a time of restitution of all things".

Resurrection

However if the benefits of His coming are limited to those who are living when He returns, the benefits will be enjoyed by only a fraction of those who have lived since the beginning of time, and that would be a shallow fulfillment of the angels' message "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10).

In order for the benefits to extend to those who have lived and died before He returns, there will have to be a resurrection, that is, the dead will have to be brought back to life. Such a resurrection is promised and is a key element of God's plan. Jesus declared "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 (judgment)" (John 5:28-29). At first glance Jesus' words "all in the graves shall come forth" present a challenge to the human mind because many have been dismembered by bombs, violence or accident, and also because it is approximately 6000 years since the creation of Adam and Eve and hence the large majority of those who have died would have "returned to dust" (Gen. 3:19).

Nevertheless such a hope was proclaimed by the Apostle Paul in his defence before Felix: "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 24:15).

With what body?

As mentioned above, the first challenge to the concept of a resurrection is the physical body - what bodies will the resurrected persons be given? The question is particularly relevant to those people who have been blown apart in warfare, been disfigured by disease or injury or have other disabilities.

The answer to that question was given by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians so that they could respond to any who might ask them the same question: "But some man will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body ..." (1 Cor. 15:35-39). And so it will be in the resurrection - the body that existed in this life and which goes down into the grave, either wholly or in pieces, is irrelevant because God will give everyone a new body.

Accommodation

The concept of a resurrection for everyone raises some conceptual issues. The first one is whether there would be enough room for everyone to live on planet Earth.

According to the United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (February 2008), the world population reached 6 billion (6,000,000,000) on 12 October 1999, and in February 2008 it was 6.65 billion. There have been a number of attempts to estimate the total number of people who have ever lived, and the results vary widely. However one estimate is that the world population was almost static until about the beginning of the 19th century with the most rapid increase occurring during the 20th century. Based on that premise, it is estimated that the present population of the Earth constitutes about one half of the total number of persons who have ever lived. That estimation suggests that the entire number would be less than 15 billion (15,000,000,000).

The area of land on Earth, including the polar ice caps, is about 148 million (148,000,000) square kilometres.

On the basis of those figures, the population density required when every person is resurrected will be

approximately 100 persons per square kilometre. Some population densities in the Earth today are:

• Monaco	23660
• Hong Kong	6407
• India	336
• United Kingdom	246
• China	137
• USA	31
• Australia	2.6
Overall (259 countries)	44.6 persons/square km.

Thus it appears that the population density after the resurrection will be a little more than double the present overall density. However today there are vast areas of the Earth that are only sparsely populated; 14% is classified as desert, and 35% as “desert region” (a “desert region” is an area that has an annual rainfall of less than 250 mm (10”). Antarctica alone comprises approximately 9% of the land area, so an overall density twice today’s average will not mean an overcrowded Earth.

Food

Another consideration is food; will there be enough food? The question is pertinent because today there are many people dying from hunger.

The Scriptures give unqualified assurance that there will be sufficient food for everyone because the Earth is going to be restored to its former productivity. The promise is recorded in Isaiah 35:6-7: “... in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes”. Such an abundance of water will enable the Earth to “yield her increase” as prophesied in Psalm 67:6. One of the remarkable phenomena of the Earth today is the prolific growth that occurs in a desert when it receives rain. And that growth is from a cursed Earth (Gen. 3:17); what the earth will be able to produce when the curse is lifted and the deserts have plenty of water is unknown (Rev. 22:3).

Consequently all of mankind will be well fed; it is within God’s power to resurrect every human being who has ever lived, and to restore the Earth so that there will be sufficient food for everyone - no one will be hungry in His kingdom.

Health

In the kingdom of God there will be many changes health-wise. Today mankind cannot thwart disease and sickness despite amazing progress in medical knowledge. In that day “... the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick ...” (Isa. 33:24). “Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb

sing ...” (Isa. 35:6). There will not be any sickness and therefore there will not be any need for doctors, hospitals, medicines, X-ray machines, nursing homes, wheelchairs and other medical apparatus. It will be a totally different world.

Peace

In the kingdom of God there will not be any politics. Isaiah 2:3-4 reads: “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 ...”. One important feature of that prophecy is that the nations will all go to the same place - “the mountain of the Lord” - to learn “of His ways”. They will not try to govern according to their own wisdom and consequently there will not be any conflict of political ideologies.

The situation described in those verses represents what the majority of rulers of this world are striving to achieve - a world without conflict. What a great change that will be! There will not be any ministries of defence or factories producing armaments to kill. At that time the promise given at Jesus’ birth will be fulfilled: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

All the governments on Earth cannot bring about such conditions; they will be brought about only by Almighty God. He has given “all power in heaven and in earth” to Jesus (Matt. 28:18), and it will be Jesus’ role to “put down all rule and all authority and power” and then “deliver up the kingdom to God even the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24).

Death

The above changes are wonderful to contemplate but they would be somewhat empty and the arrangements would lack purpose if mankind were to continue to die. Therefore a critical change is that there will be no more death and mankind will live for ever - they will have **eternal** life. Revelation 21:4-5 sums it up in a few words: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; **and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.** And he that sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’. And he said unto me, ‘Write: for these words are true and faithful’”.

Since God is the all-powerful creator of the universe, there is no task that is too great for Him. And concerning the resurrection of the dead, truly He is “the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:32).

THE RULE OF LAW

In simple terms, **The Rule of Law** is that no one is above the law and everyone must abide by it, regardless of whether they be rich or poor, mighty or despised, peasant or king.

Some historians claim that the concept of **The Rule of Law** originated at the signing of the Magna Carta in England in 1215AD. The purpose of that document was to bind Pope Innocent III, King John and the British barons to the same legal principles and so achieve consistency of administration.

God's Rule of Law

The Rule of Law is one of the fundamental principles of God's jurisdiction. The particular Law that He has upheld at all times and which He continues to uphold is the Law of Justice. Moses declared: *"Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth ... Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he"* (Deut. 32:1-4). Isaiah declared: *"For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it ... I am the LORD; and there is none else ... I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right ... there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me"* (Isa. 45:18-21). God is just, He has always operated justly and hence He has always complied with His own Rule of Law.

Old Testament Times

Consistent with the fact that God is just and that He has and always does comply with His own Rule of Law, He has always required His people to operate in accordance with **The Rule of Law**. An example from early times is the keeping of the Passover and the qualifications of those who were entitled to eat the sacrifice. Exodus 12:43-50 reads: *"It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations. And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger, eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. ... And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is home born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. Thus did all the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses*

and Aaron, so did they". Circumcision was given by God to Abraham and his descendants as a token of their favoured position with God as recorded in Genesis 17:9-11: *"And God said unto Abraham, 'Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you'"*. Circumcision was a special token of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants, and the Passover was also a special observance of which only the children of Israel were entitled to eat. Nevertheless some non-Israelites were permitted to partake of it provided they had first complied with the token of circumcision, and this was an example of the **Rule of Law**: *"One law shall be to him that is home born, and unto the stranger"*. There were no exceptions.

In keeping with God's law of justice, strict instructions were given to the judges of Israel to ensure that they judged with justice. Deuteronomy 16:18-20 reads: *"Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons ... That which is altogether just shalt thou follow ..."*. The judges were not to respect persons; the Rule of Law was to apply - one law for all persons regardless of their status amongst the people.

Jesus' sacrifice

It was God's unwavering adherence to the Law of Justice that required Jesus to come to Earth and die as a righteous man, a perfect man equivalent to the initially perfect man Adam, and which enables God to justify Christian believers: *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness ... To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus"* (Rom. 3:23-26). Jesus' sacrifice facilitated God's compliance with His Law of Justice.

Jesus taunted

The Pharisees taunted Jesus regarding the Rule of Law. The Roman Empire was in power and the Pharisees, perceiving that He deemed God to be a higher power than Caesar, tried to trick Him into not observing the law of the land on the grounds that He

was "above it". The record is in Matthew 22:15-22: *"Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, 'Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?'" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money.'* And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, *'Whose is this image and superscription?'* They say unto him, *'Caesar's'.* Then saith he unto them, *'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's'."*

Their scheme was introduced by falsely stating "we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth". If they had believed that Jesus was true and taught God's way they would not have challenged Him. Their next statement was a form of mockery: "neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men", and constituted an attempt to falsely acknowledge that He considered Himself to be above the law and not bound by it. Jesus used the engraving on a coin to rebuke the Pharisees: "They say unto him, *Caesar's.* Then saith he unto them, *'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's'"* (Matt 22:21). Jesus showed that He did not claim to be above the law, and nor should anyone claim to be above the law. Nevertheless there was a distinction between those things that were rightly the province of their earthly society and those that they were obliged to give to God.

The Christian and the Rule of Law

The Christian is to observe **The Rule of Law** in matters that pertain to "their Caesar" just as Jesus did. The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy *"that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior"* (1 Tim. 2:1-3). The Christian is not to be lawless but is to comply with the laws of the land just as the law applies to every other citizen.

Paul also instructed the brethren in Rome to observe the laws that existed in that day. The instruction has not been superseded by any later edict and therefore continues to apply today. Paul's instruction was: *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that*

resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Greek: *krima* - a decision)" (Rom. 13:1-2).

The inference from both Jesus' and the Apostle Paul's teaching is that God permits governments to exist until they have accomplished God's purpose. There is a saying that "a bad government is better than no government at all" - the alternative is anarchy - and the Christian is to endeavour to live peaceably which is a condition that is not possible when anarchy prevails. Christians are to be law abiding citizens.

The Rule of Law in God's kingdom

The Rule of Law (which may be summed up as "one law for all") will apply in the kingdom of God when it is established on Earth. It is incorrect to assume that the love that all people will embrace at that time will mean that there will not be any need for law.

The conditions that will exist at that time are recorded in Isaiah 2:2-4: *"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 pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"*.

Those verses state that the law will go forth from Zion; a simple statement but one that is very important: there will be law in God's kingdom.

Additionally *"all nations shall flow unto it"*. There will be one law for all: it will apply uniformly to all nations, whether they were powerful empires, socialist republics or struggling third-world countries. God's law will apply to all and no nation or people will be "above it" (exempted from it).

Isaiah 45:22-23 confirms that God's law will be universal: *"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear"*. The law of righteousness will apply to "all the ends of the earth": there will not be any exceptions - *"every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear"*. God's law of righteousness will apply to all as stated in Psalm 98:9: *"Before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall*

he judge the world, and the people with equity". The statement "He will judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity" is vital - there will not be any partiality, just as the judges of Israel were "not to have respect of persons".

Isaiah 28:16-17 tells of the law that will prevail at the setting up of the kingdom: "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place'". God's law of righteousness and justice - the law that He established at the beginning - will apply to all people. The standard will be righteousness.

Acts 17:31 further attests that the standard of God's judgement will be righteousness: "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in **righteousness** by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead".

Divergence from the righteous law will not be permitted: "And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Rev. 2:27).

However, as is not the case today, everyone's fate will be in their own hands and they will be fully aware of their choice. The prophet Jeremiah declares: "In those days they shall say no more, 'The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge'. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jer. 31:29-30).

Likewise the prophet Ezekiel wrote: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and

in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, 'The way of the Lord is not equal'. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, 'The way of the Lord is not equal', O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye" (Ezek. 18:20-32). The Lord declares that His ways are equal, that a righteous man shall live but the sinner shall perish for their own iniquity - a totally just judgement and one that will apply equitably to everyone. The Rule of Law will apply.

In the kingdom of God there will be justice; the law will be just and applied equitably to all. There will not be respect of persons. In the words of Revelation 15:3: "And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; **just and true** are thy ways, thou King of saints'".

The kingdom complete

When humanity reaches perfection Jesus Christ will hand over the kingdom to His father as stated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:24: "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". Of that time John was given a vision: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away'" (Rev. 21:1-4).

INCREASE OR PERISH

The concept of “increase” is mentioned many times throughout the Bible, and is applied in a variety of ways. “Increase or perish” seems to be a principle of God’s dealings with planet Earth and His human creation on it.

An increase is implied in God’s blessing to Adam and Eve: *“be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth”* (Gen. 1:28). Likewise He said to Noah and his sons after the flood *“Be fruitful and multiply”* (Gen. 9:1).

Be fruitful and multiply

The instruction *“to be fruitful and multiply”* has been complied with; today the Earth can barely support the teeming millions who have descended from Adam and Eve. However Christians should not be concerned because when Christ’s kingdom is established on Earth, *“then shall the earth yield her increase”* (Psa. 67:6) and consequently there will be plenty for all. The ecology will be returned to the delicately balanced arrangement God designed, referred to as the *“bounds of their habitation”* (Acts 17:26); “the bounds” being the temperature limits within which Man can survive, combined with the concentration of oxygen and water (both liquid water and water vapour) in the atmosphere, and the intensity of the sun’s rays.

In essence, the lower orders of the earthly creation, the herbs and trees, were “commissioned” to *‘be fruitful and multiply’* before Man was created (Gen. 1:11-12). Some species are now extinct, either because of changed conditions on Earth or because of the brutality and greed of mankind. Man’s plundering of Earth’s bounties has changed the conditions to the extent that these species have been unable to increase and so they cease to exist; they have perished.

The flood

When the wickedness of the human family, aided by the wrongdoing of the angels (Gen. 6:1-5), had reached such a state that the *“thoughts of their hearts were only evil continually”*, God sent the Flood to end the lives of all except righteous Noah and his family (Gen. 6:17-19). After the flood God said to Noah *“Go forth of the ark, thou and thy wife and thy sons and thy sons’ wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, and of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth”* (Gen. 8:16-17). In order to facilitate the increase God ordained that *“while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat,*

and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). And so it continues to this day.

The seed of Abraham

Later God made a wonderful promise to Abraham: *“In blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore”* (Gen. 22:17). At the beginning of the 21st. century there are millions of Abraham’s descendants throughout the Earth, comprised of descendants from both the seed of the bondwoman and the seed of the free woman (Gen. 21:12-13).

The Spiritual Seed

The principle of “increase or perish” applies to God’s plan for His Son. Just before His crucifixion Jesus said to His disciples *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit”* (John 12:24). He was teaching His disciples that it was necessary for Him to die and that unless He died He would *“abide alone”* because He was the only righteous Man on the Earth.

However Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15:20 that when He was resurrected Jesus became *“the first-fruits of them that slept”*. His footstep followers also are regarded as *“a kind of first-fruits of his creatures”* (James. 1:18). Thus, through the laying down in death of the ‘corn of wheat’, Jesus “increased”, God deeming His followers to also be His sons: *“For it became him ... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings”* (Heb. 2:10).

The *“other sons”* to whom Hebrews 2:10 refers are elsewhere referred to as “the seed of Isaac”: *“In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh (natural or fleshly Israelites), these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed”* (Rom. 9:7-8). *“Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise”* (Gal. 4:28). Had Jesus’ sacrifice been deficient He would not have been resurrected and He would not have had any increase; He would have “perished”.

The Christian’s increase

Christians must increase or they too will perish. The Scriptures contain several exhortations regarding the increase that Christians must achieve during their time on Earth. Three of the increases required are knowledge, love and faith. Colossians 1:10 exhorts the Christians at Colosse to *“increase in the knowledge of God”*. Knowledge is increased by studying God’s

Word, both privately and with other Christians. Paul wrote to Timothy: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The studentship referred to in that verse is wider than a study of the Bible because it includes self-examination and a conscious awareness of one's actions. Nevertheless it also includes study of God's Word because it is through the Bible that God gives the Christian the knowledge as to how to be approved unto God. That knowledge is obtained by "rightly dividing the word of truth". In similar vein Paul wrote to the Thessalonians with the admonition "... we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business ... that ye may walk honestly towards them that are without ..." (1 Thess. 4:10-12).

Love

The Christian must increase in love. Quoting again from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love towards one another, and toward all men" (1 Thess. 3:12).

Faith

Luke 17:5-6 reads: "And the apostles said unto the Lord, 'Increase our faith'. And the Lord said, 'If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, 'Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea'; and it should obey you'".

Hebrews 11:1 defines "faith" as "the substance (that is conviction) of things hoped for". A Christian cannot have too much faith because it is by faith that he "overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4), and it is by faith that he is saved (Rom. 8:24). Also the Apostle Paul says: "above all take the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Eph. 6:16).

The Apostle Peter writes that there are many things to be added to faith: "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:5-8). Again the principle employed is "increase or perish".

Accurate knowledge required

2 Peter 3:18 reads: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ..." The Christian is to increase in knowledge - knowledge of God's plan and of His requirements for them. However it is an accurate knowledge of God's plan that is required, as shown by the error of the Israelites:

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:1-3). Israel's failure was not due to a lack of zeal but to an inaccurate knowledge, and Christians are vulnerable to error due to a lack of knowledge: "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). "This I say therefore ... that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:17-18). "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). The Christian's understanding must increase as they walk the narrow path to life: "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

Peace in the kingdom

In spite of the fact that many political leaders have a knowledge of history and the downfall of their predecessors, none has been able to formulate policies that have brought world-wide peace. All systems of government that are available to Man - democracy, communism, socialism, dictatorship, imperialism - have been adopted at various times. However, even if they had tried to do so - and it is acknowledged that some have not tried to do so - none has increased to the extent of bringing universal peace, harmony and happiness and so all have perished.

The kingdom of God will be a stark contrast to the kingdoms of the world that have existed under Man's rule. Isaiah 9:7 reads: "Of the **increase of his government and peace** there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this". What a wonderful promise is contained in those words: it will be established for ever and ever; there will be no end to its increase. As Isaiah later 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). In order to reach that glorious condition the people of the world will have to walk up the "highway of holiness": "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isa. 35:8). The kingdom of God will be totally different from the present world and it will last forever - it will not perish.

LOVE DOES NOT BEHAVE ITSELF UNSEEMLY

The Apostle Paul wrote *“Love does not behave itself unseemly”* (1 Cor. 13:5). Those words present the Christian with a far-reaching challenge that requires the continual exercise of spiritual wisdom.

Some standards of conduct that are acceptable and appropriate for non-Christians are unacceptable and inappropriate for the Christian as explained by the Apostle Peter: *“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind ... That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. 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 Peter 4:1-4).

Peter’s words relate to preserving the health of the Christian’s spiritual mind whereas the context of 1 Corinthians 13:5 is love - *“love does not behave itself unseemly”*. The question is, why or how is unseemly conduct contrary to love?

Meaning

The Greek word rendered *“unseemly”* in 1 Corinthians 13:5 is *“aschemoneo”*. The only other occurrence of *“aschemoneo”* is in 1 Corinthians 7:36 where it is translated *“uncomely”*. In that verse it relates to the behaviour of a man towards a woman and is irrelevant to its use in 1 Corinthians 13:5.

In order to comply with the admonition that *“love does not behave itself unseemly”* it is necessary to have an understanding of what is meant by *“unseemly”* in the context of 1 Corinthians 13:5.

Some translations of the New Testament translate *“aschemoneo”* in 1 Corinthians 13:5 as *“rude”* (NIV), *“indecent”* (Concordant), or *“arrogant”* (RSV). Strong’s Concordance defines it as *“unbecoming”* and Vines’ Dictionary (listed under *“Behave No.4”*) defines it as *“to be unseemly”*.

The Macquarie Dictionary definitions of the various English words that are used to translate *“aschemoneo”* include *“inappropriate”* and *“improper”*. Those words embrace a wide range of situations and it is within that wide sense that unseemly behaviour is contrary to love.

Examples

Inappropriate behaviour is contrary to love because it has the potential to harm another. James 2:2-6 gives

an example: *“For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye 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’ ... ye have despised the poor ...”*. Despising anyone is not exhibiting love towards them.

The Apostle Paul advised Timothy of another aspect of *“unseemly behaviour”*: *“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel ... not with braided hair ... or costly array ... but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works”* (1 Tim. 2:9-10). Costly array is unbecoming for the Christian woman because such extravagance has the potential to belittle others who do not have material wealth. The creation of a feeling of inferiority is contrary to love because it tends to destroy the unity of the body, the church: *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:1-3).

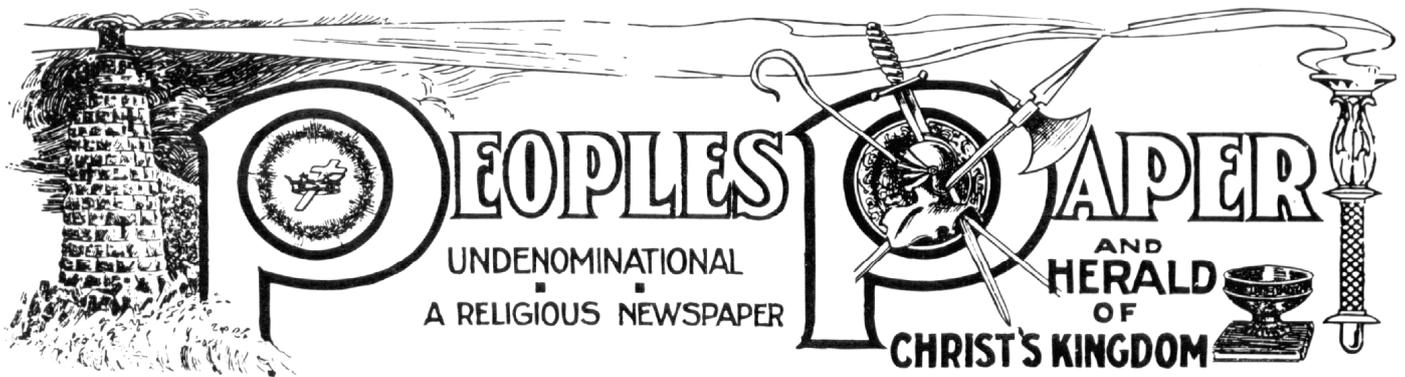
Inappropriate behaviour may also arise even when One has the best intention. Paul wrote: *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”* (Gal. 6:1). Helping another to overcome their weakness requires great wisdom because inappropriate words or actions may unintentionally be said or done. Even quoting verses of Scripture of which the weak one is unaware might be wrongly interpreted as an attitude of superiority and might therefore have the opposite effect to that which was desired or intended.

The decision whether any conduct would be inappropriate and therefore contrary to love is a personal one and requires continual application of spiritual wisdom. In all cases the guidelines must be that *“... love edifieth”* (1 Cor. 8:1) and *“... let all things be done unto edifying”* (1 Cor. 14:26). Every action that has an adverse effect on the spiritual welfare of another is contrary to the fruit of love.

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EYE HATH NOT SEEN

“...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 Corinthians 2:9).

1 Corinthians 2:9 is a verse of Scripture that poses several questions, for example who is the ‘man’ whose eyes do not see and whose ears do not hear, and into whose heart the things that God has prepared do not enter; what are *“the things that God has prepared”*; who are those who *“love him”*; and when will those who love Him be able to *“see”* and *“hear”*?

Man

The context shows that the term “man” refers to those who have not received God’s Holy Spirit; in verse 14 they are referred to as *“natural man”*: *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Cor. 2:14). Thus there are two groups of mankind; those who have not received the Holy Spirit (termed *“natural man”*) and those who have received the Holy Spirit (termed *“us”* in verses 10 and 13): *“But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit... that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God”*.

That is not to say that *“natural man”* does not see the evidence of God’s existence in the world around them. They see the beauty of *“nature”*—the birds, flowers, rivers, lakes, oceans, amazing geological formations and the wonder of the seasons. They also see the calamities, often termed *“natural disasters”*, such as fires, floods, earthquakes and cyclones, all of which indicate that there are forces at play that are beyond human control. Some may attribute these phenomena to a god but they are unable to fully appreciate that they are manifestations of *“His eternal power...”* (Rom. 1:20).

While *“natural man”* is not privileged to understand God’s majesty, it is noteworthy that 1 Corinthians 2:9 does not say that those who have received the Holy Spirit see everything clearly. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”* (1 Cor. 13:12). The Apostle wrote those words even though he had seen a vision of the *“third heaven”* (2 Cor. 12:2), had received his knowledge directly from God by revelation (Gal. 1:13), and on one occasion preached all night (Acts 20:7-11), a feat which would have required an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures. Nevertheless compared to God’s realm, Paul realised that his knowledge was minute.

Those who love Him

1 Corinthians 2:9 states that it is for those who *“love him”* that *“God has prepared”* certain things. Jesus gave His disciples a test that enabled them to know whether they loved Him: *“If ye love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15).

His commandments are not complex—they are contained in two simple instructions: *“Thou shalt*

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love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:36-40).

The concept of one's "neighbour" is very broad. In the first instance it refers to fellow Christians: "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (John 13:35). Love for all those who are striving to develop the fruits of the Spirit is an essential component of Christian character.

However the parable of the "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37) shows that those who are outside one's immediate fellowship are also to be regarded as neighbours. The Samaritan, with whom the Jews had no dealings (John 4:9), was to be regarded as a neighbour of the man who fell among thieves, and the commission is to "*do thou likewise*" (Luke 10:37). Those who are privileged to see the things that God has prepared for them will love their neighbours to the same extent as the Samaritan demonstrated by his care for the man who fell among thieves.

A crown of life

God has prepared many things for those who love Him. Perhaps the greatest is the crown of life: "*... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*" (Rev. 2:10). The crown of life is the greatest attribute because unless one receives life there is nothing. However the promise is more than just life, it is a **crown of life**. The Apostle Paul called it a "*crown of righteousness*" (2 Tim. 4:8) and the Apostle Peter termed it a "*crown of glory...*" (1 Pet. 5:4). The Christian should be greatly strengthened by keeping their eyes fixed on this crown that God has prepared for them because it does not fade away; it is eternal. **Eternal life** is the objective of those "*who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, (summarised as) eternal life*" (Rom. 2:7).

It is axiomatic that those who have eternal life cannot die. Revelation 20:6 expresses it: "*... on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years*". The privilege of not being subject to the second death is something that cannot be fully appreciated at this

time because no details are given of the subtleness that Satan will use in his attempts to deceive the nations when he is "*loosed out of his prison*" (Rev. 20:7-8). However the mention of the "*lake of fire*" (Rev. 20:15) infers that not all will be able to resist his delusions. Those who receive their crown before that time will already have eternal life and will not be subject to his temptations.

Thus it is a great privilege to see now, in the present life, the reward of a crown of life, and it should stir everyone who has received the Holy Spirit to "*hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown*" (Rev. 3:11).

Priests

Revelation 20:6 also says that those upon whom the second death has no power will be "*priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years*".

The role of a priest has always been to minister to God on behalf of the people. Their duties under the Law Covenant are detailed in the book of Leviticus, especially from chapter 4:13 onwards and are summarised in Hebrews 5:1: "*For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins*".

However there was another part of the priests' duties that was separate from offering the sacrifices, and that was to teach the people: "*Take heed... that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that **the priests the Levites shall teach you: as I commanded them...***" (Deut. 24:8). The idea of a Christian of today being a priest during the 1000 years kingdom of God on earth and teaching the nations is something of which the natural man has no knowledge. It will be an essential part of the work to be accomplished during "*the times of restitution*" (Acts 3:21) because mankind will have much to learn as they progress up the highway of holiness (Isa. 35:8). The prophet expressed it: "*... when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will **learn righteousness***" (Isa. 26:9). In that day the nations will want to learn of God's ways: "*But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains; and it shall be exalted above the hills, and people shall*

flow unto it. And many nations shall come and say, 'Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob and **he will teach us of his ways** and we will walk in his ways'; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:1-2). The prospect of being a priest to help the nations learn of God's ways is one source of great encouragement to the Christian and is something about which the natural man knows nothing.

Heirship

Another of the "things that God has prepared for them that love Him" is heirship; the promise is they are to be "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17).

Jesus will inherit the world of mankind who are also referred to as "the heathen": "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Psa. 2:8). Those to whom God has given His Holy Spirit and who receive their crown of life are promised a share in this inheritance. The combination of their priestly work and their reign with Christ for a thousand years means that they will be both kings and priests as Revelation 1:6 states: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen".

Again the natural man does not have any idea of such a glorious position and so it is something that is reserved for those to whom it is given to "know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven", to those who are "blessed with eyes that see and ears that hear" (Matt. 13:11, 16).

Things prepared

The final point to consider is that God prepared all these things before He laid the foundations of the world; they are not an after-thought or things that will be created "when the time comes". On the contrary they have been part of God's plan from earliest times as the Apostle Paul explained to the Christians at Ephesus: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him **before the foundation of the world...** Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to

the good pleasure of his will... Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; **Having made known unto us the mystery of his will**, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: **In whom also we have obtained an inheritance**, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:3-11).

The words of 1 Corinthians 2:9 are true—the eyes of the natural man do not see, their ears do not hear, nor has entered into their hearts, any of the things that God has prepared for them that love Him; those to whom He has given the Holy Spirit: "Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. 2:1).

The Light of the World

The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin;

**The light of the world is Jesus;
Like sunshine at noonday, his glory shone in:**

The light of the world is Jesus.

**Come to the Light; 'tis shining for thee;
Sweetly the Light has dawn'd upon me;
Once I was blind, but now I can see:
The Light of the world is Jesus.**

**No darkness have we who in Jesus abide;
The light of the world is Jesus;
We walk in the light when we follow our Guide:**

The light of the world is Jesus.

**For dwellers in darkness with sin-blinded eyes,
The light of the world is Jesus;
They'll wash at his bidding, and light will arise:
The light of the world is Jesus.**

**No need of the sun in the city to come,
The light of the world is Jesus;
All nations shall walk in the light of the Lamb:
The light of the world is Jesus.**

Bible Students Hymnal No. 396

CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIBLE PROPHECY

During 2007-08 there has been much discussion in secular circles about the Earth's climate.

The discussion is not a recent whim; the thirteenth Conference of the Parties ("COP 13") of the Kyoto Protocol was held in Bali, Indonesia, in December 2007. More than 10,000 delegates from approximately 180 countries attended. It is planned to hold COP 14 in Poland in December 2008 and COP 15 in Denmark in 2009. The objective of the meetings is to formulate strategies for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The emission of greenhouse gases is considered to be responsible for 'global warming', which in turn is causing changes in the Earth's climate and the destruction of several of the Earth's eco-systems.

Greenhouse gases are produced by the burning of fossil fuels, principally coal, natural gas and mineral oil products. The fuels are being burnt to produce the energy required by industry, either at the factory or to generate electricity. Transport vehicles are also considered to be producing a significant amount of greenhouse gas.

The most direct way of reducing the amount of greenhouse gas being emitted would be to reduce the amount of fuel being burnt. However a reduction in industrial activity, particularly electricity generation, would have far reaching effects on the standard of living of almost every person living in the industrialised countries. Both employers and employees would be adversely affected because there would be fewer jobs available and lower company profits. Both of those factors would cause a downturn in the nations' economies, restrict transport and travel, and reduce food production (the current level of food production has been achieved by utilising fossil fuels to power agricultural machinery). Another consideration is that a large reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is required to achieve a worthwhile reduction in global warming and so the adverse effects would be severe.

Days of perplexity

Thus the situation is difficult for the politicians to solve: on the one hand there is the need to "preserve the planet" but on the other any action that restricts industry will reduce the standard of

living. From Man's viewpoint there does not seem to be any solution.

In Biblical terms the current climate change might be part of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Luke 21:25-26: "*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; 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*". "Perplexity" means "bewilderment, confusion and uncertainty, a quandary". The Macquarie Dictionary definition of 'quandary' is "a state of embarrassing perplexity or uncertainty, especially as to what to do; a dilemma". Thus, from a human perspective, Luke's prophecy accurately describes the situation that is developing on the Earth. Nevertheless there is no need for alarm because God has the Earth and everything in it firmly under His control.

Changes required

The Biblical prophecies regarding the future of mankind on the Earth declare that changes in the Earth's climate will occur and indeed are required.

Isaiah 35:1-7 is one prophecy that states that climate change will be necessary: "*The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly... in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes*".

The basic change foretold by those verses is an increase in the amount of water on the Earth; the promise of streams in the desert, the parched ground becoming a pool and springs of water in the thirsty land suggests an increase in the amount of water in those areas, all of which might be embraced by the prophesy of Psalm 67:6: "*Then shall the earth yield her increase...*".

One may speculate about the source of the extra water. One possibility is that it will come from

the ice caps of both the Arctic and Antarctic regions which some scientists believe are melting. However whether that will be the case is something about which mankind can only speculate; God has the power to provide (or create) water as He did before the great flood of Noah's day—prior to the flood the Earth was watered by a “mist” (Gen. 2:5-6).

There is no explanation of the origin of the water that brought the flood; the record simply says: “*And it came to pass... that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights*” (Gen. 7:10-12). It is possible that God will again use the waters in “*the great deep*” and the “*windows of heaven*” to water the earth.

While the melting of the ice caps is a plausible source of the extra water required to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, it is not known whether the polar ice caps are the repository of the water that flooded the Earth in Noah's day. The record simply states: “*And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged ... And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen*” (Gen. 8:1-5). Strong's Concordance defines “asswaged” as “(physically) to abate a flood”, and Young's Concordance defines it as “to subside, to sink down”. The outcome is clear, but neither the definition of asswaged nor the other expressions that are used to describe the removal of the water—“*returned from off the earth*” and “*decreased continually*”—give any clue as to where the water went.

Regarding the future, it is noteworthy that God provided water in Elisha's day (after the flood) without rain or mist: “*And he said, 'Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. For*

thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts'... **And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water**” (2 Kings 3:16-20). Truly God's power is unlimited and He is able to create whatever He needs to achieve His purposes. It is as the Psalmist expresses: “*Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures*” (Psa. 135:6-7). Thus God has the power to remove water from the Earth and to send water to the Earth.

The way that seemed right

Returning now to the issue of global warming, Man's desire to utilise fossil fuels as a source of energy is understandable: many of the comforts of modern day life in the developed countries have been made possible only by the utilisation of such energy. The large majority of people who are living in those countries enjoy greater luxury and greater life expectancy than those in the third world. However the concern now is that the current industrial activity is not sustainable.

In some circles industry has been heralded as the means by which the promised blessings will flow to the whole world of mankind. However a contrary view is that God has allowed Man to develop this unsustainable order of things so that he will be brought to realise that while this way seemed to be right to Man, it is indeed as Solomon declared: “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (Prov. 14:12). In other words God has allowed, indeed facilitated, mankind to ‘get into a corner’ from which he cannot devise a way of escape. It will be when Man has not been able to extricate himself from the dilemma that he will be prepared to acknowledge that God's ways are the only way by which mankind can survive on the Earth forever. If that is indeed God's plan, the current change in the Earth's climate may be an indication that the day of redemption is nigh: “*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*” (Luke 21:28).

DISCOURAGEMENT

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he referred to the records that are now commonly referred to as the ‘Old Testament’ as the “*things written aforetime*”. He explains that the purpose of the records is that Christians may learn about those events and so “*might have hope*”.

Patience and comfort

The Apostle told the Christians at Rome that hope is essential for salvation. He wrote: “*For we are saved by hope...*” (Rom. 8:24). In chapter 15 he told them that a knowledge of “*the things written aforetime*” provides the patience and comfort that are necessary for them to “*have hope*”.

There are many “*things*” recorded in the Old Testament that give comfort, for example the promises that a time is coming when the inhabitant will “*not say I am sick*” (Isa. 33:24), and when “*nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*” (Isa. 2:4).

The emotional experiences of others that are recorded in the Old Testament also give patience and comfort because many Christians have similar experiences and they can empathise with them and thus their bond of love with the Lord is strengthened.

Discouragement

There are many instances recorded in the Old Testament when God’s servants experienced discouragement, even to the point of despair.

One example is the nation of Israel during their exodus from Egypt. In spite of their miraculous delivery from the hands of Pharaoh, which included the slaying of the first-born and the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 12:29; 13:18; 15:22), it was less than seven weeks after they left Egypt when they started to complain and blame Moses for their situation (Exodus 16:2-3; 17:1-3). At one point they even wished to return to Egypt because they lacked faith that they would be able to take possession of the promised land (Num. 13:30-14:4).

Moses also became discouraged during the exodus, but for a reason different from that which caused the people to be discouraged: “... *he asked the Lord, ‘How have I disbelieved you that I am burdened with the care of this whole people? Am I their mother? Where am I to find meat for them all? They pester me with their wailing. This whole people is too heavy for me. I cannot bear it alone. If that is thy purpose for me, then kill me outright. But if I have won thy favour, let me suffer this trouble at thy hand no longer’*” (Num. 11:11-15). Moses wilted under the burden of the responsibility that the Lord had given him, so much so that he despaired. Moses’ disposition is particularly notable because of his lack of confidence at the outset, and the ways in which God strengthened him (Exod. 3:10-11; 4:1-17). Likewise Christians today may feel that the ministry that God has given them is too great for them to carry. God might not give them such dramatic evidences of His support as He gave Moses, nevertheless the lesson is the same: the Christian is to go forward, not in their own strength, but in the strength of Him who has sent them. The Christian must not be overcome by the challenges of the way.

Joshua had a similar experience after Israel crossed the Jordan. They had wandered for forty years and had now entered the Promised Land. They thought that they would win their first battle (against Ai) and consequently sent only about 3000 men to fight. However they were defeated and their defeat caused Joshua to despair. He prayed: “*Alas, O Lord God, why did you bring this people across Jordan only to hand us over to the Amorites to be destroyed? What can I say now that Israel has been routed by the enemy?*” (Joshua 7:7). Joshua momentarily lost sight of God’s longer term plan and was temporarily discouraged.

Elijah also had a moment of despondency when he had to flee for his life: “*It is enough, Lord. Take my life*” (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah reached the very bottom of discouragement, to the point that he did not wish to live any longer.

Jeremiah was yet another of God's servants who felt the full onslaught of His testing: "*Alas, my mother, that you ever gave me birth. I am a man doomed to strife, with the whole world against me...*" (Jer.15:10). Jeremiah was so discouraged that he wished he had not been born.

The disciples

Coming now to "New Testament" times, the Lord's disciples also experienced discouragement. One instance was immediately after Jesus' death. They had trusted that it was He who would redeem Israel (Luke 24:21); they had left all to follow Him (Luke 18:28); but now He was dead. When He joined them on the road to Emmaus "... he said unto them, 'What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another as ye walk, and are sad (sullen, gloomy)?'" (Luke 24:17). However their sorrow turned to joy when He revealed Himself to them (Luke 24:52). Their temporary discouragement arose from a lack of understanding of God's plan, even though Jesus had told them beforehand of His death (John 14:29).

At one point even the Apostle Paul experienced discouragement: "*For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life*" (2 Cor. 1:8). Nevertheless Paul's conviction was so strong that he wrote: "*Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased (depressed) and how to abound*" (Phil. 4:11-12).

The church

God gives trials to the Christian today for the same purpose as He gave them to Israel of old, that is: "*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*" (Deut. 8:2). Thus the Apostle Peter wrote: "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you*" (1 Pet. 4:12).

However the situation for the church is different from that which applied in earlier times. In his letter to the church at Philippi the Apostle Paul

wrote: "*Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example*" (Phil. 3:17). The Apostle exhorted them to look at the example of the Apostles and others, and the principle remains to this day: the lesson and challenge for all is that each one must endeavour to exhibit an example that others can "mark" and thus the whole body be edified: "... *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things ... even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love*" (Eph. 4:15-16).

Remedies

Another means of countering any feeling of discouragement is the remembrance that nothing happens to the Lord's people without His knowledge (Matt. 10:29-31). He has provided the members of His church with all the resources they need to enable them to endure their testing and to triumph: "... *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).

There is a relationship between physical and spiritual discouragement. When one is physiologically discouraged, one does not feel like doing anything and that tends to lead to inactivity. In fact one effective antidote is to embark on some physical exercise. Medical science has recently discovered a hormone that the body produces during physical exercise that suppresses discouragement and makes a positive contribution to emotional welfare. It is very similar in the spiritual realm: "spiritual discouragement" can entice one to be spiritually inactive. However one effective remedy is to take some "spiritual exercise"; just as the level of 'physical hormone' is increased by physical exercise, so the level of 'spiritual hormone' is increased by 'spiritual exercise'. However it is spiritual exercise that is required; worldly exercise does not produce any 'spiritual hormone'.

In the words of the Apostle Peter: "*For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Pet. 1:8).

THE BASES OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

One component of the Christian faith is that every person who has ever lived will be judged and that judgment will determine, at least to some extent, the person's eternal destiny.

The doctrine is stated in several verses, one of which is John 5:28: "...an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to a resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment" (RSV). The difference in the conditions to which individuals will be resurrected implies that a judgment will already have been made—some will be deemed worthy of life while others will be resurrected to "judgment" (translated "damnation" in the KJV). Regardless of when the judgment occurred or will occur, all will be judged.

Another verse that states that every person is to be judged is 2 Timothy 4:1: "*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom*". The expression "*the quick and the dead*" occurs only three times in the Bible, the other two instances being Acts 10:42 and 1 Peter 4:5. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the truths that are expounded in those verses, suffice it to say that all three verses include every individual who has ever lived.

Variety of bases

There are different ideas about the basis that God will use to judge each individual. One idea is that God will use different bases or standards for different individuals, the underlying principle of that idea being that the judgment of each individual will take into account the light that was made available to them during their present life; those who have not had an opportunity to know God will not be judged on the same basis as those who have had an opportunity to know Him, and who will be judged to a "higher standard".

Adam

God has exercised judgment since Adam transgressed in the Garden of Eden. Having failed the test to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a verdict of guilty was passed upon him. Adam was not deceived but consciously transgressed God's dictate. **The**

basis of the judgment passed on Adam was disobedience (Gen. 3:6, 12, 17-19).

Lineage

The sentence that was passed upon Adam has had global consequences as the Apostle Paul explains: "... by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned... Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so, by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:12-19). Thus **the basis of the sentence of death passed upon all mankind is that they are descendants of Adam, that is their lineage**, even though they have not personally been judged. (However that does not mean that anyone has been unjustly condemned to death because "*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*"—Rom. 3:23.)

Another example of lineage being the basis for God's judgment is the judgment of Hagar and Ishmael: "*And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac' ... And God said unto Abraham, 'Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed'*" (Gen. 21:9-13). The basis of God's judgment between Isaac and Ishmael was solely lineage: Ishmael was the son of an Egyptian bondwoman whereas Isaac was the son of an Israeli freewoman; nothing that either of the boys had done influenced God's judgment. (Galatians 4:28-31 explains that God had a higher purpose in choosing Isaac, but that purpose is not within the scope of this article.)

Election

God's judgment between Jacob and Esau was on yet another basis. The two boys had the same

father and mother and so that part of their lineage was identical. Nevertheless, as the elder, the birthright belonged to Esau (Gen. 27:36). However in the broadest sense of the word, God made a judgment between them to convey His omnipotence: *“And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, **that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;**) It was said unto her, ‘The elder shall serve the younger’. As it is written, ‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated’. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, **‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion’**”* (Rom. 9:10-15). (God’s judgment also fore-shadowed another part of His plan—that the nation of Israel would lose its birthright to the Gentile nations (Rom. 11:7-11), but that point also is not within the scope of this article.)

The previous examples show that in times past God has used different bases for His judgments, as it is entirely His prerogative to do.

Faith

Another basis that God has used for His judgments is exemplified by Noah: *“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became **heir of the righteousness which is by faith**”* (Heb. 11:7). Noah was not actually perfect because *“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23), but God arbitrarily deemed him to be perfect on the basis of his faith.

Another who was deemed (or judged) to be righteous on the basis of his faith was Abraham: *“For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”* (Rom. 4:3). Abraham’s belief in God was proved by the requirement for him to leave the land of his fathers and go to an unknown land (Gen. 12:1). His faith was further tested when God asked him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering: *“And he said, ‘Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there*

for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of’” (Gen. 22:2). However Abraham believed that God would still honour His promises to him (Heb. 11:19) and God deemed him to be righteous on that basis—**the basis of Abraham’s judgment was faith.**

Judgment of the church

The *“righteousness which is by faith”* is promised to those who believe that Jesus Christ is mankind’s redeemer: *“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested ... Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe ... Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”* (Rom. 3:21-26). The Apostle Paul yearned to be granted the same righteousness: *“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, **the righteousness which is of God by faith**”* (Phil. 3:9). It is the Christian’s hope that they will be deemed righteous because of their faith—*“For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith”* (Gal. 5:5).

Judgment in the kingdom

John 12:47-48 reads: *“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”*. Jesus’ words explain two important aspects of the judgment of those who do not believe in Him in this life: they are not being judged at the present time, but they will be judged *“in the last day”*. **The basis of their judgment will be their adherence to His words, that is, righteousness and truth:** *“Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place”* (Isa. 28:17). *“In those days they shall say no more, ‘The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’. But, every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge”* (Jer. 31:29-30); at that time everyone will be judged on the basis of their own actions.

IT REPENTED THE LORD

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Genesis 6:5-6).

Genesis 6:5-6 are two verses of Scripture that have the potential to be faith shattering.

The thought of repentance conjures up ideas of error or wrong doing; error in the sense that although one acted in what they thought was the correct way it did not bring the desired result, and wrong doing in the sense that one deliberately acted contrary to what they knew was the “right way” and as a result they are now sorry and acknowledge their guilt.

Both of those concepts have the potential to destroy faith in God. In the first instance, it may be contended that although God acted in what He thought was proper in creating man on the earth, the outcome was different from what He intended. Thus one may doubt His **wisdom** and conclude that if His creation of man on the earth was a mistake, He cannot be trusted with the future. Additionally it may be contended that He cannot be regarded as **omnipotent** because the situation that developed was different from what He intended.

When God had finished the creative work He deemed it to be “*very good*” (Gen. 1:31), which means that initially everything “turned out” precisely as He intended. However that idea can be interpreted to mean that the situation developed in a way He had not intended and, at the time to which Genesis 6:6 refers, the world of mankind was beyond His control.

God’s majesty

Such an understanding is untenable to those who believe the Bible to be the word of God because any idea that God is not supreme and all powerful destroys the authority of Scripture. Through the prophet Isaiah He declared: “*Behold, the Lord GOD...Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance... Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath*

taught him?... Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance... All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? ... It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity... he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. ‘To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?’ saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things...” (Isa. 40:10-26).

In those verses God claims to be the Creator not only of mankind but also of the heavens, the seas and the hills. His superiority is such that the nations of the earth are to Him as a drop in a bucket and as grasshoppers are to mankind. He also declares that “*it is He who brings the princes to nothing*”, that He is able to make them wither and to have them carried away in a whirlwind as stubble by simply blowing on them. He claims that there is no one who may be compared to Him, no one who may claim to be His equal.

Thus there is a seeming contradiction between Isaiah 40 and Genesis 6:6—in Isaiah 40 God claims to be supreme but in Genesis He repents that He made man on the earth. Is it possible that mankind developed beyond His control and that God made a mistake when He made man on the earth?

The end from the beginning

The seeming contradiction is strengthened by God’s claim that He knows the end from the beginning: “... *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” (Isa. 46:9-10).

The prophet Isaiah is not alone in making such a statement. In Romans 4:17 the Apostle Paul also states that God knows the end from the beginning: “... *even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were*”. In other words the Apostle is saying that nothing can thwart God’s plans and He is indeed able to “*do all my pleasure*”—that is, there is no doubt at all that God’s plans will eventuate.

So then why did God repent that He made man on the earth?

The flood

It may be contended that the statements in Isaiah 40 and Romans 4 relate to events after the flood whereas God’s repentance recorded in Genesis 6:6 occurred prior to the flood, the difference being that since the flood “*the angels that sinned*” are restrained in “*chains under darkness*” (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

However Revelation 13:8 declares that “... *the Lamb (was) slain from the foundation of the world*”. Three key words in that verse are “from” (apo), “foundation” (katabole) and “world” (kosmos). Space does not allow a detailed examination of those words in this article, suffice it to say that Jesus was “slain” **from the beginning of God’s orderly arrangement; that is, God knew before the time to which Genesis 6:6 refers, that mankind would need to be redeemed.**

Repentance after the flood

Another factor to be considered is that there are instances after the flood when God is said to have repented: Exodus 32:14; Judges 2:18; 1 Samuel 15:35; 2 Samuel 24:16; Psalm 106:45; Jeremiah 18:8, 10; 20:16; 26:19; Amos 7:3, 6; and Jonah 3:10. Those instances nullify the suggestion that the changes that occurred at the time of the flood removed the influences that caused God to repent.

Consequently the seeming contradiction remains—on one hand God is declared to be supreme but on the other He has repented, both before and after the flood, with no explicable reason. The situation may be explained by what is called **anthropopatheia**.

Anthropopatheia

Anthropopatheia is a figure of speech in which characteristics that belong to human beings are attributed to God, the purpose being to enable human beings to better understand God’s realm.

One example is Genesis 19:13: “... *because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD ...*”. God does not have a face in the same sense as mankind has a face—God is a spirit and “*a spirit hath not flesh and bones*” (Luke 24:39). The use of the term “*face*” in Genesis 19 helped the men to realise that God had noticed their cry. Likewise in Genesis 32:24-30, which records Jacob’s wrestle with the angel, he declares that he had “*seen God face to face*”.

Exodus 33:11 is yet another example: “*And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend...*”. The verse cannot be interpreted literally because verse 20 reads: “*And he said, ‘Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live’*”. Verse 11 is a self-explanatory example of anthropopatheia; as the verse says: “*as a man speaketh unto his friend*” (that is, as a man speaks to a man).

Exodus 33:23 reads: “*And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen*”. That verse introduces another example of anthropopatheia—the expression “turning one’s back” is commonly used by mankind to indicate favour or disfavour. It is repeated in Jeremiah 18:17 (“*I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face...*”), and also in Jeremiah 32:33 (“*they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them...*”).

Other examples of anthropopatheia include Enoch “*walking with God*” (Gen. 5:22, 24), God having a strong hand and arm (Psa. 89:13, 136:17, Isa. 40:10, Jer. 21:5, 32:21) and God having a heart (Gen. 6:6, 8:21, 1 Samuel 13:14, 1 Chronicles 17:19, Psalm 33:11, Jeremiah 23:20, 30:24, Ezekiel 28:6).

Thus the words of Genesis 6:6 are an anthropopatheia, using the expressions “*God grieved in His heart*” and “*it repented the Lord*” to convey that the situation was very different from that which God deemed to be “*very good*”.

LOVE SEEKS NOT HER OWN

One characteristic of love that requires continual attention is the denial of self, as the Apostle Paul wrote: “*love seeketh not her own*” (1 Cor. 13:5).

According to Strong’s Concordance, the expression “*seeketh not her own*” refers not only to seeking accumulation of wealth but also to seeking “worship”, that is, seeking recognition and esteem from others. Thus there are at least two aspects of “*seeking not her own*”.

Material wealth

Seeking one’s own material wealth has the potential to deprive others of their entitlements whereas love demands not only a consideration of the needs of others, but also a preparedness to share one’s goods: “*But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth*” (1 John 3:17-18).

The ultimate act of sharing is exemplified by Jesus’ sacrifice: “*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:12-13). There is no greater act of love than to deny oneself the fulfillment of his or her earthly life.

Another aspect of “*not seeking one’s own*” in relation to material wealth is explained by Paul in Romans 13:8: “*Owe no man any thing, but to love one another*”. Paul declares that being a debtor to anyone is directly opposite to loving them. Compliance with this aspect of “*not seeking one’s own*” is difficult to sustain because some may be offended if their offer of assistance is not accepted, and particularly since their offer may be in ways other than financial. Nevertheless, in the context of the social arrangements that prevailed in the first century A.D., the principle of Paul’s admonition is clear and continues to apply; deliberately exploiting credit for the purpose of making selfish gain is contrary to love.

Paul continues in Romans 13 to explain yet another aspect of “*not seeking one’s own*”: “*Thou shalt not covet’... is briefly comprehended*

in this saying, namely ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self’” (Rom. 13:9-10). That statement declares that covetousness is contrary to love because it has the potential to cause one to take advantage of another. Again, to sustain compliance with this standard requires continual diligence.

Admiration and esteem

The second aspect of “*not seeking one’s own*” is the desire for the admiration of, and esteem from, others. Such a desire is contrary to love because it has the potential to denigrate others.

In Jesus’ day some of the chief rulers were unable to divest themselves of the yearning for self-prominence, in spite of the fact that they believed He was the Messiah: “*Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*” (John 12:42-43). The Christian’s attitude should be as Paul wrote to the church at Rome: “*Let love be without dissimulation ... Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honor preferring (deferring to) one another*” (Rom. 12:9-10).

Paul also wrote: “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*” (Phil. 2:3), and to the Galatians he wrote: “*Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another*”. Envy is one of the works of the flesh whereas love is one of the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:19-23).

The principle is simple: “*... O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*” (Micah 6:8).

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