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MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. 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” (Hebrews 2:9-10).

A straight-forward reading of Hebrews 2:9-10 raises at least one question: why would Jesus, who elsewhere is described as “... holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners...” (Heb. 7:26), have to be made perfect through sufferings?

The legitimacy of the question is strengthened by the Revised Version, Revised Standard Version and New International Version all retaining the word “perfect”.

Meaning of the Greek

The answer lies in the meaning of the Greek word from which the English word “perfect” is translated. It is “*teleioo*” which is defined by several translators as “to complete”. Thus the thought behind Hebrews 2:10 is not that Jesus was imperfect and had to be corrected—made perfect—but that His sacrifice would not have been complete without the sufferings He endured.

Looking at it the other way round, Hebrews 4:14-16 explains the reason why His sufferings made Him “complete”: “*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*”. His sacrifice not only redeems mankind from the death sentence inherited from Adam’s transgression in the Garden of Eden but the circumstances of His life on earth and His death provide the Christian with an exhortation to walk in the path God has set out before them, knowing that they are not being asked to endure any greater suffering or temptation than their Captain has already endured and withstood, and in that regard it is profitable to review His sufferings.

The wilderness experience

It is not possible to fully appreciate the temptations Jesus withstood because He is the only One who has come down from heaven. The significance of that aspect is that He was present when God created the heavens and the earth—indeed He was God’s agent through whom God created the universe: “*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). Thus Jesus knew all about the majesty of the heavens and earth and the glory He had when He was with His father before He came to earth, and now He was a human being—a species He had created—and was being subject to temptation by one who was inferior to Himself.

While it is possible to argue His understanding of the order in the universe would have helped Him appreciate the vanity of the worldly treasures with which He was being confronted, and hence to withstand Satan’s temptation, nevertheless He was now in the flesh and experiencing all the forces and desires of the human mind.

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The first point to note to capture the power of the temptations He endured is that He was led into the wilderness. There He was alone and separate from any and all comfort that others could provide. That condition should also be a source of comfort to all Christians wherever they may be, whether they be in the physical proximity of others or whether they be isolated from all human beings. However it is recognized that such a statement is more easily said than done: it is not until one experiences isolation from all sources of human (fleshly) comfort that one can appreciate that the test is for them to stand alone and to deny the temptations of the Devil, regardless of the consequences.

Secondly, Jesus had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Again it is not possible for those who have not experienced severe hunger to fully appreciate how powerful one's desire for material food can be. And that was the first temptation the Devil put before Jesus: *"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (Matt. 4:3-4). The temptation was much greater than what any human being can endure because He had the power to convert the stones into bread. However while the Christian does not have the power Jesus possessed, it is profitable to note that Jesus resisted the temptation by referring to the grand scale of the universe—"Man shall not live by bread alone...". In the short term it was by bread alone that He could have been sustained, but His answer reflects the situation that Man's tenure on the earth is temporary and that His strength came from His vision of eternity. Likewise the Christian may resist many temptations to be filled with temporal pleasure which might satiate the soul in the immediate future, but it is to the eternal that the Christian must look to substantiate their faith.

Next the Devil tempted Jesus in a demeaning way: *"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone"* (Matt. 4:5-6). The Devil challenged Jesus' faith that He was indeed the Son of God. And just as Jesus was tempted with such a contemptuous test so also are His followers. Such ridicule is often levelled at the Christian when they suffer some misfortune or are disadvantaged: the scorn might be framed in the form of a cynical statement such as "God should not—indeed would not—let it happen to

you if you were what you claim to be". Consequently it is manifest that the Christian needs the full armour of God and that includes realizing that they are not promised a pathway lined with roses but indeed are to experience the hardships and heartbreaks experienced by mankind in general: *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matt. 26:41).

Finally the Devil tempted Jesus with the lure of temporal power: *"Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve"* (Matt. 4:8-10). There were two aspects to Satan's temptation: firstly that, as the ruler of the world, Jesus would be worshipped by the world, and secondly, the lure that Satan had the power to make Jesus the ruler of the world. Both temptations afflict the Christian.

One temptation is that of being worshipped, or "highly respected", by one's peers. The temptation is powerful and overtook some in Jesus' day: *"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."* (Matt. 6:5). Such a spirit is not necessarily always so evident but may also take the form of domination amongst the Lord's people, as it did amongst Jesus' disciples: *"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve"* (Luke 22:24-26).

Summary

In summary, the Christian does not have to contend with any temptation the likes of which Jesus did not contend—maybe the circumstances will be different but the underlying challenge is the same. Thus it is profitable to remember the words of Paul: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (1 Cor. 10:13), *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen"* because they are eternal.■

SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect” (Hebrews 10:1)

Shadows are produced when an opaque object shields light, an opaque object being one that prevents light passing through it.

The concept of a shadow is also used in a symbolic sense, for example, when a child closely follows his father—“takes after his father”—it may be said that he is “walking in his father’s shadow”.

The phenomenon of a shadow is used in a symbolic sense in the Scriptures : “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*” (Psa. 23:4). Death does not physically shield light, however symbolically it dims the light of life and hence the Psalmist refers to it as a “shadow”.

Zacharias also referred to death as a shadow: “*To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death...*” (Luke 1:79).

Not the very image

Only some of the characteristics of an object can be derived from its shadow. For example, the shape of an object may be largely derived from its shadow, however the size of the object cannot be assuredly derived from its shadow because the size of the shadow varies with the direction from which the light is coming; the size of a person’s shadow near sunset is much larger than their shadow at noon when the sun is overhead. As Hebrews 10:1 declares, a shadow is “*not the very image*” of the object and hence it must not be assumed the shadow accurately portrays every characteristic of the object.

Thus the only way one can be assured of the meaning of a shadow given in the Old Testament is when it is explained in the New Testament by one of God’s inspired apostles. Further, the lesson to be learnt from any shadow is limited to the meaning explained by the apostles—any extension is speculation.

Some shadows in the Scriptures that God has used to reveal His plans and purposes for mankind are:

- Isaac’s life;
- The Passover;
- The Law Covenant;
- The tabernacle.

The birth of Isaac

The birth of Isaac foreshadowed some aspects of Jesus’ birth: “*Sarai, Abram’s wife, bare him no children*” (Gen. 18:1). However God promised

Abram that Sarai would bare him a son: “*But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year*” (Gen. 17:21). God kept His promise: “*And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac*” (Gen. 21:1-3).

The Apostle Paul explains there were two features of Isaac’s birth that were a shadow of Jesus’ birth.

The first is that only one son was promised: “*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ*” (Gal. 3:16). The promise to Abraham referred to only one son, and that aspect was a shadow of Jesus’ coming to earth—Jesus was God’s **only** Son: “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...*” (John 3:16).

The second aspect of Isaac’s birth that foreshadowed Jesus’ birth is the timing of his birth—both were born at precisely the time God had planned. Regarding Jesus’ birth Paul wrote: “*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son...*” (Gal. 4:4).

The Church

The Apostle Paul explains there is a third concept that may be inferred from Isaac’s life—not from his birth but from his ancestry: “*For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us... Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise*” (Gal. 4:22-28). Paul explains that Hagar was a shadow of the Law Covenant that God gave to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, and that Sarah was a shadow of another Covenant—“*Jerusalem which is above*”.

Since Isaac’s mother was Sarah, Isaac was not “*of Agar*”—not under the Law Covenant—and so Paul explains that the church is not under the Law Covenant either, because the church is not “*after the*

flesh" but by promise. It was difficult for some early Christians to accept that they were not under the Law Covenant: "*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth... Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*" (Gal. 3:1-2). Likewise, even in 2015, there are some Christian groups who believe they must obey the Law, particularly observe the Sabbath day.

The Passover

The Israelites' deliverance from Egypt was an amazing event, but its significance is more amazing when it is realized it was a shadow of things to come.

The critical component of the Passover was the lamb—its blood on the door-posts and lintels saved the first-born who lived in that house from being slain by the angel of death. The Passover lamb shadowed—foreshadowed—the true Passover lamb whom Paul explains is Christ: "*Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Another aspect of the Passover being a shadow is that it was only the firstborn who were under threat of death, and that shadowed how, first of all, the blood of the true Passover lamb protects the firstborn of the world of mankind: "*To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven...*" (Heb. 12:23).

The concept of the church being the firstborn is consistent with the fact that, in the first instance, the Passover applied only to the firstborn of the Israelites, however the final result of the angel passing over the houses where the blood was sprinkled led to the release of the whole nation of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Likewise the full benefit of Jesus' sacrifice as the Passover lamb will eventually result in all mankind being freed from the prison house of death.

Leaven

Another feature of the Passover was that the lamb had to be eaten with unleavened bread: "*And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it*" (Exodus 12:8). Jesus explained that leaven was a shadow of impurity: "... *he began to say unto his disciples... Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy*" (Luke 12:1). Hence the absence of leaven was a shadow that the firstborn of the church would need to purge out the leaven of wickedness from their character: "*Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let*

us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8).

The Law Covenant

The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt was followed by the giving of the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai: "*And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them*" (Exodus 24:12).

The Law was a shadow (Heb. 10:1), and is referred to by Paul as a schoolmaster to point the Israelites to Christ: "*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*" (Gal 3:24). There are many aspects of the Law Covenant that foreshadowed God's dealings with His church, but only the tabernacle will be discussed here.

The tabernacle

God instructed Moses to construct "*a sanctuary*": "*And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it*" (Exodus 25:8-9). Thus one of the purposes of the tabernacle was to be the place where God would meet with the Israelites—to "*dwell among them*".

The tabernacle was made of relatively light material that enabled the Israelites to take it with them as they sojourned. However as time passed God required the Israelites to build Him a more permanent structure: "*And it came to pass... That the king (David) said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains... And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.*" (2 Sam. 7:1-6). So David began to build the temple.

However it was not given to David but for his son Solomon to finish the temple: "*And the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying, Concerning this house which thou art in building... I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel. So Solomon built the house, and finished it*" (1 Kings 6:11-14); the temple superseded the tabernacle.

The temple was a shadow of the church, which in later times is where God dwells with His people: "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*" (1 Cor. 3:16).

The High Priest

The principal official in the earthly tabernacle (temple) was the high priest because he was the one who offered the Israelites' sacrifices to God: "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" (Heb. 5:1). However he was able to offer only animal sacrifices and was thus only a shadow of Jesus: "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (Heb. 8:1-2). The High Priests of the tabernacle (and later the temple) were shadows—foreshadows—of Jesus' offering of His sacrifice.

It must be noted that here is one example of the shadow not being "*the very image*". The High Priest in the tabernacle offered sacrifices of animals, but Jesus sacrificed Himself: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit **offered himself** without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:13-14).

Another difference between the efficacy of the tabernacle arrangement the Israelites built and the true tabernacle that God is building is that the sacrifices in the original tabernacle had to be repeated each year, whereas Jesus' sacrifice has been offered only once, and is effective for ever: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this

man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:10-12). Hence it is recorded: "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death... For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who **needeth not daily**, as those high priests, **to offer up sacrifice**, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for **this he did once**, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore" (Heb. 7:22-28).

Summary

In spite of the great care and attention to detail required of the Israelites in building the tabernacle during their exodus from Egypt (Exodus chapters 26 to 28), the High Priest offering sacrifices in the original tabernacle was merely a shadow of, and inferior to, the real High Priest offering His sacrifice in the true tabernacle: "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building" (Heb. 9:11).

There are many events recorded in the Old Testament that foreshadow later events in God's plan—they are some of "*the deep things of God*" (1 Cor. 2:10), and comprise some of "*the things written aforetime that were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*" (Rom. 15:4). An understanding of how God has interwoven such details into His plan should strengthen the Christian's faith that the Scriptures are the word of God and contain the words of life. Indeed who has been the Lord's counsellor?■

GOD WHO AT SUNDY TIMES AND IN DIVERS MANNERS SPAKE (Hebrews 1:1)

God has used a variety of methods and manners—at different times and in some cases at the same time—to reveal the Christian message.

The Old Testament corresponds closely to what would normally be expected in a sacred volume: there are legislative works (such as those of Moses), songs expressive of religious feelings (such as the Psalms), impassioned addresses (like those of the prophets), and histories (in a continuous series) that trace the fortunes of the chosen people. Overall this collection comprises what could be expected of the foundation vehicle of a religion.

By contrast the New Testament, which may be regarded as the foundation document of the Christian religion, is laid in a narrative. The first and greatest development of Christian theology is not in any formal treatise; not in liturgies and canon; not in works of devotion, but in a collection of letters.

The cause of this unique style of proclaiming the message of salvation is not difficult to understand. Christianity was the first great missionary religion to break the bonds of race and be extended to all races and cultures. This necessarily involved a change of mode in which it was presented. The prophet of the

Old Testament, if he had anything to communicate, appeared either in person or sent messengers to speak for him by word of mouth. One exception is the letter of Elijah to Jehoram: *“And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day”* (2 Chron. 21:12-15). This “writing” was a long letter and was a communication in a new form.

The narrow limits of the land of Palestine made direct personal communication feasible, although as an exception Jonah had to travel some distance to go to Nineveh: *“So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey”* (Jonah 3:3). Jonah travelling for three days did not mean he was the first to travel such distances: it took Laban seven days to overtake Jacob (Gen. 31:23), but his travel reflected the situation at that time and was a contrast to Elijah who wrote a letter.

The New Testament scene

However when the Christian Church started to develop it soon consisted of a number of scattered posts stretching from Mesopotamia in the East to Rome or even Spain in the far West. It was only natural that the Apostle, by whom the greater number of these communities had been founded, should seek to communicate with them by letter. He was enabled to do this by two factors: first the general diffusion of the Greek language, and secondly by the remarkable facilities of travel available at that time. The whole world was at peace, held together by the organised rule of Imperial Rome. Piracy had been put down and commerce flourished to an extraordinary degree. The inland districts were intersected by a series of military roads. The Mediterranean Sea provided a slow but reliable method of travel by ship. Some of the ships were of a considerable size, for example the ship that carried Paul from Myra to Malta carried 276 passengers plus some cargo (Acts 27: 18, 37).

It is also necessary to consider the manner in which the church was established and organised by Paul. In his missionary work he travelled with a small band of co-workers who, as the occasion arose, he despatched as delegates to the several churches he had founded.

Sometimes they were tasked with establishing procedures and protocols to bring order to a church, such as that entrusted to Timothy and Titus: *“To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee”* (Titus 1:4-5).

In these churches it is also likely that Paul adopted the organisation of the Jewish synagogue, for when Paul entered a city he first of all sought out a local Jewish assembly and used the opportunity it afforded to preach the word: *“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures”* (Acts 17:1-2). Only when his ministry was rejected, as happened at Corinth, did he remove himself and with those who had accepted his message and set up a separate church.

Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus to appoint elders is in line with the practice in the synagogue. The appointment of a bishop to be in charge of a city or a region was a later development when a central figure was required to represent them.

Travelling ministers

However there is evidence there were other touring teachers who were preaching another doctrine, as recorded in the letters of John: *“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house...”* (2 John 10); *“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth. I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not”* (3 John 5-9).

Paul also mentioned in Galatians 2:12 that certain men had arrived at Antioch with the supposed authority of James to teach and spread the Word. There is reference in one of the earliest Christian writings that such teachers should limit the length of their stay at any one centre to two or three days. As visitors to Christian centres relied on the hospitality of local congregations and it was important that they not overstay their welcome. So there were a number of different workers employed to build up the spiritual life of the church. In Ephesian 4:13 the list

of workers is given as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Each of these workers had a different function but there was unity of purpose.

Unity and Diversity

Even with the same purpose of preaching the word of God their individuality was not suppressed. The New Testament writings were written by eight or nine different writers but they all proclaim the same message. Even when Paul is writing for different purposes such as personal letters, letters of thanks, letters in deep distress at failures in the church and formal statements of doctrine, there are no words that contradict the central theme of salvation.

As with the Old Testament, the books in the New Testament may be categorised:

- Synoptic gospels (a summary account), three of which list similar events;
- Narrative account (Act of Apostles), restrictive in its record of events;
- Letters, written primarily to give instruction or to correct unacceptable conduct;
- Letters of exhortation or encouragement which may have been designed to be circulated through the various churches;
- Writings of a formal nature or treatise setting out in a logical order an explanation or statement of what God has done or is doing for mankind and the response that is expected;
- Letters of a personal nature, written to friends;
- Letters written to instruct the apostolic delegates;
- Apocalyptic writing (Revelation) with images of vivid symbolism.

In all these categories there is a common purpose and there is harmony. If there are statements in the account of events that are difficult to reconcile, they are not such as would destroy the central message, which is in harmony with the statement about Old Testament writings—that “*Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the spirit of God*” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Characteristics of the writers

The harmony (consistency) of the message in the New Testament is made more remarkable by the differences in the language the writers used.

For example, the phrase “the Kingdom of God” is found in all four gospels but is more common in Mark (15 times) and Luke (32 times). The Apostle Paul used the phrase only five times: Romans once, 1 Corinthians four times, Galatians once, Colossians once and 2 Thessalonians once. However the phrase “kingdom of heaven” occurs only in Matthew’s gospel (31 times plus once where it has been supplied by the translators of the King James Version). English readers interpret the terms as being

synonymous, but maybe the meanings of the phrases are significant in that Matthew was writing for Jewish readers and so uses terms about events suitable for that audience, whereas Luke was writing for readers with a background in Greek (Gentiles).

John used the term “Eternal Life” a total of 12 times with a scattering amongst the other writers.

Message details

The individuality of the writer is also reflected in the details of the events they recorded. For example, the records of the incident when a woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment vary: Matthew does not record that the woman had spent all she had before she came to Jesus, whereas both Luke and Mark mention it specifically. Maybe Matthew’s dealings as a tax collector had hardened his attitude towards people’s financial status (?).

Luke, a medical physician, is the only one of the gospel writers who records the healing of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2).

Diversity in the body

Since the Christian message was given in such a diverse set of writings by people with different backgrounds and interests, the question may be asked how should that realisation affect the Christian’s attitude in 2015?

One may answer that God has provided every individual with what they required to fulfil their role in the body: “*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*

” (Eph. 4:11-13). And so Paul wrote: “*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith*” (Rom. 12:3). The church is “*God’s building*” (1 Cor. 3:9); He has placed the members in the body and He gives the increase as He deems necessary to finish His work. Thus it was appropriate for the Apostle Paul to write “*who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*” (1 Cor. 3:5-7). The harmony of the Word testifies that “*God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him*” (1 Cor. 12:18)?■

DIVERSITY—UNITY—PURITY

Some of the changes in public attitudes that may be regarded as characteristic of the Western World in the present era, are the recognition of diversity, attempts to preserve unity, and the efforts purportedly made to acquire purity.

Diversity

Recognition of the **diversity** that exists amongst the nations of the world is becoming more widespread, with increased tolerance being exercised towards some differences. However tolerance is not universal and there are some so-called extremist groups that insist on exercising totalitarian power. Nevertheless overall, compared to the general attitudes which prevailed a hundred or more years ago, today there is greater acknowledgement of differences. One example of the increased recognition of diversity is the changed attitudes towards the colour of one's skin—there is greater acknowledgement of different skin colours today and less animosity stems from it than in earlier times.

Along with the colour of a person's skin, allowance is now being made for differences in culture as well as differences in language, gender, and religion. Regarding gender, the converse is almost true: one common attitude is that there is no difference between the roles of men and women in society, the only continuing distinction being the undeniable differences in their anatomy, and in some Christian circles Galatians 3:28 is quoted to justify that attitude: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*".

On the religious front, many compromises are being made to accommodate other faiths in order to preserve the "brotherhood of man". As the number of adherents continues to fall, the additional financial viability provided by uniting with other groups might be a factor enhancing tolerance of different faiths. One example occurred several years ago when an Anglican Archbishop invited a Moslem cleric to speak at the Anglican Cathedral in Perth, Australia. The event was cited and rationalised as an example of "increased breadth of understanding of God's creation of Man".

While these initiatives might have some appeal at a secular level, it is suggested it is possible insufficient weight is being ascribed to the differences in religious objectives. The proclaimed objective of the Islamic faith is to convert the world and govern it under Islamic rule. Such an objective denies the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which is the fundamental doctrine of Christianity.

Unity

In the most part, the underlying objective of accommodating diversity and striving for unity is to promote peace and prosperity. Such efforts are epitomised in the body now known as the United Nations—an organisation comprising more than 190 nations with arms to promote peace, women's rights, health, education and disarmament. However in spite of a complex array of committees and hierarchies, the United Nations has failed to achieve its primary objective of peace for all, and also its secondary objective of abolishing poverty.

Likewise the European Union is a group of nations the prime purpose of which is "the promotion of peace and the well-being of the Union's citizens" (see: <http://en.euabc.com/>). The promotion of peace, one of the principal objectives of the EU, is in stark contrast to the events of 1939-40 when Germany plundered the countries of Europe.

Purity

The endeavours of the nations of the world to accommodate the wide diversity that exists amongst the nations and maintain peace have failed because, *inter alia*, of a lack of pure and honest intention by all nations. Many endeavours have been under-mined by deceitful practices, one recent example being "illegal" arms dealings—who knows who is selling what to whom? Until the nations deal honestly with each other there is no hope of achieving a unilateral and lasting peace.

Such a lack of honesty—purity of heart—is not unique to the present time. The prophet Jeremiah records the deceitful practices of the nation of Israel: "*Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited... For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace*" (Jer. 6:8-14). Israel did not have a "clean heart" and consequently they dealt deceptively with others, including their own kindred.

The Spiritual Realm

The highest realm in the spiritual world is the divine plane, on which Jesus (as the Logos) and God (or Jehovah, His father) dwell. God and Jesus are different spirit beings and Jesus openly acknowledged that His father was superior to Him: "*Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my*

Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Additionally, Jesus ascribed all the credit for His work to His father: "*Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? 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).

The unity that existed, and continues to exist, between God and the Logos was perfect to the extent that Jesus left His heavenly realm and came to earth to do His father's will: "*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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*" (John 3:16-17). Jesus fulfilled God's purpose perfectly and the unity of purpose that characterised their relationship is exemplified in Jesus' declaration when He was on the cross at Calvary: "*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*" (John 17:4).

Such unity between the two great powers was possible because they were pure—there was no hint of any misinformation or deceit with them. Of Jesus it is written that He was "*holy, harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners*" (Heb. 7:26), and He "*did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth... but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*" (1 Pet. 2:22-23).

The church

The same three principles apply to the church on earth at the present time. There is great diversity in its membership, yet all members must understand and strive for unity, and in order to accomplish unity there must be purity (that is, no guile).

The diversity of the members of the church is one of the first characteristics the members must acknowledge and accommodate. To illustrate the point the Apostle Paul compared the diversity of the members of the church with the members of the human body: "*For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free... for the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him... the eye cannot say*

unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.... God hath tempered the body together... that there should be no schism in the body... now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" (1 Cor. 12:12-30).

In those verses the Apostle addresses almost every form of diversity of human kind: heritage (Jew or Gentile); status (free man or slave); attributes (hands, ears); ability (seeing, hearing); and function (apostles, prophets, teachers). The acknowledgement of the diversity amongst the members of the body is so important that he also included it in his letters to the Romans and the Ephesians: "*For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another*" (Rom. 12:4-5); "*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ... 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. 4:11-16). Nevertheless, in spite of the diversity of the members, they must all strive for "*the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God*", that there be "*no schism in the body*".

Doctrine

Experience indicates that the differences in personal characteristics are relatively easy to tolerate—it is tolerating differences in understanding the Scriptures that church members find more challenging. However differences in understanding must be accommodated. They are more difficult to accommodate because, if one is true to one's heartfelt convictions, one's understandings (beliefs) are the result of concerted study, and it is difficult to acknowledge that other diligent students might come to a different conclusion.

An additional factor is that one's convictions might cause differences in conduct. As Paul instructed the Romans: "*For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not*

him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth... One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks... Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way... Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:2-19). The Apostle specifically mentions two aspects of living that members might find difficult to accommodate: dietary practices and the days of the week when members should worship. In both cases the over-riding principle for each one to observe is that they must not allow the differences to hinder the spiritual growth of the other—to not let the differences be a stumbling block. The challenge for each member is to realise that the members of the body of Christ have different talents and abilities, just as the members in the physical human body differ, with each one being perfectly fitted for the function they are to perform. The challenge is to acknowledge that differences do not constitute grounds to consider another to not be of the body (the church).

Regarding the day of the week on which one believes they must worship, adherence to one's conviction might mean they cannot meet with other members of the body because they meet on a different day of the week. Indeed it might be difficult to accept that one who adheres rigidly to a particular day of the week might also be of the body. In such cases the proper course of action is to seek guidance by prayer.

Conduct

There are other differences in understanding which might prevent members from meeting together. One issue might be dress standards, one element of which might be whether sisters should wear a head covering in the meetings. Some believe they must be covered while others do not believe a covering is necessary.

In such cases, as the Apostle Paul declared, two principles apply: everyone must be fully persuaded in their own mind (Rom. 14:5), and one must not put a stumbling block in another's way (Rom. 14:13). Consequently the over-riding principle should be that if a certain action is not contrary to one's conscience they should comply with the wishes of the other. In the matter of head covering, if wearing a head covering is not contrary to one member's understanding but it is deemed necessary by another, the one who considers it not necessary should wear

one so that they do not put a stumbling block in the other's way. Such a position is consistent with the principles Paul articulated and which the brethren should observe.

However regarding head coverings, the Apostle Paul gave specific instruction to the church at Corinth. He wrote: "*For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered*" (1 Cor. 11:6). The options are clear: either the woman covers her head or she is shorn. However it was a shame for a woman to be shorn because that would indicate she was a prostitute. That argument might be considered to be weakened by the Apostle's later statement: "*But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God*" (1 Cor. 11:16 KJV). However before concluding that the Apostle's latest statement means a head covering is optional, two further points must be considered: the significance of "contention" and the authority of the Apostle Paul.

Regarding his authority, the Apostle wrote: "*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you*" (1 Cor. 11:1-2). Paul declared he was a follower of Christ, and consequently to differ with him implies he was astray in his understanding of the principles that pertained to his apostleship. Such an assertion is bold because Paul was given the spirit directly, without any intrusion by another human being (Gal. 1:15-17). He was also given an exclusive vision of the third heaven, a vision that was not given to anyone else (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Consequently, to deem him to be in error on the matter of women's head covering is bold indeed.

The second point to consider is that Paul gave the church "ordinances" (Greek: *paradoses*; Strong's #3862;... specifically the Jewish *traditional law*). He also wrote that "*if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom*". The contention may therefore be raised that there was no such tradition amongst the Jews. Maybe not, but the point is that the practice was to be observed in spite of the fact that it might not have any historical precedent. (The New International Version translation of 1 Corinthians 11:16 reads: "*If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God*".)

To those considerations may be added the Apostle's exhortation regarding the ordinances: "*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions (ordinances—Greek: *paradoses*) which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle*" (2 Thess. 2:15). Indeed the Apostle is even more forthright: "*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our*

*Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition (ordinances—Greek: *paradoses*) which he received of us” (2 Thess. 3:6).*

Summary

In summary, the Apostle Paul, a follower of Christ, who received God’s grace in unique circumstances, and upon whom was laid “*the care of all the*

churches” (2 Cor. 11:28), gave ordinances with which the brethren were to comply, one of which was that the women were not to pray or prophesy unless their head was covered. The obligation to not place a stumbling block in another’s way means that, if another in the ecclesia believes the women should wear a head covering, all women should wear a covering due to their love for the Lord and their “*fellowcitizens of the household of God*” (Eph. 2:19.■

ISRAEL ALONE ... WITH GOD

This article is reproduced from Arutz-Sheva, an outlet of www.israelnationalnews.com. It was released on Elul 29, 5771, which, translated into the Gregorian Calendar, is 28 September 2011. It is reprinted here because it seems to be an accurate reflection of the Israeli psyche, at least at that time, and also because it reflects the possible fulfilment, at least in part, of Jeremiah 30:14: “*All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased*”.

* * * *

“*The Jews have been counting time for nearly 6,000 years. I believe that we shall continue to do so*”.

Prof. Phyllis Chesler

And now it seems as if I am standing still while the years quickly swirl round me like autumn leaves, like diamond snowflakes. As one ages, time seems to gather speed.

Paradoxically, this particular moment in history seems to be taking place in slow motion. It seems we have been here before—but really, it is always new, always happening as if for the first time.

There is every reason to be pessimistic. Truth has been banished from the historical stage, jihad is fully underway, the Four Horsemen ride again, the poisoned words, like poison darts, have already struck their mark, the rockets have been raining down on Israel, many more, based in Iran, are almost poised to strike the Middle East, Europe, and America. The Ottoman Empire is back, demanding tribute; it competes with Iran for the Caliphate.

The United Nations crowd has just roared its approval for the destruction of Israel. They were joined by Islamists everywhere and cheered on by educated Westerners, including Jews.

Those who view themselves as the best among us are hopeless dreamers, stuck in amber, stuck in time, they are idealists who are more committed to fighting for

the rights of fundamentalists than they are committed to fighting for the survival of the West and its values.

Nevertheless, it is also the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. We are ushering in the year 5,772. The Jews have been counting time for nearly 6,000 years. I believe that we shall continue to do so.

I believe that Israel and the democracies will, once again, at great cost—always at cost--win against the forces of barbarism and evil that are seeking to wipe us out, to render the entire Muslim world “judenrein.” And also free of Christians, Hindus, Bah’ai, Buddhists, Zoroastrians—all the infidels whom are despised and endangered in Muslim lands.

As Jews and as Israelis, we must set the standard for taking the offense. Israel knows more about terrorism, more about the difficulties of asymmetrical and urban warfare, more about diabolical “Big Lie” propaganda than any other country on earth.

Israel can no longer afford to remain on defense. Now is the time for truly bold acts of sanity and truth-telling.

Israel is surrounded and Israel is alone. Therefore, appeasement is no longer an option. Illusions are far too dangerous to hold. We must, yet again, become heroes.

It only seems that Israel is alone. Yes, we are alone—but G-d is with us. We must act, we must do all that we can in order that G-d may join us.

Let us praise all our heroes who have been fighting for Israel’s survival and good name especially for the last eleven years. May this new year bless us with the return of both Gilad Shalit and Jonathan Pollard. May our wounded soldiers and civilians be healed, may the families of those who have fallen in battle be consoled, may all our agunot (chained wives) be freed, may our allies continue to grow.

u’metukah (a happy, and sweet New Year to you).
Arutz Sheva 28/9/2011■

UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Isaiah 9:6 contains a promise of a baby who would become leader of a government and who would be called, amongst other titles, the “Prince of Peace”. In view of the conflicts that plague the world as it enters the year known as 2015, the prospect of a government led by such a meritorious ruler provides great comfort to all who believe the promises contained in the Bible.

Neither the identity of the baby nor to whom He is given is mentioned; the text simply says “unto us”. Consequently it is significant that the promise is in the book of Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah

Isaiah 1:1 reads: “*The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah*”. Thus the book primarily relates to Judah and Jerusalem, that is, the whole 12 tribes of Israel.

Subsequent verses in chapter 1 confirm that Israel is the main focus of the book: “*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward*” (Isa. 1:2-4). History testifies to the truth of Isaiah’s statement.

Throughout the book there are several other references that confirm that Israel is the principal focus in Isaiah’s message: “*The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 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*” (Isa. 2:1-3). These verses repeat the statement in chapter 1 that the message directly concerns Judah and Jerusalem, and that it relates to a future time—“*the last days*”—which emphasizes its importance.

Israel’s pride of place

Thus it is revealed that Israel has a prominent place in God’s plan for mankind, culminating in **all nations** going to Judah and Jerusalem to be taught God’s ways after which they will walk in His paths, and in that context it should not be surprising that it is to Israel that Isaiah prophesied God would give the baby who will lead a government of such equity.

Jesus Christ, the promised child

The next point to establish in order to understand God’s plan is that the baby was Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew records Jesus’ lineage from Abraham: “*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren... And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations*” (Matt. 1:1-2; 16-17).

Nevertheless some wondered whether John the Baptist might be the promised child: “*And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not*”, to which John gave an emphatic reply: “*One mightier than I cometh, whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose...*” (Luke 3:15-17). However, initially, John himself was uncertain whether Jesus was the promised child: “*And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?*”, to which Jesus replied: “*... tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached*” (Luke 7:19, 22). Indeed, Jesus was the promised child!■

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