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## FORSAKE NOT ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

*“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

The exhortation quoted above is one which the Christian does well to observe, especially if they are living in one of the hectic societies which characterize many Western societies.

The exhortation is also included in Paul’s letters to the churches, although not so directly: *“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; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...”* (Eph. 4:1-4). The need to *“forbear one another”* implies association, either by assembling together physically or, if separated by distance, by some form of communication. In either case there is to be fellowship: the overall sentiment of the verses is mutual support stemming from fellowship.

Paul used similar language in his letter to the Philippians: *“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”* (Phil. 1:27). Again the thrust of Paul’s exhortation is that they would fellowship together and mutually support each other—*“striving together”*.

Paul’s fervency for the brethren to be united is further exemplified by his exhortation in the closing verses of his letters to the Corinthians: *“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you”* (2 Cor. 13:11). The fact that Paul’s **final exhortation** to them was for them to be of one mind and to live in peace stresses the importance of them so doing.

Likewise the Apostle Peter exhorted his readers to strive for harmony: *“Finally, be ye all of one mind,*

*having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous”* (1 Pet. 3:8)—one definition of courteous is “to be of friendly mind”.

Thus the exhortations to the churches reflects Psalm 133:1 *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”*

### Unity of the spirit

In all of the exhortations quoted above it is the unity of the spirit that is emphasised, not unity of doctrine or understanding, nor unity of procedure (for example, how meetings were to be conducted)—the unity was to come from “within” and not be imposed by some “external” dictate.

It was important that objective be kept clearly in mind because others wished to **impose** unity: *“... The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them... 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: 25 and 26). The spirit of domination is incompatible with the spirit of unity that is to be developed by the Lord’s people. One

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example of the effect of domination is recorded in 3 John: “*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church*” (3 John 9-10). There is no place for one to crave prominence amongst the Lord’s people.

On the contrary, the spirit is to be one that esteems others: “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*” (Phil. 2:3). The objective must always be the edification of each other: “*Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another*” (Rom. 14:19).

### Liberty

However the absence of domination necessitates liberty be extended to each other. One example of the extent to which brethren must exercise liberty in order to preserve the unity of the spirit is explained by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans: “*Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. 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: for God hath received him*” (Rom. 14:1-3). At least two implications arise from those verses: the need for discretion regarding the subject matter to be addressed in any conversation, and the realization that some matters are not crucial.

The first matter—exercising discretion regarding the matters to be discussed—is difficult to practise, especially amongst Bible students who are desirous of establishing the truth in minute detail. Paul’s direction is that brethren who are more learned in the truths of the Scriptures must be aware of the temptation to “air their knowledge” and to realise discussion of some matters might not be to the benefit of others present. However, on the other hand, one is exhorted to share the light they enjoy: “*No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light*” (Luke 11:33). The parable implies people must learn which means they must be exposed to (confronted with) concepts which are new to them. Thus discretion is required, as prompted by the Holy Spirit, in discussion with others.

The second matter to be considered is which things are essential and which are not. The Apostle

continues: “*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Spirit)*” (Rom. 14:17). Paul states it is not necessary for everyone to understand every aspect of Christian living, even to the point of diet—diet was significant in Old Testament times (Lev. 11:1-12) and some might not have cast off the restrictions that applied under the Law Covenant. The objective must always be that “*no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in another’s way*” (Rom. 14:13) but to develop a spirit which edifies the other.

The matter of diet might not be an issue amongst brethren who are raised in the same cultural environment. However the challenge extends beyond diet: “*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...*” (Rom 14:5-6). Therein lies a challenge!—is one able to accommodate the conviction of another that Christians must worship the Lord on a specific day of the week?—Paul’s instruction is to do so!

In order for the Christian to be aware of and comply with these exhortations it is necessary to keep in mind that it is God who has called and received each one, and therefore the Christian must be careful to “*destroy not the work of God...*” (Rom. 14:18-20). The Apostle Paul always had the welfare of others at heart: “*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not*” (1 Cor. 10:23).

It is a sobering thought that one must not destroy the work of God—indeed it is God and God alone who gives to everyone what they possess, and it is God alone who gives any increase in spiritual understanding, so that if one feels they have greater knowledge than another, it is by God’s grace and not by their own works: “*... as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit... for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 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... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Cor. 2:9-14).

Indeed it is as the Apostle also wrote: “*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). One does well to remember these words.

### Limits

The foregoing might be interpreted to mean the Christian should seek to live peaceably at any price, as Romans 12:18 exhorts: “*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*”. However the exhortation is not peace at any price, but “*as much as lieth in you*”, which implies there are limits to which the Christian may extend liberty in order to maintain fellowship.

In his letter to the Corinthians the Apostle was forthright: “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*

” (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

The above instruction may be applied to secular matters, but the principle extends to spiritual fellowship: “*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 which he received of us*

” (2 Thess. 3:6). The strength of the word “command” should be recognised—it is not an exaggeration—and hence the commandment relates to those who profess to be a brother—a fellow-servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this context that greatest wisdom and discretion is required—one must ask themselves the question “from whom do I withdraw amongst those professing to be followers of my Master?” Yes, indeed, the question must always be “is the meeting together edifying, both to those who present and those who receive?”

### As a canker

The dangers of associating with others who do not embrace the truths as they should is explained by Paul in his advice to Timothy: “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;*

*Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some*” (2 Tim. 2:15-18).

Continuing association with those who engage in worthless babblings is destructive, **to the extent of overthrowing one’s faith in the resurrection**, which is the fundamental basis of the gospel: “*And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, 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 2:10-11). The hope of salvation is the key element of the gospel message, and Paul’s advice to Timothy is that continued association with those who engage in babble has the potential to overthrow even that hope. The overthrow will not be immediate but like a cancer (cancer), that is, a little today, a little more tomorrow and so on until the whole body is overthrown.

### The ecumenical movement

One of the greatest manifestations of the effect of tolerating all things at any cost is the outcome of the efforts to unite all the Christian churches.

Beginning in September 1992, a number of Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians held consultations over a period of some two years with the aim of reaching agreement for “Evangelicals and Catholics to be Christians together in a way that helps prepare the world for the coming of Him to whom belongs the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever”. One temptation that confronts those who strive to preserve fellowship is compromising the gospel, with the result largely becoming “*clouds without water*” (Jude 12). In itself the philosophy of ecumenism is directly contrary to Paul’s instruction to Timothy: “*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:2).

### “Ourselves”

Perhaps the challenge of the exhortation to the Hebrews can be summarised by noting the exhortation was for them to not forsake the assembling of **themselves** together.

The question arises: who may be regarded as “ourselves”? One danger is to apply the conditions too liberally and compromise the truth, and on the other to apply the definition too narrowly and not give due consideration to the variety of the members of the 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... But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him...*” (1 Cor. 12:12-20). To God be the glory, great things He hath done!■

# LOVING GOD

*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18)*

The definitions of “fear” in both The Concise Oxford Dictionary and The Macquarie Dictionary include the concept of “*painful emotion caused by impending danger or evil*”, and so those definitions reflect the statement in 1 John 4:18 that “...fear hath torment...”—that is, emotional pain.

There are many causes of fear amongst human beings: fear of financial collapse, fear of starvation, fear of physical violence, fear of war. Jesus foretold that fear would assault the world of mankind in the end times: “*But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven... For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled... 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*

” (Luke 21:9-26).

The Apostle Peter confirmed the shaking of the powers. He wrote: “*The day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*

” (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

## Fearing God

Consistent with the fearful scenarios described above, there are several verses in the Scriptures which may give rise to a fear of God based on His characteristics: “*God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked... the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him*

” (Nahum 1:2-6).

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah also may be interpreted as a demonstration of God’s vengeful

character: “*Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground*

” (Gen. 19:24-25).

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah occurred in Old Testament times because of their wickedness. However the fact that it has passed does not necessarily relieve anxiety about the present heavens and earth—as Peter wrote they also will be “*destroyed*”. Such a fate is consistent with God’s actions foretold in the Old Testament because, as the Apostle John declared: “*...the whole world lieth in wickedness*

” (1 John 5:19).

## Love God

In view of the Scriptures quoted above it might be difficult to love God with all one’s heart as required by the first commandment: “*And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment*

” (Mark 12:28-30).

However such fear is overcome and is replaced by a love for God when the full message of the apostles and prophets is taken into account. For example, verse 13 in 2 Peter 3 was deliberately omitted from the quotation above. It reads: “*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*

”. That verse should allay all fear of the ultimate future because the promise is the establishment of a righteous heavens and earth. These verses illustrate that a completely incorrect understanding might result if only part of any prophecy is considered—in every case it is necessary to consider the whole prophecy, as well as taking the context into account, that is, to whom it was written, when it was written, to what time does it apply and what is its intent.

## Hope for the world

Applying the principle of the “time to which a prophecy relates” reveals that the time for the righteous heavens and earth to be established is not yet, and the desire for such a righteous environment to

be established might lead to the idea that it is the Christian's role to evangelise the world and thus bring them into existence now. However such a viewpoint is contrary to the admonition in Zephaniah 3:8-9: *"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent"*. Thus it is manifest that the time when the prophecy in 2 Peter 3:13 will be fulfilled is in God's due time—"when He turns to the people a pure language"—but that time is not yet, and the proper course of action for the Christian at the present time is to wait on the Lord.

### Knowledge

Hence fear regarding the future of the world is overcome by knowing God has a plan and that time is a critical element of that plan. It is in that vein that Paul wrote to the Philippians: *"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ"* (Phil. 1:9-10). The Apostle prayed that their love for God would increase, while realizing a complementary element of their increase in love for God was an increase in their knowledge of Him.

The Apostle Peter also wrote that an increase in grace (defined in some Concordances as "the divine influence upon the heart") is related to growth in knowledge: *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..."* (2 Pet. 3:18). Thus, as knowledge of God's plan increases so also does one's appreciation of God's attributes which in turn leads to greater (perfect) love.

### Surety of promises

However having a knowledge of God's plan does not in itself ensure a love for Him: a conviction that He is able and that He will carry out that plan and establish a righteous heaven and earth is necessary.

Regarding God's ability to carry out His plan, it is necessary to realise He is the omnipotent (all powerful) One, as recorded in Revelation (quoting in part): *"And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication... And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants,*

*and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth"* (Rev. 19:1-6). Certainly God has the power to establish His righteous kingdom, but it is not yet time for Him to do so.

Regarding God's faithfulness to carry out His promise Moses wrote: *"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"* (Num. 23:19). There are times when Men do not fulfil all they promised, however that is not the case with God—He is not as Man in that regard.

Isaiah also affirms that God will fulfil His promise: *"Remember the former things of old: for 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 was confident God will carry out all He has promised.

In the New Testament James 1:16-17 reads: *"Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"*.

Thus the world may be assured God will carry out His plan, including the establishment of a world "wherein dwelleth righteousness", and conviction that He will do so leads to one's love for God being complete.

### A more sure word of prophecy

The fact that some prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled is a further assurance that God will fulfil His promises.

One event which testifies to God honouring His promise was the coming of Jesus and the events which attended His life. The Apostle Peter summarises the importance of that event thus: *"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy... Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of*

*God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (pneuma = Spirit)" (2 Pet. 1:16-21).*

### **The regathering of the Jews**

The Apostle Paul explains that the regathering of the Jews and the establishment of the nation of Israel—a process which started in the twentieth century—is the fulfilment of prophecy: *"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins... For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance"* (Rom. 11:25-29).

Belief that the regathering of the Jews is a fulfilment of prophecy might be a challenge to some because of Jesus' words: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"* (Luke 13:34-35). However the full import of Jesus' words must be addressed—at some time they will say *"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"*, which implies their eyes will be opened—in God's due time.

### **Israel is God's witness**

Israel is a witness of God's power and authority: *"Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God."* (Isa. 43:10-12).

The fact that Israel as a nation did not recognise Jesus as their Messiah should not detract from faith that God will fulfil His promises because their unbelief (failure) was God's deliberate action: *"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand*

*with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them"* (John 12:37-40). Thus their blindness was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah which in itself testifies to God fulfilling His prophecies.

Further, God's deliberate blinding of the eyes of Israel was part of His plan to graft some Gentiles into the *"Israel of God"* (Gal. 6:16): *"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy"* (Rom. 11:11). Until the Jews rejected Jesus the Gentile nations were aliens and **without hope in the word**: *"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh... That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world"* (Eph. 2:11-12).

When He blinded Israel to the identity of Jesus God accomplished another part of His plan: *"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world... But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory... But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God"* (1 Cor. 2:6-10).

Thus the knowledge of the blindness of Israel to the identity of Jesus—which “led” to them crucifying Him—and the regathering of the Jews to the promised land, should strengthen every Christian's faith that God is all powerful, that He has the power to fulfil His promises and that He does not default on His word. Such a conviction should allay any fears of God's character and dispel any concerns about the outcome of the times of perplexity in the world.

A knowledge of these aspects of God's plan should enable the Christian's love for God to be “perfect” (that is, complete). Love that has knowledge as its basis will stand the test of time and circumstance and is a manifestation of the truth expressed in 2 Peter 1:5-7: *"And beside this, 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 charity"* (“charity” is the same Greek word as “love” in 1 John 4:18). It is the love of God that the Apostle John specifically addresses in 1 John 4:16-18; and love for God is necessary to enable the Christian to love for his fellow man and so fulfil the command to *“love your enemies”* (Matt. 5:44).■

# LITTLE THINGS

*"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much. Conversely, he that is unjust in the least is also unjust in much" (Luke 16:10).*

**I**t is the little things that often present the greatest test of a Christian's loyalty and faithfulness to their consecration, and it is faithfulness in the little things that will ultimately govern one's reward: *"Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord"* (Matt. 25:23).

Jesus assured His disciples that the Lord's interest in them includes the little things of their sojourn: *"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows"* (Luke 12:6-7). The essence of the statement is that God takes great notice of little things, even sparrows, and He takes even greater interest in the little things of His chosen ones—the hairs of their head are numbered.

## Care for His little ones

The Christian must also care for God's little ones: *"And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward"* (Matt. 10:42). Consistent with the benevolent action of giving a cup of cold water to one of the Lord's people comes the obligation to care for them in all ways, to the extent of not hindering their walk by causing them to stumble: *"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak"* (Rom. 14:21).

Further, the Christian's attitude of caring is to include all, not just those of "the household", because no one knows what the Lord has in store for those whom He has not yet called: *"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him"* (Prov. 24:17-18). The Lord might yet enlighten the minds of one who is not yet privileged to see the hidden wonders of God's plan.

## Significant events

In a stable environment, that is, one where food and raiment are regular and there is little or no social unrest, the tendency might be to measure one's life by significant events, with the consequence of overlooking the little things, even though it is the little things—the things that comprise the 'hum drum'

of life—that occupy the greater proportion of one's time. In the context of one's overall life time, significant events (highlights) may well occupy a very small proportion of one's total life time.

It should also be realised that a significant event might be the outcome of many little events, and while the temptation is to focus on the outcome, the contribution of the little events that led to that result are easily overlooked. Such a temptation applies in both a favourable and unfavourable (destructive) sense. One example of little things contributing to a negative outcome is recorded in the Song of Solomon 2:15: *"Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines for our vines have tender grapes"*. Little foxes might be attractive but when they are fully grown they are destructive and kill other animals. The moral of the story is that little things that are attractive and cute when they are small, have the potential to be destructive later.

In the quotation from the Song of Solomon the little foxes correspond to the little failings which beset the Christian. The temptation is to not take into account the long term effect of any "little action", and just as admirers might be less inclined to consider the longer term effects of cultivating little foxes, so also the Christian might be less inclined to consider the long term effects of their little faults. Christians are to be aware of the long term effects of all their actions.

Another lesson to be learned from the little foxes is that the foxes attack the vines, and that is particularly destructive because the root and structure of the vine provides life to the fruitage, and any damage to the vine severely affects any tender grapes. Thus the Christian must always be aware of the disposition of others and so not destroy them with their meat. The damage caused by little imperfections of the flesh can be widespread. The danger must be recognised: the vine itself might not be damaged—it will survive—but the effect on the tender grapes should be the concern of the Christian at all times.

## Sleep

The destructive effect of the little foxes in the Christian's make-up will grow if the Christian fails to be aware of them—in other words, if they take "time out", or in physical terms, "take a nap".

Proverbs 24:30-34 reads: *"I went by the field of the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And lo, it was all grown over with*

*thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well; I looked upon it and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth and thy want as an armed man.* The lesson is that ‘a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep’ describes a sleepy disposition. The spirit of slumber is dangerous to the New Creature just as it is to the keeper of the vineyard because it allows the thorns and nettles to grow. On the contrary, the Christian is exhorted to always be on the alert: “*Ye are all the children of the light and the children of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet the hope of salvation*” (1 Thess. 5:5-8). It has been well said that there is no “off-duty” time for the Christian.

### Leaven

Another picture of the power and danger of little things is leaven: “*Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*” (1 Cor. 5:6). Leaven is a very small component of the bakery, but it grows and permeates the whole lump. Thus the admonition is to purge out the leaven, not leaving even one trace.

Leaven is not restricted to moral issues but also to doctrine: “*Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees*” (Matt. 16:6-12). Purging out the leaven of doctrine is an on-going task, and is one that requires diligence and honesty with oneself—honesty to admit whether one is convinced what is truth.

While the task is on-going—a life-time work—and might be daunting, the reward will be great: “*If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the*

*master's use and prepared unto every good work*” (2 Tim. 2:21). Do not shrink from the task.

### The tongue

The tongue is another “little thing” that has destructive power and must be brought under control. It is one of the smallest organs of the body that exerts influence on others (the eye is a smaller organ but its main function is to **gather** information for the body).

James 3:2-8 reads: “*... If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell (gehenna). For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*” (James 3:2-8).

James compares the successes of mankind to control a ship via a comparatively small component (the rudder), to control horses via a small bit in the horse's mouth, and indeed to tame many wild animals, but mankind cannot completely control the tongue—it is easier to tame a wild beast, a horse and a ship than it is to tame the tongue.

Yet another lesson is the consequences of failure. A wild horse or an uncontrolled ship can cause great destruction, so a wild or uncontrolled tongue can be destructive to many.

Perhaps the most powerful illustration James gives is that of fire: fire can have the very smallest of beginnings—just a spark—and yet it can lead to the greatest conflagration. How many wars have been caused, and how many millions of lives have been lost, because of the failure to control the tongue? It is indeed an unruly member which no man can completely control and so it must be kept under constant surveillance.

A further consideration is that the danger presented by fire caused by the tongue exists not only in the world but also amongst the Lord's people, where the fire can lead to spiritual destruction. How blessed it is that the waters of truth can quench the fires of iniquity and love can overlook the little things.■

# FRAMING THE WORLDS

In the King James Version, Isaiah 42:5 reads: *“Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein”*. The Hebrew word translated “God” is “El” (Strong’s #410) which means “almighty”, and “Lord” (Strong’s #3068) is Jehovah—“the self-existent One”. From that verse alone it might be concluded that it was God Himself and He alone who created the world.

Such a conclusion may be drawn from Isaiah 45:18 also: *“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”*.

However other verses indicate that it was not God alone who created the world but that “the Word” was involved. Three such passages are:

- John 1:1-14: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made...and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...”*;
- Hebrews 1:1-2: *“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”*; and
- Hebrews 11:3: *“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God...”*.

Consequently the question arises: precisely what role did “the Word” play in creation?

## The worlds

The answer to the question depends upon the meaning ascribed to the Greek word translated “worlds” in Hebrews 1:2 and Hebrews 11:3.

There are five different Greek words from which the English word “world” is translated. However for the purpose of this article only two need be considered: “*kosmos*” and “*aion*”.

## Kosmos

Strong’s Concordance defines “*kosmos*” (#2889) as “orderly arrangement, that is, decoration; by implication the *world* (in a wide or narrow sense, including its inhabitants, literally or figuratively [morally])”. “*Kosmos*” is translated as either

“adorning” or “world”. That definition implies “*kosmos*” does not refer to the physical components of the earth but to the social arrangements that exist on it.

One verse which may be used to illustrate the definition is Matthew 5:14 which records Jesus telling His disciples that they were *“the light of the world”* (*kosmos*) (Matt. 5:14). The term “world” in that verse does not refer to the physical world because God made the sun and the moon to light the physical world: *“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: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. 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. 1:14-16). Jeremiah confirms the testimony of Genesis: *“Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night...”* (Jer. 31:35).

## Aion

Strong’s Concordance defines “*aion*” (#165) as “properly an age; by extension perpetuity (also past); by implication the world; specifically (Jewish) a Messianic period (present or future)”.

Young’s Concordance defines “*aion*” as “age; dispensation”.

The Companion Bible (Appendix 129.2) defines *aion* as: *“an age, or age-time, the duration of which is indefinite, and may be limited or extended as the context of each occurrence may demand”*.

W. E. Vine’s “Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words” defines “*aion*” as *“an age... a period of indefinite duration, or time viewed in relation to what takes place in the period”*.

In the King James Version, “*aion*” is translated “ages” in the following two verses only:

- Ephesians 2:7: *“That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”*; and
- Colossians 1:26: *“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints”*.

The contexts of both Ephesians 2:7 and Colossians 1:26 support the definitions of “*aion*” (a period of time—an “age”—and not the physical components of

the heavens and earth) which alters the thrust of Hebrews 1:2 and 11:3.

### **Hebrews 1:2 and 11:3**

Ascribing the definition to the Greek “aion” means Hebrews 1:2—“*by whom also he made the worlds* (aions)—shows that Jesus, God’s Son, did not only create the world but was party to the formulation of God’s plan of the ages. Such an interpretation is in harmony with Hebrews 11:3—that “*the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*”.

In relation to Hebrews 11:3 the margin of the Companion Bible has the comment: “The reference is not to creation, but to the ordering by God of the dispensations, each of which succeeded but did not spring from its predecessor...”

### **Framed**

The meaning of the Greek (Strong’s #2675) from

which “framed” is translated is “to *complete thoroughly*, that is, *repair* (literally or figuratively) or *adjust*”, and is variously translated “fit, frame, mend, perfect, prepare, restore”.

Thus may be seen the complete and critical involvement of Jesus as “the Word”, God’s Son, in the history and destiny of the world of mankind. He was not only involved in the creation of the physical earth but also in the planning of the time periods which have and will transpire upon it.

Additionally He is the one upon whom the repair (or restitution) of the world depends: “*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... If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*” (1 Cor. 15:13-20). Let us praise Him who framed the ages!■

## **ISRAEL AND JERUSALEM**

**I**t is difficult to define precisely when the preliminary processes for the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:24 began: “*For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land*”. However the physical fulfillment has been visible since 1948 A.D.

Israel’s history might indicate that God has cast them off, however the Apostle Paul declared: “*I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid... God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew...*” (Rom. 11:1-2). Jeremiah also testifies to the surety of God’s promises to Israel: “*Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night... The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever*” (Jer. 31:35-36). It is not until the sun is no more that any of God’s promises to Israel will fail.

However the re-gathering of Israel is one thing, but occupying the city of Jerusalem is another, and it was not until 1967 that the Jews regained Jerusalem. Jeremiah explains the future significance of Jerusalem: “*At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it...*” (Jer. 3:17).

While it is **not** the policy of the Berean Bible Institute Inc. to attempt to influence the governments of the world, but to abide the exhortation in Romans 13:1—

“*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*”, Christians are exhorted “to watch” and the following extract from a newsletter of the **Christian Friends Of Israel Communities** (CFOIC — [www.cfoic.com](http://www.cfoic.com)) gives some insight into the present attitude of some in Israel:

### **Sign the Jerusalem Covenant!**

*There is nothing as meaningful as celebrating Jerusalem Day in Israel. The miraculous return of the Holy City to the Jewish people – as promised in our Bible – is as exciting today as it was in 1967. Yet, there are many today throughout the world who deny the Jewish claim to our capital city. Just last week, the Church of Scotland added their voice to the Palestinian argument and announced that the Jews have no claim to the Land and called for Israel to end its occupation of East Jerusalem!*

*We were (sic) asked by a very important group, the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus, to gather 10,000 signatures from friends and allies across the world to sign the ‘Jerusalem Covenant’ which affirms Jerusalem as the undivided capital of the Jewish people. As soon as we reach our goal, I will present those signatures to the Knesset in what will surely be a historic occasion.*

*With blessings of Jerusalem,  
Sondra Oster Baras and Kimberly Troup.*

(Sondra Baras is the Director of the Israel Office of CFOIC and Kimberly Troup is the Director of the USA office of CFOIC.)■

# APPOINTED TO DIE

*“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...”* (Hebrews 9:27-28)

One’s understanding of Hebrews 9:27 depends upon what one believes is meant by “men”.

The book of Hebrews is largely devoted to explaining the symbolisms woven into the arrangements of the Law Covenant, and how they foreshadowed the arrangement that would prevail after Jesus’ death:

- *“For the law having a shadow of good things to come...”* (Heb. 10:1);
- *“... consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus”* (Heb. 3:1);
- *“a minister of... the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man”* (Heb. 8:2);
- *“It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true...”* (Heb. 9:23-24).

Such extensive symbolism gives rise to the possibility that the term “men” is also symbolic. However it is the only word in Hebrews 9:27-28 which may be given a symbolic meaning:

- *“Appointed”* is an accurate translation of the Greek *“apokeimai”*—it does not mean a specific date and time, but rather “reserved or laid aside”;
- *“die”* is also an accurate translation of the Greek.

While simplistically “men” (Greek: “anthropos”) means a human being—“man faced”—it cannot refer to the high priests of the physical tabernacle because the high priests did not die while they awaited judgment each time they *“entered into the holy places made with hands”* (Heb. 9:24), even though that potential always existed, and was annulled only by them entering with the specified sacrifices (Lev. 16:2-6). In other words, Aaron was not *“appointed to die”* (death was not a certainty) just because he had performed his duties as high priest.

## World of mankind

On the other hand, death is “laid up” for every human being due to the condemnation they have inherited from Adam—*“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die...”* (1 Cor. 15:21-22)—Jacob (Gen. 47:29) and Moses (Deut. 31:34) to wit. Thus does “men” refer to the world of mankind?

Applying “men” to the world of mankind gains some justification from the meaning of “judgment”. It is translated from the Greek “*krisis*” which is equivalent

to the English word “crisis” and is the same Greek word from which “damnation” is translated in John 5:28-29: *“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” in the Revised Version). A “crisis” time awaits every human being who has “done evil” in this present life in that, after they are resurrected, they will face a time which will determine their eternal fate.

## Animal sacrifices

A third possibility is that “men” is symbolic of the animals that were killed to provide the sacrifices offered by the high priests: such animals were *“appointed unto death”*. The symbolism can be extended to mean the animals represented the high priests; however the only high priest who is elsewhere represented by an animal is Jesus Christ: *“And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!”* (John 1:36); and *“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Pet. 1:19).

Yet another possible meaning of Hebrews 9:27-28 arises from a consideration of the word “so”: *“so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...”*

The word “so” means *“in this way”* (Strong’s #3779), and consequently there are at least six aspects of Jesus’ sacrifice that align Him with the experiences of mankind as summarized in Hebrews 9:

- He was *“once offered”* (verse 26);
- He was appointed unto death: *“Even as the Son of man came...to give his life...”* (Matt. 20:28);
- He died as a human being: *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same...”* (Heb. 2:14);
- It was *“the man Christ Jesus (who) gave Himself a ransom for all”* (1 Tim. 2:6);
- It is after His death that He will *“appear the second time without sin unto salvation”* (verse 28), in *“the times of restitution of all things”* (Acts 3:21);
- That time will be a **time of judgment** for mankind—a “time of crisis” (verse 27)—because at that time *“every one shall die for his own iniquity”* and not because *“the fathers have eaten the sour grape”* (Jer. 31:29-30).

Truly *“Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands... but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us”* (Heb. 9:23-24).■

# IF THERE BE ANY PRAISE

*“Finally, brethren... if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8)*

**T**he identification of praiseworthy things requires judgment because there are many things in the world that are not praiseworthy, indeed “*the whole world lieth in wickedness*” (1 John 5:19).

## Words

Words are the principal medium, either written or verbal, by which concepts are conveyed from one human mind to another. (Another medium is works of art, however while works of art can be powerful, they are not as prevalent in spiritual circles as words.)

While words of truth generally are pleasant, and meditation upon them might edify, not all words that are pleasant to the ears are praiseworthy, and the Christian must be aware that words may also be used to deceive: “*For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh...*” (2 Pet. 2:18). Words of vanity may be phrased to convey praise to the recipient, while their true objective is to deceive.

## Love of praise

The praise upon which the Apostle exhorted the Philippians to think did not include praise of themselves. Praise of oneself presents a challenge to the Christian because praise tends to boost pride, which in turn is not conducive to the Christian’s walk: “*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world*” (1 John 2:16). Thus wisdom is required when pondering praiseworthy words—the Apostle did not exhort the Philippians to think on words which praised them.

Indeed the love of praise can be even more powerful, as exemplified by the chief rulers: “*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). It was not praise but the love of praise that caused some of the chief rulers to stumble (just as it is not money but the love of money that is the root of all evil —1 Tim. 6:10). Let the Christian beware.

## A warning

Additionally, the receipt of praise from one’s fellow man could be a warning to Christian’s: “*Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets*” (Luke 6:26). Praise from the world should be a warning to the

Christian that they might be coming too aligned with the world—the Christian is to expect to be despised and not praised in this present life: “*But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise... and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are*” (1 Cor. 1:27-28).

## Diligent service

Nevertheless every Christian should perform their temporal duties in a way that is worthy of praise: “*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... do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good...*” (Rom. 13:1-4). While the Christian is to perform their duties honourably, and such diligence might attract praise, their objective is not to receive praise from men but that their compliance will bring praise to God: “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*” (1 Pet. 4:11).

## Fruits

It is the development of the fruits of the Spirit that **brings greatest praise to God**, “*And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more... Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God*” (Phil. 1:9-11). It is to God that the works of the Christian should accrue praise, and the Christian is to meditate upon such things: meditation on the fruits of the Spirit will always be beneficial to the Christian and it was upon such virtues that the Apostle exhorted the Philippians to meditate.

It is upon things that will bring praise to God, and not to self, that the Christian is exhorted to meditate—the Christian’s praise comes later (1 Pet. 1:7). ■

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