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OUR DAILY SERVICE

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23)

Jesus told His disciples that following Him would not be a part-time occupation, but would require their full time devotion, just as He was serving His Father daily: *"And he taught daily in the temple..."* (Luke 19:47).

Serving God has always required continual (that is, repeated and constant) attention to duty:

- When God gave Israel the Law Covenant on their exodus from Egypt, He required them to serve Him every day: *"Thou shalt daily prepare a burnt offering unto the LORD of a lamb of the first year without blemish: thou shalt prepare it every morning"* (Ezek. 46:13). The sacrifice of a lamb was a daily requirement;
- Jesus taught His disciples that they were to pray daily, that God would provide their sustenance for that day: *"Give us this day our daily bread"* (Matt. 6:11);
- Paul's dedication was so all-consuming that he wrote *"I die daily"* (1 Cor. 15:31);
- Peter wrote: *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"* (1 Pet. 3:15). Peter urged his readers to be ready at all times—daily—to help those who enquired after heavenly things. Such readiness requires one to be free of all other obligations and to be devoted solely to the one purpose to which they have been called.

Both Paul's testimony and Peter's letter exhorted their readers to practise what Jesus had told His followers: *"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness"* (Matt.6:33). The exhortation to seek *"first"* means to place it first in "time, place, order, or importance" (Strong's Concordance #G4412), and to place it first in each of those categories means the Christian must be always ready—every day—to serve God and His Son Jesus.

The first requirement

The first requirement to enable one to serve God is to believe He exists: *"... he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11:6).

Belief in God is not as simple as it might sound. In spite of God's miraculous provision and care of the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt, they did not continue to acknowledge that all they had received during their journey was God's gracious provision. Deuteronomy 1:30-32 reads: *"The Lord your God which goeth before you... in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God"*. Reviewing the written records of Israel's journey might leave one wondering why they did not continue to acknowledge God's miraculous care. However the same test applies today to all who have experienced hardship: when their trials are lifted there is a temptation to forget how God sustained them and cared for them throughout their "desert" experience. One must continue to be ever mindful of God's care.

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Trust

In order to serve God one must not only believe that He exists but they must also put their trust in Him. As Jeremiah wrote: “*Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is, for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit*” (Jer. 17:7-8). Those who completely trust that the Lord is caring for them are able to withstand the heat of their trials and also withstand the desert experiences when they are unable to readily enjoy receiving the water of life by, for example, fellowshipping with others.

David also emphasized the importance of trusting in God. He wrote: “*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths*” (Prov. 3:5-6).

Israel failed to implicitly trust God: “*Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!*” (Isa. 31:1). Israel trusted in their own resources.

Prayer

Daily prayer is necessary for the Christian to ensure they are walking with the Lord. Indeed it must not be just a daily routine but the Christian must be in a prayerful attitude at all times. Colossians 4:2 reads: “*Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving*”.

Singleness of purpose

As mentioned above, serving the Lord daily means there is no room in one’s life for any other goal. As Jesus told His disciples: “*No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Luke 16:13).

Paul had a single purpose. He wrote: “*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you*” (Phil. 3:13-15). Paul had time for only one thing: “*pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*”, and so he exhorted his hearers: “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Paul also used the analogy of running in a race to exhort the Corinthians to focus on one single purpose in accordance with their consecration: “*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain*” (1 Cor. 9:24). One who is competing in a race, with the objective of winning the prize, must devote themselves totally to running and not allow themselves to be diverted by any other goal.

Hope

One source of motivation to those who are competing in a race is the value of the prize. Regarding the prize for which the Christian is running, Paul wrote: “*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:13).

There are several aspects of the “*glorious appearing*” to which Paul referred and it is the prerogative of every Christian to decide for themselves which aspect Paul particularly had in mind when he wrote to Titus. Strong’s Concordance defines the Greek word “*epiphaneia*” (#G2015), from which “*appearing*” is translated, as “*a manifestation, that is, (specifically) the advent of Christ (past or future)*”. Paul used that Greek word only six times in His writings and in five of those instances it is translated “*appearing*” in the King James Version, (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10. 4:1, 8; Tit. 2:13). The remaining instance is in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 where, in the King James Version, it is translated “*brightness*”: “*And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming*”. Depending on the context of each occurrence, “*epiphaneia*” may be understood to refer to various times:

- the end of one’s present earthly life, after which they will be unconscious in the grave until they are resurrected at Jesus’ “*coming*” (1 Tim. 6:14);
- the enlightenment each Christian experiences in this present life due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:10);
- when Jesus takes control of earth’s affairs (2 Tim. 4:1 and probably verse 8).

Hence Titus 2:13 may be understood to refer to the enlightenment of the world at the start of His earthly reign or, for the Christian, the glorious prospect of “*living and reigning with their Lord*” (Rev. 20:6).

Self examination

Paul also urged Titus to “*put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work*” (Tit. 3:1). “*To be ready*” means to be ready at all times, that is “*now*” or “*immediately*”. Thus it is important that Christians examine themselves often—daily—to ensure they are “*ready*”. As Paul

wrote to the Corinthians: “*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*” (2 Cor. 13:5). A “reprobate” is one who is rejected, that is cast away. God reads the heart and knows whether one is truly grateful and thankful and hence ready for service.

Paul’s instruction is precise: each one is to examine themselves; which means not compare themselves with others. The words of Romans 12:1-2 are a timely exhortation: “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*”

While the Christian should not expect to be popular: “*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come*” (Heb 13:10-14). The Christian must remember that the call is to go unto Him “*without the camp*”, and to examine themselves to ensure they are developing the standard described in Hebrews 13:12: “*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.*” Such scrutiny requires daily attention..

Nutrition

Achieving the standard of conduct (conversation) described in Hebrews 13:12 is possible only if one adopts the correct “diet” and avoids contrary influences. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “*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*” (2 Cor. 6:16-17). While Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians contained an exhortation to correct their ways, his letter to the

Philippians contained only “positive” advice: “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you*” (Phil. 4:8-9).

In summary

Paul summarised the Christian’s daily service in an earlier part of his letter to the Philippians: “*If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 2:1-5).

As well as examining and correcting oneself daily, the responsibility of the Christian is to also encourage each other: “*The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back*” (Isa. 50:4-5). Likewise God instructed Zechariah to teach the Israelites that the first requirement is to be truthful with each other: “*These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates*” (Zech. 8:16).■

BOOKS AVAILABLE

The following books are available free and post free to your postal address anywhere in the world (while stocks last):

- “**Armageddon Then World Peace**” (15.2 cm x 9.5 cm, 32 pages, soft cover); (an electronic copy is posted on our web site: www.bbi.org.au)
- “**God’s Grand Plan of the Ages**” (23 cm x 15.5 cm, 94 pages, soft cover);
- “**This Land is Mine**” (22 cm x 15 cm, 31 pages, soft cover).

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WHEN YE SEE THESE THINGS

"Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matthew 13:13).

Jesus' explanation to His disciples regarding why He spoke to the multitude in parables illustrates God's power over the human mind, that is, that physically seeing an event does not mean the observer understands its significance. As John recorded: *"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). They had physically seen the miracles but they did not realise that they identified Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus declared that it was God who blinded the Israelites' "eyes"—*"He hath blinded their eyes"*—so that they could not understand. Paul explains that it is only by the Holy Spirit that anyone can understand the things that are a mystery to all who have not received God's Holy Spirit: *"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God"* (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

The challenge of our day

The privilege of the Christian is three-fold: to realise that the events occurring in the world today are significant, that they are a fulfillment of Bible prophecy, and consequently that the establishment of God's kingdom on earth is nigh: *"And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand"* (Luke 21:29-31).

Hence the question: which events in the world today indicate that the kingdom of God is nigh?

Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 all refer to events that have occurred since Jesus uttered the words recorded in those chapters: false teachers, wars and rumours of wars, distress of nations. The continued existence of these phenomena leads those who have not been blessed with God's Holy Spirit to conclude that "nothing is

changing", and that there is no evidence that God's kingdom is nigh. However Peter forewarned that would be the temptation for the Christian to resist in the last days: *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

The fig tree

One of the signs to which Jesus referred in His prophecy is *"the fig tree, yet tender putting forth leaves, and all the trees"* (Matt. 24:32; Mark 13:28; Luke 21:29). Trees feature in several Old Testament prophecies, for example Isaiah 55:12: *"For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands"*. The trees in Isaiah's prophecy are symbolic because trees do not have literal hands and hence do not literally "clap their hands".

Jesus' reference to the *"fig tree"* and *"all the trees"* implies fig trees have particular significance in Bible prophecy, and all of Jeremiah chapter 24 relates fig trees to Israel. Some verses of particular significance are verses 1, 5, 6-9: *"The LORD shewed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon... Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good... For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart... And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: And I will deliver them to be*

removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them" The challenge for every Christian is to decide for themselves whether the present regathering of the Israelites from all the countries to which they have been scattered is a fulfillment of Jeremiah's and Jesus' prophecies, and hence whether their regathering is a sign that the kingdom of God is nigh.

Other events

Jesus also prophesied that "... *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 21:25-26), Do any of the events in the world today qualify as any of these signs?

Global warming

One current topical issue is "global warming", that is, the rise in the Earth's average temperature: is it due to industrial effluent that was not part of the environment in the Garden of Eden? Some events which have been attributed to global warming include increased frequency of typhoons and cyclones, and the melting of the polar ice caps. Some marine biologists believe the molten ice has diluted the local sea such that the concentration of salt in the local ocean is now so low that some salt water fish cannot survive in that area.

On the other hand, some news reports indicate that the USA is currently intending to withdraw from an international agreement to reduce carbon dioxide emissions because the presently intended targets would create huge unemployment problems for USA. Solve one problem and create another!

Social unrest

Recently there have been several acts of violence in Europe, the mid-east and south-east Asia which have been attributed to terrorism.

Finance

During the first decade of this century there was stress in the financial sector. Its effect was so wide spread that it was termed the Global Financial Crisis; "the GFC". It is still attracting references 9 years after it "ended".

Religious turmoil

The religious arena has also experienced dramatic changes, including the Roman Catholic Church, which has changed its stance on

several hitherto sacred doctrines. The internet site www.vaticancatholic.com provides details of some of the changes. The changes are a stark contrast to the teachings and unilateral authority the Church taught and enforced for centuries.

Computers

The development of computers has added to the complexity of the present problems. The internet is an innovation of the last 30 years or so. While it is a marvellous resource for the promulgation of knowledge it has also provided a ready means for the dissemination of immoral and Satanic material. Such material undermines many of the principles upon which western societies are built. Additionally, the development of computerised machines is relieving mankind of many arduous physical tasks, but those machines are causing increased unemployment and hence financial and social problems. Again, solve one problem and create another!

The kingdom

In view of present world conditions, one question is to what extent will the present industrial activity, financial systems and immoral practices be continued in the kingdom of God?

The Bible does not answer the first part of the question, other than Peter's statement: "*And He shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*" (Act 3:20-21). One of the prophets to whom Peter referred may have been Micah: "*But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever*" (Micah 4:1-5).

May Micah's prophecy soon be fulfilled!■

WHO MAKETH THEE TO DIFFER?

"And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:6-7)

Paul presented the Corinthian church with a challenge: on what basis did they consider anyone to be more worthy than any other, and to whom did they attribute the acquisition of their possessions?

Paul referred to himself and to Apollos as examples for them to consider, and hence realise that no one had any grounds for esteeming one more important than another. He expressed his instruction in forthright terms: *"that no one of you be puffed up for one against another".*

Esteem

Paul implied that there are two aspects to esteem: esteem for oneself (which is pride) and esteem for another (which is a form of worship).

Regarding esteem for oneself, Paul reminded them that neither he nor Apollos considered themselves to be "better" than anyone else, but simply that they were the Lord's ministers: *"who then is Paul and who then is Apollos but ministers by whom ye believed even as the Lord gave to every man"* (1 Cor.3:5). It was a powerful argument: Paul—who was given charge of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28)—did not claim any honour or glory for that position. Additionally he did not claim any credit as their teacher but reminded them that all they understood of God's plan was God's gift to them, and not a gift from himself or Apollos.

An extension of Paul's message is that no one should esteem another simply because what the other has written is published in a book. The responsibility to *"receive the word with all readiness of mind"* and then to *"search the scriptures daily, whether those things are so"* (Act 17:11), applies to every individual, regardless of whom the Lord might have used to open their eyes.

On the other hand it must be remembered that another's studentship must not be denigrated nor discarded on the basis of how they are regarded by others. Again it is a matter for the individual.

Oratory

Paul made mention of oratory. He did not esteem himself above another on the basis of his oratory (public speaking). His remark is significant

because it is possible that, in his day, oratory was the principal method of spreading the gospel: *"And I, brethren, when I came to you ,came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God... and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power"* (1 Cor. 2:1-4).

Paul's refusal to esteem himself, or to encourage others to esteem him because of his preaching, is particularly significant in view of some evidence that he was a powerful orator, confronting the Jews in the synagogue: *"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him"* (Acts 17:16-17). Paul did not pander to them—He "disputed" with them—and his preaching was effective: *"Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few"* (Acts 17:12).

Maybe Paul's example contains a lesson for all who preach the Word from a public platform today. Sophisticated media such as Powerpoint and video presentations are available to influence their audience and bring acclaim to the speaker, however the technical media are not responsible for any growth in anyone's knowledge: it is God who gives the increase.

Flattery

In similar vein all who teach another must firstly remember that their knowledge is God's gift to them and not a result of their own study. Nevertheless any who would teach another must be well versed in the Scriptures: *"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat"* (Heb. 5:12). However their knowledge must not be a cause for self esteem. They must always realise that they have gained their knowledge only because God has revealed it to them. Thus a teacher must be on guard and reject any flattery from another. Their mission must always be to recognise the spiritual status of their hearer and seek to provide only those things that will assist

the other to grow in their knowledge of God's Word: "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:2-3).

Another effect of esteem

Esteem has the potential also to cause division by enticing or encouraging some to follow the one who is esteemed, and in turn that has the potential of creating a sect or cult. Hence in his message to the Corinthians, Paul exhorted them to strive for unity: "now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you may be perfectly joined together in the same mind" (1 Cor. 1:10). It is as Jesus instructed His disciples: "But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

Gifts.

Another temptation that confronted the Corinthians was the miraculous gifts. 1 Corinthians 12: 4-18 reads: "Now there are diversities of gifts but the same spirit, for to one there is given by the spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit, to another faith by the same spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. 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 the body of Christ 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?"

Those words mean that some learnt by a different medium than did others; some were given the gift of "seeing" while others had been

given "ears to hear". Hence one must be aware that God reveals certain aspects to His chosen ones by different means.

Once again the overall lesson is that it is God who gives gifts to the members of the body and that "the whole building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple" (Eph. 4:16).

Doubtful disputations

Paul wrote: "To him that is weak in the flesh receive ye but not to doubtful disputations" (Rom. 14:1). Paul reminded the Romans that there were some elements of God's plan that were not clear at that time, and likewise there are some elements of God's plan that have not yet been revealed.

One issue that troubled the Romans was which foods they may eat and which were prohibited: "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 that eateth not judge him that eateth for God has received him" (Rom.14:2-3). The Christian must realise that such a matter must not be a cause for division or judgement of another: it must always be remembered that everyone's knowledge is God's gift to them.

Another issue that troubled the Romans was the day of the week they were to set aside for worship: "One man esteems one day above another, another esteems every day alike, let everyman be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom.14:5) Opinions on this matter have existed all down the ages and still exist today. The Christian must not condemn those who believe it is necessary to worship on one particular day; it must be remembered that it is God who has revealed the liberty of not being constrained to one particular day, and that He has not yet revealed that freedom to everyone. Such uncertainty in the mind of another must not be despised.

Looking at it the other way around, if one is tempted to claim they have superior knowledge, they should remember that maybe God has revealed something to others that He has not revealed to them. One must not be "wise in one's own conceits" (Rom. 12:16).

Gradual revelation of truth

Those who consider themselves knowledgeable in God's Word should remember that there are some aspects of God's plan that He has not yet fully revealed to anyone. Some are:

- The times of the Gentiles. It should be acknowledged that God might not yet have revealed to everyone the precise date of the

commencement of the *Times of the Gentiles* and the time of their completion. It is the prerogative—and the responsibility—of each individual to decide for themselves what the Scriptures say about this “time”, and whether such knowledge is so crucial to their sanctification that it should determine whether they should not associate with anybody who has a different conviction regarding the precise times of the start and ending of that “time”;

- The time of the end (Dan. 12:4). Likewise the beginning and conclusion of the “time of the end” may be understood differently and one must realise that it is God who reveals these details to each one.
- The treading of the winepress. This is another event which some believe is not categorically defined in Scripture, and hence it may be regarded as another aspect of God’s plan about which He has not yet revealed some details;
- The expression “*which God ordained before the world unto our glory*” (1 Cor. 2:7). This expression may also be understood differently. “Ordained” is translated from the Greek “proorizō” which Strong’s Concordance defines as to “*limit in advance*, that is, (figuratively) *predetermine*”. At this point it is timely to note that Paul goes on to remind the Corinthians that it is God who reveals His truth by giving them of His Holy Spirit: “*What man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man that is in him even so the things of God knoweth no man but the spirit of God, the natural man seeth not the things of God for they are foolishness unto him neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Cor. 2:11-14).

Unbelievers

While the exhortation is to exercise tolerance and understanding among Christians regarding several points of doctrine, another issue that troubled the Corinthians was the attitude they should adopt towards “unbelievers”.

The Christian must realise that it is by God’s grace that they are different from “unbelievers”. Paul wrote: “*Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: 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 as it is written, Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God*” (1 Cor. 2: 6-10). Paul continued and

introduced the concept of them being the temple of God; a concept that God has not yet revealed to all those who profess to be His servants.

The temple of God

Paul wrote: “*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God, for God has said I will dwell in them and walk in them and I will be their God and they shall be my people*” (2 Cor. 6:16).

While it might seem proud or conceited to consider oneself to be a member of God’s Temple, nevertheless that is the privilege He has given to those to whom He has given His Holy Spirit. Realisation of this privilege means the Christian has no reasonable option but to comply with Paul’s instruction to separate from those who practise deeds that are contrary to God’s Will: “*Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you*” (2 Cor. 6:17). However such separation must be due to God having given His Holy Spirit, and not due to personal pride.

The temptation to be proud is overcome to some extent by remembering that at one time “*such were some of you*” (1 Cor. 6:11), and that it is only because of God’s grace that anyone is able to understand anything of God’s plan. One must remember that God may yet enlighten the unbeliever just as He enlightened them.

The path of the just

Daniel wrote: “*But thou O Daniel, Shut up the words and seal the book even till the time of the end: Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased*” (Dan. 12:4). God is revealing more of His plan as time progresses, and the fact that greater light is shining today than in previous times is no basis for pride.

Such a gradual revelation is consistent with Proverbs 4:18: “*The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*”. The path is being increasingly enlightened by both the revelation of God’s plan overall and also as each individual “*grows in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Summary

No one may consider themselves to be superior to another, or to esteem another better than another. “*For by Grace are we saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast, for we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works that God has before ordained that we should walk in them*” (Eph. 2:8). ■

ACCOUNTING THAT GOD ...

"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Hebrews 11:19).

Abraham's faith may be held up as an example for Christians to emulate. Its virtues are magnified when the details of the tests the Lord gave him are examined in detail.

Accounting

The first consideration is that he "accounted" that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead.

There are several aspects to "accounting", and hence each occurrence has to be considered in its context.

The parent Greek word in Hebrews 11:19 is "*logizomai*", defined by some authorities as:

- Strong's Concordance: "*take an inventory, that is, estimate*" (literally or figuratively);
- Young's Concordance: "*to reckon*";
- Vine's Expository Dictionary: "*to reckon, whether by calculation or imputation*";

Every instance where "*logizomai*" occurs contains an element of "the unknown", which is consistent with the concept of faith as defined in Hebrews 11:1: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*". As Paul wrote: "*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?*" (Rom. 8:24). Thus Abraham believed—accounted—that God would do something Abraham had not seen: bring a person back from the dead.

Abraham's faith

Abraham's faith was based on his belief in God's promise that "*in Isaac shall thy seed be called*". That promise required Isaac to be resurrected. Those words comprise almost all of Hebrews 11:18, and if that verse is taken alone it might give the impression that they were a major part of God's message to Abraham. However in Genesis 21:12 they appear as the last few words of just one verse, and are immediately followed by God's promise that He would also raise up a nation by the bond woman (Hagar). Hence Abraham's grasping onto God's promise to him is an example of his attention to the detail of God's words: an aspect relevant to the Christian.

The Christian's challenge

The challenge confronting the Christian is also to believe that God is able to—and will—do things He has not yet visibly demonstrated to mankind. Some of them are:

- The world-wide resurrection of the dead. Just

as Abraham had not seen an individual who had been resurrected from the dead, so it remains today (except as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:1-7). However one difference between the situation today and the challenge to Abraham is that today, in Christian circles, the idea of a resurrection has been discussed—although not believed—whereas previously it was original;

- Another difference is that in Abraham's case it was the resurrection of only one person, whereas today the promise is that millions will be resurrected: "*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice*" (John 5:28);
- With the resurrection of all mankind comes the challenge of providing for everyone's needs: room on planet Earth, food, water and shelter. God has given several promises that He is going to provide these needs, but not in detail, except passages like Isaiah 35:1-2: "*The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God*". Isaiah 34:1-2 indicates that this promise will not be confined to the land of Israel but will apply to the whole of the planet;
- Many of the world's problems today are due to conflict. But God has promised: "*Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth*" (Psa. 46:8-10);
- The challenge is more than stopping war; it is the long term maintenance of peace. In that regard Nahum 1:9 reads: "*What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time*".

And so, in spite of many of God's promises having been fulfilled already—the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms, the life and death of Jesus, the scattering and regathering of the nation of Israel, and the rapid increase in knowledge during the last century—belief in the promise of "*the times of restitution of all things, which have been spoken by all the prophets since the world began*" (Acts 3:21) means that there is much accounting for the Christian to do today!■

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

"For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliceousness, but as the servants of God"
(1 Peter 2:15-16)

Liberty means freedom. When Jesus finished His work on earth, when He cried on the Cross "it is finished" (John 19:30), at that moment "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Matt. 27:51). At that moment Israel's obligations under the Law Covenant ended. As the Apostle Paul wrote, at that moment Jesus blotted "out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2:14).

The Law was a form of bondage and thus the end of the Law Covenant represented liberty to Israel. Hence the Apostle Paul wrote: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

Israel's bondage under the Law Covenant was two-fold: there were certain things the Law prohibited them from doing and there were other things they were required to do, both of which limited their freedom.

Prohibitions

Some of the prohibitions imposed by the Law Covenant are expressed directly in the "Ten Commandments" (Exod. 20:1-17). One gauge of how restrictive the Ten Commandments were is to consider their effect on the lifestyles of the Western World in the twenty first century:

- No work on the Sabbath Day: "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exod. 20:9-11). If that prohibition applied today it would destroy the life style of the inhabitants of every industrialised country. Many of the processes that contribute to modern day life, such as the generation of electricity, require factories to operate 24 hours per day 7 days per week. In factories such as metal foundries the processes cannot be started and stopped at the end of every day but must run continuously;
- No marriage between peoples of different nations: "When the LORD thy God shall bring

thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deut. 7:1-3). This prohibition had two effects:

- the prohibition of making covenants with other nations. This prohibition would mean the European Union and the United Nations would not exist, along with the huge number of trade agreements between nations;
- no marriage between people from other nations. Today there are many families whose parents are descendants from nations which in times past have been at war with each other;
- Only certain animals may be eaten: "These are the beasts which ye shall eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat... And every beast that parteth the hoof, and cleaveth the cleft into two claws, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that ye shall eat. Nevertheless these ye shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the cloven hoof; as the camel, and the hare, and the coney: for they chew the cud, but divide not the hoof; therefore they are unclean unto you. And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh... These ye shall eat of all that are in the waters: all that have fins and scales shall ye eat: And whatsoever hath not fins and scales ye may not eat; it is unclean unto you. Of all clean birds ye shall eat. But these are they of which ye shall not eat: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray, And the gled... " (Deut. 14:3-21). Bacon and pork were prohibited and only fish with fins and scales was permitted; both of those restrictions are widely ignored in Western countries today;
- Restriction on borrowing: "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee" (Deut. 15:6). Such restriction would bring the world's financial system to a complete stop with a

collapse of life styles in many countries;

- Not permitted to wear garments comprised of more than one material: *"Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together"* (Deut. 22:11). This prohibition would exclude many fabrics used today;
- Not permitted to gain interest from a loan to one's countrymen: *"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury..."* (Deut. 23:19-20). No interest bearing loans within one's country would be permitted; the only loans permitted would be across international borders;
- Not permitted to seek the return of anything lent to another: *"When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge"* (Deut. 24:10). There were no enforceable repayment provisions for loans.

The present day Western World would not be able to operate under the restrictions imposed by the Ten Commandments.

Obligations

As well as imposing restrictions on the Israelites, the Law Covenant also imposed burdensome duties. One onerous requirement was the perpetual sacrifice. This obligation required an animal to be sacrificed every morning and every evening: *"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering... shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season... This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, for a continual burnt offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even... it is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained in mount Sinai for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD... And the other lamb shalt thou offer at even..."* (Num. 28:1-8).

The burden was greater on the Sabbath day when two lambs had to be sacrificed: *"And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot..."* (Num. 28:9-10).

The lusts of the flesh

The end of the Law Covenant relieved Israel of those restrictions and responsibilities. However their new found liberty brought the temptation of loose living and so Paul urged them not to succumb to those temptations: *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another"* (Gal. 5:13). His message was for

them to resist the temptations of the flesh; they were to use their liberty to serve one another.

Regarding the lusts of the flesh, Paul continued: *"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish... Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revels, and the like, of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practise such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such there is no law"* (Gal. 5:16-23).

When Paul wrote to the Galatians the term *"lust of the flesh"* had a broader meaning than what is generally ascribed today. Nowadays "lust" is usually taken to involve sexual desire, but in those days it embraced all of the desires that stem from the human frame as Paul has listed them. Paul did not claim his list was exhaustive but included the expression *"and the like"*, which in turn required them to understand the principle behind the examples he quoted.

A second category of *"works of the flesh"* relates to religion: *"Idolatry" and "sorcery"*. *"Idolatry"* means the worship of things other than God, whereas *"sorcery"* means taking an interest in the powers of evil, such as consulting spirit mediums, attending séances, attempting to communicate with the spirit world and the dead (who were thought to be alive in some other form of existence).

A third category of the *"works of the flesh"* that Paul listed relates to pride: *"hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revels"*. All must be resisted.

Christian conflict

Thus discipline is required to properly exercise Christian liberty. On the one hand the Christian must be prepared to cast off the traditions and customs of one's previous life, including past ungodly associations if they are contrary to the development of the fruits of the Spirit, and on the other to consciously endeavour to develop the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long suffering... Indeed *"...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature..."* (2 Cor. 5:17).■

PREACHING THE WORD: OUT OF SEASON

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2)

Paul's charge to Timothy required him to "preach the word in season" and "out of season". The "season" was not to be determined by Timothy but by his hearer. In other words, Timothy had to be ready always to minister to others regardless of whether or not it was "convenient" for him at that moment in time.

Isaiah

Isaiah is one who immediately accepted the Lord's call: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8). There is no indication whether it was convenient for Isaiah to undertake the task at that time.

Isaiah volunteered for the task before he knew the details of what was involved. It was after he had volunteered that the Lord told him: "... Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isa. 6:9-10).

Duration

Further, Isaiah accepted the task before he enquired about its duration: "Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate. And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land" (Isa 6:11-12). The time frame would be determined by the Lord, not Isaiah. And so it is with the Christian today: as it was with Paul, their ministry is to continue until the work the Lord gives them is done: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

Ready to serve

Those who would be the Lord's servant must be ready to serve Him whenever the Lord calls them. Samuel did not hesitate to accept the Lord's call—as soon as he realised it was the Lord (and not Eli) who was calling him, and in spite of him being asleep his response was immediate: "And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel.

Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:1-10).

Jesus' disciples also immediately answered His call: "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me... And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matt. 4:18-22). All four of them were engaged in other tasks when Jesus called them but they left off their present tasks immediately.

Levi, the publican, was another who responded immediately to the Lord's call: "And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him" (Luke 5:27-28).

Contrast

In stark contrast to the examples cited above, one disciple wished to delay taking up the Lord's service due to the death of his father : "And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead" (Matt. 8:21-22). In countries where some importance is attributed to the passing of a loved one, it might be considered rude to not attend such a ceremony. However Jesus did not esteem it thus, but relegated it to the province of those who are not privileged to serve Him. A call to serve Him must be given the highest priority, regardless of whether it is convenient for the individual.■

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