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DIVERSITY—UNITY—PURITY

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

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

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

Continuing on the religious front, as the number of adherents of the Christian faith continues to fall, many compromises are being made to accommodate other faiths. One example occurred several years ago when an Anglican Archbishop invited a Moslem cleric to speak at the Anglican Cathedral in Perth, Australia. The event was cited and rationalised as an example of "increased breadth of understanding of Man as the creation of God". Another factor driving the ecumenical movement might be the increased financial viability of a larger group. Whatever the reason, there is a ground swell of opinion to unite.

While these initiatives might have some appeal at an organisational level, it is suggested it is possible insufficient weight is being ascribed to the differences in the objectives of different groups. Some believe the objective of the Islamic faith is to convert the world and govern it under Islamic rule; such an objective denies the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ and is contrary to the Christian's hope.

Unity

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

Likewise the European Union is a group of nations the prime purpose of which is "*the promotion of peace and the well-being of the Union's citizens*" (see: <http://en.euabc.com/>). The motive to promote peace is in stark contrast to the events of

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1939-40 when Germany plundered the countries of Europe and which led to the global conflict of World War 2. The war lasted for almost seven years.

Purity

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

Dishonest practices are not confined to those between nations: deceit has permeated the core of nations which has resulted in efforts being made to eradicate it internally. One such effort in Australia is the establishment of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption* (ICAC), which was established in 1988 to combat corruption.

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

The Spiritual Realm

The treachery that afflicts mankind does not exist in the spiritual realm, even though there are significant differences amongst those in that sphere.

God and Jesus are different spirit beings and Jesus openly acknowledged that His father was superior to Him: “*Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I*” (John 14:28). Additionally, Jesus ascribed all the credit for His work to His father: “*Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works*” (John 14:10).

Nevertheless while they were and are different beings they worked together in complete unity: “*My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man*

is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:29-30).

The unity that existed and continues to exist between God and the Logos was so perfect that Jesus left His heavenly realm and came to earth to do His Father’s will: “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*” (John 3:16-17). Jesus obeyed God’s instructions perfectly and the unity of purpose that characterised their relationship is exemplified in Jesus’ declaration when He was on the cross: “*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*” (John 17:4).

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

The church

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

The **diversity** of the members of the church is one of the first characteristics the members must acknowledge and accommodate. To illustrate the point the Apostle Paul compared the diversity of the members of the church with the members of the human body: “*For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free... for the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him... the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.... God hath tempered the body together... that there should be no schism in the body... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets,*

thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:12-30).

In those verses the Apostle addresses almost every kind of diversity that exists amongst human kind: heritage (Jew or Gentile); status (free man or slave); attributes (hands, ears); ability (seeing, hearing); function (apostles, prophets, teachers). The acknowledgement of the diversity amongst the members of the body is so important that Paul also included it in his letters to the Romans and the Ephesians: *“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another”* (Rom. 12:4-5); *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ... From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* (Eph. 4:11-16).

Unity

In spite of the wide diversity of the members of the church, diversity in itself is not to be a cause of division in the body—all members must strive for *“the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God”*, that there be *“no schism in the body”*.

The “unity” to which Paul refers requires effort. The word from which “unity” is translated occurs only twice in the Bible, both in Ephesians. The other instance is in chapter 4 verse 3: *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”*. The Apostle urged them to **endeavour** to keep the unity of the spirit, an expression that implies effort is required and, in the absolute sense, it also implies unity will not always be possible. The need for effort is apparent from the context: *“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. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (Eph. 4:1-6).

The exhortation to walk with *“lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love”* implies that unity of the faith would only be possible if they walked humbly, not proudly, and if they considered the welfare of each other.

Persuasion

The faith to which Paul referred is common throughout the Scriptures. Dr. Strong defines it as “persuasion or moral conviction” (#4102). The concept of persuasion is consistent with Romans 14:5 where Paul exhorts everyone to be *“fully persuaded in their own minds”*. However when taken together the concepts of each one being fully persuaded in their own mind and the diversity of characteristics and roles of the members of the church mean that their will be diversity of opinion amongst the members of the body.

Such a difference is acknowledged by Paul—he exhorted the Romans to tolerate such differences. He quotes two specific examples: *“For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth... One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks... Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way... For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men... therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another”* (Rom. 14:2-19). There are two important principles embodied in those verses.

The first is the challenge for each member to realise that the members of the body of Christ have different convictions and further to acknowledge that such differences do not constitute grounds to consider another to not be of “the body”.

Initially dietary practices might not be an issue but if the rules pertaining to the Law Covenant were enforced there could be “friction” between members—some foods considered permissible by some were forbidden under the Law.

Of greater significance is the day of the week when members should worship. The day of the week on which one believes they must worship might present

a challenge to some believers—they might need to ask themselves if they can accept, as a member of the body, one who believes they must worship on the seventh day. The Apostle Paul wrote that one must not be excluded on that ground alone, but some might find it difficult to accommodate one who deems such a practice to be obligatory.

In both cases the over-riding principle for each one to observe is that they must not allow the differences to hinder the spiritual growth of the other—to **not constitute a stumbling block to their fellow believer**. This principle is indeed the over-riding one and is the spirit behind Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4:3—that they walk with all “*lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*”. It is only when such an attitude of heart and mind is pursued that there is any prospect of keeping the unity of the faith.

Abstract convictions

The differences in the personal characteristics listed above—dietary practices and the day of the week when one “must” worship—are relatively easy to accommodate. History seems to indicate that it is differences in understanding of the Scriptures in relation to non-practical doctrine that have been more challenging. Nevertheless differences in understanding on all matters must be accommodated, such as differences in the fine points of defining “immortality” and to what extent the practices recorded in the Old Testament can be symbolised in relation to the Christian’s walk.

Purity of heart

When brethren, who have different aptitudes and abilities, are fully persuaded in their own minds and are zealously pursuing the truth, it is understandable effort will be required to “*keep the unity of the faith*”. Thus is seen the need for **purity of heart**—a pure desire to serve the Lord in their own heart in accordance with their own convictions yet grant the same privileges for others. In such cases it must be realised that the Lord has placed the members in the body and so any differences are His doing. Such a realization removes all personal characteristics from “the debate” and leads to a recognition of God’s omnipotence and watch-care over the church.

The height of the standard described above is indicated by the Apostle’s wording to Timothy: “*Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned*” (1 Tim. 1:5). The Greek from which “end” is translated (“*tellō*”) means “to set out for a definite point or goal; properly the point aimed at as a limit, that is, (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state...” (Strong’s Concordance #5056).

The concept of love out of a pure heart being the end or goal of the commandment implies it is not the starting point and it requires effort to achieve.

Depart from iniquity

The need for effort and progress is further indicated in Paul’s second letter to Timothy: “*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*” (2 Tim 2:19). The concept of departure implies effort to leave one’s previous abode and set out for a new goal. Paul continues: “*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. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart*” (2 Tim. 2:19-22). The concepts of “purge” and “flee” conjure up thoughts of effort—to leave previous habitats and move towards a new goal, the path being via righteousness, faith, love and peace as practised by those who have a pure heart.

On reaching the goal

The Apostle Peter adds a final word to the task of accommodating differences in a spirit of unity through the exercise of love coming from a pure heart: “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently*” (1 Pet. 1:22). Peter’s language exhorts those who consider themselves to have reached the goal to continue on—to maintain the effort—and not just merely to love one another but to love them **fervently** (intently; **without ceasing**).

Unique

Thus the church is unique. It is a body comprised of individuals who are diverse (in colour, in national customs, in language) and yet who have a common unified spirit, all striving together to build each other up, with each one prepared to forego their own preferences (preferences as distinct from convictions) in order to promote the welfare of other members, while overall each one strives to develop a pure heart, the thoughts and intents of which are known to the Creator. Indeed all members are to join with the Apostle Paul as he wrote: “*Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully... For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord... For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*” (2 Cor. 4:1-7). Praise be to God for His marvelous work!■

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Liberty means freedom. When Jesus finished His work on earth, when He cried on the Cross “*it is finished*” (John 19:30), “*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 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 Covenant was a form of bondage for Israel, and so the end of the Law Covenant represented liberty for them. 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).

The Law Covenant was a form of bondage from **two aspects**: there were certain things the Law prohibited them from doing and there were things they were required to do, both of which restricted them.

Prohibitions

Some of the prohibitions imposed by the Law Covenant are expressed directly in the “Ten Commandments” as recorded in Exodus 20:1-17. One gauge of how restrictive the Ten Commandments would be if they were imposed today is to consider their effect on the lifestyles of those living in the Western World:

- No work on the Sabbath Day (Deut. 5:14). This verse repeats the prohibition specified in Exodus 20:9-11. If the prohibition applied today it would destroy the life style of the inhabitants of every industrialised country because many of the processes which contribute to modern day life, such as the generation of electricity, require factories to operate 24 hours per day 7 days per week (commonly termed “24/7”). In other factories such as metal foundries the processes themselves cannot be started and stopped at the end of every day nor after a few days but must run continuously with minimum disruption;
- No marriage with the inhabitants of the promised land (Deut. 7:3). While there might not be a “promised land” involved today, there is marriage between people from different nations with different customs, hence there would be restrictions on the social lives of many;
- Not to eat certain animals and birds (Deut. 14:3-21). Bacon and pork were prohibited and they were permitted to eat only those fish that had fins and scales—neither of those restrictions is applied in Western countries today;
- Not permitted to borrow from other nations (Deut. 15:6). Such a restriction would bring the world’s

financial system to a complete stop, with a collapse of life styles in almost every country;

- Not permitted to wear garments comprised of more than one material (Deut. 22:11). This restriction would exclude many fabrics used today;
- Not permitted to lend to one of their brethren and gain interest from the loan (Deut. 23:19-20). Again the financial system would be in disarray;
- Not permitted to seek the return of anything lent to another (Deut. 24:10).

Consequently the present day Western World would not be able to operate under the restrictions imposed by the Law Covenant.

Obligations

As well as imposing restrictions on the Israelites, the Law Covenant imposed duties which were burdensome and which required constant attention. Perhaps the most onerous in terms of requiring constant attention was the requirement to offer 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).

In addition to the continual sacrifice which had to be offered every day, on the Sabbath day two lambs had to be sacrificed: “*And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot...*” (Num. 28:9-10).

The sacrifice of these animals imposed a constant burden on Israel—the animals had to be killed every morning and every evening. Killing animals involves work and so the offering of these sacrifices required much effort and constant attention. An additional factor was that the animals had to be perfect—without blemish (Num. 28:19, 31)—which meant they were the best of the flock and thus the sacrifices might have constituted a considerable cost to the Israelites.

A consideration of these prohibitions and obligations brings into sharp focus the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to Israel that they not become “*entangled again with the yoke of bondage*” (Gal. 5:1).

The lusts of the flesh

However the termination of the Law Covenant brought a new challenge to Israel. When they realised they were liberated from the Law Covenant there was a danger they would feel free to do completely as they pleased, and so the Apostle Paul goes on to warn them of the dangers of such an attitude.

The warning is relevant today to those who have not experienced life under such restrictions and obligations as were imposed by the Law Covenant.

The Apostle wrote: *“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 warning has two fronts: at an individual level and at a corporate level. At the individual level there was a danger they would fall into unholy living (which Paul calls “occasion to the flesh”—that is they would indulge in activities which would satisfy the desires of their fleshly lusts). Additionally, at the corporate level, their self indulgence would cause them to overlook their responsibilities to serve the interests of their brethren.

Regarding self indulgence—using liberty for an occasion to satisfy 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... 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, 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... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16-25). **The danger for the Israelites was the temptation to turn their liberty into licence.**

The Christian’s warfare

The temptations that confronted the liberated Israelites have confronted all Christians and continue to confront the Christian today. The natural tendencies of the flesh are contrary to the characteristics of the new creature: *“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would”* (Gal. 5:17).

Consequently those who are striving to develop the new creature—*“...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”* (2 Cor. 5:17)—must heed the words the Apostle wrote to the Ephesians: *“... take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”* (Eph. 6:13-18).

Protecting oneself with the armour is the only way by which the Christian can ensure they continue to “walk in the Spirit” and do not abuse the liberty that results from not being subject to the Law Covenant.■

THE LIGHT TURNED YELLOW

The light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crossing, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating driver was furious and honked his horn, screaming in frustration—he had missed his chance to get through the intersection; **“that driver”** in front had caused him to waste precious time.

He was still in mid-rant when there was a tap on the window from a very serious police officer. The officer ordered him to exit the car. He took him to the police station where he was searched, fingerprinted and photographed. After a couple of hours the driver was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with his

personal effects. He said, “I’m very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn and abusing the driver in front of you. I noticed the ‘What Would Jesus Do’ sticker on your back window, the ‘Choose Life’ licence plate holder, the ‘Follow Me to Sunday-School’ bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the back of your car, so I assumed you had stolen the car”.

The above story might be an exaggeration, but it might also be a gentle reminder of the Apostle’s words: *“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men”* (2 Cor. 3:2). And as Peter wrote: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8).■

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

In Romans 8:15 the Apostle Paul introduces the concept of the Christian being adopted into the family of God. A knowledge of the procedures involved under Roman rule increases the significance of his statement.

Roman adoption was a protracted and serious procedure which was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses.

The procedure was made difficult by the *patria potestas*—the father’s authority over his family. His authority was absolute and extended to the power of life and death—the law allowed a father to execute a grown son for treasonous behaviour.

A Roman son never came of age until his father died. No matter how old he was, he was still under the *patria potestas*—absolute possession and absolute control—of his father. Such subserviency added to the gravity of adoption—in adoption a person passed from one *patria potestas* to another; **he passed out of the possession and control of one father into the equally absolute possession and control of another.**

After marriage, a Roman girl left her father’s authority to enter the household of her husband (or father-in-law, if he was still alive).

The adoption procedure comprised two steps. The first was known as *mancipatio*, which was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were symbolically used. Three times the symbolism of sale was carried out, twice the father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back, but the third time he did not buy him back, when the original *patria potestas* was held to be broken.

After the sale there followed a ceremony called *vindicatio*. The adopting father went to the *praetor*, one of the Roman magistrates, and presented a legal case for the transfer of the person to be adopted into his *patria potestas*. It was not until both procedures were completed that the adoption was accomplished.

Consequences

In spite of the adoption procedure being protracted, it was the consequences of the procedure that were more significant, and it is upon the consequences that Paul concentrates in his letter to the Romans. There were three main consequences:

- The adopted person lost all his inheritance in his

first family, but gained all the rights of a natural son in his new family;

- He became an heir of his new father’s estate, even if other sons were born after his adoption;
- All records of his previous life were obliterated, including all debts. The adoptee was regarded as entering a new life which was completely separate from his previous life.

Spiritual adoption

The adoption procedure for Christians is different from that used by the Romans. There is no “third sale” involved in the Christian’s spiritual adoption—it is a “once only” transaction. More so, Jesus warned His disciples about looking back to their previous earthly associations: *“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).*

While the procedures might differ, the consequences of the Christian’s adoption parallel those that applied under Roman law.

Firstly, just as the Roman adoptee lost all rights to any inheritance arising from his previous family, likewise the Christian’s inheritance is no longer on the earth but in heaven: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which... hath begotten us again unto a lively hope... to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:3-4).*

Secondly the Christian also obtains a new Father—*“whereby we cry Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15)*—who cares for them as if they were His natural sons: *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).*

Thirdly they will be heirs of their new Father: *“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...” (Rom. 8:17). “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).*

Fourthly all records of past demeanors are cancelled: *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).*

Finally there is a witness to the Christian’s adoption: *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16).■*

TWO HEROIC BIBLE TRANSLATORS

Due in part to their ready availability in the Western World, it is easy to overlook the fact that the Bible is a treasure; to own one is a privilege and to be free to study it at times of one's choosing is a great blessing. A knowledge of the events that have resulted in the Bible being so readily available should increase one's appreciation of it and also one's desire to study it.

John Wycliffe

One early figure in bringing the Bible to the Western World was John Wycliffe (1330-1384). He lived in an age of ignorance and superstition, of worldly ambition and corruption in the established Church.

The schism of the Papacy in 1378 resulted in two Popes being placed at the head of the Church, one in Rome and the other in Avignon. Each anathematised the other, each raised armies resulting in the slaughter of helpless women and children for the sole purpose of aggrandisement for each of the pretenders to the title "vicar of Christ".

John Wycliffe was chief among the leaders opposing Roman aggression and corruption. He led a life of devotion and self-sacrifice, and was a most devoted student of Scripture. To him Christians are indebted for the first translation in 1383 of the Scriptures from Latin into English, the language of the people.

William Tyndale (1433-1536)

One hundred years after the death of Wycliffe, and one year after the birth of Martin Luther, William Tyndale was born. The year was 1483.

William Tyndale won a distinguished position in Oxford for scholarship. He moved to Cambridge at the time when Cambridge had received Erasmus's Greek New Testament. To Tyndale, this work of Erasmus was an inspiration, and probably set him on the task which was to become the object of his life.

The established Roman Catholic Church was opposed to translating the Scriptures into the language of the people, and Tyndale met with general opposition from Church authorities.

At the outset of his work Tyndale declared, "I defy the Pope and all his laws; and if God spare me I will one day make the boy that drives the plough in England to know more of the Scripture than the Pope does".

To accomplish his translation, Tyndale had to leave England and work in exile. He left England in 1524, never to see it again. At Hamburg in Germany, in

poverty and distress, and amid constant danger, the brave-hearted exile worked at his translation so diligently that in the following year he delivered the first sheets of his quarto New Testament to a printer in Cologne. But the Church discovered his work, and he had to flee to Worms, where the enthusiasm for Luther and the Reformation was at its height. There at length he achieved his purpose, producing for the first time a completely printed New Testament in English translated from Greek manuscripts.

Because of the opposition of the established Church, and the utmost vigilance of the authorities at the ports, Tyndale's New Testaments had to be smuggled into England in cases, barrels, bales of cloth, sacks of flour and every secret way that could be devised. Many were discovered, but many were not, and in a few years the books were scattered far and wide throughout the country.

William Tyndale pressed on with his translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, in continuing financial difficulty, distress and danger, until finally he was betrayed and imprisoned in the Castle of Vilvorden. It is pitiful to read of the poor prisoner there, in his cold and misery and rags, writing to the governor to beg "your lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here during the winter, you will request the procureur to be kind enough to send me from my goods which he has in his possession a warmer cap, for I suffer extremely from a perpetual catarrh, which is much increased by this cell. A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin; also a piece of cloth to patch my leggings--my shirts too are worn out... Also that he would suffer me to have my Hebrew Bible and Grammar and Dictionary".

In 1536 William Tyndale was strangled at the stake and his body burnt to ashes.

Poverty, distress, misrepresentation, imprisonment and death were constantly before him, but Tyndale pressed on unflinchingly with his translation work until his final betrayal.

Tyndale's translation

All English versions of the Scriptures before Tyndale were translations of translations, being derived from the Vulgate or older Latin versions. The Vulgate was a Latin version of the Scriptures translated by Jerome in the fourth century AD. Tyndale went back to the original Hebrew and Greek, though the manuscripts available to him were neither as old nor as authoritative as those available to more recent translators. Tyndale embodied that truth in so noble a

translation that his expression has been only slightly improved even to the present day, except for modern day spelling and vocabulary.

Tyndale devoted himself chiefly to the New Testament, bringing out edition after edition as he saw anything that could be improved. Of the Old Testament he translated only the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, and some of the Prophets.

In January 1604 a conference of bishops and clergy was held in Hampton Court Palace under the presidency of King James I of England. James I decreed that a new translation of the Bible was to be

made. The result was the production of the Authorised Version of the Bible.

It must be noted that since the Authorised Version appeared in 1611, many words used by the translators have become obsolete, and many have completely changed their meaning.

The Revised Version of 1885 brought about many desirable changes to the language of the Authorised Version and the modern versions have made many verses and passages clear to present-day readers. However not all “modern” translations yield a more accurate understanding. ■

GOG AND MAGOG

At the time of going to press there was much unrest in the world, triggered by a variety of events. Some of the countries in which there had been “demonstrations” were Zimbabwe, Yemen, Somalia, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Afghanistan, Bolivia, Pakistan and Russia.

In the geographic centre of the strife is the nation of Israel, which is continually faced with threats of annihilation by Iran. Israel is one of the smaller countries in the area both in terms of land area and population, and so to the secular mind the prospect of their annihilation is plausible.

The prophet Ezekiel wrote much about God’s dealings with Israel in the end times. Chapter 36:1-15 reads (in part): “... thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel... Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because the enemy hath made you desolate... Surely in the fire of my jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen... Prophesy therefore concerning the land of Israel... Because ye have borne the shame of the heathen: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I have lifted up mine hand, Surely the heathen that are about you, they shall bear their shame. But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches... For, behold, I am for you... the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded: And I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit: and I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings: and ye shall know that I am the LORD... Neither will I cause men to hear in thee the shame of the heathen any more, neither shalt thou bear the reproach of the people any more...” (Ezek. 36:2-15).

The prophecy describes a great upheaval in the affairs of the nations around Israel and in Israel itself. In common parlance it might be said that “the tables will

be turned” and Israel, which in times past has borne the shame of the heathen, will no longer bear that shame but will prosper and it will be the heathen nations that will bear the shame.

The prophecy continues and explains **why** God allowed Israel to suffer such despite: “Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings... Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries... And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land” (Ezek. 36:16-20).

Not only did Israel defile their own land but when they were scattered they profaned God’s name in the lands to which they went (although the actions by which they profaned God’s name are not listed).

God’s purpose

The prophecy continues further to explain why God, after scattering them, will gather them again into their own land: “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: **I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name**, which ye have profaned among the nations, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which hath been profaned among the heathen... and **the nations shall know that I am Jehovah**, ... when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes” (Ezek. 36:22-23). The prophet declares that God’s purpose in gathering Israel again into their own land is two-fold: to sanctify His Name; and to cause the heathen nations to acknowledge Him as God. That will be a dramatic change from the present when some nations

do not worship any god (they are atheistic), or worship a false god. Thus Ezekiel declares that the nation of Israel is a pivotal nation in God's dealings with the world of mankind.

The sequence

God has a planned sequence of action by which He will accomplish His two objectives.

Firstly He will implant His spirit in the hearts of Israel: *"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep mine ordinances, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God"* (Ezek. 36:25-28).

While those verses speak only of a blessing for Israel, the change will cause them some distress: *"Then shall ye remember your evil ways, and your doings that were not good; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations"* (Ezek. 36:31). Israel will have a guilty conscience when they recognise their misdemeanours.

God and Magog

The second stage of God's plan by which He will cause the heathen to acknowledge Him is also twofold. It involves the nation of Gog, together with several other nations: *"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee... in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee"* (Ezek. 38:1-7). Gog and the nations which will accompany them will not come of their own volition but God will direct

them so that He will accomplish His will through them—God will *"put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth"*.

Identification

It is not possible to identify from the Scriptures alone which nation is "Gog". The name Gog occurs only nine times in the Bible, seven of which are in Ezekiel, with the other two being in 1 Chronicles 5:4 and Revelation 20:8.

1 Chronicles 5:4 reads: *"The sons of Joel: Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son"*. Gog was a son of Joel who was the first son of Samuel (1 Sam. 8:1-2). Joel *"walked not in his ways (the ways of Samuel) but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgement"* (1 Sam. 8:3). Thus Gog did not have an upright father to guide him.

As well as not directly identifying the nation of Gog, the Scriptures also do not give any specific information about the area Gog inhabited, except to say it is in the "north parts" (Ezek. 38:15). Since the prophecy is directed to Israel (*"Also, thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel, and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD"* Ezek. 36:1), it seems reasonable to assume that Gog comes from a region north of Israel. However it remains that historians are the only source of information regarding precisely who the nation of Gog is and where they are located on the earth.

In that vein, Halley's Bible Handbook (page 333) reads: "Gog was ruler of the land of Magog. In Genesis 10:2 Magog, Meshech, Tubal, and Gomer are named the sons of Japheth and founders of the northern group of nations... Whatever may be the exact identification of these peoples, Ezekiel speaks of them as dwelling in "the uttermost parts of the north" (38:6, 15; 39:2), and there can be little doubt but that he means nations beyond the Caucasus. A glance at the map makes it plain that he has in mind that part of the world known as Russia". (The Caucasus is generally perceived to be the dividing line between Asia and Europe, encompassing the area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea).

Notwithstanding the absence of any clear identification of the nation of Gog, it is clear that Gog is the nation God is going to use to demonstrate His power and turn the nations around, and some insight into future events on the world scene can be deduced from a study of Gog and Magog.

Israel dwelling safely

The prophecy states that at the time of the assault Israel will be *"dwelling safely"*, *"without bars or gates"*. It is also clear that the attack on Israel will be

initiated by Gog: “*Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land... Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee... And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes. Thus saith the Lord GOD; Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them?*” (Ezek. 38:10-17)

God’s direct involvement

Ezekiel continues to give more details of the assault and God’s direct involvement in the outcome: “*And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face... And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man’s sword shall be against his brother... and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD*” (Ezek. 38:18-23).

While Israel’s prosperity will incite Gog to plunder Israel, Zechariah 8:23 indicates other nations will be attracted to Israel because of their prosperity and will voluntarily come to learn of God through them: “*Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you*”.

TUNISIA AND THE JEWS

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Levites living in Djerba, Tunisia, did not heed Ezra the Scribe’s call to return to Israel. At its peak there were 110,000 Jews living in Tunisia—fewer than 2000 Jews remain today in one of the Diaspora’s oldest Jewish communities which some sources say was first settled by Jews around the time the First Temple was destroyed.

In December 2011, Tunisia-born Vice Prime Minister of Israel Silvan Shalom called on the Jews still living in Tunisia to immigrate to Israel. That call was rejected with much derision by the remnants of Tunisia’s once thriving Jewish community, but with new legislation being proposed in the Islamist Ennahda led government, Tunisian Jews may need to rethink their loyalty to a country that no longer wants them—the Tunisian Parliament is working to pass a law that will prohibit the import of religious books, kosher food, and even visitors from Israel.

In an interview with Makor Rishon, Rav Haim Biton, Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community in Tunisia said, “Today, the government lets us bring in food, medicine, religious and educational books from Israel. If this law passes, our condition will completely change”. Some community members believe the proposed law is part of the government’s strategy to cut off Jews from their culture.

He continued on to say that they are trying to explain to the government that, if the law passes, their relatives from Israel won’t be able to visit, they will not have much needed kosher food items, and they won’t be able to bring in religious and educational materials. Despite the fact that the new proposed law hasn’t yet been passed, Israeli citizens who have requested permission to visit Tunisia recently have been repeatedly turned down, while eight months ago, they could visit. **Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Silvan Shalom is urging Tunisian Jews to leave while they can.**

[Data extracted from “*The Jewish Press*”, September 1st, 2012—<http://www.thejewishpress.com/>]

“*Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes*” (Jer. 16:14-17).

WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY

In his letter to the Christians at Philippi the Apostle Paul listed eight characteristics of the things that should occupy their minds during their times of meditation. One of those characteristics was that the things were to be “lovely” (Phil. 4:8).

Things that human beings deem to be “lovely” are things that are favourable to them, things they enjoy. In secular circles the concept is applied very widely and is encapsulated in the idiom “everything in the garden is lovely”, which is another way of saying “life is good”—the expression is used in a general sense and its use is not restricted to physical gardens.

Significance

The characteristics of the things that people ponder affect their character. Proverbs 23:7 reads: “*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...*”. Although the overall theme of Proverbs 23 is to warn God-fearing men of the subliminal objectives of deceitful men, the principle applies to all people—the things upon which one’s mind dwells modifies their disposition and consequently their actions.

God’s characteristics

Philippians 4:8 did not introduce any new concept—it was simply an exhortation for them to think on the things that reflected God’s character. Many centuries earlier David declared: “*My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up. For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee*” (Psa. 5:4). David declared that God does not have any pleasure in wickedness and consequently those whom He has “*chosen to be a soldier*” (2 Tim. 2:4) also must not have pleasure in wickedness—that is, wickedness must be repulsed by the Christian. Such a mind-set is different from that of the natural man, as the Apostle exhorted the Ephesians: “*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind... who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ... and have been taught by him... that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Eph. 4:17-24). Thus the things that the Philippians regarded as lovely in times past—things that were pleasurable to them—were now to be discarded and they were to put on Christ and things that were consistent with God’s character.

Historical record

In times past God has taken a firm hand with His people when they have disregarded His standards and embraced wickedness. Regarding His dealings with Israel Paul wrote: “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men... because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God.... but became vain in their imaginations... and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man... For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections... receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient*” (Rom. 1:18-28). Paul wrote those words from a natural man’s perspective, nevertheless God blinded their minds to the extent Israel failed to recognise their Messiah—God gave them over to a reprobate mind.

Eternal consequences

The meditations of one’s heart have consequences far beyond the present life. Romans 2:6-11 reads: “*Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good...*” (Rom. 2:6-10). “Well doing” is lovely in God’s sight; contention is not.

Thus the meditations of one’s heart—the things upon which one thinks or meditates—determine one’s reward. Consequently the Christian is exhorted to think—to meditate—on the things that are lovely in God’s sight. In this regard the Christian should meditate on things which make for peace because “*the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*” (Jas. 3:18), and on those things that edify one another (Rom. 14:19). ■

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