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FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

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

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

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

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

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

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

A position of glory

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

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

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

Heaven more glorious

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

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

God's agent in creation

A further attribute of Jesus before He came to Earth was that He was God's agent and as such He made the worlds: "*God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds*" (Heb. 1:1-2). John confirms Jesus' role in the creation of the world: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God ... The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*" (John 1:1-3).

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

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

Mission understood

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

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

Ordained to suffer

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

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

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

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

Ignominy of the cross

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

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

It is difficult for anyone today to fully comprehend the scorn and derision that were heaped upon Him; He who was with God before the world was created, He who made the worlds; He who left the glory of His father's throne in heaven to come to Earth to redeem mankind. Matthew records it thus: "*And when they had plaited a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews'*" (Matt. 27:29).

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

His reward

Jesus did not demand any reward for His sacrifice. All He asked was to be restored to His former glory as recorded in John 17:4-5: "*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*".

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

Inheritance prophesied

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

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

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

The Christian's privilege

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

THE FATHER AND HIS SONS

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

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

He first loved us

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

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

Jesus was a chosen Son

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

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

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

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

God calls His sons

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

Holy Spirit

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

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

Knowledge essential

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

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

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

Comfort

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

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

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

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

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

Sanctification

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

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

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

Victory assured

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

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

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

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

Correction

God's love for His sons, His church, includes ongoing vigilance and watch care. Jesus said "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit*" (John 15:1-2). This metaphor contains several valuable lessons for every Christian. God is the vine dresser and He is the One who does the pruning, the objective of which is to increase the fruitage. It is reassuring to realise that all of God's dealings with His sons are for their ultimate spiritual benefit: "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*" (Rom. 8:28).

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

Called brethren

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

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

Kings and priests

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Bible Student Hymnal 308
(Based on Matthew 6:8)**

NUMBERING OUR DAYS

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

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

Primacy

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

Duration

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

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

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

Three score years and ten

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

The days of youth

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

Adulthood

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

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

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

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

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

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

Old age

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

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

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

The “Kosmos”

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

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

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

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

The Universe

The widest interpretation of “*kosmos*” is “*universe*”, that is, both the heavens and the earth. Acts 17:24 states: “*God that made the world (kosmos) and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ...*” The “*world*” referred to in this verse may be interpreted as including both heaven and earth; the universe. God made both, as stated in Genesis 1:1 - “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*”. Isaiah also proclaims God as the creator of the heavens and the earth: “*For thus saith the LORD that*

created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else” (Isa. 45:18).

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

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

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

The Earth only

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

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

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

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

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

The human race

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

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

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

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

Unbelievers (the heathen)

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

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

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

Gentiles only

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

The social order

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

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

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

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

Material possessions

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

Region of influence

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

The other "worlds"

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

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

Summary

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

LOVE IS NOT PUFFED UP

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

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

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

Effects

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

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

Personal achievements

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

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

Antidotes

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

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

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

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