



Volume 92 No. 3

AUSTRALIA

July-September 2009

REASONING WITH GOD

“Come now, and let us reason together”, says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18 NKJV).

Human experience testifies that conversation with another is stimulating, and it is in that vein that the thought of “*reasoning together*” is an exciting one. There are several factors that make it exciting, one of which is that at least two minds are involved; one is not alone. Another factor is that those involved are addressing a common concept and have the same objective: either to ascertain the truth of an issue or to identify the best solution to a problem. A still further stimulating factor is that reasoning together has the potential for those involved to gain knowledge which, in itself, can give great satisfaction.

Each of the factors listed above applies to any reasoning process, including Christian fellowship—fellowship being the interaction of two minds as Paul and Timothy expressed in their letter to the brethren at Philippi: *“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons... I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now...”* (Phil. 1:1-5 NKJV).

Objective

As mentioned above the objective of any reasoning process is to achieve unanimity of understanding, as the apostles went on to exhort the Philippians: *“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”* (Phil. 2:1-2).

However, over and above the objective of achieving like-mindedness, Christians strive to ascertain the truth, as did those at Berea: *“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so”* (Acts 17:11 NKJV).

Isaiah 1:18

Notwithstanding the objectives mentioned above, the expression “*reason together*” in Isaiah 1:18 does not include the idea of two minds working together to come to a common conclusion.

The Hebrew word from which “*reason together*” is translated (Strong’s Concordance number 3198 *yâkach*), is defined as “a primitive root; to *be right* (that is, correct); reciprocally to *argue*; causatively to *decide, justify* or *convict*”. It occurs 59 times in the Old Testament and several English words are used to translate it: appoint, argue, chasten, convince, correct, correction, daysman, dispute, judge, maintain, plead, reason, **reason together**, rebuke, reprove, reprover, surely, “in any wise”.

In none of the instances where the word occurs, other than Isaiah 1:18 and possibly Job 13:3, is there any thought of two minds bargaining together, but rather that **one mind is dominant** and either instructing the other or deciding an issue. Some examples from the New King James Version are:

- Genesis 24:44: “...let her be the woman whom the LORD has **appointed** for my master’s son”;
- 2 Samuel 7:14: “If he commits iniquity, I will **chasten** him...”;

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- Job 5:17: “Behold, happy is the man whom God **corrects**...”;
- Isaiah 2:4: “He shall judge between the nations, and **rebuke** many people...”.

The thought of God’s mind being superior to Man’s mind is consistent with the supremacy of God above His creation, as Isaiah proclaims: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). The Apostle Paul quotes and expands on the prophet’s words: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of god! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has become his counsellor? or who has first given to him and it shall be repaid to him? for of him and through him and to him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36).

Context

From the outset, the book of Isaiah is not one of mutual reasoning but of rebuke. Its opening verses record the wilful errors of the Israelites: “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: ‘I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider’. Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward” (Isa. 1:1-4 NKJV).

The prophet goes on to declare that God was aware of their hypocrisy in continuing to offer sacrifices: “‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?’ says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood’” (Isa. 1:11-15 NKJV).

The following verses may be difficult to fully comprehend because they constitute a stark contrast to

the preceding verses: “‘Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. Come now, and **let us reason together**’, says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken’” (Isa. 1:16-20 NKJV).

Thus the meaning of “reasoning together” in Isaiah 1:18 is not as one reasons in the secular world, but is the same as in the other instances where the Hebrew word occurs, that is, of One being, who is superior to the other, instructing the subordinate one to take notice of and be subject to the decree. In effect God is telling Israel that, even though they had sinned grossly in times past, they were not beyond redemption and, if they washed themselves, He would regard them as pure, even as white as snow or wool.

God’s grace

Such forgiveness illustrates the magnitude of God’s grace. Indeed, maybe it is so great that it is difficult for the human mind to accept that He can be so gracious. However other prophets also testify of God’s grace.

Jeremiah is one such prophet: “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD’, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For **I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more**”. Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): “If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the LORD, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever”. Thus says the LORD: “If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the LORD” (Jer. 31:34-37 NKJV). The authority of the assurance given in those verses is so great that no human being can sensibly question it: God is going to “forgive their iniquity” and “remember their sin no more”; the edict is given by Him “who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night”, and He who controls the sea. It is only if those ordinances fail that He will “cast off all the seed of Israel”. Just as the ordinances of the sun and the moon will never fail, neither will God’s promise to forgive the sins of Israel.

Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel also records God's forgiveness of Israel and how their previous sins do not negate His covenant with them.

Ezekiel 16:1-14 records God's dealings with Israel in their infancy and how He blessed them and made them to *"thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful"* (verse 7). Indeed He goes on to say: *"Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you", says the Lord GOD*" (Ezek. 16:14 NKJV). Nevertheless they were not fully appreciative of God's blessings and verse 15 records that they *"... trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it"*. Such was their sinfulness that God regarded them worse than Sodom (verse 48). Nevertheless God has promised that He will forgive their sins completely: *"So I will lay to rest My fury toward you... and be angry no more"* (verse 42). *"Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you...Then you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done", says the Lord GOD*" (Ezek. 16:60-63 NKJV). Surely God will

punish Israel for all their waywardness, but His promise is also sure that He will honour the covenant He made with them when He formed them. Thus the prophet adds confirmation to the promise given to Isaiah that He will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.

Thus the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel both confirm that, although Israel has sinned terribly, God is going to disregard their sins completely. The invitation to Israel recorded in Isaiah 1:18 is not for them to reason with God as human beings reason together, but rather to "get the matter straight"—though their sins be as scarlet and crimson, He will forgive them completely and regard them as white as snow.■

ERRATUM

The previous edition of the Peoples Paper (Volume 92 No. 2, April-June 2009) contains an incorrect reference.

On page 10, right hand column, paragraph beginning: "One example of a symbol...", line 12 refers to Isaiah 27:18. The reference should be Job 27:18.

Additionally the first word of line 12 was intended to be "transient" and not "destructive" as printed.

Any inconvenience caused is regretted and the editor wishes to thank those who pointed out the error.■

CONVENTION PRAYER

"Our loving heavenly Father, we come again into your presence and that precious and all-prevailing name, the name of your dear Son and our Lord and Saviour. We ask for your blessing upon the services of this Convention, that they may be honouring to Thee and edifying to each one here—that they be the grand statement of our faith and determination as individuals and as a group of your people to press on in the narrow way, seeking to follow in the footsteps of Him who went before.

We would ask that you guide us throughout by the administration of your Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds, not only in those who speak, but of those of us who listen to the message of truth that will go forward. We ask that each of our speakers be indeed blessed of Thee and guided in what they bring to us, that it may be edifying and helpful and give us renewed zest, as it were, for the coming year.

We ask, too, that those of us who listen may have attentive hearts and minds to pick up what gems of truth no doubt will be amongst the words that are spoken to us from your Word of truth, that wonderful mine of truth, of gems and riches beyond compare.

We would ask, too, that our service might not be the end but may be the beginning of the next stage of our walk in the narrow way and that the times of refreshing will be strengthening and enable us to fulfil those vows of consecration which each of us personally has made to do.

So just again we ask for the guidance and blessing of your Holy Spirit on this occasion. We remember those who are not with us, those who would like to be here, those who are kept away by illness or physical problems, problems of distance, and so on. You know their circumstances and we ask that they, too, may feel in some measure that they are with us in spirit.

We ask again for your guidance and blessing upon all that is undertaken in your name. Here may we prove the power of prayer to strengthen faith and banish care. Here help our souls to rise; reveal Thy glory to our eyes.

Hear our prayer and answer according to your perfect will because we ask in that all-prevailing name of Jesus Christ. Amen."■

DECLARING THE END

"... I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure'" (Isaiah. 46:9-10).

The statement in Isaiah 46:9-10, "*declaring the end from the beginning*", indicates that there never has been, nor never will be, any doubt that God will accomplish everything He wishes.

Jehovah

Jehovah, the LORD, the self-existent one, can make that declaration because He is pre-eminent, that is He is before all and above all. He is the One who has been "*from everlasting*" and will be "*to everlasting*" (Psa. 90:2). He is the all-powerful One, the Lord God Omnipotent (Rev. 19:6). Isaiah 40:25 reads: "*To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?' saith the Holy One*". Daniel declared: "*Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness ... I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me ...*" (Dan. 2:20-23).

Daniel's statement that God "*removeth kings, and setteth up kings*", indicates that God exerts control over individuals. In view of the fact that He created the universe it might be difficult to accept that He would involve Himself in such minute affairs as those of one king on the earth. However that is the case.

Nebuchadnezzar

One king over whom God exercised direct control was Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel chapter 2). Daniel 4:35 records Nebuchadnezzar's conclusion after he had experienced God's over-ruling: "*And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*" Later Daniel declared to Belshazzar that God had given his father his kingdom: "*O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour*" (Dan. 5:18).

Pharaoh

Pharaoh was another king whom God controlled. Moses was commissioned by God to approach Pharaoh and ask him to release the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. Since Moses was carrying out God's command, the natural mind might expect that Pharaoh

would have agreed to the Israelites' release. However God had a greater purpose, and He told Moses in advance what He was going to do: "*And the LORD said unto Moses, 'When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go'*" (Exod. 4:21). Pharaoh reacted as God had told Moses: "*And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, 'Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness'. And Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go'*" (Exod. 5:1-2).

Throughout the subsequent events that preceded the exodus God continued to declare beforehand what He would do to Pharaoh and how Pharaoh would react. One instance was Aaron's rod becoming a serpent: "*And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said*" (Exod. 7:10-13).

One argument that might be proposed by the natural mind to deny God's direct involvement with Pharaoh is that Pharaoh's "natural disposition" was to be a ruthless despot and that was why God used him. The only verses that suggest that Pharaoh hardened his own heart are Exodus 8:15 and 9:34: "*But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said*", and "*... when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants*". However such statements are at variance with all the other references of God's dealings with Pharaoh: Exodus 4:21 (quoted above), 9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10 and 14:8. All of those verses state that it was the Lord who hardened Pharaoh's heart and consequently to assume that God used Pharaoh because he was naturally a ruthless despot is assuming something that is not stated in the Scriptures. The

Scriptures do not give any details as to how God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and since He has limitless powers it is not beyond His power to have directly controlled Pharaoh. One interpretation of Exodus 8:15 and 9:34 is that they record the effect of God's control as it appears to men. In any event, the fact remains that Pharaoh acted precisely as God foretold and so he fulfilled God's purpose.

Since the nation of Israel was God's chosen people (Deut. 7:6) it might be bewildering that God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he did not agree to God's request as conveyed by Moses. God's purpose in hardening Pharaoh's heart is recorded in Exodus 9:16 and is cited by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9:17-18: *"For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth'. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"*. Thus God used Pharaoh to not only show that He controlled individuals in order to achieve His purposes but that He also devised the events so that they would demonstrate His power. It might be difficult to believe that God, the creator and ruler of the universe, would harden Pharaoh's heart just to show His power, however whether or not it is difficult to believe is immaterial because that is the plain statement of Scripture.

The Garden of Eden

God "knew the end from the beginning" before Adam and Eve transgressed in the Garden of Eden. In order to understand the situation it is necessary to understand the hierarchy in God's creation.

The angels

The angels are of higher rank than mankind: *"What is man... thou hast made him a little lower than the angels"* (Psalm 8:5).

2 Corinthians 11:14 (*"Satan ...is transformed into an angel of light"*), and Revelation 12:9 (*"And the great dragon...Satan...was cast out...and his angels were cast out with him"*) at least imply (although not categorically state) that Satan is an angel and therefore of higher rank than Adam and Eve, even in their perfection before they transgressed.

Eve deceived

Genesis 3:1 reads: *"Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, 'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"*. (Revelation 20:2 identifies the 'serpent' as 'the devil and Satan'.) Satan **deceived** Eve: *"And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived..."* (1 Tim. 2:14). There are two parties in an act of

deception, one being superior to the other. The superior one convinces the inferior one to believe something that is untrue. Thus Satan was able to deceive Eve because the angels are above mankind in God's hierarchy. Eve's deception was no fault of hers—she was subjected to the wiles of a spirit being whose station was above hers. In summary the situation was:

- God had established the angelic realm above the human realm;
- God had created Satan a spirit being; an angel;
- God had created Eve a human being;
- God had created Adam, gave him his desire for a helpmate, and created Eve to be that helpmate.

Thus it is no surprise, even to the human mind, that God would know the end from the beginning, that is, that Satan would be able to deceive Eve.

It may be speculated that it was Adam and Eve's natural disposition that caused them to sin, however there is no Scriptural support for such a contention.

Jesus

Indeed Jesus' coming to earth to be Man's redeemer was planned by God before He created the world. It is another example of God knowing the end from the beginning: *"Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you..."* (1 Peter 1:20). Thus it is evident that the transgression in the Garden of Eden was foreknown by God; indeed it was part of His plan as testified by Revelation 13:8: Jesus was *"the lamb slain from the foundation of the world"*.

The church

The call of the church is another example of God "knowing the end from the beginning": *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... According as he hath chosen us in him before"* (Greek: pro – in front of, before) *the foundation of the world..."* (Eph. 1:3-4). The statement *"he hath chosen us before the foundation of the world"* shows that God had pre-determined to call human beings to be members of His church, which in turn shows that God foreknew that Adam would transgress, that Jesus would overcome the temptations of Satan, that Jesus would be resurrected, and that He (God—John 6:44) would call some of mankind to be His sons and joint-heirs with His Son Jesus (Rom. 8:17).

How blessed are those who realise that God knows the end from the beginning and therefore all His promises are sure and steadfast: *"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast..."* (Heb. 6:19). Truly He is able to declare the end from the beginning and to *"... call those things which be not as though they were"* (Rom. 4:17).■

GOD'S SECONDS

The term “seconds” often implies that the object is second-rate or defective, and to regard any of God’s actions or products as “seconds” may be deemed heresy because His standard is perfection: “*As for God, his way is perfect...*” (Psa. 18:30).

However there are at least three parts of God’s plan where the “second” is, or will be, superior or more glorious than the “first”. The instances do not mean that the “firsts” were contrary to God’s plan but rather that they were a necessary preliminary; a prerequisite.

Adam

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 explains that there are two Adams: “*And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit...The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*”.

Genesis 2:7 records the creation of the first Adam: “*The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul*”. His name was Adam (Gen. 2:19). Adam was perfect: “*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him...And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was **very good**...*” (Gen. 1:26-31). Adam’s subsequent disobedience, by which “*sin entered into the world*” (Rom. 5:12), was a subsequent phase of God’s plan and does not indicate that Adam had any defect.

God’s plan provides for some human beings to become spiritual beings and inherit the heavenly realm and it was in accord with that plan that the first man Adam was of the earth. God sent Jesus to earth to become a man just like Adam. After three and a half years’ trial He proved faithful and was without sin; He was crucified and paid the ransom price for Adam and his race. He is called the **second Adam** because He had the same father as Adam and was therefore perfect but He came to earth after the first Adam; He will give life to mankind and not death, and in that sense He will be more glorious than the first Adam.

Covenants

God’s covenants are another example of God’s “second” being superior to the “first”: “*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second*” (Heb. 8:7). The first

covenant was not deficient—it only required the Israelites to keep it: “*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine*” (Exodus 19:5). The people agreed to keep it (Exodus 19:8), however they failed.

The failure was not due to any fault of the covenant but the weakness of their flesh: “*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*” (Rom. 8:3). The New Covenant will not fail: “*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake...this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel...saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (Jer. 31:31-33).

The first covenant had a specific purpose in God’s plan—it was not superfluous: “*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Gal. 3:24). Christ’s coming meant that there was no further need for the schoolmaster and so the Law Covenant became obsolete: “*But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster*” (Gal. 3:25).

The advents

Jesus’ two advents are another example of the “second” being more glorious than the “first”. At His first advent Jesus came as a baby, was born of a woman and died on the Cross; His second coming will be as a king who will rule the earth in righteousness: “*Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained...*” (Acts 17:31). He will “*put down all authority and power...And when all things shall be subdued unto Him then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him...that God may be all in all*” (1 Cor. 15: 24-28). The Second Advent will bring to fruition the purpose of the First Advent and in that sense it will be more glorious than the first, but the benefits of the Second Advent have been made possible only because of the work of the First Advent.

Thus God’s “seconds” are not inferior to His “firsts” but they are integral parts of His grand plan for the redemption of mankind.■

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

When he was before Felix the Apostle Paul declared: *"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust"* (Acts 24:14-15). The resurrection was central to Paul's hope and it is still central to the Christian's hope today.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote: *"Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty"* (1 Cor. 15:12-14 NKJV). The Apostle's statement means that the resurrection of mankind is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus, and hence Jesus' declaration to Martha is of great significance: *"I am the resurrection and the life..."* (John 11:25).

I am alive!

Jesus' disciples believed that He was the One who would deliver Israel from their subordination to the Romans. Consequently, as indicated by the disposition of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, their faith in God's promises was shaken when He was crucified: *"And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done"* (Luke 24:13-21).

However their sorrow turned to joy when they realised that He had risen from the dead: *"And it came to pass,*

as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:30-34). The fact that He was alive rejuvenated their hope of a Deliverer who would "redeem Israel"; God had previously provided deliverers for them but their deliverance was only temporary (Judges 3:9, 12, 15) and hence they sought a lasting deliverance from their oppressors.

John also saw a vision of the risen Jesus when he was on the isle of Patmos: *"I John...was in the isle that is called Patmos...I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet... And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man...And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death"* (Rev. 1:9-18).

The resurrection hope for the world

Jesus, now the risen Lord, the "one like unto the Son of man" in John's vision, has the keys of hell and of death and has the power to release from death everyone who has died. He knew before His death that He would gain that power: *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die"* (John 12:32-33). The "drawing of all men unto Him" refers to the work He will do when all men are resurrected, as He declared before His death: *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"* (John 5:28-29).

The word "resurrection" does not occur in the Old Testament; it occurs only in the New Testament. It is translated from the Greek word 'anastasis', which, according to Strong's Concordance means "a standing up again, that is, (literally) a resurrection from death...". It is variously translated: raised to life again, resurrection, rise from the dead, that should rise, rising

again. “Anastasis” means a restoration to the life previously held, which for the large majority of mankind means a restoration to life on earth.

The word “damnation” is translated from the Greek word “*krisis*”, the implied meaning of which is justice, and specifically divine law. It is variously translated: accusation, condemnation, damnation, judgment. The meaning of the word is critical because “damnation” is commonly interpreted to mean doomed to a future of eternal misery or obliteration. However the meaning in John 5:29 is that they will be resurrected to a time of crisis: that time will be a time of crisis for mankind (“*krisis*” in Greek equates to “crisis” in English) because there isn’t another redeemer who can rescue them (or ransom them). Paul explained this to Timothy when he wrote: “*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Jesus is the only Mediator and He gave Himself as a ransom price for the whole world of mankind when He died on the Cross. His ransom price will be testified in due time (that is, it will be vindicated) when all mankind is resurrected. However His sacrifice was a “one-off” event and, as stated in Hebrews 10:26, it will not be repeated: “*there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*”. Jesus has paid the ransom price once, He has been resurrected, and He is not going to die again: “*behold I am alive for evermore*” (Rev. 1:18). Consequently those who die a second time will remain dead.

Thus the overall message of John 5:28-29 is that mankind will stand up again (be resurrected) to a time of “crisis”. However the world then will be vastly different from the present evil world in which exploitation and injustice prevail: “*And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible*” (Isa. 13:11); “*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” (John 3:19); “*The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil*” (John 7:7); “*I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil*” (John 17:15); “*Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father*” (Gal. 1:4). The new world will be a stark contrast to the present environment as the prophet Isaiah declared: “*...They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*” (Isa. 11:9), and it is for this righteous world that Christians are waiting: “*Nevertheless we, according to*

his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).

The resurrection hope for the Church

The hope of a resurrection applies to all who have ever lived: the Scriptures do not exclude anyone, except those it calls “*spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots*” (Jude 12). The description in that verse does not apply to the majority of mankind; the implication is that those to whom it applied were professing to be Christians but were phoney. Of particular note is that such a description does not apply to those such as Noah who was “*a just man... who walked with God*” (Gen. 6:9). Indeed it does not apply either to all those mentioned in Hebrews 11 of whom it is written: “*And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect*” (Heb. 11:39-40)—suffice it to say that they have obtained a “good report”.

The “us” referred to in Hebrews 11:40, for whom God has provided some “better thing”, is defined by the opening verses of the book: “*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). The book of Hebrews was not written for the fathers, but for those who have lived in these “last days”, that is, the days since Jesus' first advent: it is for them that God has provided “some better thing”.

The “better thing”

The “better thing” that God has prepared for “us” is better than anything anyone has imagined: “*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*” (1 Cor. 2:9). John wrote: “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*” (1 John 3:2). Other aspects of the glorious resurrection that is promised to the Christian may be derived from the Scriptures that tell of them being children of God: “*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:26); “*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified*” (Rom. 8:17). The Christian is deemed to be “dead in Christ” (Col. 3:3), and if dead then to have part in the first resurrection (1 Thess. 4:16) and all its benefits (Rev. 20:6).■

OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

Chapters 2, 3 and 21 of Revelation contain several promises of the glorious rewards that await those who “overcome”: they will eat of the tree of life; not be hurt of the second death; will be able to eat of the hidden manna; will have power over the nations; will be clothed in white raiment; will be a pillar in the city of God; will sit with Christ in His throne; will inherit all things.

To these explicit statements may be added the promises of “*living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years*” (Rev. 20:6) and, as a consequence of being part of the “*city of God*”, “*coming down out of heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband*” (Rev. 21:2). Such prospects led the Apostle Paul to write: “*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Rom. 8:18).

Of all those who have suffered for the name of Christ, Paul was perhaps equal to any: “*I speak as concerning reproach...I am...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands*” (2 Cor. 11:21-33). The full impact of the sufferings Paul lists in those verses might be difficult for those living in Western society to fully realize, yet he considered them not worthy of comparison with the rewards that await those who overcome.

Every Christian has shortcomings that they strive to overcome as they travel along the narrow way. Each one's shortcomings are unique; no two Christians are exactly the same. However maybe there are some obstacles that are somewhat common.

Wanting to be liked

The first is an attribute common to all mankind: wanting to be well regarded—by their friends, their class mates, their employer—in summary, by everyone with whom they have ongoing dealings.

This can be a desirable quality, often prompting to positive, wholesome “above average” qualities, but, as in so many aspects of human nature, it can have a negative influence as well. For young people this desire is especially strong; the pressure of peers to conform and be one of the crowd can become irresistible; personal conviction is required.

But the desire is not limited to young people: it confronts adults as well and challenges them to take a stand for principle. Whether as young people or adult brethren, Christians are not immune from having difficulty, at times, in making the right decision—in discerning between their longing to be liked and their desire to do what is right.

What should the Christian do in these situations? A good guide is their conscience: if they start to feel a tinge of guilt, the time has come to review the principles involved. Feelings of guilt are caused by their conscience warning them that a course of action is contrary to God's will. Disregarding guilt feelings will surely lead to injury, either morally or spiritually. Phillips' translation of Romans 12:2 reads “*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould*”. Another has written: “In a word, conscience is one of the Christian's most valuable assets; according to obedience to conscience will be their standing before the Lord”. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience...*” (1 Tim. 1:5).

Seeking recognition

The Pharisees were a religious sect in Israel who felt they were superior to all others. They were continually calling attention to their self righteousness; trying to impress others. They were filled with a judgmental attitude against others and continually calling attention to legalistic outward observance of the law. Of them Jesus said: “*Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess'. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than*

the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14).

In His sermon on the mount Jesus gave some heart searching admonitions regarding seeking recognition: *"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:1).

Jesus continued the sermon and gave three examples that illustrate how people promote their own righteousness: *"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee"* (Matt. 6:2-4). In other words whenever anyone is involved in a righteous act of Christian service, they should not sound a trumpet to call others' attention to see what they did. The Lord's admonition is to keep it quiet, even a secret.

He then gave a second example: *"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men"* (Matt. 6:5). Here too the Christian must be careful—public prayers should be simple and brief; from the heart to God. Flowery language and long prayers referring to almost every aspect of the Plan are not needed. Public prayer should never be worded to call attention to knowledge or piety.

Jesus' third example is in Matthew 6:16-17: *"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face..."*. If the Christian fasts they are to *"anoint their head"* and *"wash their face"*, that is, they are to look clean, fresh and neat. They are not to try to appear humble and sad calling attention to their great sacrifice. Alms, sacrifice or any service which is done to be seen of men will have little value in the eyes of God.

Rumours or gossip

Another attribute in which the flesh likes to engage is spreading rumour. James wrote: *"But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison"* (James 3:8).

No one is able to tame the tongue perfectly, but the Christian must try to do so because, as James metaphorically expresses it, it is full of deadly poison.

David wrote of his endeavour to control his tongue: *"I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good..."* (Psa. 39:1-2). When he was confronted with wickedness, as well as *"keeping his mouth with a bridle"*, he also refrained from speaking, even about those things that were good. It is as the old proverb expresses it: *"I have often regretted my speech, rarely my silence"*.

Comparing oneself with others

Another of the adverse tendencies of our fallen flesh is to make comparisons. Frequently it is an unconscious act that focuses on the weak points of others. Jesus addressed this tendency: *"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, 'Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye'; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye"* (Matt. 7:1-5).

It is so easy to see the smallest fault in others while not realizing the faults in oneself. If comparisons are made, let them always be in the spirit exhorted by Paul: *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God"* (Phil. 2:3-6).

On the other hand, one possible result of comparing oneself with others is to conclude that they are inferior and become discouraged. The Apostle Paul addresses this aspect in 2 Corinthians 10:12-13: *"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves..."*. One's own measure is an invalid measure: the example of Jesus is the only valid one.

The truths expressed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 should always be kept in mind: *"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit...the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal"*. In other words, God's will for each one is different from everyone else—God has chosen to have many members in the body; each one is different, each one has their own part to play and function to perform for the wellbeing of the whole body, so that *"no flesh should glory in his presence"* (1 Cor. 1:29).

Excuses

Another of the besetments faced by the Christian is that they might feel inadequate to carry out a task that God has given them. In those cases it should be remembered that those who are spirit begotten children of God are given astonishing promises of virtually unlimited strength and abilities: *"They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint"* (Isa. 40:31); *"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to him be the glory"* (Eph. 3:20); *"The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God"* (Psa. 68:35); *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Phil. 4:13); *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (1 Cor. 10:13).

Oh! what precious promises!—through the Holy Spirit God has promised to give special strength, powers and abilities of which the world in general does not have any idea; "take it to the Lord in prayer". There is no excuse for the Christian to say that they are unable to accomplish any task the Lord has given to them to serve Him. Remember Moses! (Exod. 4).

Fear

Everyone has, at some time, experienced fear. Fear destroys inner peace. It takes on many forms but the underlying basic element is fear of failure, whether that is failure in talking to people, falling from heights, illness, what others might think, loneliness, or ultimately death.

There are many assurances in God's Word that should help the Christian overcome this obstacle which has the potential to prevent them from living a quiet and peaceable life. One of them is stated in Isaiah 41:10: *"Fear thou **not**; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee"*.

Another promise regarding overcoming fear is in Psa. 46:1: *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. **Therefore we will not fear**, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea".* Oh! that the Christian could have the confidence of the Psalmist: *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?...Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident...For*

in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion : in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head shall be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD...I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD" (Psa. 27:1-14).

May every Christian strive to realize that everything in their lives is beyond their control; they are in God's hands, for God has promised them that He is overruling every aspect of their lives: *"For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose"* (Rom. 8:28). Yes, indeed, all things! God is at the helm and will work it out for the ultimate good of every one that He has chosen.

The opposite of fear is courage, and it is possible to err in that way also—having too much courage or taking things into one's own hands. Hence again arises the need for prayer, asking for God's guidance in everything.

One who exercised faith and acted courageously was Joshua when he was about to enter the promised land: *"Be strong and of a good courage, for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest"* (Joshua 1:7-9). The Christian's challenge that requires them to exercise courage might not be on the literal battlefield as it was for Joshua, but it will be in the quiet inner tests of faith of daily life. Such tests may be far more subtle than was Joshua's: it may be as simple as saying "No!"; it might be an inner struggle between right and wrong; it might be standing alone when misunderstood; it might be enduring pain when all alone; it might be when a loved one passes away. Through them all the Christian may hear their Heavenly Father whisper: *"Be thou strong and very courageous"*. God is a very present help in trouble.

The Christian must keep pressing on, for soon they will reap if they faint not, and hear those blessed words: *"Well done, my good and faithful servant: enter thou into the everlasting joys of thy lord"* (Matt. 25:23). Indeed, blessed will be he that overcometh!■

LOVE REJOICES NOT IN INIQUITY

1 Corinthians 13 lists several characteristics of love, one of which is: *"Love...does not rejoice in iniquity..."* (verse 6). In order to grasp the significance of the apostle's words it is necessary to have a clear idea of the meaning of the words "rejoice" and "iniquity".

Rejoice

Some psychologists define joy as a deep sense of fulfilment: it pertains to the individual alone and is not something that can be shared with anyone else, although some may be aware that another is rejoicing. Joy is the state of mind that emanates from an innermost sense of satisfaction; when the deepest desires of the heart are fully met.

The Apostle Paul experienced joy when he learnt of the steadfastness of the Christians at Colosse: *"For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ"* (Col. 2:5). It was deeply satisfying to the apostle to hear of the spiritual growth of those at Colosse and the satisfaction was something that he was able to treasure even though he was not physically present with them.

John 16:22 also records a situation where joy will be experienced: *"Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you"*. At that time the apostles' deepest desires will be fully met and nothing or no-one will be able to take their joy from them.

Iniquity

Iniquity is injustice in any form. It may be an intention to commit an unjust act or the act itself after it has been committed. Iniquity embraces all acts and intentions that are not morally upright or virtuous—it includes all unrighteousness and wrong doing.

For the Christian there are two arenas where the Apostle's statement is to be applied: their personal conduct and the actions of others.

Christian conduct

In relation to the Christian's own conduct, there is no place for any iniquitous action, neither contemplated nor committed. In his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul wrote: *"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour..."* (Rom. 13:10), and to the Thessalonians he wrote: *"See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men"* (1 Thess. 5:15). He also urged them to: *"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (1 Thess. 5:22).

The environment

While the Christian may not commit iniquitous acts nor even contemplate doing so, the Apostle's statement that love does not rejoice in iniquity has application beyond one's own personal life.

The deepest desires of those who are motivated by love cannot be completely at peace when they are surrounded by acts of iniquity; that is, they cannot rejoice in the same way that the Apostle Paul rejoiced over the steadfastness of the Christians at Colosse.

Jesus discerned genuine love from insincere love, which is deceit. He told His disciples: *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves...Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven...Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"* (Matt. 7:15-23). Their outward appearance was noble but inwardly they were insincere and hence Jesus called them "workers of iniquity". Such discernment should remind the Christian of the need for them to *"be as wise as serpents, and harmless as doves"* (Matt. 10:16), as was the Apostle Paul: *"But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion...For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works"* (2 Cor. 11:12-15).

The Christian may be helped to rise above the present distress by remembering that: *"weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning"* (Psa. 30:5). They may always rejoice whenever good is done, regardless of by whom it is done, and to forbear when evil is done, regardless of by whom it is done, as they wait for the glorious appearing of their Lord and Master who will eradicate iniquity forever.■

**PEOPLES PAPER
AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM**
ABN 23 734 654 922 Reg. No, 0022186J

*Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.
P.O. Box 402 Rosanna, Victoria, Australia, 3084
Email: FREE.Bereanbibleinstitute@gmail.com*

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